

**THE ROLE OF CULTURE
IN SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING
WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO
THE JAPANESE STUDENTS AT THE
INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL OF DÜSSELDORF**

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Abstract

This thesis examines the role of culture in English language learning for Japanese students at the International School of Düsseldorf (ISD) and the effect this has on the rate at which these students master English to the level required for academic success.

English is the language of instruction in international schools all over the world. Many of multi-lingual multi-cultural students only remain in the school for a few years before their parents are transferred to other assignments by their employers. Non-native English speakers need to master English in order to study successfully and are generally assisted in this by English as a Second Language (ESL) departments.

At ISD Japanese students make up 25% of the high school population. It was observed, over a period of time, that these students took longer to reach English competence and exit ESL classes than their peers of other nationalities.

This ethnographic study is based on observation of classes in Japanese schools, both in Japan and Germany, together with participant observation, interviews, questionnaires, student responses and case studies at ISD over a period of six years. Data collection concentrated on three key areas the school, the family and friendships. The research includes a close examination of teaching and learning as it is understood in Japanese schools compared with the culture of teaching and learning in an international school. Similarly the role of the family in the lives of young adolescents and their attitudes to friendships is examined.

The results show that the culturally determined Japanese norms of teaching and learning, together with the expectations of families and friendships contrast so starkly with those of an international school that often neither the teachers nor the students are able to communicate their needs successfully. The resulting lack of progress is shown to be due to the cultural mis-match of understandings and expectations and leads to a situation which can only be resolved through greater knowledge and understanding of culture and its effects on learning.

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Chapter One

The Root of it all

1 Introduction

Like many ethnographic studies (Heath 1983, Cochran-Smith 1984, Peak 1991), my research questions are rooted in my personal and professional experience. During my teacher training in the sixties there was no mention of the issue of teaching students from other linguistic or cultural backgrounds and consequently no preparation for it. In my teaching experience in primary schools in England and in Germany, I was mainly concerned with native speakers of English. This was particularly the case during the four years I spent teaching the children of British military personnel in Germany in the early seventies. During the following years I taught English as a foreign language in Germany, mostly to adults who were learning English for a variety of reasons, some of these were professional and others personal. As these adults were almost all German nationals, I encountered only their culture which in time became part of my own as I was married to a German and immersed in the German culture. When my own children started German elementary school, the differences in British and German attitudes, expectations and values especially those concerned with education, became more evident. I think my children were often disadvantaged in some ways by having a mother whose opinions were the result of a different cultural background to the German teachers. An example of this is the first dictation one of my sons brought home (he was eight at the time) where he had

made fifteen mistakes. I suggested to him that it would be far more important to count the words he had right rather than the mistakes, but this is not the German way. In a German school, after each unit of learning the children are tested, the grades are recorded and a new topic is begun. The deficiencies, which have become apparent through the testing, are never dealt with and this seems to me to take the emphasis away from the importance of content knowledge while affirming the importance of test taking and grades. Through these and many other experiences, I feel a certain affinity with my English as a Second Language (ESL) students as I also regularly face culturally challenging situations.

When my children were old enough to deal with the vagaries of the German education system, I returned to full-time school teaching at the International School of Düsseldorf (ISD). I had already taught there as a substitute teacher for music, drama and English and enjoyed the variety of students and colleagues, especially after only having worked with native speakers or German students for so long. However when I began as a full-time teacher in the English as a Second Language department, I was confronted by a new type of student for whom I was woefully unprepared.

The students at international schools come from many countries with different languages and orthographies. The largest language group at ISD is English, spoken by students from America, Great Britain, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa, followed by German and then closely by Japanese. My students' knowledge of English can range from almost nothing, where even the alphabet is new, to relatively

fluent speakers and writers. Students do not generally remain long in international schools and our student population is subject to continual change. We estimate that in each school year we have a turn-over of one third of the student population. As the Japanese school year begins in April, we often receive new students at that time. Other students may enter school at any time as a parent is transferred by their employer. This often affects the students emotionally as they are unprepared for the transfer and have problems leaving their friends and familiar environment. It can be difficult for families who are taken out of their own country to a foreign land where one language is spoken by the surrounding world and another in school. For English or German speaking families this does not present such a problem, but for families where neither English nor German are spoken fluently, this can be incredibly difficult. The fathers often speak their native language at work or have colleagues to help translate, but the mothers and children are confronted by numerous linguistic and cultural challenges.

I tried to find the best ways to work with such divergence by talking to experienced colleagues, attending in-service training sessions and conferences on language teaching but I found very little of practical use and even less research on teaching and learning with respect to multilingual, multicultural classes. I decided to take an M. A. in TESOL (Teacher of English to Speakers of Other Languages). However this programme, although interesting, had little relevance to my situation and did not support or inform my teaching in the context of an international school in any way.

I was frustrated to find that while all the theories of language learning (Chomsky

1965), second language learning or acquisition (Krashen 1981), bilingualism and multilingualism (Baker 1993), linguistic competence (Cummins, 1986, Collier, 1989) and teaching methodologies covered many areas of language learning and teaching which were relevant in my situation, I could find very little written about the role of cultural differences in language learning as I was experiencing it. Second language learners are said to need between one and two years to acquire basic interpersonal communication skills and between five and seven years to attain native speaker competence in the area of cognitive academic language proficiency (Cummins 1986, Collier 1989). The complex interplay between the development of interpersonal communication skills and cognitive academic language proficiency, whether they are separate or occur concurrently and how they occur for students from different cultures still lacks detailed investigation. My experience at ISD has shown that some students acquire both basic interpersonal communication skills and cognitive academic language proficiency in a far shorter time than Cummins and Collier maintain but others take a lot longer.

Students in an international school cannot afford to take up to seven years to reach cognitive academic language competence, just as they cannot afford to lose years of conceptual development and curriculum content while mastering English. It is of vital importance that teachers are aware of possible cultural barriers to effective learning and are equipped with ways to deal with them.

In the English as a Second Language department at ISD, English language is taught through the content of the mainstream English and Humanities classes as far as

possible. The principle is that the ESL student entering the mainstream class will have the same or a very similar background of content knowledge as the mainstream student and be familiar with the relevant concepts, and vocabulary and able to work effectively with them. This of course assumes an extensive cultural understanding on the part of the student which is generally not given, but often assumed by the mainstream teacher. Until I read “Making Sense of a New World; learning to read in a second language” by Eve Gregory (1996) I felt very much alone in my concerns about this topic.

1.1 The Challenge - my new world

From the beginning I was fascinated by the Japanese students in my classes. I watched as they carefully unpacked their pencil cases and lined the pencils up on their desks, I observed their painstakingly neat handwriting with frequent but careful use of an eraser to remove even the shadow of a mistake. I was amazed by their constant ability to remain on task regardless of what was happening around them and was bemused by their reaction when their names were called of jumping up and shouting “*Hei*” like *toast popping out of a toaster* as Feiler so aptly put it (Feiler, 1991:37). Their constant cheerfulness and high level of motivation, compared to that of other students also surprised me. The contrast between the Japanese sense of order and their way of doing things and that of many students from other countries was apparent from the start. The Japanese students took every aspect of the lesson very seriously; they were always worried about what the homework was, when work was due and what would be the content of the next test. In contrast the students from

other countries tended to be more relaxed about everything.

However when it came to oral participation I was frustrated. It seemed impossible to get a straight answer from any of my Japanese students. If I was prepared to wait for hurried whispers and a joint answer, I usually was given one but the idea of an independent, snap answer to a simple question seemed to be beyond any of the students. I could not understand why they could apparently express themselves reasonably well in writing, but were incapable of simple spontaneous speech. The Japanese students worked particularly well on learning vocabulary and repeating it faultlessly in tests, in completing grammar questions or other exercises and short pieces of guided writing but as soon as the books were away and anything different or spontaneous was required, these students had problems. They tended to become uncooperative and silent to the point that I was often tempted to give up before losing too much time. I thought that this pattern of behaviour was specific to this particular class and planned a different approach beginning with the next new class.

1.2.i Pilot Study - A Practical Example

This activity was not planned as part of a Pilot Study and only as it developed did I begin to see the relevance of it to my work. The content, my teaching goals, the how and why of the activities and the students' reactions to them, all combined to point towards a series of questions which at that point were vague and difficult to formulate, and the answers, if there were any, were even more elusive.

I began to teach a new class of ESL students in a course entitled *Communicative Competence*. The class met on alternate days for forty-minutes and took place during a time allotted to *elective* classes. They were called *elective* because the students were allowed, at least in theory, to choose their courses which were intended to extend the students' experiences in ways not covered by the curriculum. The offerings depended on the teachers' expertise but included topics such as pottery, gardening, cooking, choir, drama, weaving and so on. The *Communicative Competence* elective class was offered to students in the English as a Second Language programme only. These students were from grades 6 to 8, aged eleven to fourteen. There were twelve students, German, Russian, Korean, Finnish and Japanese. From the start some students were more active and involved than others, so I tried to introduce a wide variety of activities in an attempt to interest and stimulate each one. As the aim of the course was to improve the students' communication skills, I concentrated for some time on building trust and good relationships within the group.

At the beginning of each class we moved the desks and chairs to the edge of the room giving enough space to move around. I started the course with non-threatening activities where we all sat in a circle to introduce ourselves and play a number of games. This then extended into more active, drama-based activities, using pairs, threes or groups of four which changed often so that the students got to know each other. Nearly all of these activities were teacher directed. The students were all beginners with very limited spoken English, although I found as the course went on that in fact some of them could write quite fluently but were reluctant to speak. I was

confused by the apparent lack of success that some of the “fun” activities produced. In fact some things I had expected would be fun turned out to be disastrous for some of the students and came close to destroying the trusting atmosphere which I had tried so hard to create.

An example of this was the Line Dance, the final activity in a long series of lessons. We had learnt parts of the body, through games like “Simon Says” and other teacher directed activities, and had gone on to learn verbs of movement, run, walk, skip etc. Next we worked on asking and giving directions. We had walked around the school in pairs with one person blindfolded and the other not touching but giving spoken instructions, go right, left, stop, walk straight on and so on. We had written instructions to a specific place in the school and sent a partner off to find and identify it. These activities had surprised some of the students but they had generally been willing to try them.

The culmination of this series of lessons was for the students in groups to create a dance, either a line dance or an MTV-style backing group dance, with a set of written instructions for others to learn the dance later. The idea was that they could use all their newly learnt vocabulary of movement, direction and body parts to create something original with appeal for teenagers which would be fun too. Before introducing this idea we had done some formation type movements with my instructions and then set them to music. That was relatively comfortable for most of the students. I then said how unoriginal I was and I was sure they could do much better as they always have such great ideas and turned it over to them. I have used

this activity with other classes and had some really good work come out of it; in fact one class was so exciting that I video-recorded it and have used it in presentations to teachers on using drama style activities to teach English. The students have been creative, original and used their English extensively. The other classes had also been mixed nationalities and I had not allowed the students to choose their own working groups but deliberately formed mixed nationality groups. This time I decided to experiment and allow single nationality groupings to see if this had any effect on the students' creativity, spontaneity and willingness to take a chance and have a go.

Their assignment was to choose their own groups, their own music and work out a simple dance routine. For the following class each group brought their music and we borrowed CD players from the library. Each little group spent the entire period listening, discussing and choosing their music. The next class was the first chance for the students to start working on the dance. Between classes I had already heard from a number of students that they did not like to dance and did not want to make a dance.

For the next lesson when they had to work on their dance routines I moved away and tidied my desk while quietly observing the groups. During the previous class, while they were listening to their music and discussing, the atmosphere had been quite animated. As I had allowed free choice of groups the language used had not always been English but I was unconcerned as I was more interested in the final result and the activity itself rather than the language use, which is my usual focus.

The “European Group” was made up of four boys, two Germans, a Finn and a Russian. The two German boys both had behavioural problems so that it was often a point of discussion among the teachers whether they actually needed English as a second language or Learning Development (LD). Since little can be done in LD until they understand English sufficiently, they were with me. They disliked each other intensely and would each do any thing to make the other look foolish. The Finnish boy was sweet, kind cooperative, and a follower rather than a leader. The Russian boy had spent seven years in German schools so was able to converse with the German boys easily in German but tried very hard only to use English.

This group worked but there was so much friction that it was hard to see where it was going and by the end of class they had agreed that each student should have their own solo. It was a real disadvantage having the two German boys, who were both very opinionated and wanted to lead, in one group.

The two Korean boys were really enthusiastic when told they could, of course, use Korean music, but they spent so long listening that they had no ideas about what to do for the dance. They were enthusiastic when they told me about Korean pop singers and their dancers.

The Japanese boys and girls categorically refused to work together, so formed two groups. The five Japanese girls had brought about ten CDs and loved listening, talking and giggling but nothing constructive came out of it. When encouraged to get up and start working they dissolved into embarrassed laughter but made no move, I

assumed no one wanted to be the first. I am sure if one had started they might all have joined in but there was no catalyst.

The two Japanese boys were enthusiastic about the music but not prepared to move on it. They wrote me notes in their journals that they did not want to dance. The students kept regular personal journals which were like daily diaries of their life at ISD and could include personal problems, learning difficulties, successes and anything the student wanted to share with me. I collected the journals regularly, corrected the main mistakes and always wrote responses to them. This was the first activity in this class which had resulted in spontaneous writing.

1.2.ii The Follow-up Discussion

During the following session I asked them about the dance. For the first time in any class the Japanese became quite vocal in expressing how unwilling they were to continue. The German boys' group had disintegrated as they were all bickering again. I decided a change of activity would be the best solution to the general feeling of dissatisfaction.

In contrast to the dance activity this was a highly structured activity in which four students played the parts of hoteliers and sat in the four corners of the room, equipped with their room lists and price lists. The others each received an assignment card which told them exactly what kind of room they were looking for; for example a twin room with shower, overlooking the sea etc. They then had to go

to each hotel to get the prices and then go back and book the cheapest, if it was still available. This activity is always a success, in fact we have to do it several times as all of the students want to be the hoteliers. It produces plenty of predictable, structured dialogue, is totally safe, requires no imagination and every one is working within his or her comfort zone.

In the next class I gave each student a piece of paper and reminded them of the two activities, the dance and the hotel, and asked them to write about what they thought of each one and why.

The Japanese Comments (direct quotes)

- *I like to move my body. But I don't like dancing. I like to do hotel more.*
- *I don't like dance. Thank you. And I never dance. I like hotel best. It's not so interesting but it's better than dancing. Thanks!*
- *I like dance. But it's dismeful. Everybody shy. So we can't decide dance but I like dance. Hotel game is best. Because we can learn the words. We can learn the math and it's profitable game.*
- *But it's boring. I don't like it maybe ...*
- *I don't want to dance. Because dance is boring and dance is ashamed.*
- *I don't like dance activity best because I never dance, we need to make dance action and we need to choose music so I think hotel is better than dance. I like hotel activity because hotel activity is just answering the questions.*
- *I don't like dance because it's dismeful and I never play dance. I like watch dance very much Hotel activity I like this is relation money.*

So, this game is profit, but this game is boring, I like it.

German boys' answers

- *I liked the dance more. Because Maximilian was trying to dance he had some problems so it was more fun. I didn't like the hotel game because it wasn't fun.*
- *I liked more the hotel game I didn't like the dance it was something for girls. It was studied. I only want to dance when I big.*

Finnish boy

- *I like dance because I try dance. I like dance because I like type. I like hotel because it is easy.*

Korean boys

- *I like dance because it's funny, it is good, it is nice, my tape is good, because I like H.O.T. (Tepe's people gurp) I don't like hotel because I just don't like it.*

It seemed that the Japanese students did not enjoy the dance to the point that they did not want to do it at all. Afterwards we talked about the kind of activity they enjoy. They found it difficult to describe but from working with them so far it appears that they have more enjoyment and success in activities which are teacher directed, require little or no individual initiative and are low risk. My questions after the activity were: Did this reflect some aspects of their attitudes to learning? And if so, were these culturally determined?

Six of these students were also in my regular ESL class. At that time we were reading a murder story together and any suggestion of acting out a scene from the

story sent them into fits of embarrassment. It could be fun since there were six of them and just six characters in the story. However when I suggested we make models of the house where the murder takes place they were really enthusiastic and did very well. It seems that making models might be an acceptable low-risk activity. Even doing comprehension questions about the story is more acceptable than acting.

1.3 Japanese Students - A World Apart?

Japan has the second largest number of second language students in our school after Germany so it would seem to me that the question of how these students' cultural backgrounds affect their learning styles in an international school is one of great relevance which to my knowledge has not been researched before. This is certainly not an area which is given consideration in our curriculum or in the appointment of teaching staff.

Whilst a great deal of research has been done on the Japanese education system, practices in Japanese schools and other related topics (White 1987, Peak 1991, Smith 1994, Rohlen 1983, Shields, 1989), the problems involved when Japanese families are sent overseas and their children taken out of the Japanese system have generally only been given passing mention. The years which parents spend overseas with children of school age are of vital importance for each individual. According to the Japanese Ministry of Education figures in 1997 over 50,000 Japanese children of school age were studying outside of Japan (Yamada-Yamamoto & Richards, 1998:1). There is a network of Japanese schools throughout the world but where

none is available the choice is between a local state school, which involves learning the language of the country they are in, which of course may not be English, or if possible attending an international school. This situation would appear to offer a very worthwhile area of research.

1.4 My Research Questions and Problems

This led to my main question "Why do some second language students progress so rapidly and others need far more time?"

Although "successful" students come from a variety of backgrounds, for example Norwegian, Spanish, Brazilian, French, Korean, Russian, noticeably few in fact are Japanese. These "successful" students have all exited the ESL programme and are now making excellent progress in mainstream classes while other students linger longer in ESL, and are often frustrated and lack motivation. It seemed to be that the students who were spontaneous in their speech, who were willing to try even if the situation was challenging and who were not afraid of making mistakes succeeded most while the students who worked really hard on book-based exercises, learnt lists of vocabulary and scored full marks on every test were not the students who mastered English rapidly or successfully.

My initial hypothesis is that there must be some aspects of their cultural background which influence these students and their language learning more strongly than their successful peers. My original interest led to reading more about other cultures,

talking more to the students, listening to them talking and observing their behaviour out of the classroom. During this process I found that there seem to be common features which need to be considered, defined and investigated if we are going to make the time spent at an international school academically and personally beneficial, worthwhile and profitable.

1.5 Summary

Living in a bilingual, bicultural world within my own family, I am very aware of potential cultural, but also linguistic differences which can lead to misunderstandings and miscommunication. As an English as a Second Language teacher, I am one of the first teachers to work closely with non-proficient English speakers from many different backgrounds. Clearly successful mastery of the English language is a pre-requisite for academic success in our school. This needs to be achieved quickly as the students' academic learning can and should not be delayed. My observations have shown that some students succeed rapidly and go on to do well, whereas other students face greater difficulties and take far longer before they are ready to succeed in the mainstream programme. These students seem to fall into two main linguistic and cultural groups, although there are of course exceptions, those from western cultures and languages and those from the east.

My big questions are:

Why do some students progress so well and succeed so quickly?

Which aspects of a student's cultural and linguistic background might facilitate or hinder his/her learning progress?

Chapter Two

The Fascination of an International School

2 Introduction

In this chapter I examine the nature of international schools, in particular that of the International School of Düsseldorf, and consider the three main groups of students and their parents. I also examine the exit test which was used to determine a second language learner's readiness to leave the English as a second language programme and enter a mainstream course of studies and which clearly showed a difference between some cultural groups with regard to how long the students spent in English as a Second Language (ESL) classes.

2.1 International Schools

In the last decades of the twentieth century increasingly more people have left their home countries to live and work elsewhere. Appleyard (in Pang, 1995) lists the following categories: permanent settlers, temporary contract workers, temporary professional transients, clandestine or illegal workers, asylum seekers and refugees. One of the many problems facing all of these groups is the education of their children in a new country with, most often, a new language. For those whom Appleyard terms "temporary professional transients" it is not always desirable or necessary for the children to have to learn a new language as their stay abroad is

often limited to two or three years. For these citizens and also for the children of diplomats and in some cases military personal, International Schools, where the language of instruction is generally English, have been set up all over the world. They are steadily increasing in number as internationalisation of companies becomes more important. In the former East Germany since reunification schools have been quickly established in Potsdam, Dresden and Leipzig to join the growing number in Europe. These schools operate under an institution called the Council of International Schools (CIS) with headquarters in England. At present there are approximately five hundred international schools either accredited by CIS or affiliated throughout the world. Although each school is self-funding and managed by a Board of Directors, usually elected from the parent body and local community, CIS inspects each school regularly in order to give and confirm accreditation. This accreditation process is carried out by experienced teachers working under strict guidelines who examine every aspect of a school's operation. The accreditation visit takes place every ten years, with a five year visit and frequently additional one year visits to confirm that recommendations have been acted upon. In addition some schools are affiliated to school boards in America and undergo a similar accreditation process.

2.2 The International School of Düsseldorf

The International School of Düsseldorf (ISD) was established in 1968 for the children of predominantly American citizens. It was called the American School of Düsseldorf at that time and started with a handful of children in a building lent to

them by the British Military forces. Since then it has grown to a thriving school of over eight hundred students aged from three to eighteen years. The curriculum is permanently under review and development and recently the school has received full International Baccalaureate status with the implementation of the Primary Years and the Middle Years Programme, in addition to the Diploma Programme which has been in place for almost twenty years. There is emphasis on articulation between the three school areas and department heads have been appointed to facilitate this. The curriculum is still predominantly American/British and the final qualification, the International Baccalaureate, is recognised by universities all over the world. The school provides a high standard of education. This was recently confirmed when the German Ministry of Education (Kultusministerium) officially granted the school the status of an alternative school within the German school system from grades one to ten (Ersatzschulstatus). Most recently, in March 2000, the German Ministry of Education officially gave recognition to the International Baccalaureate diploma gained in international schools in Germany as an equivalent qualification to the Abitur which is the German qualification required for university application. This recognition makes the International School of Düsseldorf even more interesting for German parents who seek an international education for their children but additionally welcome the recognition of the final qualification. As the school is self-supporting the parents are required to pay fees.

The school is now situated on its own site in a suburb of Düsseldorf, Kaiserswerth, and has relatively new purpose-built high, middle and elementary school buildings. The grounds are limited in recreational space for middle and high school students

but still adequate. The students and teachers at ISD are truly international, at present thirty-nine nationalities are represented and the student body is eight hundred and thirty-five. (Statistics from 11.10.04) Thirty-three per cent of these students are native English speakers, coming from America, Canada, South Africa, New Zealand, Australia, Great Britain and Ireland. The largest group of students is still American, twenty-one per cent, closely followed by an increasing number of Germans, twenty per cent, since the granting of Ersatzschulstatus (the official recognition by the German Ministry of Education of the International School of Düsseldorf as an alternative school) and the third largest group is Japanese, fifteen per cent. These three groups represent about sixty percent of the student body. There are over eighty full-time teachers from eleven different nationalities, the majority of whom possess higher degrees. Teachers are initially employed for a two-year period. Extended contracts are offered to teachers whose work is satisfactory and who wish to stay. Many of our teachers are young Americans, Australians and Britons who are practising their profession but also seeing the world and these are usually not interested in staying for more than a couple of years. Other teachers, especially in the high school, choose to stay on and make a career in Düsseldorf. The constant turnover of young, relatively inexperienced but enthusiastic teachers working alongside a group of stable, committed, slightly older faculty has both advantages and disadvantages but results in an interesting, lively faculty. ISD offers the teachers in-service training in many areas; outside experts are frequently brought in, teachers are actively encouraged to attend professional conferences and keep up to date on professional developments. The school was involved in Project Zero (a research project led by the education faculty of Harvard University into more effective

teaching and learning which involved six European international schools) but this was dropped due to the new commitment to the Primary and Middle Years programmes of the International Baccalaureate which also involve considerable in-service training both on site and at other centres. Each teacher has a generous yearly budget for professional development and time for this is allowed away from school as deemed necessary by the administration. In fact professional development is actively encouraged by the administration.

As the majority of students are in Düsseldorf because of their parents' employment, the population fluctuates continually. Companies rarely think of children's school careers when sending their employees overseas or transferring them. Consequently, students arrive and leave throughout the year, often not knowing long in advance of a forthcoming move. There is a turnover of approximately one-third of the student population each year. This is, of course, difficult for the children and their families but it also makes budgeting or planning difficult for the school as numbers cannot be predicted with accuracy until the children actually arrive. Often before the autumn terms starts, there is uncertainty until the last minute as to how many classes will be in each grade. This makes classroom allocation, the number of teachers and their assignments, scheduling and purchasing supplies challenging. In addition there are now a number of competing international schools in the vicinity so that parents have a choice and do not automatically send their children to ISD.

Clearly, if the school suffers from this type of uncertainty, it must also be a factor in the lives of families. Often they are uprooted at short notice to go to an unfamiliar

country with little regard for the effects this may have on the family and especially on the children who leave friends, teachers and home. Ezra (2003) takes Dorothy in the Wizard of Oz as an extended metaphor for these students. Just as Dorothy is suddenly taken from her own home and familiar surroundings and lands in a strange place, so too the students and their parents find themselves in a strange and unfamiliar country. However Dorothy speaks the same language, she is lively and outgoing, she makes friends quickly and is not afraid of taking risks. Her final goal is always to go home but just as she has made friends and is beginning to adjust to life in Oz, she leaves. The similarities are fascinating. Our students too are uprooted often at short notice and have to leave their extended families and friends to go and live in an unfamiliar environment where a different language is spoken. They too take time to adjust, depending on their personalities and attitude to the new move, but then often like Dorothy just as they are beginning to feel comfortable and happy, they are whisked away again by a parent's new job or transfer to begin the process all over again. Other research has been conducted into the effects of this life style, based originally on the children of missionaries. Useem (1960), described the experiences of those who live between two cultures, predominantly between western and non-western and found that after a time they became neither part of their own culture or the other culture but a merging of the two into a third, which produced the term *Third Culture Kids* (TCKs). This term is also used in international schools and has been the subject of research and much discussion. Pollock defined a Third Culture Kid as

An individual who, having spent a significant part of the

developmental years in a culture other than the parents' culture, develops a sense of relationship to all of the cultures while not having full ownership in any. Elements from each culture are incorporated into the life experience, but the sense of belonging is in relationship to others of similar experience (Pollock and Van Rieken, 1999).

The non-German students at ISD fit this description as the years they spend out of their own culture being educated in an international school are very much part of their *developmental years*. The research in international educational fields on the effects of this process reveal that these students often have problems with their sense of identity and belonging. Walker (1998) decided that the feeling of belonging can relate to a place or significant relationship. I undertook some informal research with home room groups in the middle school at ISD. The students were asked to rate the importance of various aspects of their lives, for example family, friends, hobbies, free time, school. The answers showed that these students tend to value their families more highly than their friends, in contrast to students living permanently in one place. This is also confirmed by research done by Useem and Downie (1976) who found that the majority of Third Culture Kids like, respect, and feel emotionally attached to their parents. It seems that this is the result of the family being the only stable element in these children's lives. The families share the experience of moving into unknown territory and offer mutual support. Parents are the only people with whom the children have a continuing relationship and often the families spend more time together than they would in their own countries. As Useem and Downie point out,

the family provides one form of continuity for TCKs. The school provides the other (In Austin, 1986: 169).

Taking this into consideration, it becomes clear that good communication between the three groups involved, children, parents and the school are extremely important for the child's adjustment, happiness and academic progress in an international school. Little or no training is offered to international school teachers about these processes, unless they choose to read research journals or attend conferences. New teachers themselves often find difficulties adjusting to life in a strange country, even though the culture of school is one which is so familiar to them and they continue working in their mother tongue. The process through which individuals are socialised into another culture, acculturation, is not an easy or comfortable process for most people. There are several recognised phases which people pass through before the process is complete. The beginning excitement is often followed by rejection of the new culture, before the superficial accommodation and gradual adjustment and acceptance are complete (Fennes and Hapgood, 1997). Although international school students and teachers are very conscious of the process, having all been through it themselves, unfortunately little time or consideration is given to the effects of the process of cultural adjustment in international schools, as at any time in any classroom, someone is going through one of these phases. The process of leaving ISD attracts more attention and there are a number of rituals to ease the process and the separation from friends which ensues. A further area where little or no inservice training or assistance is offered to teachers is that of cross-cultural communication; understanding students from other countries and cultures and the

possible effects these differences may have on how they are taught and how successful learning is accomplished. Although an international school is home to many different languages and cultures, sadly many teachers continue teaching as if they were still in their home countries working in a monolingual, monocultural environment, should such a thing still exist, and give no consideration to the fact that they are teaching children from many different backgrounds and cultures. Often it is forgotten that many of our students are working in a second language at school. Those teachers who have never learnt a foreign language to an advanced stage of fluency often underestimate the task which the students face every day.

2.3 The Culture of the School - The Students and their Parents

2.3.i The Americans

For the largest group of students, the Americans, coming to Europe is generally seen as a positive, exciting experience. The school has many similarities to their old schools, many of the teachers are American and the students are familiar with the organisation, procedures, values and general school culture. Americans tend to feel at home in the environment of the school very quickly but find the German world outside of school less hospitable. The language and culture are unfamiliar and often present difficulties. Simple activities such as shopping, a meal in a restaurant, using public transport or going to the cinema become stressful when done in an unknown language or different way. The fathers usually work for American companies and so have a relatively wide network of friends and colleagues provided with similar

interests, expectations and possible problems. The fathers also travel frequently on business leaving the mothers to cope alone and for them the situation is not so easy. I am assuming that the fathers are the employees who have been sent overseas although there are some families where the mother is the employee and the father is a “houseman” . Generally the children do not live within walking distance of the school so they are brought each day by their mothers who then socialise in the school cafe, as they also do after school. School provides a safe, familiar environment for many American mothers. They are very active in the life of the school, working on the monthly newsletter, helping as classroom mothers, making costumes and scenery for plays, helping with sports activities, working for the Booster club (a group who support sports activities) or the parent-faculty association (PFA), taking part in classes offered after school, using the library and so on. New mothers are very quickly integrated as the Americans are consistently welcoming, friendly and open. There is also a very active American Women’s Club in Düsseldorf which helps with day to day living in Germany and offers a variety of social activities. Many of the American women had their own careers in the States and find the new lifestyle, with a lot of free time but without their old network of family and friends, very different and so actively seek things to do. Generally they do not speak German fluently enough to look for work of the style they were used to or to make friends from the local population outside of school, consequently their efforts and energy are concentrated on the school.

2.3.ii The Germans

In the past there were very small numbers of German students at ISD. However the recognition of the school by the German authorities as a provider of an acceptable alternative education has led to a positive influx of students. For the Germans, of course, the situation is the reverse of that of the Americans. The world outside of school is familiar but school is strange. However for them the choice of ISD is usually a deliberate one and they embrace the international way of life whole heartedly. These are the children of relatively wealthy Germans who are well-travelled and familiar with the American way of life. The students often already speak good English and plan to go to university in America. In contrast to the other students at ISD who are only in Düsseldorf for a few years, the German students give a certain stability to the school as they usually stay until their education is complete. Each year before the high school graduation, the graduating students are polled to see how many have been at ISD since kindergarten, at present it is never more than two or three.

For the German parents there is very little change; their mothers keep a relatively low profile as the children are quite able to come to school alone. The mothers do not actively seek contact with other German mothers and the school does not fulfil a social need for them. In addition they are not used to playing a role in their children's schools, as German schools do not encourage or require the presence of parents, except for parents' evening or special events. Often the parents are left behind as their children become competent in two languages and cultures. Their

presence in the social activities provided by school or supporting their children in extracurricular activities is not as noticeable as that of the American mothers.

2.3.iii The Japanese

Each of the previous large groups has one area which is familiar, either the school or outside environment. For the Japanese students nothing is familiar; the languages and cultures within and outside of school are strange and unknown.

In Düsseldorf there is a very large Japanese population as many Japanese companies have their European head offices in the area. According to the Düsseldorf city registration statistics of 2004, there are more than 5,000 Japanese citizens living in the city. In addition many others live in the surrounding areas. There are Japanese shops, restaurants, a hotel, library, a temple, three Japanese kindergartens, a Japanese elementary school and a middle school. The Japanese schools in Düsseldorf offer the same curriculum as schools in Japan and the teachers are sent by the Japanese Ministry of Education for a three year term after which they must return to Japan. For this reason the students receive authentic Japanese education and their previous education and transcripts are fully recognised when they return to Japan. Some Japanese parents however choose to give their children an international education and send them to ISD during their elementary or middle school years. On average there are at least five Japanese children in each grade level. These children can arrive at any time in the school year and leave just as suddenly. Unlike the students who graduate from the Japanese school into grade nine at ISD as a group,

these students have no friends when they arrive and they are not used to living in Germany. Individual Japanese students come from a relatively homogenous Japanese school to the antithesis, an international school. There are only three Japanese teachers teaching in the middle and high schools, and none in the elementary school, hardly anyone speaks Japanese, the organisation, procedures, values and school culture are unfamiliar. In addition, of course, everything is in English as well, which is often the biggest, or at least the most recognisable, problem.

After the age of fifteen, which is the end of compulsory Japanese education, there is no provision for Japanese education in Düsseldorf. Consequently, that is when the largest numbers come to ISD since the alternatives are either attending a Japanese boarding school or returning to Japan, which may not be convenient if the father's employment continues in Düsseldorf and there are other siblings. Japanese students constitute 25%, on average, of the high school student population at ISD. Those Japanese students who join our high school usually remain until graduation. Should the father be transferred back to Japan before the student graduates, some families choose to leave the mother and younger siblings with the high school student in Düsseldorf or even in some cases, the student stays in rented accommodation alone until graduation. At the most, two or three Japanese students each year complete the International Baccalaureate before going on to American universities. The majority take some IB courses but graduate only with the high school diploma and return to Japan to take the entrance examinations for a Japanese university.

The Japanese parents are seldom seen at school as the children very quickly become competent users of the German public transport system and travel together with their friends. The parents seldom participate in out of school activities and rarely socialise with other parents. If asked for help they take their tasks seriously and produce wonderful results. Strangely, although they send their children to an international school fully expecting their children to integrate and take advantage of the educational, social and linguistic situation, the parents noticeably do not make any efforts to integrate. The fathers all work for Japanese companies and are known to work long hours. They are frequently away on business trips and take very little time off. When the Japanese children talk about a holiday with their parents, it is rarely for more than a couple of days. The mothers generally do not work as it is not expected and would be difficult any way in a foreign country. However, they have an extensive network which not only keeps them up-to date with what is happening in school, but also enables them to play golf or tennis, take cultural trips but still be home in time for the children returning from school. Many of the mothers also study German or English in their free time. The mothers are also well informed of whatever happens at ISD but the network is Japanese only and it is most unusual to see Japanese mothers socialising with other nationalities. Paradoxically, although the Japanese parents isolate themselves as a group from the school community, they expect their children to integrate successfully.

2.4 New ESL Students

Unless new students have come from another international or English speaking school and so acquired native level competence, all non-native speakers are routinely tested for ESL placement in the middle and high school. This takes the form of an interview, a piece of directed writing and a short grammar test. Students who need additional English instruction are withdrawn from mainstream classes during English and humanities. During these two periods every day the ESL students learn English which, as far as possible, is content-based to continue content learning and to facilitate entry into mainstream classes as soon as possible. During the rest of the school day the students take all other classes with their English speaking peers; mathematics, science, IT, drama, art, physical education, music and German.

Language learning has been the subject of numerous research studies and a number of individual learner variables which relate to speed of acquisition have been described. Ellis (1994) quotes the factors listed in three surveys done during the 1980s and 1990s and lists twelve factors: age, sex, previous experience with language learning, proficiency in the native language, personality factors, language aptitude, attitudes and motivation, general intelligence, sense modality preference, sociological preference, cognitive styles and learner strategies.

Our students are all of a similar age, social class, and their individual motivation can also be positively compared; they all know that this school experience is limited to a few years after which they will return to their home countries, they are all literate

in their mother tongue, with at least five years of schooling in their native country and they are all subject to immersion in the English language on a daily basis. However they are from many different linguistic and cultural backgrounds and show differences in the rate of successful acquisition which cannot be easily explained.

Influential studies by Cummins (1981) argue for the recognition of two models of proficiency. One is concerned with Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS or basic communicative ability) which Cummins states takes between one and a half and two years to reach. The other, Cognitive Academic Language Skills (CALPS) may take five to seven years to acquire. The latter is the level to which our students aspire. However, it is of course not possible to wait until they reach true native level ability level before exiting the students into mainstream and we aim to exit the students at a stage where they have sufficient language competence to succeed.

2.5 The Class of 1999

A typical example of an English as a Second Language class is taken here from my field notes. From January 1999 to June 1999 I taught an ESL class of eighth graders who were preparing to go into high school after the summer and were required to take the high school exit test in May. The class consisted of six Japanese students, a Korean, a Finn, an Israeli and a Brazilian. Unusually, they were all male except for one Japanese girl. There were other students in the class who were in seventh grade but were not involved in this work. All ten students had been in the class together from August 1998, so that they were used to each other and accustomed to working

together. They were all relatively fluent speakers, with effective interpersonal communication skills, and with a good sound knowledge of English grammar but they lacked the necessary vocabulary and had not yet reached grade level reading and writing skills.

Performance in Other Classes.

In the mainstream classes, the Japanese students were all far advanced in mathematics and most of them were working at individual programmes. The Finn and Brazilian were both behind in mathematics and needed extra coaching at lunchtimes. In science the Japanese were all working satisfactorily at grade level. Although the science teacher was concerned that they never spoke or asked questions, he was more than satisfied with their homework and test results. The other three non-Asians had problems in science. The Brazilian and Finn had had very little science instruction in their home countries, and, combined with language difficulties, science was very challenging for them both. The Israeli insisted he had learnt a great deal of science but it was all "different" so he too had problems. Often the students brought their science books and homework or test preparation questions to ESL class and we worked on it together although the Japanese never seemed to find it necessary and usually spent their time talking about the science in Japanese together which I actively encouraged. I regretted this was not possible for the other three nationals.

In ESL

The six Japanese students could be subdivided into two groups; Hiro and Go had been at the International School of Düsseldorf, and Toshi at another international school, since April of sixth grade, so they had spent two years in an English speaking environment, having begun with no English at all. Yasu, Yasa and Koto had come at the beginning of eighth grade, having had one year of English in Japanese school. The grammar and written skills of those in the latter group were good but they had great difficulties with oral work. However they quickly improved although were still not as keen to speak as their three classmates. It may be stating the obvious to say that although the boys were all Japanese from one cultural background, a background which contrasts greatly with that of the Brazilian, Israeli or Finnish of their classmates, they were individually very different in personality and character. However, all six shared in common that they were highly motivated and regularly did more than expected. Their homework was always complete and their test results for rote learning, ie vocabulary tests, were always excellent. They only experienced difficulties in completing homework assignments when they had important *kanji* tests (Japanese writing uses three different forms, *hiragana* the easiest is usually learnt in kindergarten, *katakana* is used for foreign imported words and *kanji* which is the most difficult and is studied throughout schooling. These are included in the appendix) at their Japanese Supplementary school, which took place in the evenings and on Saturday mornings, and so their assignments were moved to accommodate this. The six Japanese students were always, without exception, on task in class and always ready and active. Their attitude was positive and they were

motivated by the upcoming exit test which they sincerely wanted to pass. The Korean student also fitted into this style of learning. The Japanese and Korean were the only students in the class who were actively studying their mother tongue outside of school. The Japanese especially take this very seriously as it is only too easy for the students to fall far behind in their language learning. Japanese is generally thought to be an extremely difficult language. According to White (1987) in the elementary school children must learn to read and write approximately one thousand characters and by the end of Junior High School, the equivalent of our middle school, they must learn nineteen hundred characters as the minimum for literacy stated by the Japanese Ministry for Education. These requirements make our twenty-six letter alphabet seem very simple.

The other three students were very different to teach. Tom from Finland was very relaxed about homework assignments and often needed extra time. He sometimes "forgot" homework or to study for a test and never missed an opportunity for fun. He was not as concerned about passing the exit test as he was sure it would be really hard work in mainstream. Even the idea of being with his friends for every class did not raise his motivation. He did what he had to do, and not a lot more.

Isu from Brazil was extremely sociable, within a couple of weeks was known by everyone in eighth grade. He was popular, talkative and always made a point of asking questions and engaging the teachers; sometimes he verged on being irritating but his charm usually saved him. His attitude to school work left a lot to be desired, he found written assignments tiresome and often asked "Why do we have to do

this?". It was as if he considered school as a social arena, an extension to the beaches of Brazil, and the work was just a tedious extra. He showed no great desire to exit the ESL programme, but admitted he supposed he ought to as there were more girls in mainstream anyway. So much for motivation.

Ore from Israel was very intense and driven towards success. He was not sure if he would still be in Germany the following year as his family were unhappy to be living in Germany. One of his best pieces of work was a history of his grandmother's experiences during the Holocaust. This was an extended essay and whereas the other students were more concerned about how long it had to be, what they would be graded on and when it was due, Ore's greatest concern was to write it in beautiful language as his grandmother had used, in Hebrew, when he interviewed her. He brought in single paragraphs daily and literally demanded that I read and correct his writing and then "make the language beautiful". Like the Japanese, Ore was always seriously on task in class and completed assignments diligently. He always wanted to understand everything exactly and there was often friction between him and the Japanese boys as they felt we were not progressing fast enough because of his continual questions. At one point in pure frustration Go shouted out;

What difference does it make? If she says like that, do it like that.

Don't ask so many questions!

The other Japanese supported Go, but Ore would not be silenced. In his words,

I have a right to know!

Tom and Isu were always amused by these conflicts, obviously feeling they were a

welcome interruption.

Out of the Classroom

Out of the classroom Tom and Isu spent a lot of time with mainstream students, Ore chose to be alone and the Japanese were always in all Japanese groups, speaking Japanese. All of the boys took an active part in extracurricular sports, with the exception of Hori who played baseball for a German club, and Ore who was not interested. The others all played in the school soccer teams. As a means of improving their English out of the classroom I always encouraged the ESL students to get involved in sports and other extracurricular activities. On Monday mornings there was always a match post-mortem and after training sessions we often had heated discussions about team tactics. The initiator of these was nearly always Isu who frequently complained that within the team there were two teams, one of the Japanese players and the other of the rest. According to him the Japanese only played together and the team was weakened by this, he also complained that the coaches seemed to be unaware of it and did nothing to remedy the situation. The Japanese boys on the team were all in the ESL class and hotly denied this, but were quietly convinced that they played better anyway.

2.6 The Exit Test

This group took the ESL exit test in May 1999. The high school exit test was designed and administered by high school ESL colleagues. The high school ESL

students all routinely sat the exit test in December and in May and could only exit at these times. In contrast to the programme in the middle school there is no "trial period" before exiting officially. After succeeding in the test they were placed in mainstream classes without any further additional support.

The test comprised four sections; listening comprehension, reading comprehension, grammar and an essay. It was at the level of the Cambridge First certificate. The test was designed to test general competence and it was not possible to study for it. It was aimed to confound any blind application of grammar rules and test the student's mastery of the whole language.

After the tests had been corrected by my high school colleagues, I was astounded to learn that only the three non-Asians had all passed. The Asians had all been placed in high school ESL classes. They were bitterly disappointed and felt cheated after all their hard work. The other three were of course delighted but also surprised as they were very aware that the Asians had worked far harder than they had. If the decision to exit had been based on class work, homework, in class test results, attitude or effort the results would have been reversed.

From August 1999 the Finnish and Brazilian boys, Tom and Isu, joined the mainstream classes and although it was challenging at first they went from strength to strength, according to their teachers. Ore returned to Israel and Toshi left to go to another international school, where he was also in the ESL programme. The other Japanese and the Korean went into high school ESL classes. They were put together

in one class, being of the same level and were joined by two German boys and a Swede. As I share an office with the high school ESL colleagues I often heard about "my" students and their progress. At first my colleagues complained as they found them far too verbal. My colleagues were mostly used to Japanese students who had come directly from the Japanese school and who tend to be very quiet in class. They did, however, admit that they were comparatively lively to teach and the teachers began to enjoy their oral ability. During the course of the half year I often saw the Japanese come to the office for help, with questions, to hand in work and I always asked them how they were progressing and they were quietly confident, as I was, that this time they had to exit. The test was administered in December and once again to my amazement none of the Japanese or the Korean passed. The two Germans, who had come from German schools and not had the benefit of total immersion in the English language for as long, both passed. In fact Hori, who had worked extremely hard, as my colleagues confirmed, gained exactly the same number of points on the listening and reading comprehension sections as he had in the summer. The others showed a slight improvement but not enough to pass the test. The crucial question was: Why should Asian, particularly Japanese and Korean students, consistently fail this test since the results appear not to reflect their ability or potential? What could be going wrong?

My high school colleagues maintain that the test has proved its value by the fact that those students who exit do well in mainstream and succeed without any support system. The mainstream teachers are satisfied with the standard of the exiting students and no remedial work or special efforts are required to assimilate them into

the class.

The results in the following year confirm what has taken place in the years since I took over the middle school ESL department. During the course of this time only two Japanese girls have succeeded in passing the exit test at the end of the eighth grade, but almost all of the students of other nationalities have done so. The Japanese students then remain in high school ESL classes for up to three semesters. The high school policy is to exit the students after four semesters regardless of their test results as they cannot otherwise complete the courses and gain the credits needed to graduate.

Considering the level of attainment in other subject areas and the amount of effort and diligence which the Japanese bring to their English classes, the fact that they are consistently taking longer than students of other nationalities to reach proficiency in English is a problem which needs to be researched. A closer examination of the test reveals some areas which could be problematic, although the fact that the students of other nationalities succeed without difficulty seems to show that these difficulties are perhaps more cultural than linguistic.

Understanding Spoken English

The first section has as its stated aim, to test how well students understand spoken English. The tester reads twenty sentences and the students have a sheet on which there are three alternative responses to each sentence. The exercise involves

choosing the most appropriate response.

Example:

The tester reads

Do Mary and her brother do the cooking together?

In the students' booklet they have

a. No, he doesn't.

b. No, she doesn't.

c. No, they don't.

The student must now choose the appropriate response and write a, b, or c on their answer sheet. They have twelve seconds before the next statement is read which leaves little time to consider and even less time to read the following three alternatives to be prepared for the next statement. While the time element is without doubt a stress factor, there are other possible difficulties. What is the test really testing? What do the students need to know in order to succeed? Of the twenty sentences, ten are questions. They bear no relation to any sentences which occur before or after, no previous knowledge is assumed or required although generally tests are of course designed to test previous knowledge. Thus the students' automatic reaction would be to ask themselves -

Who is Mary?

Do I know anything about her or her brother?

How do I know if they do the cooking together?

How can I know if they do the cooking together?

Is there anything in the sentence which gives me a clue as to whether or not they do the cooking together?

All of these questions are redundant; the students do not need to know any thing except which answer constitutes a grammatically appropriate response. As simple as it sounds this involves a number of cognitive steps. First, the students must hear and fully comprehend the sentence. At the same time they must read the three alternatives and check each one mentally against the remembered sentence. Then they must then make a decision, cross check and fill in the answer on the answer sheet, all during the twelve seconds before the tester reads the next sentence.

Given that students of other nationalities succeed without much difficulty, could it be that the difficulties encountered are more cultural than linguistic? In addition to the ten questions there are ten statements, requiring the same thought processes.

For example

The light is so dim that she can't read the letter.

a. She has enough light

b. She has too much light

c. She needs more light.

Ten of the twenty sentences use English first names, Mary, Tom, Steve, Bill, Jane, Patrick, Phil, John, and Betty which could cause additional complications. Considering that our ESL students come from their home countries to an international school, their contact with English names will be limited to those learnt from their English text books and those in use in school. Of the nine names used in this test, only Tom is a name they will be familiar with from their peers in 1999. Fashions in names change so much that the test is instantly dated by the use of names which are not currently in popular use as far as the students are concerned.

Lack of familiarity with first names could lead to confusion as to gender which would make the answers even more difficult to find.

Similarly the place names used are all American, although this should not present such a problem as most international school students are familiar with New York and California. Harvard University is also mentioned and may not necessarily be known. In fact the sentence assumes a cultural knowledge which, if present, helps almost to guess the answer.

If Harvard University accepted him, would he go there or to his state college?

a. Yes, he would

b. He'd go to Harvard.

c. He went to the state college.

Any student familiar with the reputation of Harvard would find the correct answer quickly, but lack of familiarity with Harvard or what a state college is, could lead to confusion. With only twelve seconds to find the correct answer, the students cannot afford to be confused by gaps in their cultural knowledge.

A number of other sentences also assume cultural knowledge. For example:

She doesn't like sugar in her coffee very much, but she does like cream.

The immediate association between *coffee and cream* would definitely be part of a German, Austrian, or Spanish culture but for a Japanese or Korean student it cannot

be assumed. Certainly the sentence is less easy without the additional cultural knowledge of an automatic connection between coffee and cream.

There are also several Americanisms in the sentences. For example:

How many of your classes meet today?

The use of the verb, *meet*, in relation to classes may not be familiar to a student.

Another example:

How long will Jane be in the hospital?

Students who have been taught by native British teachers will usually have learnt that with hospital no article is used in the normal sense of the word. The unexpected use of the article could cause confusion or hesitation.

A further example:

He left the car running when he went into the store.

The use of the word *running* for the car engine could also be confusing.

What did Phil buy his sister for her birthday?

Even this sentence has cultural overtones as in Japan, for example, giving presents on someone's birthday is not the norm, so that the understanding, which is assumed by the test writer, that the concept of giving present on a birthday is known and familiar, is not given. The name Phil could also lead to confusion in this sentence as it could be wrongly identified or mistaken for the verb *feel*. Although it would be

grammatically incorrect, second language learners often have difficulty with long and short vowel sounds so that the difference between *feel* and *Phil*, could well lead to confusion. When these additional complications are considered, use of questions where no previous knowledge is available, use of unfamiliar first names, use of place names, American English and cultural practices make almost every sentence in the exercise loaded in some way to the advantage of students with more common cultural ground.

Reading Comprehension

The next part of the test consists of a number of reading comprehension exercises; a longer literary style text, with five incomplete statements referring to the text to be completed from a choice of four possible endings, then ten written statements followed by either a question or an unfinished sentence where the students are required to find the answer which fits best. The final exercise is a Social Studies type of text followed by five sentence beginnings and a choice of four possible endings. The students have fifty minutes to complete this section.

The literary text

This text is approximately four hundred and fifty words. If this type of dense text is compared with the usual reading done by my students outside of the classroom, there is a clear difference. The non-Asians do read books in their native languages but not as assiduously as I would wish. The Asians, in particular the Japanese, tend to read

comic books with very little text but a good deal of pictorial content clues. This text is written in the first person and describes the discovery of an island by a grandchild whose grandfather had hidden a treasure there. The writer is female but this is not revealed until the final word of the text. However the first question which refers to the third of five paragraphs already uses the female pronoun which could confuse. The sentences are testing implied knowledge, that *reading between the lines* which is not necessarily a required skill in other cultures, although English speakers and writers often enjoy implications rather than direct references. For example the first question refers to this extract from the text:

As the boat approached the island, I suddenly became aware that I was nervous, and my hand was shaking very slightly as I compared the sketch with the coastline ahead. Yes, there was the sandy beach with a little river running into the sea. There were the hills and cliffs visible on the left, and I had just sailed between two offshore islands.

And asks the student to choose the correct response:

- As the writer approached the island, she was*
- A. feeling seasick.*
 - B. unable to see the sea and cliffs.*
 - C. looking out to sea.*
 - D. comparing the view with a hand-drawn map.*

The correct answer is of course D but first the students must not be distracted by the fact that the writer is nervous, not seasick, also they must be aware that *unable to*

means *not able to* and *visible* means she *could see* the sea and cliffs, although they are not mentioned together in the text. In order to find the correct answer the student must also know that a sketch implies drawn by hand. These lexical clues demonstrate a good grasp of the English language, but the fact that the correct solution is not specifically stated could well lead to confusion for students who are unused, culturally, to looking for implications.

The second question is even more complicated for someone unused to reading between the lines as the answer is deliberately obscure. The relevant passage of text is:

I tried to imagine how my grandfather must have felt as he had sailed in. He could not have known that he might have been in trouble if he had approached the island from the other direction. To the north was a coral reef and lagoon, with rocky beaches and high cliffs to the left and right of it. Even he, experienced traveller that he was, must have felt excited. He had probably laughed too, that deep laugh of his, at the thought of what he was about to do.

The writer's grandfather had approached the island
A from the south.
B from the north.
C through a coral reef.
D by a dangerous route.

In order to find the right answer, the student must understand the route which the writer has taken and understand that the reference to *approached the island from the other direction* refers to the other direction from that which the writer herself has

taken. The description of the north coast of the island is confusingly not the description of the approach the grandfather took but a description of the dangerous route, through the coral reef and so not the route which the writer took and not the from the north so that the right answer must be from the south. This question is an extended exercise in logic which not only assumes perfect understanding of the text but also the ability to unravel the text in a way in which not all cultures would be practised. The thought processes required are very culturally specific. In addition to the way of reading the text not only for content but also for implications, the level of vocabulary is demanding. Words such as *creepy-crawlies*, *swamp*, *glinted*, *gleamed* or *unaccustomed* or phrases such as *I was off*, *I thanked my lucky stars*, and *I gritted my teeth*, make this text even more challenging for ESL students. However it appears that what is being tested here is not the students' all-round competence in English but their ability to understand implied ideas. The underlying question must be whether this is a valid concept to be part of an exit test which proposes to test English competence and also whether in fact this style of implied knowledge is also a relevant concept for students from other cultures.

Reading Interpretation

The third part is entitled Reading Interpretation and gives ten single statements to which the student must find the answer that best fits. The sentences are similarly confusing to the listening comprehension, although this time there is not the time pressure on the students. They have time to consider and have the questions in front of them so that they can re-read them at will. As with the listening comprehension

no previous knowledge is supposed or required although names are again used which may or may not be familiar, Rita, Paul, Dave, Golden, and Palmerston. Again the student is required to fully understand the question and re-phrase it which also presupposes fully understanding all of the answers. Many of the answers appear to be deliberately confusing, unless the student looks closely at the context. For example:

Rita asked if I could give Paul a ride home.

Who needed a ride?

a. Paul did.

b. I did.

c. Rita did.

d. Paul and Rita did.

In addition to being familiar with the expression *need a ride* the student must be able to unravel the sentence to see just who does need a ride. This is the simplest example, the others become more complicated.

For example:

The popularity of Palmerston as Prime Minister was based on the impression he gave of aggressiveness in foreign policy, but now we realise that his policies were exceedingly cautious.

People liked Palmerston because....

a. he was foreign.

b. his policies were flexible.

c. they thought he was cautious.

d. they thought he was aggressive.

Assuming that the students are familiar with terms such as *popularity*, *Prime Minister*, *foreign policy*, *aggressiveness*, *impression* and *exceedingly*, which are of a fairly high level, the challenge then is to read between the lines and reach a logical conclusion to complete the sentence without being distracted by the variety of possibilities. This assumes not only an ability to understand a text but also to manipulate, see connections and understand relevance within a specific context. All of these do not seem to be within the realms of language teaching but to a certain extent they appear to be culturally based and part of the knowledge a student may or may not bring with them.

Social Studies Reading Comprehension.

The final section consists of a social studies text. In this example, the topic is Ethiopia. The text is the same length as the literary text, about four hundred and fifty words. Although the vocabulary is quite difficult the sentences to be completed are more straightforward, however, a certain amount of deduction is still required. For example;

In Harrar you can see

a. modern buildings

b. outdoor market stalls

c. Cuban children

d. old cars

The relevant passage reads-

In the east is the town of Harrar which is of an entirely different character. It is reached by what must be one of the slowest trains in the world. This town is entirely isolated from the rest of the world, surrounded by high white-washed mud walls. It does not seem to have changed in thousands of years. The dusty streets are winding and very narrow. In the open market place merchants display their goods: brightly coloured cloth or piles of spices are laid out on sheets on the ground. It is only the shoe shops which make sandals out of old car tyres and the small gangs of children shouting ,Cuba! Cuba!‘

That reminds one of the twentieth century.

In order to be able to answer the questions, a good understanding of the vocabulary is required as well as the ability to reject irrelevant detail, and identify the main ideas.

After these sections of the test the students are required to write an essay. The essay is usually only marked if the students have passed the comprehension sections.

Questions Arising

The ten students who took the exit test in May 1999 had all been in the same class for an academic year. They had had a double period of ESL daily for this time as well as being immersed in English in all their other classes. None of them had demonstrated problems with the materials they had studied, some had worked harder than others but there had been no discernible divide between those who could and those who could not and all had reached the goals set. Yet after the results of the exit

test became known there was a clear divide between the three who had succeeded and the seven who had not. These results reflected those of previous years in that often the Japanese and Korean students appear to be less successful learners than students from other countries.

In November 1999 the same Japanese and Korean students re-took the test after a further intensive high school ESL course of three periods a day in addition to being immersed in mainstream classes for all other subjects. With them were two new students to ISD who had been in German schools until summer, 1999 and joined ISD in August. After only a few months of ESL, both German students passed the test but none of the Asians did. In fact Hori gained exactly the same result as he had done in May 1999, 60%.

In May 2000 the same students once again sat the test, this time Hori scored 64% and will be exited as the high school colleagues now accept that he is ready for mainstream, despite the test results. The eighth grade students going into ninth grade suffered exactly the same fate, the Japanese all failed the test, a German and an Iranian both passed.

When I compared the test papers which the Japanese and Koreans had completed on each occasion when they had failed the test some interesting details appeared. Although there are four different examinations for the reading texts, the test of spoken English is always the same, the same sentences and the same answers are repeated each time. A close examination of the answers given each time show that

the failing students gave different wrong answers each time. A few of the questions were consistently right but the incorrect answers varied each time. This would seem to indicate that they were never sure of the answers and just guessed and there was no learning process involved. The papers were never discussed after the examination. The students were never shown their results nor were their mistakes ever used in lessons. The Japanese and Koreans always felt very uncomfortable at the idea that they could not study for the test. In fact they were often confused at the idea of having a test for which they could not prepare. The fact that their score changed only slightly each time would seem to indicate that they had made little progress in the six months between each test.

Knowing that the Japanese are industrious students with high levels of attainment in mathematics, why do they fail so consistently in their acquisition of English language competence as measured by the test? If we assume that performance in the “exit test”, as devised and conducted here, symbolises success or failure in one international school, why are the Japanese students so unsuccessful? Does shared cultural knowledge lead to success in the classroom? What are the less obvious cultural differences, which we do not take into account, but could be playing a greater role here than the obvious ones? Which areas of the invisible classroom culture are inaccessible to the students and how can we help them to succeed? What do we need to know about their home lives, the child-rearing philosophies of other cultures and how these affect childrens’ progress in school? How do differences in acceptable behaviour and notions of what is “good” affect our students’ learning? How do the practised learning and teaching beliefs and styles of other cultures affect

our students? How do concepts of what is relevant in the classroom, in the area of learning and knowledge, affect students' success? What might facilitate success?

2.5 Summary

In this chapter I described the students of the International School of Düsseldorf and their diverse backgrounds. The high school exit test results over a period of three years have shown an apparent discrepancy between the students' level of effort and involvement in the language learning process and their success. This test was designed to test competence in all four language skills. The Japanese as a group attract attention as they tend to be industrious, serious and concentrated in their study of the English language and yet they are unsuccessful in the exit test. In contrast some other students make less effort in class, take their studies less seriously but succeed in the exit test and go on to do well in the mainstream classes. This apparent discrepancy throws up a number of questions related to the relationship between the effect of culture and our view of successful learning, and more particularly how the Japanese view of education affects the children's success in a new and very different learning environment.

Throughout my research, some Korean students have demonstrated similar difficulties to the Japanese students. However as Japanese and Korean cultures and languages are very different, I would not presume to treat them as one. My decision to concentrate on Japanese students, rather than Korean in this study was based on the fact that the Korean student population at ISD is considerably smaller than the

Japanese. In 2004 there were 47 Korean students in the school compared to 124 Japanese students.

The pilot study appears to show that many Japanese students at the International School of Düsseldorf, despite being conscientious and hard working, do not successfully learn English as quickly as students of other nationalities. This seems to indicate that language is very closely linked to culture and that culturally different attitudes to learning play a role in successful language learning and acquisition.

In order to find relevant information gained by other researchers, the areas I would like to pursue through the literature in the next chapter are

- a) the effect of cultural differences on learning
- b) the Japanese view of teaching, learning and testing.

Chapter Three

Theoretical Perspectives

3 Introduction

In this chapter I review literature related to culture and the effect of culture on learning generally, first language learning and then especially second language learning. I have also extended my search to examine literature which describes the effects of discontinuity in the cultures of home and schools as well as the results of research conducted in international schools on culture shock and the effects of culture. Culture and language are inextricably connected. We use language to share culture and learn culture through language. As Minami states

Language can be thought of as both a manifestation and product of culture (2002: 19).

It is of vital importance for second language students to develop a good level of proficiency in the language of the school in order for them to function socially and academically and become effective members of the school culture.

3.1 Definitions of Culture

Research studies offer many different definitions of culture. According to

Matsumoto

... there are no hard and fast rules of how to determine what a culture is and who belongs to that culture (1997: 5).

He determines that culture is

... as much an individual, psychological construct as it is a macro, social construct. That is, to some extent, culture exists in each and every one of us individually as much as it exists as a global, social construct. Individual differences in culture can be observed among people in the degree to which they adopt and engage in the attitudes, values, beliefs and behaviours that, by consensus, constitute their culture. If you act in accordance with certain shared values or behaviours, then that culture resides in you; if you do not share those values or behaviours, then you do not share that culture (Matsumoto, 1997: 5).

3.1.1 A Fish in Water

One of the problems involved in trying to define culture is that we are trying to describe or reflect on something of which we are part, so that a definition will always be limited by our own view and restricted consciousness.

Fennes and Hapgood (1997) draw the analogy of man/woman in culture with a fish in water. The fish is always surrounded by water, but its existence and importance is only noticed when the fish, or in this case mankind, is confronted with something

different. We only become aware of our culture when confronted by members of other cultures whose behaviour is unexpected or in some way different from our own. Fennes and Hapgood (1997) also depict culture as an iceberg only a small part of which is visible while the larger part remains invisible. The visible part of culture includes music, dress, food, literature, fine art and are those aspects of culture which are most immediately accessible and understandable because of their overt nature. The invisible part, which is far larger, includes such ideas as conception of self, roles in relation to status by age, sex, kinship, occupation, notions of leadership, concept of past and future, tempo of work and so on. These ideas are far less accessible or observable and are those which lead most frequently to misunderstandings and miscommunication.

The idea of culture having hidden depths has also been underlined by comparing it to an onion, with an outer visible layer and many separate layers beneath, or to a deep lake where only the surface is visible. In every day activities in international schools, some attention is paid to culture, but it tends to be limited to lip service; flags, festivals and food.

3.2 Culture and Learning

However, culture is not in-born and so in the nature/nurture debate culture has to come down on the side of nurture. Through upbringing and socialisation babies acquire and develop the cultural norms of their social group. Matsumoto makes it clear in his definition that individually people can vary in the expression or strength

of their cultural conformity, meaning that their personality and experiences can affect their cultural position. According to Geertz

One of the most significant facts about us may be that we all begin with the natural equipment to live a thousand kinds of life but end in the end having lived only one (1993: 45).

If then culture is learned and not part of nature, it follows that the shared knowledge and understandings must be transmitted through social interactions. In his statements about culture as knowledge, Duranti states

If culture is learned, then much of it can be thought of in terms of knowledge of the world. This does not only mean that members of a culture must know certain facts or be able to recognise objects, places, and people. It also means that they must share certain patterns of thought, ways of understanding the world, making inferences and predictions (1997: 27).

Humans learned to use tools, from the stone age primitive axe to today's technological world of SMS and mobile phones which can take and transmit photographs. But according to Cole (1996) the tools are not just the artifacts made by humans but also the concepts and ideas which contribute to culture and become vital, central elements of mankind's cognitive development. Cole places culture in the middle of man's cognitive development and learning processes. Various terms are used to organise the huge range of processes both within and outside of the brain which are included in this idea. Geertz refers to them as *webs of significance* which

mankind spins. Cole (1996: 122) uses the terms *cultural schemas* or *scripts* to describe the organisation of essential cultural elements.

Linking these ideas of culture to education, Bruner (1996) describes two main theories of the workings of the mind. One idea is that the mind is concerned with information processing, almost like a computer and the other he calls *culturalism*.

It takes its inspiration from the evolutionary fact that mind could not exist save for culture. For the evolution of hominid mind is linked to the development of a way of life where 'reality' is represented by a symbolism shared by members of a cultural community in which a technical-social way of life is both organised and construed in terms of that symbolism. This symbolic mode is not only shared by a community, but conserved, elaborated, and passed on to succeeding generations who, by virtue of this transmission, continue to maintain the culture's identity and way of life (Bruner, 1996: 3).

Bruner links these ideas to education, as

education is not an island but part of the continent of culture (11).

3.3 Culture and Early Learning

The role of culture in learning has been the subject of intensive research which has been influenced particularly by the work of Vygotsky (1978, 1986) and others. In

contrast to the work of Piaget, who considered the child as an individual working parallel to others and paid less attention to the socio-cultural environment, Rogoff (1990), Cole (1996), Bruner(1996) and others consider in the first instance the effect of the child's socio-cultural surroundings in the learning process. Rogoff compares the young child's learning to that of an apprenticeship where the child follows the caregiver's actions just like the behavioural patterns of anyone learning in an unfamiliar culture

stay near a trusted guide, watch the guide's activities and get involved in the activities when possible and attend to any instruction the guide provides (Rogoff:1990: 17).

Peters and Boggs (1986) describe from their research how, during the process of learning to speak appropriately, a child learns both language and social rules, that is to say through interacting socially with others. Vygotsky's *Zone of Proximal Development* theory (1978) is also based on a learner interacting with a teacher who introduces him/her to a stage of learning slightly more advanced than the present level. Through being introduced and taught the next stage of learning, the student then progresses further than would have been possible alone. Heath's research (1983) into the literacy practices of three communities also showed the importance of the culture of the child's community and their practices in the process. Clancey examined the way Japanese children acquire their own cultural communication competence as members of their culture, which in fact is very different and special compared to other cultural groups (Clancy, 1986).

As long as we consider learning to be a cultural practice, it must be clear that society's cultural practices, beliefs and norms will strongly affect their teaching and learning process.

3.4 Culture and the World of Business

The business world has reacted quickly to potential problems in the areas of cross cultural communication. With the ever-increasing globalisation of businesses, increased speed of communications and the necessity of dealing with business partners, colleagues, and customers from other cultures, cross cultural communication has become an important issue. Much of the research in this area is also relevant for education; Scollon and Scollon (1995) in their book *Intercultural Communication* list twenty-four employment positions which could be considered to require professional communication. Teachers are not included in the list although the authors do believe that teachers are cross-cultural communicators too. Hofstede conducted a major research project which investigated unconscious levels of culture involving over 100,000 people from fifty different countries in the world of business (Hofstede, 1980). He suggests that there must be a mechanism in societies which permits the stabilisation of cultural patterns through generations. He maintains that the origins of culture are in a variety of ecological factors which then affect the structure and way of operating of a society which then result in a certain structuring of institutions, such as the family, education, etc. These then become established and reinforce the societal norms and ecological conditions from which they developed.

Japan is an interesting example of Hofstede's theory; a mountainous island with little fertile farming land and very few natural resources which is subject to natural catastrophes, earthquakes, tidal waves and hurricane force winds. In addition, Japan is relatively isolated from other countries as it is over 100 miles from the nearest country, Korea. As a consequence of these ecological factors, throughout history the Japanese people have had to work in close harmony and cooperation in order to survive. In fact they regard themselves and their way of life as special and often refer to things being done the Japanese way, which other people are not expected to understand. This has received even more emphasis in the second half of the twentieth century by the press and theories of Japanese uniqueness *nihonjinron* are taken seriously. These theories are discussed in more detail in the chapter on Japan.

Hofstede (1980) maintains that for change to be effected in a culture there must first be change in behaviour and that this change comes from outside influences. Throughout Japan's history, the Japanese have borrowed from other nations and adapted features to suit their own culture. An early example of this is the extensive contact which Japan had with China. During the fourth and fifth centuries Japan copied Chinese agricultural methods, they also adopted Chinese Buddhism and the Chinese writing system which became the Japanese system called *Kanji*. However, for over 250 years, from 1600 to 1868, Japan was virtually closed to the outside world and its influences and this automatically resulted in a strengthening and reinforcement of the culture. Since 1945 Japan has become increasingly westernised, at least superficially, and adopted and adapted many features of modern western life, especially from the world of entertainment and technology.

Hofstede lists four areas of deeper culture within which, he maintains, national cultures can be shown to differ systematically. They are

- *power distance* which refers to the relationship of the individual to authority,
- *uncertainty avoidance* which relates to the individual's anxiety, need for security and reliance on experts,
- *individualism and collectivism* which are concerned with the relationship between an individual and the group which prevails in a given society,
- *masculinity/femininity*, which differentiates between a masculine culture as one which values assertiveness and acquisition of things and a feminine society as one in which caring for people and quality of life dominate (Hofstede, 1980).

3.5 Hofstede's Research in Relation to Education

Fennes and Hapgood (1997) interpreted Hofstede's findings in relation to education and suggest that in a culture with high power distance, the teacher is dominant in the classroom, learning is teacher controlled, students only speak when asked and do not criticise the teacher. In contrast, in a low power distance society the students are treated as equals, the teacher is the facilitator of learning, and students are encouraged to give their own opinions. Consequently if a student moves from a high power distance culture to a low power distance culture the effects on his/her learning could well be far-reaching. In cultures with high uncertainty avoidance, Fennes and Hapgood suggest that the students expect the teachers to know everything, and students do not disagree with the teacher, whereas in a low uncertainty avoidance

culture the teacher can say, I do not know, and the students can disagree with the teacher. Individualism and collectivism relate to the importance of the individual as opposed to the interests of the group, so that in collectivist cultures, the individual would tend not to speak up, unless addressed directly, confrontations and differences of opinion are avoided and it is important not to lose face. In an individual oriented culture, the students expect to be treated as individuals and open discussion, even with some disagreement, is thought to be positive.

With regard to the masculine/feminine dimension, Fennes and Hapgood state that a school in a culture which is predominantly masculine would place great emphasis on achievement, competition between students and career-orientation, whereas a predominantly feminine culture school would encourage mutual solidarity, be interest-oriented and the teachers would be friendly.

From these descriptions of the variations within the dimensions of culture which Hofstede investigated and Fennes and Hapgood related to education, it seems clear that students coming from a culture which is radically different to the culture of the school could have major difficulties adjusting. This would be especially the case as the dimensions researched are related to unconscious values rather than immediately obvious, even visible, cultural differences.

In fact the present level of cultural awareness in most international schools, which is limited to flags, food and festivals, does not take into account in any way the differences which Fennes and Hapgood describe.

3.5.1 Literature Pertaining to the Effect of Culture on Second Language Learning

Kramsch describes how language is *bound up with culture in multiple and complex ways* because the words we

use express facts, ideas or events that are communicable because they refer to a stock of knowledge about the world that people share. Language expresses cultural reality (1998: 3).

However if we do not share a *stock of knowledge* problems occur. Research on second language learning regularly lists a number of learner variables, but one aspect which often seems to be missing is the role of the learner's own culture in successful second language acquisition or learning. For example, Tokuhama-Espinoza (2001) lists what she calls *Ten Key Factors* influencing successful language learning, whether bilingualism or multilingualism. They are timing, aptitude, motivation, strategy, consistency, opportunity, the linguistic relationship between languages, siblings, gender and hand-use as a reflection of cerebral dominance. In line with other many other second language researchers and writers, Tokuhama-Espinoza does not seem to view the culture of the learner as a consideration when looking at the successes or failures of second language learners.

Ellis treats culture as a relatively insignificant area in his extensive study of second language learning. Although in his introduction he claims that the aim of his over seven-hundred-page book is to

Develop a framework for describing the field as it currently exists and to use this framework to provide an extensive account of what is currently known about L2 acquisition and L2 learners (1994: 3).

In fact culture or cultural differences are barely mentioned as being significant features of second language acquisition. In the twenty-page subject index there are only four brief references to culture, none of which treat the subject as having any real relevance to second language acquisition. He mentions its importance with respect to caretaker's talk, learner strategies and the effect cultural and social milieu have on learners' beliefs about language and culture.

Ellis quotes factors influencing individual learner differences in language learning from three surveys, Altmann (1980), Skehan (1989), and Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991). Altmann's list includes *age, sex, previous experience with language learning, proficiency in the native language, personality factors, language aptitude, attitude and motivation, general intelligence, sociological preference (e.g. learning with peers, vs. learning with teacher), cognitive style and learner strategies*. Although it would seem that personality factors, attitude and motivation, sociological preference, cognitive styles and learner strategies must all be influenced by the culture of the learner, it is not included as an explicit category. This is even more apparent if we consult the list from Skehan who in addition to *language aptitude, motivation, language learning strategies* lists *cognitive and effective factors; extroversion/introversion, risk-taking, intelligence, field dependence and anxiety*. Of these introversion/extroversion, risk taking and anxiety could all be influenced by

the culture of the learner. In Larsen-Freeman and Long's list, factors which would seem to be part of the learner's culture include; *self-esteem, extroversion, anxiety, risk-taking, sensitivity to rejection, empathy, inhibition, tolerance of ambiguity* (Ellis, 1994: 472).

In an article in the TESOL Quarterly, Atkinson states

Except for language, learning and teaching, there is perhaps no more important concept in the field of TESOL than culture. Implicitly or explicitly, ESL teachers face it in everything they do. Yet there has been remarkably little direct attention given to the notion of culture in TESOL in the past 15 years (1999: 625).

He goes on to say that in the past 15 years only 10 full-length articles in the TESOL Quarterly

have included the term (or alternate forms of the word) in their title. Although culture as such is seldom addressed specifically in second language research, it is certainly the unacknowledged basis of almost all research. Most second language research seems to fall into one of two areas; firstly, those projects which result in measurable, quantifiable results and are based on fixed variables such as age, or length of stay in the second language environment (Collier, 1987) the long term effect of bilingual education (Cummins, 1981, Collier and Thomas, 2004), the effect of reading on language acquisition (Krashen 2004); and secondly those which consider factors which are not measurable; for example the effects of home and school culture on literacy.

Research published by Byram (1989), Kaikonen (1997) and others may refer explicitly to culture in the titles but in fact the main thrust of their arguments is concerned with the culture of the target language not the culture of the learner, which is what concerns me here.

This is also the case with Stapleton (2000: 291) who states in his research on culture's role in TEFL at universities in Japan that

the role of culture in TEFL has received considerable attention in the past twenty years

but his research focuses on the English language teachers' own culture and the effect this had on their teaching; how much consideration they gave their culture, their culturally influenced choice of teaching materials, although he did find teachers at Japanese universities who gave some thought to the cultural learning style of their students.

Ellis does mention research into ethnic differences in second language learning which show that the more distant the culture of the learner, the lower the achievement levels and he refers to research by Svanes (1988) which investigated the successful acquisition of Norwegian by three ethnic groups, a 'near' group who shared a common western culture, an 'intermediate' group which had some contact with western culture and a 'distant' group with little contact with western culture and found that the 'distant' group were the least successful. Ellis notes however

there is no way of knowing whether the difference in the grades obtained by the three groups was a reflection of cultural distance or linguistic difference (1994:207).

Short (1999) discusses a variety of factors which influence school success for second language learners in America which are unrelated to learner variables. She argues the case for English to be taught through academic content and for core content to be taught additionally in the mother tongue. She concludes that students are expected to assimilate quickly even though most school systems do not *value and respect the students' cultural heritages or include these in the educational process* (:109).

3.5.2 Socio-Cultural Theory

Socio-cultural aspects of language learning have been considered by a number of researchers.

Hymes (1966) introduced the idea of communicative competence as an area most important in second language acquisition. He determined that language learners need more than just grammatical competence to be able to communicate in a second language, they also must be aware of how the language is used. In later work he states

A key question in the classroom is what the teacher may make of the attitudes and values towards language use brought by the children. Sometimes a situation is taken to be a question of knowledge of language when it is in fact a question of knowledge in the sense of appropriate uses of language (Hymes, 1996: 74/5).

And he emphasises the importance of cooperative research by social scientists and linguists to unite *the so-called micro and macro levels of the sociology of language* (: 83).

Gardner (1988) developed a socio-educational model to demonstrate a number of factors which influence second language acquisition. These are social and cultural milieu, individual learner differences, the setting and learner outcomes. Of these the social and cultural milieu would seem to be the most closely connected to the learner's own culture but in fact are primarily concerned with the learner's beliefs about other cultures and language and their own attitude to language learning. Although the culture of the learner is included in these discussions it is not addressed as a central point of interest.

The role of social interaction is a major consideration in Vygotsky's work where he suggests that each child has an actual development level which can be raised by problem solving with others who are at a higher developmental level. Throughout Vygotsky's work the emphasis is on activity guided by a more able partner in order to reach the next level of development within the individual's zone of proximal development -that is activity through social interaction leading to development in culturally appropriate ways. (Moll, 1990)

Halliday's systemic-functional language approach is also based on a social theory of language. Because language is used socially, learners need to master the language code and social rules of use in order to communicate with others. (Halliday, 1980)

Research by Cummins and others shows the development of basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS) as a fundamental stage of language learning. According to Cummins this stage takes between one and one-and-a-half years and precedes the development of cognitive academic language proficiency. The development of these skills is based on social activity and interaction.

Block connects social interaction to language acquisition. through the Input-Interaction-Output (IIO) model, relying heavily on the work of Gass ((1997) and moving beyond Krashen's acquisition/learning debate to discuss Sociocultural/Activity theory and theory of participation. Breen's profile of learning contributions is examined in some depth, although this only includes culture specifically in the realm of cultural identity of the learner. . In his discussion of the role of culture in second language learning/ acquisition, as considered by Breen, Block determines that

any conceptualisation of culture must be able to account for how structures of the world views, behaviours, and artefacts or collectives of human beings interrelate with individual agency which is both determined by and a determinant of the structures concerned. Any conceptualisation of culture in the context of SLA will need to relate this structure/agency interaction to ongoing language development (Block, 2003:128).

Block admits that this is a *tall order* but goes on to quote Breen again who says that culture remains largely unproblematic in SLA.

Thus it seems to me that much of the research into second language acquisition fails to consider the effect of the learner's own culture, specifically. The concentration on variables such as age, sex, previous experience of language learning, length of study, motivation, language distance, and so on all fail to put the culture of the student at the centre of the learning process or consider the effect this might have on a student learning successfully. In the case of the Japanese students at the International School of Düsseldorf, most of the variables are of no consequence, being almost identical; the students in any one class are all of the same age, there is a balance of male and female, their previous experience of language learning is remarkably similar, the length of study is also the same, the language distance identical and their motivation, at least when they first arrive at the school, is remarkably high. The motivation levels often dip seriously as the students encounter continual difficulties. However, looking at the learner variables in second language acquisition offered by many of the leading researchers in the field, there seems to be very little real emphasis on the culture of the learner and this generally does not appear to be considered central to the process. In fact, much of the research related to second language learning emphasises the role of culture as it applies to the student learning about the culture of the target language, rather than the effect the student's own culture has on the process of second language learning. Although this appears to be the case in research which is specifically on second language acquisition, research based on other aspects of children's education frequently pays more attention to the culture of the child. A good deal of research has been undertaken which looks at the situation of children whose home culture differs from the dominant culture of the school.

3.6 Cultural Differences between Home and School

The theory that students stepping into a very different culture from home to school are likely to encounter difficulties is well researched (Heath, 1983, Rogoff, 1990, Gregory, 1994, 1997, Baker, 2000, Stoicovy, 2002, Greenfield et al. 2000, 2003, 2004).

The work of Greenfield looks closely at two aspects of culture which are also discussed in Hofstede's four areas of deeper culture; the *individualistic* which emphasises individuality, independence, self-fulfilment and standing out and the *collectivistic* which emphasises group membership, interdependence, social responsibility and fitting in. Greenfield refers to these two patterns of cultural behaviour as *pathways*. Non-western cultural communities such as Chinese, Japanese, Indians, West Africans, or Puerto Ricans are given as examples of interdependent cultures, which follow the collectivistic pathway. Western industrialised communities are shown to follow the independent, individualistic pathway, and the Germans, European Americans and the Dutch are the examples given. She also maintains that practices related to socialisation begin at birth or even before and a child moves along a particular pathway according to the parents' child rearing theories which are culturally determined. One of the projects developed by Trumbull, Rothstein-Fisch and Greenfield (2000) is called *Bridging Cultures in Our Schools: New Approaches That Work*. In this project classroom research is carried out by teachers which aims to help educators think about *where differences may lie and head off potential conflict*. It focuses on *identifying commonalities within*

cultures, avoiding stereotyping and remembering that within any given ethnic group individuals vary greatly in their beliefs and practices.

Clearly Hofstede's four areas of deeper culture and Greenfield and others individualistic and collectivistic research are very applicable to the situation in an international school where students and teachers of different nationalities and cultures work together. However, the emphasis in this work is on general classroom teaching and learning, rather than specific second language learning which is my area of focus. Although the work brings new insights to my research, it does not answer my questions as to why the majority of Japanese students at the International School of Düsseldorf take much longer than most students of other nationalities to successfully learn English.

Baker (2000) describes the relationships between home and school, particularly for language minority families as being often problematic due to language and cultural difficulties. He discusses the possibility that relationships between parents and teachers can in fact be so badly affected by lack of cultural understanding that it can result in alienation or antagonism between the two agencies. He believes that if the minority students' home language and culture are incorporated into the curriculum this can be beneficial for the children in every way.

Moll (1992) encourages the building of links between home and school so that the teachers can build on the *funds of knowledge* which children bring with them into the classroom from their home learning. These are often ignored, undervalued or

seen as irrelevant but in fact they could be a source of encouragement and motivation for the students and increase the relevance of their learning. This would avoid what Stoicovy (2002:80) describes when she writes

Too often, the culture of the school experienced by the child is very different from the culture of the family and community in which the child lives. The result is that schools frequently become discontinuous or out of sync with the populations they serve.

Stoicovy describes research undertaken with American-Indian children, Hispanic groups, Afro-Americans, the Kamehara Early Education Programme (KEEP) in Hawaii and research undertaken in Guam. All of these studies underline the importance of culturally responsive teaching.

A number of studies in both the United Kingdom and the United States investigate contrasting home and school literacies (Heath, 1983, Gregory, 1994, 1997). Gregory investigated the literacy practices of second language learners learning to read. However, here too a certain language competence is already assumed and the main issue is the cultural process of learning to read and how the teacher scaffolds the learning process working from the known of the child and leading him/her to the unknown in a joint activity based on Vygotsky's zone of proximal development (ZPD).

Heath (1983) investigated the language use and learning of children from different communities in the Piedmont Carolinas and the effect their home culture and their

ways of knowing had on their learning in schools. This was an investigation across cultures but again although the culture of the families was central to the investigation, the emphasis was not on second language acquisition.

Research carried out in this area describes the discrepancies between the culture of the home and the funds of knowledge which children already have before entering school, and the culture of the school, the requirements for success, that unwritten part of the curriculum which is so important for children to master. The focus throughout is on culture and cultural dissonance and the role of language in learning. However the role of second language learning or acquisition is not part of this.

3.7 International School Research

Clearly in an international school culture must play a major role. Unfortunately this is seldom the case as the culture is frequently seen only as the three Fs, flags, festivals and food, rather than a huge area of potential discrepancies and conflicts but also an enormous opportunity for learning.

It is generally acknowledged that it is almost impossible to define just what international schools really are in the twenty-first century. Although most are accredited by the Council of International Schools (CIS) and many follow the International Baccalaureate programme of study in fact there are usually more differences than similarities between schools.

What is known is the extremely high number of non-native speakers from other cultures within the international school populations.

The majority of students in international schools are non-native speakers of English. In the 2004 European Council of International Schools (ECIS) annual statistical survey, 297 schools with a total enrolment of 161,863 students indicated that over half the student population (59%) spoke English as an additional language (EAL). Of these, 198 schools (67%) had 50% or more such students while only 21 schools had fewer than 10% EAL speakers. In 18 schools none of the students spoke English as first language (ESL Gazette, August 2005).

One other major feature which international schools all have in common is the frequent turn-over of staff and students. The average stay in most schools for pupils who do not belong to the local population is between three and four years. Many young teachers spend their first years in the profession travelling the world as international school teachers before they settle down to raise their own families or just simply go home. Others make a life time career in international education and see the world in the process. At the annual conference of the Council of International Schools over three thousand of these teachers meet to share best practice and renew old friendships with past colleagues. Numerous works on international school practice have been published as well as two regular journals which share the results of research in the area of international education.

One important area of research is concerned with the global nomads or third culture

children we teach (Useem and Downie, 1976, 1986, McCaig, 1994, Storti, 1990, 1997). These are the students who live between two cultures, often western and non-western, and over time the two cultures merge to form a third. So that the students no longer really belong to their first or second culture. The phases of cultural adjustment which everyone seems to go through are well documented. In fact as students and their families rarely stay for more than three years they never actually cease to be in a phase of adjustment. No sooner are the phases of arriving got through than it is time to start looking forward to the next move. For non-native English speakers this adjustment comes in addition to coping with an unknown language, an unfamiliar school culture and the loss of the security of their familiar environment with all it involves.

Research published on international education, includes aspects of language acquisition and cultural diversity. Van Oord (2005) describes a theory of culture which he believes has relevance for the learning styles of students in international schools. This theory is based on the fundamental religious beliefs of different groups, so that Christians emphasise the concept of an underlying meaning of life which results in a tendency to prefer theories and conceptual learning. According to Van Oord this results in the predominant western learning style which emphasises abstract thinking, discussion and pays scant attention to the right way of doing things. In contrast the Asian religions emphasise the right path, the right way of doing things, the importance of the performance and the practice. This results in the preferred Asian way of learning which emphasises the right way of doing things, and accepting the 'master' version without discussion. Van Oord contends that these

differences are not fundamentally problematic for students. He feels that the adaptive process by young people to new environments and unknown social customs and habits usually takes place with incredible speed and fluidity and usually without signs of serious crisis and loss of anything in their personalities. He does, however, identify the problem that conceptual learning, the preferred western style, is in fact dominant in the international education movement, through the influence of the International Baccalaureate. The curriculum, he concludes, is a problem, but in his opinion the differences in teaching/learning styles can be addressed swiftly and students adjust to the change easily. However, van Oord only discusses individual cases and he does not, for example, address the situation where one cultural group makes up a larger percentage of the student population.

In a small scale research project, Deveney (2005) investigated aspects of Thai culture and its impact on Thai students in an international school in Thailand and how the culture manifests itself in the classroom, with reference to the teachers' awareness of the impact of the Thai culture and its effect on their own expectations. Deveney includes Thailand as a *collectivist* culture and mentions many of the behavioural traits which are also exhibited by many Japanese students in ISD. She mentions a tendency to be passive in class, and only respond to direct questioning, a reluctance to put up their hands, and she explains that Thai children are trained to be good and "a child the nation desires" which she says suppresses initiative, self responsibility and individual maturation. The teacher is held in high esteem as a representative of moral goodness with the gift of knowledge and the reputation of the group, the family and school is very important. Interestingly she concludes that

the teachers in her school were more aware of cultural differences than she had expected. Deveney highlights the importance of culturally responsive teaching and improved awareness of cultural differences, however she writes generally about classroom behaviour and does not relate this to second language learning.

Kusuma-Powell (2004) identifies a number of students in international schools who are multi-lingual but she says *not making it*. She calls this Functionally Multi-Lingual (FML) a term describing children who are multilingual at conversation level but have difficulty with higher order thinking skills, and abstract thinking so that their spoken and written work remain at a concrete level. She recommends that these students need a language rich environment with continual modelling of ways of learning. She also says the learner needs to work in the zone of proximal development so that teachers can scaffold the students' learning to the next stage. Although Kusuma-Powell mentions the importance of teachers being aware of each student's culture, she limits her comments to considerations of the child's preferred way of learning.

Many of the threads which I have been investigating are also discussed by Ezra (2003) in an article entitled *Culture, language and personality in the context of the internationally mobile child*. In this article she compares a typical international school student to Dorothy in the Wizard of Oz who is also snatched from her familiar home environment and then lands in a strange and unfamiliar place. Dorothy has the advantage of being able to use her native language in this strange place and she is also a very outgoing, pro-active child who is not afraid to take risks.

Ezra reviews the difficulties and challenges facing all internationally mobile students but especially the non-native speakers who have the additional burden of a new language to learn. In her sixteen recommendations given to facilitate new students' entry to an international school she concentrates on general suggestions which fit most cases for both the native and non-native speaker dealing with culture shock. She concludes

Since culture, language and personality are inextricably bound, teachers must develop awareness that the speed and ease with which children are successfully acculturated into a new English-medium environment are dependent on cultural values and traditions, the rate of English-language acquisition and differences of personality characteristics (Ezra, 2003: 144).

Although Ezra has touched on the area of my research in very general terms, she does not look in depth at any specific ethnic group or investigate how the culture of a particular group can affect their rate of second language acquisition.

3.8 Summary

In this chapter I have reviewed relevant literature describing culture, the relationship of culture to education, the role of culture in second language acquisition, the challenges children face when their home culture is very different from the culture of the school and articles relating to culture and second language acquisition in international school education. In my reading I have been unable to locate research

which connects the rate of successful second language acquisition to a specific culture, in this case Japanese, which could explain why most of the Japanese students at the International school of Düsseldorf take longer to acquire English than most students of other nationalities. This appears to be a neglected area in need of closer examination.

Chapter Four

Japanese Pedagogical Theories Which Inform Teaching, Learning and Testing

4 Introduction

In the previous chapter my literature search concentrated on culture, culture and education, culture and second language acquisition, as well as the relationships between the culture of home and school and international school research related to culture and language acquisition. I determined that there appears to be no research which would explain why the Japanese students at the International School of Düsseldorf should take longer than most students of other nationalities to acquire English as a second language. In this chapter I examine the effect Japan's history has had on the present education system, and the underlying beliefs and principles which inform teaching, learning and testing in Japanese education today.

4.1 The Effect of Japan's History on the Japanese Education System

Throughout history Japan has shown a remarkable ability to borrow from other nations and cultures and then adapt the borrowed ideas to make them singularly Japanese. This has happened with religion, writing, and education. From 1600 to 1868, the Tokugawa Period, Japan was virtually closed to the outside world. During that time most of the teaching was at first through private tutoring, but gradually

schools were established, some private and others located in Buddhist temples, and by 1850 about a quarter of the population was literate. The students were the children of the Samurai warrior class, which subsequently developed into the administrative class, some of the merchants' children and some farmers' children (Reischauer, 1977, Rohlen, 1983). After the Meiji Restoration in 1868, compulsory education was established and from then on English was taught in the junior and senior high schools, which are now generally referred to as middle and high schools. In 1907 the period of compulsory education was extended to six years and by 1935 to eight years. The educational leaders of that time travelled extensively and learned from other countries. According to Rohlen (1983) they copied the French system of centralised education, the idea of higher education being built around a few elite public universities was copied from Germany, character building through athletics and moral education from England and practical pedagogical techniques and interest in vocational training from America.

After the Second World War many changes were made to the educational system bringing it in line with the American system by reducing the power of the Ministry of Education and spreading the authority through the prefectures. The structure of the school system was also changed to six years of elementary school and three years of middle or junior high school, which were compulsory, followed by three years of high school and four years of university. However, although the structure of a democratic education process was in place, by 1951 the Ministry of Education had resumed full control of the contents and methods of instruction at all levels, a practice which continues to this day.

4.2 The Japanese Education System Today

According to figures published by the Ministry of Education in 1994, 97% of Japanese students continue on to high school for a further three years after the end of compulsory education. There are two kinds of university course which students can then follow, the more prestigious four year programme, which is most often chosen by male students, statistically only 30% of female students take these courses, or the less prestigious junior college two year course, where 90% of the students are female. The two year courses tend to be less academic. The information on the Japanese education system available to me is published in English, and consists of the official reports by the Japanese Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, *Mombusho*, or the work of other researchers, written in English, German or translated from Japanese. Research written in Japanese is not accessible to me. The available research shows a remarkable variety of views according to which area of education is being considered and by whom. Titles such as *The Japanese School, Lessons for Industrial America* (Duke, 1986), or *Educational Achievements in Japan, Lessons for the West* (Lynn, 1988) or *The Learning Gap: Why Our Schools are Failing and What We Can Learn from Japanese and Chinese Education* (Stevenson and Stigler, 1992) clearly see the Japanese education system as far superior to any system in the west. Similarly Wray (1999) praises the Japanese schools' higher achievement, literacy, efficiency, discipline, classroom management, and the strengths of educational centralisation and management. Lynn states

... in Japan educational standards are exceptionally high, such as

that by adolescence average Japanese teenagers are some three years ahead of their counterparts in the West (1988:1).

He claims that there are four important principles to be learnt for the West from the high standards in Japanese education. Firstly, he maintains that the students are highly motivated to work hard because of the examinations taken at fourteen for entrance to high school and at seventeen plus for entrance to university. The second principle according to Lynn is the length of the Japanese school year, which he claims is 240 days, and he calculates that by mid-adolescence Japanese students have had the equivalent of three or four more years' schooling than students in the west. His third principle is that the Japanese teachers have greater incentives for efficiency. He gives three reasons for this, firstly that the curriculum is specified by the Ministry of Education, secondly that there is intense competition between high schools for the best students and university placings and thirdly that there is an extensive private sector. Finally Lynn acknowledges the fact that

Major Japanese companies and the civil service recruit their trainees for senior management almost exclusively from the elite universities (1988:66).

In his opinion, the examinations for high school and university entrance have a backwash effect on the years leading up to the examinations resulting in a higher standard of educational achievement. Entry to a prestigious high school usually leads to acceptance at a leading university and this gives the Japanese student a higher social status for life. These four principles which Lynn views as advantages, the

examination system and the nature of the examinations, the central control over education exercised by the Ministry of Education, the length of the school year, and the importance of a student going to the right high school or university, will be discussed at more length below. Apart from the length of the school year, which is a fact, the other three are basic, much disputed but important features of the Japanese school system.

Duke (1986) also praises the high standard of education of the average Japanese worker which he claims has resulted in the high standard of efficiency in the work place, in turn leading to Japan's economic success. Both Lynn and Duke base their conclusions on observations and statistics concerning literacy levels, the number of hours of tuition, the number of students who stay on after the compulsory school years have been completed and the number of students who graduate from high school. These statistics are supplied by the Ministry of Education. They also refer positively to international research into mathematics examination results and the scientific knowledge of school age children. These works only discuss the higher levels of Japanese education.

As already stated, Lynn sees the centralised control within Japanese education as an advantage. The Japanese Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, *Mombusho*, exercises control over every aspect of education; finance, teacher training, appointments of administrators and teachers, in-service training and the implementation of the results of their own surveys of all areas of school life from class size to curriculum. The text books used in Japanese schools are also selected

and authorised by the Ministry of Education (Yamazumi, 1989:241, Sugimoto, 1997:121, Wray, 1999:31, McConnell, 2000). This allows the government to control what is taught and how. All educational statistics are published solely by the government. This is seen by some Japanese educators as a distinct disadvantage.

In fact some Japanese educators are severely critical of the system (Horio, 1988, Sugimoto, 1997). In particular the higher levels of Japanese school education, which seem to impress some western researchers, dismay some Japanese educationalists.

Horio claims that

... the ideology of overmanagement dominates contemporary Japanese society and abuses children's rights to freely grow and learn (1988:15).

He lists prescribed rules for hairstyles, skirt length, color of socks, width of bookbags as examples of overmanagement. In his opinion at present

... education is something the People passively receive from the State rather than demand and achieve through their own efforts (Horio, 1988:15).

With regard to the meaning of learning he writes

in present day Japan the verb "to learn" is generally understood only in relation to the passive reproduction of knowledge or techniques already established by others (3).

Sugimoto describes the high degree of state control over education especially in the areas of social studies and Japanese history and maintains that the government

... sways textbook writers towards emphasising nationalism, patriotism, submission, obedience to social order, duties and obligations to society (1997:132).

The Japan Teachers Union is also strongly opposed to the centralised control operated by the Ministry but they are unable to change the situation as the Ministry maintains such tight control (Horio, 1988:189-279, Shields, 1989:245).

The Japanese education system is widely considered to be meritocratic and fair. It is generally thought that success in life means a good job with a powerful company or a ministry usually for life, and it is known that this can only be achieved by entering the right university. Once students have entered their course at university, their future is secure. Unfortunately the entire education system is influenced by university examinations although not every student will actually go to university. Universities in Japan are clearly ranked and leading companies and ministries are known only to take students from certain universities, making entrance to them very desirable. For students, teachers and parents the pressure to succeed in the entrance examinations is enormous and this of course affects the content and teaching methods so that the teachers are in fact teaching to an examination system which is deeply rooted in Japanese society. As Sugimoto states

One irony of Japan's education scene lies in the sharp contrast between stringent schools and slack universities. While primary and secondary education in Japan produces highly trained pupils, Japan's universities remain a resting place or "leisure land" for many youngsters. Exhausted both physically and mentally by examination hell, they seek relaxation, enjoyment, and diversion in their university life (1997:129).

Hoshii similarly maintains

... once he has passed the entrance examination to university, he can relax and enjoy life; he will be able to graduate almost automatically (1987:128).

Sugimoto quotes Japanese research (written and published in Japanese) which found that Japanese university students study for a total of thirteen hours a week, compared with fifty-three hours of study undertaken by American students (Kato, in Sugimoto, 1997:135).

The top universities have a very clear order of importance in the eyes of all Japanese. Number one is Tokyo University followed by the other Imperial universities, these are followed by two private universities, Keio and Waseda, then the national universities which are of long standing, and numerous private universities which also have an order of importance. The second type of universities, which offer only two year courses which are most often taken by women, come at the bottom of the rankings and their courses are more like a Japanese finishing school than an

academic institution.

4.3 University Entrance

The competition for university entrance is described as examination hell, *juken jigoku*, an expression which is used frequently to describe this phase of a Japanese student's life (Rohlen, 1983, White, 1987, Lynn, 1988, Amano, 1989, Fukuzawa and LeTendre, 2001). Unlike other national university entrance systems based on S.A.T. examinations, A levels, Abitur or Baccalaureate, the Japanese universities each have their own entrance examination. The examinations take place on days chosen by the university so that it is often not possible to apply to more than two or three. In Reischauer's introduction to Duke (1986) he writes

The infamous examination system for entering schools, which rewards rote memory rather than reasoning, is a notably unsatisfactory and inhuman way of sorting out leadership, usually for life, but it is so deeply embedded in the system that it seems almost immovable.

Hoshii (1987) also describes the entrance examinations as

mainly memory tests, the student has to commit to memory an enormous amount of unrelated facts or methods (1987:128).

The entrance examinations for universities in Japan consist primarily of questions on discrete facts; there is almost no application of critical thinking skills or any kind of

logical thinking required, as the questions are mainly multiple choice or of the yes / no variety. This type of examination requires the student to learn numerous facts and be able to give the answers as quickly as possible. The exception to this is in mathematics which requires higher level thinking skills rather than discrete facts. The main examinations are set for mathematics, Japanese and English, and other subjects according to the course requirements. The English entrance examination consists of strictly grammar based questions with no opportunity for oral work, and little opportunity for any kind of extended writing. Brown and Yamashita (1995) describe the university entrance examinations for English as tending *to be of a discrete point and passive nature*. This means that the emphasis is on individual grammar items and translating sentences and the student is not required to produce any original language or display any mastery of communicative skills. Amano (1990) has shown how the university examination system dominates English teaching and learning. Some of the English used is out of date and would be unfamiliar to a native speaker. Past examination questions from different universities are published regularly enabling the students to practise and their teachers to analyse closely any changes in content. A large proportion of students attend cram schools, *juku*, which specialise in high school and university entrance examination preparation. These classes take place in the evening and are attended by many Japanese middle and high school students. This results in students studying from 8.30 a.m. to 3.30 p.m. in a normal school and then often from 6 p.m. to at least 9 p.m. in the evening at a cram school and then going home to do homework. The cram schools are not supported by the Ministry of Education and are privately run. They vary in size from huge chains of schools to small classes run by retired

teachers. The parents have to pay fees of course, but in fact most students are not reluctant to go to cram school as all their friends are there too and the atmosphere is more relaxed than in regular school. The cram schools also have the facilities to administer practice entrance examinations for high schools and universities and from the results they are able to advise the students as to which university entrance examinations they are likely to pass. This kind of testing was in place for a short time in state schools but then banned by the Ministry. Due to the stress of regular school, cram school and homework, it is not unusual for students to fall asleep in class in Japan. A well-known, often quoted, Japanese expression refers to the number of hours sleep a student may have in order to be successful in examinations, *Fail with five, pass with four.*

The university entrance examination results are published with a tremendous level of publicity and are a major news item. Extensive coverage is given in the media as to which high schools were most successful in placing candidates at the best university. These results inform the high school rankings in Japan. Just as the ranking system of universities and the close public attention to university entrance successes from individual high schools leads to a ranking of all high schools, so this effect washes down to the junior high schools and the elementary schools. The choice of the right school plus success in the entrance examinations is crucial for the rest of a student's life. There are no second chances in the Japanese education system. Unlike in other countries where students can begin to study at a later age, perhaps after finishing vocational training, students in Japan go to university straight after school and at no other time. The only exception to this is for students who fail

to get into their chosen prestigious university and spend a further year studying at a cram school before attempting the entrance examinations again. These students are referred to as *ronin*, meaning a travelling samurai, in the sense that the travelling samurai were not attached to any master, these students are not enrolled in any educational institution. Some elementary schools and junior high schools are affiliated with leading high schools and universities. These promise automatic entrance at each level provided a student's progress is satisfactory. These *escalator* schools, so called because once you are in, your way to the top is assured, are difficult to enter and result in the stress of entrance examinations being brought down to a younger level.

4.4 Effort - the Key to Success in Japan?

The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, *Mombusho*, statistics show that over 94% of Japanese students complete high school education. Although not all of these students are competing for university places, these figures do indicate a high level of general education and literacy throughout Japanese society. However there is no policy of failing students who need to repeat classes or of gifted students being moved up; the policy is for all students at any one grade or age level to move on together. There is in fact no consideration of different levels or kinds of intelligence or aptitude as Japanese society firmly believes that effort and application is the key to success in school (White, 1987, Shields, 1989, Wray, 1999). There is also no final examination; it is sufficient merely to have completed the course of study.

During the time when students are studying for entrance examinations, family life revolves around them and mothers are so involved in supporting their children in every way that the expression *kyoiku mama* meaning "education mum" has developed (White, 1987). A student's education often means financial commitment for families as cram schools, on several evenings a week often over years, plus possibly private tutors, involve considerable expense. Reischauer (1977) suggests that the drive for education has also been a factor in the reduction of the birth rate in Japan since providing a good education for a child is a costly exercise. Completion of high school in Japan actually means the completion of attendance rather than any kind of proof of an academic level reached. The university entrance examination is a one-off chance to get a place and previous school results or grades are of little importance. The educational process in high school is centred on preparing the students to pass entrance examinations and not on educating the whole child. As the examinations test learned facts and do not require critical thinking skills or creativity, the schools focus on cramming as much information into the child as possible and teaching the child to regurgitate these facts as quickly as possible when required to do so (Sugimoto, 1997). According to Hoshii

Today's schools with their large classes and rigid curricula do not educate children but teach subjects (1987:127).

The continuous pressure and "chalk and talk" style of teaching from middle school upwards contrasts strongly with the emphasis on creativity, cooperation and fun which permeate Japanese kindergartens and elementary schools. Wray states

Although Japanese nursery, kindergarten and elementary teachers could provide many hints to improve the methodology of their American counterparts, the reverse is true at the secondary and college level (1999:88).

Lynn (1988) claims that the continuous examination pressure is the reason Japanese students do well. In his opinion Japanese students are highly motivated for academic work as a result of wanting to get into the right university because of the practice of the civil service and prestigious companies recruiting only from the best universities. He claims that high school entrance examinations act as a powerful motivator for academic work and this has a backwash effect on the 12-14 year-old age group. He believes that the examination process is the motivating force for Japanese students to work so hard and attain such high mathematical, scientific and literary skills. In fact, he feels that this motivation is lacking in western education and we would do well to emulate the Japanese.

Not all researchers agree with Lynn as previously stated. In particular some Japanese writers (Horio, Sugimoto) are most critical of their system and see both Ministry management and the examination system as problematic.

Horio quotes from the speech made by Professor Ouci Tsutomi on his retirement from the Faculty of Economics at Tokyo University

Today's students have no historical consciousness and are thoroughly deficient when it comes to thinking critically about

problems other than those they have been tutored to respond to on entrance examinations. I seriously wonder if there is any future for scholarship in Japan (1988:14).

The fact remains, however, that within this government dominated-school system, 94% of students complete high school, bearing in mind that compulsory education ends after junior high school. Many western observers and researchers enthuse about the high level of mathematical and scientific ability and high level of literacy displayed throughout the Japanese school population. Although Duke (1986) praises the educational system in Japan and maintains that their economic success is due to their highly educated, literate workforce, he remains realistic and admits that America should not model its school system on the Japanese because as he points out

The Japanese school itself reflects the social and cultural patterns of Japan, its customs and traditions, which date back many centuries (Duke,1986).

As with so many ideas about Japan, the Japanese education system seems to be full of contradictions. For example, although a number of studies have shown Japanese students to be ahead of their western peers in mathematics and science (Stevenson, 1989:85), if the number of Nobel prize winners is taken to be an indicator of high level scientific or mathematical achievement the results are surprising. In the period 1901 to 1982 Japan had only 4 winners, compared to 126 in America and over 200 in Europe (Duke, 1986). Lynn, however, defends the lack of Japanese Nobel prize

winner as being due to the low number of pure science and pure mathematics courses offered in Japan.

4.5 Language Learning in Japan

A second contradiction lies in the area of language learning. The Japanese language is extremely complex. Japanese kindergarten students manage to learn 48 *hiragana* symbols in kindergarten, a further 76 symbols in grade 1 and up to grade 9 they are required to master a total of 1,850 *hiragana*, *katakana* and *kanji* symbols. Yet Japanese students' results on the TOEFL (English language proficiency examination) are near the bottom of the world-wide rankings. Wray (1999) states that the average TOEFL result for Japanese applicants was 493 out of 677 points. Japan was ranked 197th out of 214 participating countries. It is widely acknowledged that even after six years of English language classes very few Japanese have the English language competence level to hold a conversation.

Harasawa wrote

Of all the countries in the world where English has been taught on a nationwide scale, Japan seems to be about the least successful on balance our English teaching has become a disastrous failure The idea that almost all students, despite going through 6-10 years of English instruction, remain unable to hold the most basic conversation with a native speaker is heard from Japanese in all walks of life (1974:71-2).

McConnell writes that *English teaching emphasises rote and grammar and is taught*

as Latin was taught long ago (McConnell, 2000:23). According to Rohlen and TeTendre (1996) secondary level English teaching is generally found to be

dependent on copying texts, translating and memorising lessons spent on conversational English are viewed as largely irrelevant to preparing for entrance exams which require the memorization and manipulation of discrete lexical items (1996:212).

Fukuzawa and LeTendre (2001) describe mostly lecture-based lessons which were text oriented in teacher controlled classes, with no discussion, or opportunity for questioning, reasoning or disagreement, and where participation is limited to answering questions. Browne and Wada's (1998) research on high school English teaching in Japan looked closely at the training these teachers have had and concluded that more than half of the teachers had in fact studied English literature at university

... prospective English teachers studying in literature departments are not required to take any additional courses in second language acquisition theory, ESL methodology and techniques, or testing. The only major requirement for becoming an English teacher beyond taking the prerequisite English literature department course and passing a written test is to complete two weeks of practice teaching, usually with another teacher who has also majored in English literature (:101).

Most teachers do in fact continue to take in-service courses but because of the

limitations of their training it would seem that the grammar-translation method is easiest for them to teach. Not only is it generally the method by which they have been taught, but it satisfies the requirements of the university examinations and prepares the students adequately without encouraging any kind of communicative language competence.

In 1994 the Ministry for Education, Science and Culture, *Mombusho*, set new guidelines for English teaching in high schools with the emphasis on the development of communicative competence as the primary goal. This was easy to state but extremely difficult to implement given the teachers' training as described above. Another difficulty in the way of communicative competence is the fact that all textbooks in Japanese schools must be chosen from those approved by *Mombusho* only. These textbooks are provided with a teacher's manual and aim to prepare students for the entrance examinations. They concentrate on translation and drills to improve grammatical competence rather than communicative competence. The Japanese Ministries of Education, Home Affairs and Foreign Affairs began a joint programme called the *Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Programme* in 1987 which engages native speakers of English as teachers in Japanese middle and high schools. These teachers are often employed in a number of schools, visiting them in rotation, and often team teaching with their Japanese colleagues. In 1997-98 Browne and Wada reported that there were 4,800 teachers working as assistant language teachers in Japan. Although they also reported that, according to their survey taken at that time, during Oral English classes English was used by the high school Japanese teachers for only 41% of the time. This seems to show that the JET

programme will take some time to become influential. Maybe it will take a new generation of English teachers and a new set of textbooks to effect any change in the English language proficiency of the average Japanese student who, it must not be forgotten, must study English for six years.

Reischauer concluded that *the Japanese have proved notably inept at learning to speak foreign languages or to comprehend them orally* (Reischauer, 1977:387). He blames this partly on the geographical isolation of Japan and also what he refers to as *the phonetic poverty of Japanese* but he also maintains that for the Japanese

knowing a foreign language too well, it is feared, would erode the uniqueness of the Japanese people(:392).

And therein lies part of the problem. The Japanese want to be unique and both encourage and enjoy the theories of *nihojinron*, Japanese uniqueness, but they also want to be international. One of the main problems with English language teaching in Japan is generally acknowledged to be that the teaching is aimed towards passing university entrance examinations which consist of grammar-based questions without any need for the students to be able to speak, read or understand spoken English. Consequently, although most of the students will not go on to study for four years at university, all students receive the same kind of teaching. As their teachers were all taught in the same way, they frequently have a very low level of oral proficiency themselves and lack confidence in English and so are unable to teach their students differently. Reischauer sees the failure of the Ministry of Education to improve the

standard of English teaching and the failure to improve the university system as two of the very few areas in postwar Japan in which

tradition and apathy have been allowed to prevail in an otherwise much changed and very dynamic society (Reischauer, 1977).

4.6 Summary

A great deal has been written about the Japanese education system; some full of enthusiastic praise, others less so. There are several areas of Japanese education which are of particular relevance in this study and which have been given next to no attention; the area of foreign language learning, how children cope when coming from the culture of traditional Japanese education into an international system where individualism, initiative, creativity, and risk taking are valued and where students are encouraged to question and evaluate information critically. The culture of teaching and learning in an international school is a complete contrast to the culture of teaching and learning in the Japanese system. Students who move from one system to another face enormous challenges, not least of these is the challenge of learning English.

Chapter Five

A Review of the Literature related to the Effects of Japanese Culture on Education

5 Introduction

In the previous chapter I examined the Japanese education system and Japanese pedagogical theories which inform teaching, learning and testing and the effect which the university entrance examinations have on English teaching. In this chapter I review literature which addresses the effect of the Japanese culture on education, beginning with Japanese child-rearing beliefs and then examining the role of Japanese culture in the educational process, both within and outside of Japan.

5.1 Studies of Japanese Education

Numerous studies have been written about Japan and the Japanese and especially the strengths and weaknesses of the Japanese education system. Some of these are academic studies and others are written as the result of personal experiences in Japan in a less academic style. One reason for the great interest is the economic success of the Japanese in the later period of the last century, which is generally attributed to the high standard of education of the workers. In fact, Shields (1989) gives what he calls a surprisingly large list of over 200 English resources which discuss the Japanese education system. These works date from 1970 to 1988. Obviously the

amount written has increased since then. Topics of researchers include: early learning in the Japanese education system, mathematics and science learning, the fate of Japanese students overseas and the difficulties they encounter on their return to Japan. Less attention has been paid to the situation of the Japanese students overseas while they are learning in other educational systems. Although many of these studies take aspects of Japanese culture into consideration, none appear to look closely at the influence of culture on Japanese students learning English outside of Japan.

5.2 Japaneseeness - Nihonjinron

The difficulties involved in negotiating with a culture which leaves a non-Japanese outside and even has specific language terms for those outside of the in-group are enormous. There is a theory in popular Japanese culture, perpetuated by the media, that the Japanese are different. Japanese parents and students at ISD assure me on a regular basis that the Japanese are different. There are television programmes, magazine and newspaper articles in Japan but also elsewhere which discuss and reinforce *nihonjinron*, the theories of Japaneseeness. Without wishing to stereotype, it is true to say that many Japanese often have very different values, ways of behaving, communicating and reacting to outsiders who show an interest in what is going on, to what we as westerners would expect. Their attitudes towards teaching and learning, not to mention the complexities of the Japanese language, and my situation of being, in their eyes, a complete outsider who could not be expected to understand anything about Japan or the Japanese, have led to many frustrations but

rich rewards. As Rohlen and LeTendre state (1996:3)

The paradoxes and contradictions found in the Japanese culture of learning should stand as a warning: We simplify Japan at the risk of adequate understanding.

These paradoxes and contradictions are also discussed by Benedict (1997), Doi (1981) and other researchers who are not only concerned with educational aspects but also looking at the Japanese culture as a whole. But it is just these differences, often surprising, sometimes bewildering which make research into this culture so fascinating.

Kubota looks closely at the way Japanese culture has been described by other researchers. She warns against taken-for-granted cultural labels and sees much of the present research as creating and perpetuating, rather than reflecting, cultural differences. She says that some research

does not recognise the organic and plural nature of culture influenced by political and ideological forces and intricate power relations within the culture and between cultures at a certain time (1999:17).

She expresses her concern that many researchers actually reinforce fixed ideas about a particular culture by not taking into consideration the dynamic nature of every culture.

However, in much of the research, great emphasis is also placed on the effect of Japanese culture on teaching and learning, ranging from its effects on child-rearing practices to the university examination system. Japan's economic success is one of the reasons for this interest, as this economic success is seen as a reflection of an effective educational system.

5.3 Child Rearing Beliefs which underlie the Educational System

The Japanese believe that a child is born essentially good (Tobin et al, 1989, Peak, 1991, Lewis, 1995). This is based on Confucian beliefs and supported by folk tale tradition which views children as divine, even personifications of God, and likely to return to the other world if not indulged and loved. This belief contrasts greatly with the fundamental Christian belief, more or less prevalent in western society, that man is basically evil and that Christ died to save man from his sins which results in the idea that children need to be shown how to behave, to be trained and to be brought up to be good people. Japanese children are born inherently good, and do not need strict discipline. White (1987:27) states that the child should be *otonashii* mild, gentle, *sunao* compliant, obedient, cooperative, *akarui* bright-eyed, *genki* active, spirited, energetic, *hakihaki*, brisk, prompt, clear and *orko* obedient and smart. All of these qualities are encouraged and praised strongly. In the translation, the meaning which a person from the west attaches to 'compliant' and 'obedient' are not the meanings which a Japanese sees. In addition to these qualities, the good child also displays the ability to persist, *gambaru*, to endure hardship, *gaman suru*, and to reflect on their own weakness, *hansei suru*. There is no word for adolescence in

Japanese and teachers still refer to the students, even in high school as, *kodomo*, children.

According to Miura (1993) the first goal of Japanese childrearing is to minimise stress and anxiety for the child. Japanese babies spend almost no time alone as their mothers are always near them. Unlike western families who usually encourage their children to sleep in their own beds in their own rooms, Japanese babies sleep with their mothers (White,1987 :37). One of the reasons that this has continued to the present day is no doubt the lack of space in typical Japanese apartments. Often the living room doubles as a bedroom, the tatami mats are spread on the floor at night and there is nowhere else for the babies to sleep. Japanese babies are kept close to their mother, night and day. Even when the baby sleeps during the day the mother stays nearby. The Japanese have a word, adapted from English, for the kind of close relationship mothers have with their very small children *skinship*. Japanese mothers do not leave their children to cry as they do not want them to be afraid or anxious. In fact the Japanese equivalent of Dr. Spock, Dr. Matsuda, tells mothers that it is quite all right for babies to sleep with the mother even during their second year and if a baby cries at night the mother should pick him up and give him a sense of warmth and security. Miura (1993 :35) claims

there is a stricter relationship between American mother and child, and this kind of relationship may cause the child mental problems because of lack of enough love from the mother.

Japanese mothers would rarely leave a baby with a baby-sitter as it is their job to

look after the child and that takes priority over everything. In fact Miura suggests that the Japanese family is more child-centred than the American family and the Japanese family is described

by the letter L, with the father at the top of the vertical line, the mother at the bottom corner and the children along the horizontal line that starts from the mother's corner

while the American family is

more like the letter T, with the father and mother at both ends of the bar at the top and the children along the vertical line joining the bar in the middle (Miura, 1993:135).

After the birth of a child, Japanese parents refer to each other as *otoosan* (father) and *okaasan* (mother) indicating that their role as parents is now stronger than that of husband and wife. The father's position on the L, as described above, would also seem to show that he has very little contact or responsibility for his children and he seems to be somewhat isolated and only to be needed as a provider for the family. It is often stated that the dominant relationships in Japanese society are the hierarchical vertical relationships, like that of the mother and her child. According to White (1987 :21)

... the central human relationship in Japanese culture is between mother and child.

Fathers tend to work long hours and take part in obligatory socialising after work, so that children often only see their fathers at weekends, invariably only on Sundays. Fathers also take very short holidays. The relative roles of the family members and the different family structure in a typical Japanese family are also addressed in my data analysis as they play an important part in the cultural differences which affect students in school.

Research has been undertaken into the patterns of interaction between mothers and small babies and it has been shown that although American mothers spend less time in the same room as their babies, they talk more with them and try more to encourage a response from the baby. Japanese mothers are far more passive although they are physically always there. Caudill and Weinstein (1969) examined interactions between American and Japanese mothers and their babies and found that Japanese middle-class mothers talk far less frequently to their toddlers than American middle-class mothers. From this model which the mothers give their children, Minami concludes

In a characteristically individualistic society such as the United States, an individual should be verbally assertive, whereas in a characteristically group-oriented society such as Japan, an individual should be verbally restrained (2002 :25).

Whereas western parents try to encourage their offsprings to become independent as quickly as possible, Japanese mothers endeavour to keep their children dependent on them for as long as possible. Miura describes the second goal of childrearing in

Japan as to teach the child to be *sunao*, honest, receptive to adult expectations and obedient through the child's internalised desire to conform. In Japanese society group harmony is an important goal and the individual only exists in terms of the group, unlike in western society where the individual exists as an autonomous unit within a social group. In Japanese culture *ittaikan* is important, the feeling of oneness with the group.

Japanese mothers fulfill all the wishes of their children. It is often said that Japanese mothers never or rarely raise their voices, or show other signs of irritation with their children. This is generally achieved by never going against the child as the Japanese expression *you can win against neither steward of the manor nor a crying child* would seem to explain. Japanese children are tolerated and indulged. At the same time as the child is unconditionally loved and indulged s/he is also learning to value and understand other people's feelings and closely observe the caregiver to understand what they mean. As nothing is explicit the Japanese child quickly learns *omoiyari*, empathy with others. From birth the close physical contact and empathy practised and modelled continually by the mother train the child to know exactly what she means. As a result of this empathetic understanding between mother and child, the mother's hopes and desires for the child are also passed on and become the hopes and desires of the child. This kind of indulgent love is known as *amae* in Japanese and has been described in great detail along with the effect it has on the whole of Japanese society by Doi in his work *The Anatomy of Dependence* (1981). Doi defines *amae* as

... an attempt to draw close to the other person the craving of a newborn child for close contact with its mother, and, in the broader sense, the desire to deny the fact of separation that is an inevitable part of human existence, and to obliterate the pain that this separation involves (1981:167).

It is also very important for the Japanese child to learn to behave as others do. They are often told they will be laughed at if they behave differently. They are warned about being *okashii*, strange, peculiar or not like everyone else because it is embarrassing to be different. At the age of three, the Japanese child begins kindergarten and the socialising process which will prepare him for school and later life begins.

... Japanese children must make a transition from the undisciplined, 'indulgent' child-rearing of the home to an elementary classroom where subordination of personal needs to group goals is the dominant norm. For most Japanese children, nursery school is that transition (Lewis, 1989:29).

5.4 The Japanese Kindergarten

There are two kinds of Japanese kindergarten. The *Yochien* caters for children from the age of three years until they enter the first grade and is run by the Ministry of Education. The *Hoikuen* is a day care centre for the children of working parents and takes infants up to school age and is organised by the Ministry of Health and Welfare. According to research there is very little difference in the activities and

basic classroom organisation of the two types of kindergarten (De Coker, 1989). Japanese teaching theory and practice is based on working with large groups of children. *This is what Japanese teachers are trained to do. This is what they do best* (Tobin et al, 1989).

The teacher is also not a friendly ‘mother’ replacement but a slightly distant person. The teachers tend to be very young, single women who then give up work when they marry. They consciously encourage group membership by delegating authority, letting the children sort out their own fights and disagreements, tending not to intervene but leaving the children to work together. The atmosphere generated by the teacher is one of constant kindness and gentleness. As Tobin states

The child’s transition from the dyadic world of home to the triadic world of school and society is facilitated not by offering teachers who are mother substitutes but rather by offering a program of large class size and high student/teacher ratios, a program structured to limit face-to-face, emotionally intense interactions between children and teachers (Tobin et al, 1989).

In order to encourage individual responsibility towards the group, Japanese kindergarten classes are always divided into groups called *han*, who work and play together. Each group has a monitor and the role of monitor rotates so that everyone has the responsibility of being the leader in turn.

5.5 Japanese Culture and the Language Learning Process

A number of features described above are also easily identified as problematic in the process of foreign language learning, although the researchers do not always refer to them as being the results of early childhood rearing practices or connect these practices to lack of success in language learning. The idea of working or preferring to work in large groups and the unwillingness to communicate spontaneously or individually are discussed in the following reports.

Ike in a historical review of English in Japan describes the situation of Japanese learners.

Culturally Japanese prefer larger classes. Japanese students feel more comfortable when they are buried within the group Japanese are hesitant to expose themselves as individuals being shy, while highly valued in Japanese culture, is seen as a weakness in American culture not asking questions, while a sign of respect to a Japanese professor, is a sign of inattentiveness to an American professor (1995 :9-10).

Ike also recognises what she calls a *double-edged problem* for Japanese learning English. Although they are very keen to become orally competent, at the same time there is a reluctance due to their *perceived inferiority complex* rooted in cultural differences. Ike's work concentrates on the historical review and so she does not relate it directly to the acquisition of English competence.

Koike and Tanaka (1995) in an article entitled “English in foreign language education policy in Japan: Toward the twenty-first century” discuss the social, economic, political and geographical influences on foreign language education in Japan. After reviewing the influence other cultures and languages have had on Japan throughout history, the researchers turn their attention to English teaching in Japan at present and quote a five-volume *General Survey of English Language Teaching in Japan (1983-1990)* which concludes that *TEFL within the Japanese education system is not very effective* (19).

Despite a number of initiatives from the Ministry of Education, Assistant English Teachers (AET), the Japan Exchange and Teaching Program (JET) and the introduction of early childhood English education in some public schools, as well as a system of self-accreditation, this situation has not yet improved and in their conclusion Koike and Tanaka discuss seven factors which characterise foreign language teaching in Japan. One of these is the Japanese group consciousness which discriminates against outsiders.

Japanese people feel comfortable within their own group, but they feel uneasy outside the group. They are weak in individuality and in verbal communication (1995:23).

A further difficulty identified by the writers are the Japanese specific communication strategies,

which often involve discrepancies between their outward

behaviour and real mental state. Japanese people's verbal expressions are not necessarily consistent with their inner feelings.

Koike and Tanaka also discuss the structure of the Japanese language, which is very unlike English and so presents added difficulties, as well as the most dominant teaching methods in Japan which rely on translation rather than communication. This research, by two Japanese academics, does in fact discuss many of the issues which I have also identified, but they are related to foreign language teaching methods in Japan only.

Moore and Lamie (1992) discuss English and communicative competence in Japanese schools and mention some of the linguistic problems in English faced by Japanese learners. They admit that despite the number of years of compulsory English instruction, very few people can make themselves understood in English. Moore and Lamie claim that English is a particularly difficult language for the Japanese to learn. They attribute this to syntax, intonation, some sounds which are not present in Japanese, and the inconsistencies of written English. They also quote from a conference for Japanese teachers of English, where a number of factors were listed which prevented the teaching of English being as successful as the teaching of Japanese. These factors were the lack of exposure to spoken English, lack of confidence in communicating, adherence to traditional teaching methods and other factors such as class size and difficult teaching materials. The researchers note that they would add the examination system to this list which only tests grammatical factual knowledge rather than spoken English ability.

In contrast to the situation in Japan, in the international school setting, the students have maximum exposure to English, very varied and often innovative teaching methods, small classes and teachers have free choice of teaching materials so that they can be selected to suit the needs of the students. In Japan the teaching materials are controlled by the Ministry of Education so that there is no possibility to match the texts to the students' needs. In fact the teaching materials prescribed by the Ministry of Education dictate the content and the teaching methods as there are always manuals describing how the books should be used with lesson plans and additional materials.

Akamatsu (1998) discusses the influence of the mother tongue or first language (L1) on second language (L2) reading. He concentrates on L1 Japanese and the transfer problems it creates with L2 English, specifically the orthographic effects of Japanese on word recognition in English. The Japanese writing system is extremely difficult, being made up of three different syllabaries. Japanese children have to learn the characters by practising them over and over again in repetition drills. Japanese characters always have the same sign/sound correlation which makes reading in Japanese relatively easy. This is in contrast to the great variety of sounds which English letters can produce, for example the combination "ough" in *bough*, *rough*, *cough*, *although*, etc. Akamatsu acknowledges an Englishman, Harold Palmer, as one of the greatest influences on teaching English in Japan at the beginning of the twentieth century. Palmer believed in the importance of the Oral Method as he valued the importance of communication (Palmer, 1921). Due to a lack of opportunities for communicating with native speakers of English in Japan, the

method was later dropped and the Translation Method took precedence which still dominates English teaching in Japanese schools today. Akamatsu discusses four issues which affect the acquisition of English by Japanese students in his conclusion; the importance of providing oral instruction in English before teaching reading, the possibility of a critical age in learning to read L2 and the possible effects of learning styles in L1 reading on L2 reading proficiency and L1 orthographic effects on L2 word recognition. A number of studies have emphasised the language distance between English and Japanese, the additional complication of the different writing systems, and the differing requirements of the Japanese and western educational systems. These factors only represent part of the problem and no one has related these difficulties specifically to the period of time Japanese students need to master English.

5.6 The Japanese Abroad

Pritchard (1995) conducted an action research study using informal group interviews with three Japanese girls who were in her class on a residential course in England. Although the teacher found the students to be highly motivated and cooperative, the relationship between them was very strained. It was thought this was due to cultural differences and it became clear at the end of the project that it was indeed the case. The study was based on informal, unstructured interviews held with the students, however these shed little light on the difficulties concerned in my research. Although the problems occurred during language learning, the findings were not related to the acquisition of language but were focused on interpersonal

communication difficulties rather than academic matters.

In another study Pang writes about Japanese students at the International School in Brussels (ISB) and attempts to

capture the complex reality of Japanese youngsters studying at ISB through participant observation, ethnography, and interpretive analysis within the larger context of internationalization process and the discourse on Japanese ethnic identity (1995 :45).

The study examines the process of integration or lack of integration of these students into the life of the school. Although the study of English and the time it takes is important for these students, the study focuses on the integration process and makes little mention of language acquisition.

None of these cultural studies address the problem which this study has raised concerning why it often takes Japanese students longer than other nationals to reach English language proficiency.

McPake and Powney (1998) conducted research to investigate *The Educational Experience of Japanese Children at School in the UK*. The Japanese were chosen as they were thought to be *an under researched, though economically important minority group in UK schools*. Two Japanese communities, one in Scotland and one in England, were chosen and the researchers looked closely at the 11-13 year olds in

these communities who were studying at British state schools during the week and at Japanese school on Saturdays. Four areas of dissonance for Japanese pupils placed in English classrooms were found and it was believed that these were the results of differing educational practices and philosophies in Britain and Japan. The four areas of dissonance identified were; the understanding of the role of talk and silence in the classroom, the relative importance placed on knowledge and skills for learning, expectations of academic achievement and educational aspirations and notions of cultural identity. This study did not address the problems involved in learning English but did state

While Japanese children, over time, become highly proficient in English, they rarely become active contributors to classroom discussions, and some remain 'pathologically shy' (McPake and Powney,1998 :5).

Little direct reference was made to the length of time Japanese students take to reach competence although the identified areas of dissonance must play a role in the process; this was not the focus of the research.

Yamada-Yamamoto and Richards (1998) investigated the *Linguistic Experiences of Japanese Pre-school Children and their Families in the UK* and refer to the research done by Cummins and Swain (1986) which suggests that a minimum of four years is required for non-native speakers of English to attain grade norms on English academic tasks. This research by Richards and Yamada-Yamamoto was more concerned with pre-school children and the amount of interaction they had in

English and Japanese languages on a daily basis, the contact hours and interactions between Japanese and English speakers and the relevance, as the parents viewed it, of maintaining Japanese proficiency. Yamada-Yamamoto and Richards (1998) also published a collection of articles on Japanese children abroad considering cultural, educational and language issues. These included both of the two research projects mentioned above and other academic research and anecdotal accounts are included. The point is made that there is an increase in the number of studies on returnee children, that is Japanese children who have lived and attended school outside of Japan for a longer period, but that there has been less written on the experiences of Japanese children during their overseas period. A number of problems are raised which are also issues in international education, for example the fact that the majority of Japanese students return to Japan within five years, making mother tongue maintenance and development paramount, and also the fact that Japanese companies rarely inform their employees about the intended length of their overseas work. The employees sent overseas are chosen by the company, and they are not necessarily enthusiastic to come.

5.7 Research on Teaching and Learning

Shimahara and Sakai (1995) compared teacher training in Japan and the United States in an ethnographic study. Although this account sheds light on many cultural differences, for example how classroom control is managed in the two cultures, it does not give any further information on language teaching methodologies or address the topic of foreign language learning.

Simmons (1990) describes Japanese children growing up and going to school but again gives little insight to the teaching of English. His research is concerned with Japanese students' attitudes to life and their cultural values. He compares them to children of a similar age and educational standing in the United Kingdom at that time.

Education and selection in a Japanese middle school is described by Shimizu (1992) but this is limited to cultural activities rather than academics. The amount of time spent on extra-curricular events, social relationships, moral issues is quite impressive compared to the minimal amount of attention such matters receive in international schools. The teaching of foreign languages, particularly English, is not addressed.

Shimahara (1986) considers the effect of culture on learning but in curriculum areas other than language acquisition. He begins his research by stating that Japanese students continually outperform other nationalities in all categories of arithmetic and mathematics and goes on to claim that this is due to the culture in Japan. He describes three areas which he claims support the cultural basis of student achievement in Japan. They are the creation of a strong learning environment, created through the close bonds of mother and child, which results in extremely obedient, compliant children and mothers who are highly involved in their children's education as well as a strong sense of obligation to the family group from all members. Secondly, the Japanese strongly believe that all children have the same ability to learn and any differences in the final result are due to the amount of effort

made. Consequently the concept of differing intelligences or a measurable intelligence quotient (IQ) is not a issue. Ability grouping does not happen in Japanese schools as the children are deliberately mixed to benefit from each others' strengths. Thirdly, he claims that group orientation and concentration contribute to student success. The group exerts pressure on the individual to conform and meet group standards. Concentration is believed by the Japanese to be a key to success and it is strongly encouraged from pre-school on through the education process. Shimahara does not focus on the relevance of these issues to second language learning in the research, although the implications can be seen.

Yokota-Adachi and Geva (1999) used semi-structured interviews to investigate the different beliefs of Canadian teachers and Japanese immigrants with respect to schooling and learning. Although they did not relate their findings specifically to differences in success in second language learning, they did identify parental confusion about teacher expectations as a problem.

Kondo and Willis (1995) describe the difficulties involved in achieving satisfactory cross-cultural communication and maintaining one's own cultural identity. As cross-cultural communication plays an essential role in effective learning, especially language learning in multi-national schools the topics they address would appear to be relevant for this study. However, the authors do not connect them in any way to language learning. One connection to language learning which can be identified in their research is the essential and very basic western idea that children learn through talk. This presents immediate problems with the Japanese students as they often

appear to westerners to be unwilling, unable or just not interested in the topics being discussed. The reasons for this are included in Kondo and Willis' descriptions of misunderstandings which can occur

due to the lack of knowledge of the 'discourses', those culturally-conventionalised practices of communication/socialisation which involve an integration of ways of speaking, behaving, interacting, thinking, feeling, valuing and believing (Gee, in Kondo & Willis 1995).

Nakata (1990) admits to a lack of communicative competence on the part of many Japanese teachers of English and blames this on the predominance of the grammar translation method of teaching which the teachers themselves received but also blames the syllabus which is driven by the university entrance examinations.

Studies often focus on the excellent cognitive skills of Japanese students, particularly in the areas of mathematical and scientific studies. As Feiler (1991:278) states

Every major international study of the last fifteen years has shown that Japanese children consistently outperform their Western counterparts in these two areas.

Stevenson (1989) also theorises on the reasons for this in an essay entitled "The Asian Advantage: the Case of Mathematics". Other studies also consider the high level of reading achieved by the Japanese students despite having an enormous

syllabary to contend with. Rohlen (1983) quotes a survey of elementary teachers in Kobe conducted by the Kobe City Education Research Office, which states that over 90% of Japanese schoolchildren enter first grade already reading the Japanese syllabary, *hiragana*, which is taught in kindergarten.

The lack of studies on foreign language learning, particularly English, is interesting as Japanese students are required generally to study English for six years, three years each in junior high school and high school and English is also one of the basic requirements for university entrance. Over 94% of Japanese children go on to study at a high school, although compulsory education ends with junior high school as Mochizuki (1989) and Rohlen (1983) state, referring to figures published by the Japanese Ministry of Education. Entrance to a Japanese university is decided by an examination. The individual faculties of each university can examine their own subjects, but the key subject areas of the examination are mathematics, Japanese and English.

In Ellington's (1992) very detailed description of the Japanese education process from pre-kindergarten to university she maintains

Despite recent efforts of the Japanese government and Mombusho to place more emphasis on spoken English, a student's written command of the English language is what counts on high school and university examinations. Therefore, grammatical analysis, translation, practise with basic sentence patterns and vocabulary memorization are, by far, the major activities students engage in

during lower secondary school English classes (1992 :90).

With so many students studying English, in junior high and high schools, and the importance of English as a subject for university entrance, it is surprising that so little research appears to have been done on the language learning process for Japanese students both within and outside of Japan. The ability to speak English fluently and with confidence and ease appears to be a major challenge, even for the Japanese teachers of English. In fact, students who return to Japan speaking fluent English, having studied in an English speaking environment, are frequently seen as difficult in the classroom. Research has been published by the Japanese authorities and other researchers (White, 1988, Yashiro, 1995) on the problem of *returnees*, as they are called, and the difficulties faced with their reintegration into the Japanese education system.

5.8 Summary

Although there is a wide range of literature related to the effect of Japanese culture on the education system, teaching, learning and testing, in the course of my research I have been unable to find any work which relates directly to the problems which I have encountered; the fact that the Japanese students seem to take longer than students from other countries to reach the standard of English required to succeed in an international school with English as the language of instruction. The majority of studies concentrate on areas of the Japanese education system in Japan, its advantages and disadvantages, with only the work of Yamada-Yamamoto and

Richards, Pritchard, Pang and McPake and Powney closely examining Japanese students outside of the Japanese education system. My own findings are supported by the world-wide listings for TOEFEL. These show that despite the importance of English in the Japanese school curriculum and for university entrance, not to mention for future business careers, Japan is well down in the scoring lists for the world. In the research there are also frequent references to the poor ability of Japanese people to speak English as a result of difficulties connected to teaching and learning within the Japanese system and this is also a problem which is related to this research.

My research focuses on the length of time Japanese students in the International School of Düsseldorf require to achieve the level of competence in English to succeed academically. Having failed to find similar research to support or inform my work, the following chapter describes the methodology chosen for my research.

Chapter Six

Methodology

The Road Taken

6 Introduction

This research is an attempt to answer the overriding questions: *Why do many Japanese students at the International School of Düsseldorf take longer to reach competence in English than most students of other nationalities? What is the role of the students' culture in this process?*

This chapter, methodology, is divided into two sections. In the first section I describe the underlying reasons which initiated the research and then outline, briefly, other relevant research related to the Japanese education system and my area of research. I discuss and explain my choice of methodology as well as the advantages and possible disadvantages of ethnography, and describe some of the difficulties encountered on the way. I then look at the risks involved in discussing one ethnic group; the dangers of stereotyping, as well as the ethical considerations of my work. The effect of culture on the research has been a major concern and this is explained in the next section. The first part of the chapter ends with a discussion of the triangulation validation and analysis procedures.

The second section begins with a description of the theoretical framework underpinning the methods used which are demonstrated by excerpts from my data.

Part One

6.1 First Thoughts

My research grew from a sense of injustice. How could it be that the students who worked the hardest, took their lessons most seriously and were continually on task could so consistently fail to reach the level of English competence required to exit the English as a Second Language (ESL) programme? How could it be that other students with less commitment, a generally relaxed attitude to study and an ever-present sense of fun should succeed so easily and consistently?

The students I was concerned about were being denied full access to the curriculum for longer than students of other nationalities. As long as their English competence was less than that required for academic work, they had no chance of succeeding in mainstream classes. They could neither follow the content of science classes sufficiently nor explain their reasoning in mathematics classes. They were unable to join the mainstream classes for English and humanities as this was ESL class time. Although the ESL classes are content-based and shadow the mainstream curriculum, they did not have the benefit, during that time, of being immersed in a rich language environment, as long as there was only one fluent English speaker in the room, the teacher. This is regrettably the case in a pull-out English as a Second Language

programme. The students who were the subjects of this research were originally both Korean and Japanese. They were generally the students who worked hard, did their homework and always remained on task during class, although of course there were some exceptions. However as the number of Korean students at the beginning of my research was considerably smaller than the numbers of Japanese students in ESL classes and as the cultures are very different, I made a conscious choice to limit my research to the Japanese students at the International School of Düsseldorf.

6.1.1 Starting Out

At the beginning I was surprised by the huge field of research related to the Japanese education system. The field is extensive and covers every aspect conceivable as revealed in chapter four and five, the literature review. The high level of interest displayed by western researchers and writers in the Japanese education system is partly due to a number of measurable factors: the consistently high scores gained by Japanese students on international tests of mathematical and science achievement, (Rohlen, 1983, Stevenson and Stigler, 1992), the number of Japanese students who continue full-time education after compulsory education (Moore and Lamie, 1992, Rohlen 1983, Shields, 1989), the claim of 99% literacy in Japan and most importantly the Japanese economic successes which have been attributed to the high level of education of Japanese workers (Rohlen 1983, Lynn, 1988, Shimizu, 1992). All of these factors can be proven by statistics; the results of international comparative tests of achievement, and figures published regularly by the Japanese Ministry of Education. Other research has been conducted into the problems of

Japanese students overseas and especially the problems which these particular students have on their return to Japan (White, 1988, Downs, 1990, Goodman, 1990, Kobayashi, 1995, Kanno, 2000).

A number of studies have also been undertaken which describe the school experience in Japan in a more naturalistic, partly ethnographic way (Rohlen, 1983, Tobin, Wu, and Davidson, 1989, Simmons, 1990, Lewis, 1995, LeTendre, 2000, Willis, 2004) but none of these focus on the English language learning of Japanese students which is my focus. These studies underline the great interest in Japanese schooling. Rohlen, LeTendre, Simmons and Willis all concentrate on the middle and high school areas whereas Lewis, Tobin, Wu and Davidson focus on the early years, pre-school and early learning experiences. Minami's (2002) ethnographic study of Japanese children addressed the development of mother-tongue oral narrative and literacy.

There is little research simply concerned with the effectiveness of Japanese students learning English. It is generally agreed that English language teaching in Japan is in need of improvement Furahata (1999:129) discusses a variety of English teaching methods in higher education and states

... it is common knowledge that most Japanese students are not able to express more than simple greetings and self-introductions in English, despite at least eight years of formal English instruction.

Initiatives have also been undertaken by the Japanese government to remedy this

situation (Koike and Tanaka, 1995, Browne and Wada, 1998). The results of these endeavours have been reported in the form of statistics; the number of new teachers, the number of native speakers of English employed and so on. Research has been undertaken related to the linguistic experiences of Japanese children in the UK, with the emphasis on their experiences rather than their language learning (Yamada-Yamamoto and Richards, 1998, McPake and Powney, 1998). Other research related to this area focuses on the differences between English and Japanese, grammatical and orthographical but I am sure there must be more to the problem than just the nuts and bolts of the languages themselves. I have been unable to find research related to the length of time it takes many Japanese students to learn English effectively.

Quantitative research which centres on statistics, numbers and variables does not take the social and cultural world of the individual or the group with all the rich variations into account and so I needed to get deeper into an examination of the learning processes of my students in a way that could not be accomplished by just looking at test results and statistics. The results of the ESL exit test at the International School of Düsseldorf, discussed in detail in chapter two, reveal the depth of the problem and statistics on students' length of stay in the ESL classes support the fact that there is a problem. But none of this data supplied a reason or an explanation for the phenomenon which I was witnessing on a daily basis. Contrary to common sense and popular educational beliefs, hard work does not bring rewards, studying grammar and vocabulary lists does not result in passing the exit test. Yet for some students, with what appears to be a less academic approach, with far less

dedication or sweat, successful language acquisition is not only possible but a reality. What I needed was to get inside the heads of my students, I needed to see the problem from inside to find out what was going on from the point of view of the students themselves, not through statistics and test results. There were so many questions to be answered, so many unknowns to reveal. Qualitative research methods rather than quantitative research methods seemed to be the way forward to reveal the events below the surface.

6.1.2 Qualitative Research: Ethnography

My research began with the questions proposed by Ely et al. (1997)

“What is going on here?” “What is the experience like for these people?”

The search for answers has led me to move through a number of phases, which began with background reading and keeping a diary.

In qualitative research the data are often considered as a totality; they are thought to shed light on a singular logical whole (Alasuutari, 1995:11).

This was what I needed, a way to find the *singular logical whole* that connected the many different aspects of the phenomenon which led me to ethnography. Ethnography stems from research methods used by anthropologists who often worked in exotic

settings. Their aim was *experiencing documenting and understanding not just the unusual and the exotic but also the mundane and everyday activities that constituted everyday life for the people of these far away places* (Pole & Morrison, 2003:12).

In Hammersley and Atkinson's (1995:1) words

Ethnography involves the ethnographer participating, overtly or covertly, in people's daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions - in fact collecting whatever data are available to throw light on the issues that are the focus of the research.

Hammersley and Atkinson describe ethnography as

in many respects the most basic form of social history.

They refer to its long history and the fact that

it also bears a close resemblance to the routine ways in which people make sense of the world in everyday life (1995:2).

Through reading ethnographic research (Heath, 1983, Cochran-Smith, 1984, Ely et al, 1997) I found that this methodology and combination of methods offers the chance to take a holistic, multi-layered look at what is happening over a period of time and also leaves time and space to address the issues of culture and language differences. Pole and Morrison (2003:3) offer the following principal characteristics

of ethnography:

- *A focus on a discrete location, event(s) or setting.*
- *A concern with the full range of social behaviour within the location, event or setting.*
- *The use of a range of different research methods which may combine qualitative and quantitative approaches but where the emphasis is upon understanding social behaviour from within the discrete location, event or setting.*
- *An emphasis which moves from detailed description to the identification of concepts and theories which are grounded in the data collected within the location, event or setting.*
- *An emphasis on rigorous or thorough research, where the complexities of the discrete event, location or setting are of greater importance than overarching trends or generalisations.*

The notion of the researcher as *bricoleur*, (Denzin and Lincoln 1998:3/4) which describes a kind of professional do-it-yourself person who produces a complete picture, or as complete as possible, using multiple methods, depending on the situation, the participants and what is feasible, seemed to me to be the best way to reveal the problem in its entirety. The variety of methods which can be used is one of the features of ethnography which enables the researcher to design a theoretical framework which addresses the research needs appropriately. Geertz describes the intellectual effort which results in *thick description* as defining ethnography (1993:8) and he explains that

we begin with our own interpretations of what our informants are up to, or think they are up to and systemise them (15).

My study is about the language acquisition, or sometimes lack of it, of Japanese students at ISD. Kamil, Langer and Shanahan (1985) warn that there can be problems with educational ethnographies as the school is only a part of the life of the child and other influences cannot be taken into account if only the school is studied. This would seem to indicate that my research needs a deeper focus than just the students' school life. According to Ogbu (1988:5)

what the children bring to school - their communities' cultural models or understandings of 'social realities' and the educational strategies that they, their families and their communities use or do not use in seeking education are as important as within-school factors.

Trueba (1991:137) states

Ethnography focused on minority students has a unique potential in educational research.

He goes on to explain the importance of a consideration of the child's cultural and linguistic background and he describes a number of ethnographic studies related to literacy and the importance of understanding the needs of minority children. These researchers all emphasise the importance of the child's home culture and language and make it clear that for a real picture all aspects of the students' lives must be

considered and included. This leads to a multi-layering or multi-level approach (Conteh et al, 2005) taking not only the school, but also the family and friendships into consideration, together with the influence of the Japanese culture on child rearing patterns, education from kindergarten to university, as well as Japanese understandings about teaching and learning.

6.1.3 Some concerns

How does the role of the researcher, their own language and culture, their personal history and the ability to describe effectively what they believe to have observed influence the final result? The words of Geertz above and those of Duranti (1997:95) are reassuring

An ethnography is an interpretive act and as such should be turned in on itself to increase the richness of descriptions, including an understanding of the conditions under which description itself becomes possible.

Both of these comments appear to me to emphasise the element of individual interpretation involved in doing ethnography and so justify it.

A further challenge was my lack of success in mastering Japanese despite a number of attempts. I realised that the time I was spending on it was inverse to the amount of Japanese I was learning. So although my students were delighted and thoroughly enjoyed correcting my pronunciation and grammar and helping me with my

homework, I decided finally to end the pain. It was very galling to realise that having spent the best part of 6 weeks learning Hiragana, the syllabary which Japanese children learn in kindergarten, without continual revision I promptly forgot it all. Although I understand the truth in Duranti's claim (1997:110)

there is no question that fieldworkers should try their best to become familiar with the language(s) used by the people they study. This is important not only for the ability to conduct interviews without interpreters, but also, and most importantly, for understanding what is going on.

I have to admit that I did not reach the goal. I did become familiar with the language and have learnt a great deal about its structure and use which have been important in my study.

6.1.4 Ethnographical Methods - The Tool Box

The most intriguing element of using ethnographic research approach is the range of methods which can be employed to collect data. Some of these include observation, participant observation, interviews, case studies, life histories, diaries, journals.

6.1.4.i Observation and Participation

Pole and Morrison (2003:19/20) assume that most people know intuitively what observation is but add that *ethnography takes observation a step further since an*

essential aspect of the ethnographers' role is participation in the setting observed.

This stems from the idea that the researcher is also a participant in the process and the writing up of observations will include biographical elements from the researcher. The definition of ethnography is writing about folk which is not limited to the folk observed but also ourselves, the observers. Hammersley and Atkinson (1995:99) describe the first experiences of an ethnographer as similar to those of a novice or *layperson faced with the practical need to make sense of a particular social setting.....making observations and inferences, asking informants, constructing hypotheses, and acting on them.*

For educational research in particular, Pole and Morrison (2003:22) cite categories identified by Denscombe (1998:150)

- *Total participation*, where the researcher's role is kept secret
- *Participation in the normal setting*, where the researcher's role may be known to certain 'gatekeepers', but may be hidden from most of those in the setting. The role adopted in this type of participant observation is chosen deliberately to permit observation without affecting the naturalness of the setting, but also allows the researcher to keep a distance from the group under study. The role might be warranted on the grounds of propriety, or the researcher lacks the personal credentials to take on the role in question.
- *Participant as observer*, where the researcher's identity as a researcher is

openly recognised - thus having the advantages of gaining informed consent from those involved - and takes the form of 'shadowing' a person or group through normal life, witnessing first hand and in intimate detail the culture/events of interest.

My research fits into the second category to a great extent. The administration and some colleagues are aware of my research but generally in the classroom, especially at the time when I wrote the bulk of my field notes, the students were unaware of any research being conducted. I deliberately wanted them to remain unaware as I did not want to affect their behaviour in any way. As an English as a second language teacher at the International School of Düsseldorf, I have full access to the day-time learning of the second-language students, especially during my own lessons but it is also possible to observe other classes at any time. It is one of the stated aims of the school administration that teachers should observe colleagues on a regular basis. I have been, of course, less interested in observing my colleagues and more interested in observing the second language students, but the possibilities were always there. This type of observation would also describe my activities when I observed the students out of classroom time, at breaks, lunch or before and after school. My presence was always legitimate and expected, whether I was on duty or just passing through. The third category would cover my observations when visiting classes at the Japanese kindergarten or schools in Düsseldorf but also the observations I made during meetings with parent groups.

6.1.4.ii Interviews

In order to gain insight about the participant's point of view; what they think is going on in any situation or what they know that we need to know, the interview is an obvious method. However there are many ways an interview can be conducted. Within an ethnographic methodology, an interview would profitably be less structured than a conventional interview where specific answers to predetermined questions set the pattern. An ethnographic interview leaves room for the participant to develop and extend themes and introduce new ideas into the discussion. However, if an interview is a formal occasion at a pre-arranged time, with the room set up and recording equipment in evidence, it can become a daunting experience. The process becomes increasingly complex if we take each player's competence in the language used, age and gender into consideration as well as their relative social positions and perceived power relations. As Pole and Morrison (2003:29) state

All interviews focus upon a verbal stimulus to elicit a verbal response.

This is perfectly valid. The problems occur when the interviewee has limited English competence, is reluctant to speak English because of a lack of confidence in his/her own ability and is afraid of losing face by making mistakes or saying something which could be thought foolish. Add to this the culturally-based need to give a question the respect it is due, and then the need to reflect deeply about the answer before speaking, and the progress of an interview can be very slow indeed, if the two

participants are of equal social status. If the interviewer is the teacher and the respondent a Japanese student, unless the student has been in international circles for a considerable time and has acquired reasonably fluent, spontaneous English, there will be no verbal response at all. Even informal short exchanges of information, which could be considered interviews, are subject to some of these limitations. I encountered what I understand to be culturally determined difficulties with the interviewing process in many cases which are described in more detail later in the second half this chapter. Fortunately, ethnography permits a range of research methods and to compensate for the cultural limitations encountered during face-to-face interviews, my research includes journals, which the students originally wrote in Japanese, diaries in English and creative writing relevant to the research theme created by Japanese students. These come under the heading of secondary data according to Pole and Morrison (2003).

6.1.4.iii Case Studies

Stake (1998:86) lists three types of case study, the intrinsic, the instrumental and the collective case study. The *intrinsic case study* is undertaken to reach *a better understanding of the case itself*, the *instrumental case study* is undertaken to provide *insight into an issue or refinement of theory* and the *collective case study* is an *instrumental study extended to several cases*. All three of the case studies which I undertook within this research were *instrumental* as they gave additional data for the whole study. Two case studies concentrate on individual Japanese girls who arrived at ISD mid-year and were the only Japanese girls in their relative classes. The other

case study is comparative as it traces the language acquisition of two students. I chose to do this not in an attempt to understand one student's progress better or to show that one or the other was unique in any way. It was undertaken in the first place because of the special possibilities such a comparison offered. Two new seventh grade boys arrived at ISD and joined the ESL classes on the same day, one boy was from Belgium and the other was from Japan. On their arrival they were close in age and ability, and their previous language learning experiences were also comparable. Within a very short time the differences in their progress in English language learning were noticeable. The results of the case studies are described in detail in chapter nine.

6.1.4.iv Secondary Sources

Denzin and Lincoln (1998:3) suggest that

if new tools have to be invented, or pieced together, then the researcher will do this.

I found it difficult to give my students a voice. I wanted them to tell me what is going on, but could not find a way for them to communicate in any depth with me. I was interested to see if their ideas of what was happening and mine were the same. I needed them to validate my work. As a result in addition to first hand, primary, experience, I found it necessary to draw on secondary sources of ethnographic data.

Pole & Morrison (2003:48) write

Although secondary data sources such as diaries, photographs, maps, timetables and works of art are not created for the purposes of a specific research project, they have the capacity to tell the researcher a great deal not only about those who created them but also about the context and the social world in which they were created.

In fact the language learning diaries which my students wrote in their Japanese classes and which were subsequently translated for me were authentic class writing exercises but they were produced intentionally to allow the students to express their real voice and their concerns. Similarly, the journal entries which students wrote in my ESL classes were authentic, educational exercises but were guided as the topics they wrote about were provided by me. Two other examples of secondary source materials were not instigated by me. They were spontaneous pieces of creative work in which I recognised the original voice which I had been seeking, one was the skit created by a group of Japanese girls and the other was the mini-saga. Both of these examples tell a great deal about the students who were the authors and even more about their social worlds. After the difficulties I had experienced with interviews it was eye-opening to discover, quite by chance, that my Japanese students, both present and past, their parents and teachers were far more willing to share information and answer my questions in great detail by email. Those who had been unable to produce any kind of answer to my face-to-face questions, suddenly answered me with a surprising depth and openness.

When the culture of the group being researched makes face-to-face interaction with

a researcher inappropriate, discovering a method which produces rich, authentic data is very exciting.

6.1.5 The Risk of Stereotyping

A major difficulty inherent in writing about one group of people from a distinct culture is the risk of being accused of stereotyping or over-generalisation. Kubota (1999) accuses many researchers of creating a dichotomy between the cultures of the west and east and creating an image of an unchanging Japanese culture which reinforces the basic ideas of groupism, harmony coupled with a notable lack of critical thinking or creativity so reducing Japanese culture to basic stereotypes. At first glance, many of Kubota's accusations would appear to be evident in my work. However as Sower (1999:738) points out in his response to Kubota's remarks

*... to describe Japanese students, or any other group of people.
...it is necessary to use generalisations. These will of course be wrong in some instances, as no one can describe every case an educator may encounter. The only productive course of action is to put forth observations and hypotheses about students' behaviour in as sensitive a manner as possible.*

Similarly in Borden's foreword to his research into Korean students studying at an international school in Seoul, he writes

it should be realized that whenever any group is described in general terms, there are necessarily many, many individuals who

do not conform to all, or even some, generalities (Borden, 1997).

This is of course true for Japanese students at ISD. Some Japanese students embrace the western way of life whole-heartedly from the beginning, they break away from their own nationality groups and spend very little time in ESL classes. Some students are quiet and very afraid of the new environment, others become noisy and develop behavioural problems. It is impossible to say that *all Japanese students do this* or *all Japanese students do that* as variations are always visible in any group.

6.1.6 Ethical Issues

I am profoundly grateful to the Director of the International School of Düsseldorf for allowing me to use the name of the school in the title of this thesis. In doing so he passed on to me the responsibility for what I write and how I write it. From the beginning I was unsure how much to tell the children or my colleagues of what I was doing and why. In the first instance, I felt that my field notes were not harmful and could not negatively affect the students in any way. I did not want them to become self-conscious or change their behaviour because they were being observed. I was anxious for the situations which I described and my recorded findings to be as natural and authentic as possible. As time went on I began to talk to colleagues about what I was doing and later when I talked to the children and or tried to ‘interview’ them, I told them clearly what I was doing and why. The results of my interviews are discussed later in this chapter.

During my visits to the Japanese kindergarten, elementary and middle school in Düsseldorf I explained my interest and focus to the relevant people and received the same incredulous reaction which has become familiar over time. Most Japanese students, teachers and parents are faintly amused by my research. They find it hard to believe that anyone who is not Japanese should show any interest in their language acquisition or learning processes. Non-Japanese are not expected to be able to understand their language, culture or way of working. In fact at times I felt my questions were simply being tolerated which did not always leave me feeling confident or successful about the whole process.

Although it is clear from the title that the research described was undertaken in the International School of Düsseldorf, between 1997 and 2005, I have taken pains to use only the names of students and other informants who have agreed to this. In other cases I have used initials or pseudonyms. Unlike any national school, the transient nature of an international school is such that the students who unwittingly aroused my curiosity in the first place, have long since left Düsseldorf. The situation is similar at the Japanese kindergarten and schools as the directors and teachers are only permitted to stay in Düsseldorf for three years and most of the children have also left the city. This means that for each of these people their location and situation have changed. Students whose test results I described in chapter two have all long since left ISD and most of them have now completed their studies at university and moved into the professional world. I have also quoted research written by a Japanese student in 1986 who investigated the *Social Interaction of the Japanese: A Study of various relationships of students at an American International school* as part of my

secondary data and used a pseudonym for her too.

My descriptions are only written. The problems of tape recording in my research is described below in detail. I considered using video but in my role as teacher this would also have changed the situation in the classroom so much as to make it no longer typical. Photographs would have greatly enriched my data collection as they would have shown the tendency of the Japanese students to sit, both in the classroom, cafe and library, and move, before and after classes, in nationality clusters which greatly reduces contact and communication in any other language but Japanese. They would have made the students much more identifiable, and this would have been a serious consideration as we are not permitted to use photographs of students without explicit written permission from their parents. A further consideration is the typical behaviour of Japanese students at the sight of a camera. They tend to either fall into poses with victory Vs above each others' heads or else hide their faces and refuse to be photographed.

My research complies with the ethical guidelines published by the British Educational Research Association. (www.bera.ac.uk/guidelines.html accessed: 28.12.2005)

6.1.7 The Effect of Japanese Culture on the Research Process

Japanese culture is indeed very complex and very different from other cultures and this would seem to be confirmed by the existence of theories of Japanese uniqueness

nihonjinron. The effect of Japanese culture, as I interpret it, pervades every area of my research. The more I learn about Japanese culture, and its variations, the more I see added depth within my findings. The culture is so very different from the west, and yet so easily influenced at least superficially. The most usual reaction from my Japanese respondents when told what I was researching and why was incredulous amusement. The very idea that I, as a non-Japanese and a complete outsider, could hope to understand what was basically their very own Japanese way of doing things was thought to be strange. Many of them were unable to get beyond simply wondering “why?” However interestingly, as the number of years of western influence on the individual respondent increased, so too did their understanding of why I might be doing this and also their willingness to serve as informant. One very basic requirement of ethnographers is the ability to see the familiar as strange, different and observable, through a conscious effort to establish distance. The strange and different must remain strange or the data collection will be ineffective and differences lost. Pole and Morrison (2003:25) refer particularly to the situation which can occur with ethnographic research in schools. This requires a conscious effort by the researcher working in their own educational situation, their own school or even classroom, to maintain distance. This was rarely a problem in my research as contact with Japanese students, parents and colleagues continually produced surprises. These surprises always re-awakened the feeling of strangeness, of unfamiliarity and not quite knowing ever what to expect. One example of this came at a later stage in my work. I was delivering a talk on my findings to a group of international educators and asked one of my Japanese colleagues if she and I could talk it through first. She readily agreed and we spent a very pleasant hour together.

My colleague was surprised at some of my findings but did not seem unduly perturbed or express disagreement with any of my conclusions. I asked her if she would come to my presentation the next day as she could help validate my findings if necessary. I promised she would not be called on to speak in front of the group but her presence would strengthen my case enormously. She agreed, or so I thought. My colleague has been working in Europe for a number of years, she has taught at German universities and in the international school for three years. She speaks English and German fluently and with ease and to all intents and appears to be not only trilingual but also bicultural. Later that evening I had a phone call from her and after we had discussed a number of unrelated issues, it slowly became clear, in a very round about way, that in fact she would not be there for my presentation the next day. I know from my study of Japanese cultural and discourse patterns that the Japanese have many ways of refusing, all of them indirect. To say “no” directly is considered to be extremely rude. I was fooled by the overt cultural similarities, my colleague’s ease with English and our situation as colleagues, into thinking that our conversation was based on mutual understandings. I had ignored the underlying cultural differences which were still so much part of her personality, those which Hofstede (1980) calls the “*software of our minds*”, which programme us according to a set of values and belief systems. The deep differences in our cultures were apparent despite all of the superficial similarities.

Greenfield et al (2004) talk about culture being *external*, artefacts and institutions, *internal*, in terms of knowledge, skills and values and *interactive* to the individual in terms of social practices and social interactions. The *strange*, which I see as

resulting from the internal and interactive areas of culture mentioned above, is continually present in my research and cannot be ignored. In fact there was another Japanese lady from a school in Japan present at my presentation who afterwards thanked me and told me how interesting she found my “*interpretation of their culture*”. This clearly identified me as an outsider looking in, in her eyes, who was only able to describe what was seen through my lense and give my version of the truth. Also present at the same session was a student from the twelfth grade of ISD who came to me later and in great excitement and with refreshing directness, said I had described her class, which was over 30% Japanese and split into two groups, the Japanese and the non-Japanese. She thought that hearing what I had to say opened her eyes and showed her why the two groups are so separate in class.

6.1.8 Analysis, Triangulation and Validation

The analysis, triangulation and validation seem to me to have been part of the process throughout my research. New data has constantly been held up and compared to existing information, and continual reading has added to my knowledge and understanding of a culture which is so very different from the west. The actions and reactions of my Japanese colleagues, students and their parents often confirmed my reading or my reading explained their actions to me. It has been a long process of a steady accumulation of a mass of information which is at times overwhelming.

Triangulation is a term borrowed from navigation and surveying where a point can be located by taking bearings from two others, so confirming the findings in one set

of data by finding similar evidence in another set (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995:231). Stake (1998:97) explains triangulation in ethnographic research as

a process of using multiple perceptions to clarify meaning, verifying the repeatability of an observation or interpretation. But, acknowledging that no observations or interpretations are perfectly repeatable, triangulation serves also to clarify meaning by identifying different ways the phenomenon is being seen.

As well as using a variety of methods, participant observation, interviews, case studies, diaries, journals, and so on, data can also be validated by triangulation with written sources of other research and through respondent validation. In the course of this research as well as using my own observations and interpretations of the actions, written and practical of the Japanese students, parents and colleagues at ISD, I also read other research into Japanese education and culture and sought participant validation from my informants. I looked for evidence of the same phenomenon within my various sources of data and found common features which seemed to indicate some kind of pattern. I then turned to what Alasuutari (1995:16) refers to as ‘unriddling’. He writes

In qualitative research unriddling means that, on the basis of the clues produced and hints available, we give an interpretive explanation of the phenomenon being studied.

Hammersley and Atkinson (1995:206) suggest that

Ethnography research should have a characteristic 'funnel' structure, being progressively focused over its course.

Just as with a funnel, the opening, that is the beginning of the research process, is wide open and takes in everything which seems to be relevant, so like a funnel with time the data selection is narrowed down and becomes focused. At times the funnel was in danger of becoming blocked by the wealth of information which I collected. By comparing the results of data collection using multiple methods, from different sources at different times, certain characteristics become evident. My data is so complex, multi-layered and extensive with overlaps in so many places that a few triangles with neat straight edges would be totally out of place. In fact I much prefer the term suggested by Ely et al (1997:35) who refer to Richardson's use of the verb *to crystallise*. Although at the beginning it seemed there were no straight edges, neat angles or overlapping bearings, in fact the results of my research have slowly grown like crystals, with multiple shapes and angles, to take on a form which is recognisable and clear while being multifaceted and complex: crystals.

Part Two

6.2 Research Context and Design

Using ethnographic methods I hoped to find the answers to my key question which was - Why do most Japanese students at the International school of Düsseldorf take longer to reach competence in English than most students of other nationalities?

What is the role of the students' culture in this process?

Duranti's (1997:85) description of an ethnography as

the written description of the social organisation, social activities, symbolic and material resources, and interpretive practices characteristic of a particular group of people.

serves as a good introduction to my research design.

6.2.1 Some Culturally-Specific Research Limitations

Before describing my research design, I would like to give some background information about communication styles in Japanese culture which may help to explain and support my choice of methods.

As the ESL teacher of very many of the Japanese students at the international school, I feel a strong empathy with my students. As a British citizen, living in Germany, I too have been the unknowing participant in a new culture who had to watch carefully to see what the rules were, how to behave, what to say and how to say it. Culture and language are so closely entwined and influence the what, when, how or if of what is said and how it is received by the listener. This is brought home to me continually in contact with my Japanese students and their parents. Most Japanese people do not communicate verbally as often or as easily as westerners do. Research by Caudill and Schooler (1973) showed that American children used verbal

expression as a means of communication more often than Japanese children did. Caudill and Weinstein (1969) also discovered that Japanese mothers talk far less to their young children than American mothers do. The communication between Japanese people is more empathetic and less direct than in the west. In their early childrearing practices Japanese parents train their children to be far more sensitive to the needs and feelings of others than we are in the west, but also to be far more reserved about expressing one's ideas too spontaneously in case of causing a break in the feeling of harmony which is so important in a group. This was illustrated to me very clearly when recently I met a group of mothers of our second language students in the middle and high school at ISD. I spoke about second language acquisition, the importance of mother tongue maintenance and related topics. There was an Italian mother, a German father, a Korean mother, the middle school principal and twenty five Japanese mothers. A bilingual Japanese mother translated for those who had difficulty following my talk. Throughout the session I asked for questions and comments; the Italian mother, the German father and the middle school principal all spoke at different times but not one of the Japanese mothers or the Korean mother commented at all. At the end, as I was well aware of their reluctance to comment freely, I suggested that the Japanese mothers should get into groups of five or six and discuss the points I had covered and then together, in the group, formulate any questions they may have. I explained that I understood that they would not spontaneously raise their hands with questions. This comment was a great source of amusement and some giggles and bashful smiles after it had been translated. The Italian mother, German father and middle school principal had had their questions answered and were happy to leave. After ten minutes I asked for the

questions from the groups of Japanese mothers and each group had several questions which they needed to have addressed. The questions were expressed fluently with no grammatical problems but to maintain group harmony, respect the wishes of others and not to appear to be pushing themselves forward the mothers needed first to reach a consensus about their questions. Had I not known so much from my research and reading about the Japanese cultural attitude towards speaking openly in front of others, I may have thought that the whole session had been of no interest whatsoever to these mothers as they showed little sign of active interest, asked no questions and made no comments during the session. At the end when they were asked for questions or comments there was total silence. Without the background information, I could have then closed the session and we would all have gone home disappointed and I would have felt that the session had been a complete failure.

6.2.2 Research Context

My research was undertaken at the International School of Düsseldorf, Germany from 1997 to 2005 where I teach English as a second language. At the beginning of the research process I was teaching in the middle school, grades 6 - 8, later I also taught grades 9 and 10. Consequently I have a complete overview of the ESL programme and I also taught mainstream English and Humanities classes, with ESL students fully integrated. The subjects of my research are Japanese middle and high school students who are living outside of Japan and attending the International School in Düsseldorf. These are the children of Japanese businessmen who have been sent to Europe by their companies, usually for a period of two or three years.

On average, there are approximately 20 Japanese students in the middle school, grades 6 - 8, and over 60 in the high school grades 9 - 12. The substantially larger number in high school is due to the fact that compulsory education, provided by the Japanese education authorities for Japanese students in Düsseldorf, ends after the completion of middle school. There is no provision for Japanese high school education in Düsseldorf. However, as over 95% of Japanese students continue their education in high school, the students who graduate from the Japanese middle school in Düsseldorf have the choice of going back to Japan without their parents, going to a Japanese boarding school or joining the International School to continue their education.

Student numbers at the International School of Düsseldorf fluctuate but at present there are 850 students of 41 nationalities and 83 teachers from 11 different countries. The balance of nationalities at the International School of Düsseldorf is approximately 25% English native speakers, 25% German, 25% Japanese and 25% other nations. A full list is enclosed in the appendices. Most of the students are the children of well educated, highly successful professionals who have high expectations of and for their children. Apart from the local German students, who tend to remain at school until graduation, there is a turn-over of approximately one third of the student body each year, as their parents' companies transfer them to other locations or as the parents decide the students should return to their homeland to complete their education. The average stay of non-local children is between two and three years. As the language of instruction at the school is English and the educational system and goals are western, it is essential that first language speakers

of languages other than English master the English language and curricula expectations for academic success as quickly as possible.

6.2.3 Research Design

Janesick (1998) uses the metaphor of dance to describe the stages of research design. Once the answer to the leading question-*What do I want to know in this study* - has been identified, she suggests the phases of the research process follow those of a dance - the warm-up, the dance and the cool-down.

The Warm-Up

In 1997 the school sent me on a study trip to Japan where I spent three weeks visiting kindergartens, schools and universities, watching classes, and talking to students, teachers and administrators. Communication was difficult as I had to rely on my Japanese colleague for translations. During the visit I met some of our ex-students and was intrigued to hear stories of the difficulties they had had readjusting to life in Japanese schools and being accepted by classmates and teachers. Some of their stories were dramatic. They described experiences of bullying, rejection and isolation not just by the other students but also by the teachers. At that point this seemed to me a topic worthy of further research. While in Tokyo we stayed at an International House which had a library where I discovered a range of books related to education in Japan. I discovered that the topic of *returnees*, as students are called who return to Japan after a stay overseas, had already been discussed by a number of

writers.

Back in Düsseldorf, I began to observe my students more closely and in November 1997 I met with Dr Eve Gregory for the first time to discuss the possibility of working, under her guidance, on a research project. The idea for a thesis was born but the questions still needed to be formulated. My first steps were limited to observing my students, recording my observations and reading everything I could find about the Japanese and especially the Japanese school system. Düsseldorf university has a Japanese section and there is also a Japanese library in Cologne which I used extensively. Our school library also has a number of popular books on Japan and the Japanese.

My research question gradually grew out of a growing sense that the Japanese and Korean students were spending longer in ESL classes than students of other nationalities. During the school year 1998/99 I wrote copious field notes on the ten students in the class of '99. This phase of the research culminated in the exit test and my analysis which are described in Chapter two. The Pilot Study was based on work with an elective ESL class in March 1998 and was just one example of many different approaches which I was trying at that time. I wanted to use drama to develop the students' communication skills. Referring to my lesson plans and notes as well as the written responses of the students, it became apparent that there was a divergence between my ideas about language learning and theirs which seemed worthy of investigation. The twelve students involved were from grades seven and eight and were all in the ESL classes. This was an additional "elective" class, meaning that the students could choose from a range of classes. The activity was not designed as a

Pilot Study, but emerged as such during the course of my work. The class of 1999 and the Pilot Study showed me the direction to take but not how.

Both the Pilot Study and my background reading showed me that I needed to look further than just the classroom situation to find out what other factors were influencing the language acquisition of these children. It became clear to me that I also needed to examine the role of the family and friends as they are both vitally important areas of the students' lives. I was surrounded by a potential wealth of information; my own classes, colleagues' classes, the parents and my colleagues. I was also aware that there were Japanese schools within the Düsseldorf area. The problem at first was the formulation of the research question and selection of the data.

So far I have described the warm-up which involved extensive background reading, and observations which led to the formulation of my big, overriding questions - *Why do some students progress so well and succeed so quickly? Which aspects of a student's cultural and linguistic background might facilitate or hinder his/ her learning progress?*

The Dance

Having determined the questions, I developed a methodology that combined systematic gathering of data with data gathered on a more opportunist basis. The process of data collection. The dance could begin. I examined the sources of

information available to me and began systematically to accumulate a mass of data, planning then to unravel it and look for themes. This is the process which Alasuutari (1995) describes as *unriddling*, basically unpicking the data to look for common ideas and shared themes. In the planning stage I envisaged the data collection to be based on field notes, observations and participant observations and interviews.

Working closely with Japanese students and colleagues I realised that within the international school the Japanese did not have a 'voice'. I was confronted by reluctance on behalf of the Japanese to make their feelings known. Language is a form of power and without fluent English, the dominant school language, the Japanese students had no power. As long as there is delay in the rate of language acquisition the Japanese students remain disadvantaged in every school arena.

Throughout my study I very much wanted to hear their voice, it was not enough to base my work only on my observations as an outsider, as Geertz explains

that what we call our data are really our own constructions of other people's constructions of what they and their compatriots are up to (Geertz, 1973; 9).

I wanted to hear from them *what they were up to* and throughout my study I attempted to find an authentic voice. The most obvious method seemed to be through interviews but these were unsuccessful. This is described in more detail below. However during the process of research I found other possibilities; written journals, diaries and emails. These proved to be rich sources of data. The family and friends are two major influences, in addition to school, on the students' lives which

need to be taken into consideration and which also affect learning.

Research about students at international schools has shown that they tend to value their parents as the most stable factor in their lives, more highly than students in less transient situations (Useem and Downey, 1976, Schaetti, 1998). The importance of parenting, differing child-rearing patterns and variations in the role of the mother make the role of the family an important part of my study. My research on the family was based on texts written by the students where I found the authentic voice, (the skit and mini-saga) I was seeking and of course the mothers themselves were also a rich source of data. Through interviews, informal conversations, emails and a piece of research written by one mother I accumulated powerful data.

Increasing knowledge about the importance of harmony, hierarchy, the concept of *Amae*, all led to a consideration of the role of friendship and the resulting effect on language acquisition. I used case studies as one source in the chapter on Friendship (chapter nine) as the case studies show that without language one cannot make friends, but equally difficult, without friends one does not quickly learn language. A further rich source of data on friendship was a piece of research written by a Japanese student at ISD in 1986. Not only was this rich in itself but the present students who read and responded to it provided even more fascinating insights to the role of friendships in their lives.

Time Line and Students involved in the study

June, 1997	Study Trip to Japan
November 1997	First meeting with Prof. Gregory
1997/98	Formulation of research questions, observations and field notes collection begun
March 1998	Pilot Study activity; 12 students involved
September 1998 to June 1999	the class of 1999 study; 10 students involved (4 of which were also in the Pilot Study)
September 1999	Interviews with Japanese high school students; 12 students involved
September 1999	Case study :The Loneliness of Isolation; 1 student involved
November 1999	First visit to Japanese school in Düsseldorf
January 2000	Visit to Japanese kindergarten in Düsseldorf
August 2000	Case study comparing language acquisition of two new students
March 2003	Incident of friendship and <i>waragichi</i> with high school students; 3 students involved
June 2003	Interview with Mrs A. re returning to Japan
August 2003	Case study of one new Japanese student
September to December 2003	Learning Journals written for my work in Japanese language classes; 15 students involved
June 2004	Skit written by Japanese students, The Family; 4 students involved
March 2005	Mini saga written by Japanese student
January 2006	Written responses from Japanese Hgh school girls to research written in 1986; 9 students involved

In addition to the Time Line of course, my on going research included - field notes, observations of students; in classes, at break times, before and after school, on field trips etc, email correspondence with Japanese mothers and students who have now returned to Japan, conversations with colleagues and parents about Japanese

language learning. Also on a regular basis visits to Japanese school, on average four times per year, meetings with mothers three or four times a year formally, at irregular intervals informally.

6.3 Back to the Beginning

My interest in this area stems from my decision to let my eighth grade ESL students take the High school exit test to ascertain whether or not they were ready to join mainstream classes in ninth grade, rather than trusting my own judgement as I had done previously. The results of the test were devastating. The students I had expected to pass all failed and the students who had worked far less, not taken their studies seriously and often not done their homework, all passed. I had been aware that the Japanese and Korean students tended to take longer to reach proficiency than students of other nationalities, but this was the first time it had been so distressingly obvious. Even worse, six months later the same students were retested and failed no better and some still were unsuccessful a whole year later. There seemed to be either something dramatically wrong with the ESL programme or the test or there were other factors which had not been addressed.

The analysis of the test which we used is explained in detail in chapter two. In fact it was found to be culturally inappropriate in many ways and so when I became department head shortly afterwards, I had no hesitation in scrapping the test completely. From then on the exit procedure was dependent on the ESL students being able to produce work which was comparable with that of the mainstream. The

ESL programme was changed from an English language programme to a holistic, content-based language programme. The necessary grammar, vocabulary and so on are taught through the content in a meaningful way. This allows more cooperation with the mainstream departments, especially English and humanities, as we share materials and work together as much as possible. Even after the programme change the slow language acquisition of most of the Japanese students remained apparent.

6.3.1 The Journey begins

My research began to take shape after my study visit to Japan where I was able to observe the educational processes of each stage from kindergarten to university. I was fascinated by the chaos, noise and exuberance of the early years and the sudden change to serious learning at the middle school stage. It seemed to me a total contrast to the structured early learning at ISD which is teacher-controlled to a very high degree in the primary grades, but which gradually becomes freer as the students get older, culminating in the freedom and trust which our high school students enjoy. My interest led to extensive reading about Japanese educational beliefs and the formulation of my research questions. The methods chosen for my research were those most appropriate for my situation. As a classroom teacher I had continual opportunities to observe my students at work and play. My pilot study was the result of an ESL class which did not always progress in the way it was planned but was rich in data production. In school I used observations, field notes, interviews and secondary data sources as my key data sources as described below.

6.3.1.i Observation and Field Notes

From the very beginning of the study I took great pleasure in writing field notes. It seemed an incredibly comfortable way to do research. At first I just ‘wrote like crazy’, aiming to get as much as possible of what had happened in class down on paper immediately. I found the best way was to take particular note of one or two events, jot them down as bullet points and as soon as I got home I began to write. It was an incredible experience, my pen just flew across the paper as I remembered in great detail. Reviewing the notes much later, I could remember exactly how it had been and I could hear the students’ voices as I read their words. These notes tell a story of highly motivated, consistently on task Japanese and Korean students working in the same room, but never cooperating voluntarily with varying groups of French, Spanish, Dutch, Norwegian, Brazilian, Russian, Finnish students. These students tended not to be consistently on task; they loved to chat, play games, make jokes but always in English and enjoy ESL class as the one time they could relax. These were the students who passed the exit test fairly easily and went on to do well in mainstream classes. The fact that they did do well was felt to be proof that the exit test was an effective assessment of a student’s readiness to exit the ESL programme. My research and analysis of the exit test is presented in detail in chapter two. However, even after the exit test was abandoned as inappropriate and culturally biased the same pattern continued, that is, there was a distinct tendency for non-Japanese or Korean students to exit the ESL programme quickly and for the Japanese and Korean students to be left behind. In addition to field notes of my own classes and looking for a more holistic picture, I began to observe the students

before and after school and during breaks. I also asked my colleagues if they would allow me to observe their students during their classes. I was able to observe a number of mainstream classes where I witnessed the same behaviour as in my class, the Japanese students were consistently focused and on task, studiously following the lesson. They never asked questions or volunteered answers unless called upon personally. Even then their answers often took a very long time to be formulated, to the extent that the teacher often felt it necessary to rephrase the question, or even let someone else offer the answer. This pattern of behaviour presents a number of real problems in mainstream classes where participation is a requirement which contributes towards the final grade and students are required to consistently demonstrate their understanding.

During a study visit to Japan, I was able to observe classes and informally interview teachers and students, who were generally assigned to me by the school principals. Observing classes in Japan was an eye-opening experience which revealed a wealth of information about the backgrounds and previous learning experiences of my own students and contributed to better understanding of the problems we were facing. I felt strongly at the beginning of my research that one of the major stumbling blocks would be my inability to speak Japanese and the need to rely on the English ability of our informants. I very soon discovered that most Japanese teachers, even teachers of English, are extremely reluctant, in fact often totally unwilling, to speak English. The English classes I observed in Japan and at the Japanese International School in Düsseldorf (JISD) tended to be conducted in Japanese with the bare minimum of English being spoken. I heard very little English spoken in Japan at all. We had a

translator with us but very often my questions produced long, seemingly detailed answers in Japanese which to my frustration were then translated into very curt responses in English. When I asked for more detail, I was told that was all that had been said. On one hand an inability to speak fluent Japanese could be considered a positive feature as the “strange” remains very strange and unknown. The assistance of a translator in itself maintains a permanent distance between me and the subjects of investigation but it has also been a handicap as primarily I was often reluctant to rely on my translators. Especially if the response was written or recorded I was tempted to get a second opinion. A further disadvantage was that I could not read research on the Japanese education system in Japanese and was limited to reading works in English or translations of Japanese works. Despite spending four years trying to get to grips with, in my opinion, an exceedingly difficult language and I know my informants would all agree with me on that, I finally decided to abandon my attempts as the length of time and the effort I was investing in it was in no way proportional to the meagre results. My fruitless attempts have, however, taught me a great deal about how the language works and how the discourse system differs from English, which is of course closely related to the culture.

My extensive field notes, written over a number of years record the experiences and activities of Japanese students, as I perceived them, in Japan from kindergarten to university level, in Germany at the Japanese kindergarten, elementary and middle schools, at ISD in middle and high school ESL and mainstream classes, at breaks before and after school, during out of school activities, sporting, dramatical and musical. The process of writing up the field notes and reflecting on the people and

events described led to the formulation of my first tentative theories of what seemed to be happening. My recorded observations turned events in the classroom -

social discourse from a passing event, which exists only in its own moment of occurrence, into an account, which exists in its inscriptions and can be consulted (Geertz, 1973:18).

This is the first phase of what Alasuutari calls *unriddling* (1995:17). Through this process of writing, reading and re-reading and reflection some features which seemed to indicate a pattern of culturally consistent behaviour emerged. The fact that my observations stretched from 1997 to 2005 and the patterns observed remained with slight deviations would seem to indicate their validity. Parallel to my writing I also read a great deal of research by others on Japan and the Japanese, ranging from the work of Benedict in the 1940s to Befu in 2002 which also confirmed the patterns of culturally determined behaviour which I had described.

6.3.1.ii Interviews

One of the methods often used in ethnographical research is that of the interview. This is an approach which can yield rich, insightful information and which gives the participants a voice which is so essential in ethnographical work. For me it was a disaster. My first attempt was to interview a group of Japanese high school students about their history of English learning. The students were not in my classes but they knew me from the ESL department and had seen me on a regular basis. I was not a stranger. I set the interview up carefully; the students were released from class so

that it would not take up their free time, a Japanese university student was also present to help if there were difficulties understanding my questions. I explained a little about my research to the group of twelve, boys and girls together sitting in a circle. I told them of my intention to find ways to support and improve English language learning through new information gained from my research. I had the tape recorder running and began with my first question. -You have all clearly been successful English learners, what advice would you give to new students at ISD to help them learn English quickly?

There was a long, very long silence. No one looked at me, no one spoke. I tried again, and re-phrasing the question. A long silence. I asked the Japanese university student if she could translate the question, this was also greeted with a long silence. I switched off the tape recorder and asked again, I asked if it was the tape recorder which put them off. Not one of my questions was answered, the students refused to speak. Eventually I gave the attempt up and suggested we try again in pairs or small groups, perhaps the boys were put off by the girls or vice versa. Small groups stayed in the room with me, the others went out. The results were no different the tape recording consists of my questions, a series of long silences, and some giggling. Even thinking about it now, I feel the same frustration and helplessness which confronted me then. I have since learnt some of the reasons why the attempt was doomed to failure. *The nail which stands up will be hammered down*, is a Japanese expression frequently used to show that in Japanese culture no one should put themselves forward or be seen as a show-off or know-all. In addition I have learnt of the great lack of confidence which many Japanese people have in speaking in

English together with a fear of making mistakes and looking foolish, compounded no doubt by the presence of a tape recorder. An additional factor is the Japanese discomfort with very direct questions, as the tendency is to be more indirect. The kind of direct questions and answers which are standard procedure in the west, are felt to be impolite. I later discovered that the longer students, or parents, had been immersed in western culture, the more willing they were to attempt to take part in an interview. However, their immersion in the western culture was also reflected in their answers which introduces a new element to the research. Duranti (1997:112) warns against relying too much on bilingual speakers and adds

This is one of the paradoxes that field workers must live with, namely, that the people who understand us the best and are most easily understood by us are usually the ones who are closest to the way we are.

My solution to the dilemma of how to give my participants a voice if interviews were impossible was to use secondary sources which are described below.

6.3.1.iii Secondary Data Collection Methods

As Strauss and Corbin (1998:174) put it

we have an obligation to the actors we have studied: obligations to “tell their stories” to them and to others-to give them voice - albeit in the context of their own inevitable interpretations.

The Japanese students at ISD do not have a voice. The Japanese faculty, who could represent them, maintain a culturally-appropriate very low-profile, and keep slightly distant from their colleagues. They take little part in social activities and do not assert themselves in in-service training, cross-cultural activities or any other way. Similarly the Japanese students are rarely seen in any drama productions, do not stand for election for student council and their voices are rarely heard in class discussions. In fact they are subsumed by the dominant western culture, even though they make up 25% of the high school student body. Japanese students are frequently members of the choirs, orchestras, and sports teams at the international school but they remain the silently cooperative, highly effective and skilful group welcomed by teachers and coaches alike. The parent body is similarly withdrawn and silent. They are rarely seen, unless there is work to be done. Japanese parents are always welcome candidates for election on the school's Board of Governors and because of the weight of numbers they are usually guaranteed a seat. However these Board members rarely show a high profile and although superficially the Japanese community is represented, they tend to remain silent.

Taking all of this into consideration, the extent of the problem of delay in acquisition of English to the level required for success in a mainstream classroom seems to cross over from the classroom and in fact be related to the way other cultures are recognised and accepted within the culture of a so-called international school. I felt it was imperative to give my own students a voice in the research and yet they were not fluent or confident enough to do so by conventional methods. Interviews and especially open-ended questions did not produce any kind of useful data. Journal

writing in English also tended to produce trite, superficial evidence. This was usually due to the students' level of English competence. One of the native Japanese teachers, helped me by having the students keep *learning journals* in Japanese. They were required to fill them in each week over a period of six months and afterwards I had a random selection translated by a fluent bilingual student. These entries form part of my data chapter and examples are included in the appendix. They reveal in depth the students' attitudes to and concerns about learning at an international school in a way which they would not have been able, or maybe willing, to reveal to me in English.

After the disappointing interviews which I interpret as being due to the Japanese cultural importance of group pressure, or not losing face by making mistakes or saying something which could be construed as foolish, as well as my informants' general reluctance to speak openly or spontaneously, I discovered that via email the responses were of a different quality. Through email the Japanese teachers answered my questions in depth which surprised me and with an openness I had not experienced before. Similarly ex-students and parents who had returned to Japan gave me far more information than I had come to expect in our face-to face conversations.

Another source of secondary information which I have used in my data analysis is a skit which was written by a group of Japanese teenage girls during an ESL summer drama programme. Their skit is described in great detail in chapter seven. I chose to use it, although the original task had nothing to do with family life, because as a group they dramatised an episode from Japanese family life which surprised me. The

style and tone of the language used, bearing in mind that the girls were all in ESL classes, and the individual roles and responsibilities show Japanese family life, I felt, in a negative light. I was surprised by their skit and when on the final day the parents, mostly mothers, came to see the end products I felt some concern about the interpretation of Japanese family life. My concern was not shared by any of the mothers, who were in fact complimentary about their daughters' work.

A further piece of secondary documentation which I use is a fifty word saga written by a Japanese eighth grade student who has exited the ESL programme but is not yet totally fluent. I felt her poem, described in chapter seven, was a valuable piece of evidence in constructing the reality of Japanese family life in Germany. I also use a piece of action research in my data collection which was written by an anonymous Japanese student in 1984, at that time the school was still called the American International School. This looks at the *Social Interaction of the Japanese: A Study of various relationships of students at an American International school* and describes patterns of friendships and influence within the group of high school Japanese girls. At that time student numbers were considerably smaller. The importance of this research for my work is that it was written by a Japanese high school student who observed many of the social problems which are still evident at the school today, for example the lack of integration of the Japanese students with the rest of the student body. I showed this piece of writing to a twelfth grade group of Japanese girls and have included excerpts from their reactions, in 2006, to research written before they were born.

6.3.2 Multilayering

In order to gain a fuller picture of what is happening in school it is necessary to examine other areas of the lives of the students. I concentrate on two which I feel are the most influential. Firstly the *family* and secondly *friends* as especially for Japanese people belonging to a group and being accepted and supported by friends is of vital importance.

6.3.2.i The Family

My Contacts

At the beginning of each school year, Japanese class teachers in Japan visit the homes of each of the students in their classes and spend a short time talking to the parents and seeing where and how their students live. This is not expected of the teachers in an international school but I have in fact visited the homes of quite a few of my students, generally to talk to their mothers and this has given me deeper insight to my students. My research related to the family was, in the first instance, based on the writing of many Japanese experts. I was especially interested in child rearing and the differences between our philosophies in the west and the Japanese ideas. After reading, I was able to informally discuss these ideas with some of the Japanese mothers at school and one of them then brought me her MA thesis which she had written in America which focuses on just these differences. My reading gave an added depth to my observations of some of the Japanese families which I

encounter during school life. For example I meet the parents of my students at the annual *Back to School Night*, this is an evening of information about the school curriculum, extra-curricular activities etc but not about individual students held for parents at the beginning of each school year. Later in the year we hold *Parent-Student-Teacher Conferences*, a three way meeting to discuss individual progress and concerns. On a regular basis the school hosts parent coffee mornings. As not all of the Japanese mothers speak English fluently, we hold a Japanese coffee mornings at a local hotel regularly. These are attended by nearly every Japanese mother, rarely fathers, members of the administrative team, the Japanese department head and me as ESL department head. Through our frequent contacts most of the mothers know who I am and so we can communicate if the need arises. My frequent contact with Japanese parents both at meetings, but also through letters, phone calls and emails all contribute to form a rich source of data. Through the students' journal writing I had another view of the family but a large portion of my data about the family came about through a strange pattern of events. Each year a drama teacher and I organise a drama programme for ESL students and fluent English speakers, during the first two weeks of the summer vacation. We work on many different aspects of theatre, improvisation, pantomime, trust exercises, theatre games, and at the end of each week the students put on performances for their parents, usually only the mothers are able to come but we have a show. The students make scenery, find costumes, do the lights and sound themselves, make invitations, organise refreshments and perform. We take the students to the theatre to see variety or musicals which work for the students who do not speak fluent German. This particular year we had taken the students to the musical *Cats*. Back in school the next day we continued to work on

the theme of Cats. The full account of this is in chapter seven, as this activity also led to rich data about the Japanese family.

The family abroad

The influence of the family is especially interesting as the situation and importance of the family and individual family members' roles change when they are taken from their home country to live in a different culture. Extensive research has been done on third culture kids although little of this refers explicitly to Japanese students. An area which has been investigated more thoroughly is that of the re-acculturation process of Japanese children when they return to Japan after a stay in another country and need to re-learn Japanese patterns of behaviour and *the Japanese way*. These students are referred to as *returnees* and there are special schools and special classes within normal schools to accommodate their needs, although slowly the Ministry of Education in Japan is beginning to appreciate the international insights these children bring with them. Befu (2001) refers to the Japanese families who are mostly business expatriates and their families as *nonpermanent sojourners*. In particular the role of the mother changes. In his preface Shields (1995) writes

while Japanese fathers have become "invisible," many Japanese mothers have gone into "a state of fret" over their children. They spend a considerable amount of their energy and time working hard to ensure that their children succeed academically, enter good schools, and secure stable professional positions (xi).

Although this is the case in Japan my research, which included informal conversations with parents, conversations with mothers whose English was fluent enough to describe the situation and samples of writing from my students, including the skit described in this research, has shown that the mothers' situation outside of Japan loses a great deal of validity when they are unable to fulfil the expected role through a combination lack of English and lack of knowledge of the educational system. In addition to the mother's role changing, the child's identity and role within the family changes. At first imperceptibly but then with increased English competence, the effect of the western culture plus the culture of the school take precedence over the previously acknowledged ways of behaving and communicating. This leads to a clash between the behavioural, academic and social expectations of the school and the home which is generally not anticipated and is not understood by any of the participants. My research in this area is based on observations, case studies, field notes and discussions.

6.3.2.ii Friends

The importance of friendships and group membership is a vital consideration when looking at the Japanese students in the international school system. After coming from a relatively homogenous, mono-lingual school environment, the international school with its emphasis on individual effort and achievement, within a multi-cultural, multi-lingual community presents the Japanese student with an enormous challenge. My research into the role friendships and the group play for the individual Japanese student was based on diary entries, observations and field notes, case

studies, and a piece of research written by a Japanese student at ISD twenty years ago which shows marked similarities to the situation today, where the wish to preserve the harmony of the group is stronger than the wishes of the individual. Almost every Japanese student asked at the beginning of their time at ISD *Why do you want to come to this school?* answers that they want to learn good English and make international friends. In fact my observations, interviews, the students' diaries and other sources reveal the difficulties that the Japanese students find in each of these areas. They tend to remain with their Japanese friends and make very little attempt to make friends with non-Japanese students until their English language competence is very highly developed, providing they stay at ISD long enough for this to happen.

6.4 Summary

In this chapter I have attempted to explain and justify my choice of research methods. Ethnography offers the chance to look at the problem holistically, using a number of methods, including participant observation, observations, interviews, questionnaires, diaries, emails. All of these sources combine to produce a wealth of data. As Geertz states

In ethnography, the office of theory is to provide a vocabulary in which what symbolic action has to say about itself - that is, about the role of culture in human life - can be expressed (1973:27).

Grounded in the data and developed through a process of layering and analysis, a

number of key theories and ideas crystallised. Ethnographic methods made it possible to look at three main areas of the students' lives, each of which play a major role in their acquisition and understanding of cultural norms and language. As long as they lived in Japan the school, friends and the family were the main sources of linguistic and cultural acquisition and development. Living in Germany and attending an international school meant that although the family and at first most of the friends continued to support the Japanese language and culture, the school introduced new linguistic and cultural ways of life which are very different to the students' previous experiences. The effect of the cultural differences on rate of the acquisition of a second language, English, is the subject of this thesis.

Chapter Seven

The Family

7 Introduction

In this chapter I examine the importance of the family in the educational processes of their children. I look at research into students who live outside of their home country. I examine data produced by my students at ISD about their families which is supported by interviews, email and other evidence from secondary sources. The importance of the family overseas is shown and the problems which occur when the expectations of family and school do not match are identified. I also discuss the difficult situation of many Japanese mothers at ISD when the role which they would normally fulfil in their home country becomes impossible in this new setting.

7.1 The Family Overseas or All At Sea?

What the children bring to school - their communities' cultural models or understandings of 'social realities' and the educational strategies that they, their families and their communities use or do not use in seeking education are as important as within-school factors (Ogbu, 1992:5).

This quote from Ogbu confirms that in order to gain a holistic view of what is happening to students in school, multiple aspects of the students' lives must be

considered. This leads to a multi-layering or multi-level approach (Conteh et al, 2005) which includes not only the school, but also the family and friendships. The importance of the family to their children's academic success was addressed by the Director of the International School of Düsseldorf, Mr Neil McWilliam, in the PFA (Parent-Faculty-Association) magazine, Winter 2005. He began his article with a comment he had made at a Parent's Welcome Coffee morning at the beginning of the academic year 2005/6. He said

Kids whose parents are involved in school do better academically than those whose parents are not involved.

He backed this statement up with research from Vanderbilt University and gave the following quote

Whether construed as home-based behaviors (e.g. helping with homework), school-based activities (e.g. attending school events), or parent-teacher communication (e.g. talking with the teacher about homework), parental involvement has been positively linked to indicators of student achievement, including teacher ratings of student competence, student grades, and achievement test scores Involvement has also been associated with other indicators of school success, including lower rates of retention in grade, lower drop-out rates, higher on-time graduation rates, and higher participation in advanced courses.

In addition to these outcomes, parental involvement has also been linked to psychological processes and attributes that support student achievement. These student motivational, cognitive, social, and behavioral attributes are particularly important because they

are susceptible to direct parent and teacher influence (Hoover-Dempsey, 2005:105).

This clear endorsement of the importance of the family in a child's education at ISD in the opinion of our administration also supports my decision to include the family as one layer of my research. In addition, research has shown the increased importance of the family for students living outside of their home countries. Research undertaken by Useem and others (Useem and Downey, 1976, Schaetti, 1998) on *Global Nomads* or *Third Culture Kids* reveals the greater importance of the family to these children compared with children who remain in their home environment. *Global Nomads* or *Third Culture Kids* are defined as children who spend a significant part of their developmental years in one or more countries outside of their passport country. In the past these were the children of missionaries, military personnel or diplomats but nowadays they are the children of businessmen and women employed by international companies. Due to their changed circumstances, the nuclear family is the only constant factor in these children's lives and as such increases in importance as other support systems, such as the extended family, friends or neighbours are no longer easily accessible. The children of parents who are sent overseas are often uprooted at very short notice from their school, friendships are torn apart, other family relatives are left far away and the children are taken to countries where they may not speak the local language, and have no friends. The emotional turmoil which results, particularly for teenagers, is predictable. For students who speak the language of the school, the transition period can be shorter, but for those with little knowledge of English the transition can be long and painful.

In the course of my research and data collection, two main ideas about the role of the family in the education process have crystallised which are closely entwined and difficult to deal with separately. I have found there is discontinuity between Japanese educational practices and beliefs, which are confirmed and supported at home, and the educational practices and beliefs of an international school, in this case ISD. Parallel to this is the Japanese mother's lack of knowledge about the beliefs and practices in an international school, which results in a further, significant loss of support for the child. The joint effect of these two factors, the lack of continuity of home and school practices and beliefs and the loss of any kind of knowledgeable support from the home, leaves the student stranded. Add to this a low level of English proficiency and the resulting difficulties would appear to be predictable.

When non-German speaking families are sent to Düsseldorf, the International School of Düsseldorf is one of the first places they visit to find schooling for their children. For many of the families it becomes a main source of contact with others of the same nationality. For the Japanese families, the situation is a little different. The Japanese population in Düsseldorf is approximately 5,000. (Düsseldorf citizens' register, 2002) and there is a wealth of established facilities in Düsseldorf, including Japanese shops, restaurants, hotels, hairdressers, doctors, a library, schools and kindergartens. Because of these facilities, the parents are less dependent on the school as a social arena. Whereas mothers of many other nationalities regularly meet in the school cafe for their morning coffee, we hardly ever see Japanese mothers using the school as a social centre.

7.2 Japanese Family Life through the Eyes of Teenagers

As we enjoy long summer vacations in the international school system, a number of summer programmes are offered in school which are eagerly attended, especially by Japanese students. During the *ESL and Drama summer programme 2004*, the children were given the task of writing a short sketch for four characters inspired by a visit to the musical *Cats* in Düsseldorf. The drama exercise began in a rather unusual way.

The students each sat opposite a friend and were told to do a quick sketch of that friend. They then exchanged sketches within the class of fourteen and had to turn their new sketch into a cat. The students then exchanged pictures again and had to create a character for the cat and write a play, in groups of four, including all of the characters in their group. The sketches were to be performed as readers' theatre for parents on the last day of the workshop, along with other drama pieces. Given the instructions as described, the results of course varied greatly. The only limitation we had given the students was that there was to be as little fighting and violence as possible. The final skits involved such plots as a jewellery robbery and a kidnapping. A group of four Japanese girls, aged between 13 and 14, wrote the following sketch which is given here exactly as they wrote it with no corrections to grammar or spelling. (The original script is appendix 4)

Family

- 1 (F) - father
2 (M) - mother
3 (B) - daughter Victoria
4 (L) - daughter Emily
5 F: I'm home!! Mum, please give me beer.
6 M: There is no beer because you drunk all yester day.
7 F: What!? I always drink after work. You know it!! Why didn't you buy
8 it?
9 M: I was so busy today. You drink too much these days, don't you? It
10 isn't good for your health. You should not drink too much...
11 F: Shut up!! Who do you think earn for you?? You should be grateful
12 for me! (B is coming)
13 B: So noisy. Can you be quiet guys?
14 F: What don't oppose me. My stress builds up because of you!! By the
15 way, what do you have in the hand??
16 B: This? It is cigarette.
17 F: Did you say cigarette? You can't smoke yet.
18 B: It is universal. All my friends are smoking too.
19 F: You mustn't do it. Give it to me!!
20 B: No I don't because I bought it myself
21 F: Give it to me.
22 B: I said no!! I don't like you. Okay, I go to my room. Don't come my
23 room
24 M: Victoria (B leave)
25 F: She is like that because you don't take care of her.
26 M: I'm sorry. (L is coming)
27 L: What happened? You guys were noisy.
28 M: Victoria and Dad had a quarrel.
29 L: Again? Where's she?
30 M: She is in her room.
31 L: Okay. I go to see how things are. (L is go to B's room)

32 L: *May I come in?*
33 B: *Are you Emily?? Yeah. Come in. (B open the door and L come into*
34 *B's room)*
35 B: *I was surprised because I thought you are a parent.*
36 L: *Is it beer? Did you drink it??*
37 B: *Yes. Do you want to drink some?*
38 L: *No thanks. So, Will you make up with Dad??*
39 B: *I don't think so, because he doesn't say sorry.*
40 L: *Victoria Please make up! Dad is a heavy drinker because of you! He*
41 *didn't drink like that before. And then he said that because he is*
42 *worried about you!! And mother too ...*
43 *Why don't you say sorry? (B&L go to F&M)*
44 B: *I'm sorry. I didn't know you are worry about me.*
45 F: *That's all right. And I drank too much. Sorry.*
46 L: *Be nice to each other.*
47 F&B: *Yes ...*
48 M: *Tine to go to sleep.*
49 L: *Yes mum. Good night.*
50 F:M:B: *Good night.*

Although the assignment had nothing to do with family conflicts, this was what the girls chose. The piece was performed on the final day of the drama workshop for parents as readers' theatre and most of the Japanese students' mothers attended, but no fathers. I felt uncomfortable about the content as it does not appear to show Japanese fathers in a good light. The mothers all watched closely but made no comments at all. The sketch seems to show, in a very innocent way, the relative roles of the parents.

The scene begins with the father coming home and demanding that the mother give

him beer. It is often said that Japanese fathers are just like an extra child and the fact that he calls her mum and demands that she serve him would seem to confirm this. Similarly the references in lines 6 to 10 about alcohol and his heavy drinking confirm accounts given to me by students at other times. His defensive comments in line 11 reflect the fact that Japanese men are the family breadwinners. It is very unusual for Japanese wives to go out to work once they have children, although that too is slowly changing. It is thought that full attention should be given to one task at a time and as the mother is totally responsible for the success or failure of the children this necessitates her full time attention. Certainly living in Düsseldorf makes it difficult for Japanese wives to work outside of the home.

The cigarette discussion in lines 14 to 24 is fairly 'universal' as Victoria says but the comment that his stress levels build up because of his daughter, line 14, reflects the Japanese preoccupation with health.

Line 25 confirms the Japanese attitude that the mother is solely responsible for all aspects of the children's development, *she is like that because you don't take care of her*, but equally telling is the mother's humble admission of guilt in the words *I'm sorry* (line 26).

It would seem that, rather than the daughter being guilty of smoking and insolent to her father, the mother is guilty because the daughter's behaviour is due to her negligence.

Interestingly, neither of the parents tries to reason with the daughter and it is left to the younger sister to resolve the conflict. A major part of the discipline in Japanese schools is exercised through peer pressure, and the need for harmony within in the group is maintained by the students dealing with trouble makers themselves, reasoning and remonstrating with them, while the teacher keeps a low profile (Stevenson and Stigler, 1992:90, Lewis, 1995:139). The fact that in the students' skit the younger sister was the one who reasoned with her and persuaded her that everyone was worried about her would seem to reflect the importance of peer pressure, rather than authority being exercised as a disciplinary measure.

Within this sketch the main areas of family life addressed were the absence of the father due to work demands and his role as, almost, a dependent extra child and the importance of the mother's sole responsibility for the success of the children.

Living in Germany, the Japanese fathers spend their working day with Japanese colleagues in a familiar work environment, the children have their days filled with school and contact to their Japanese friends. In many ways the Japanese mothers are isolated unless they quickly build up a circle of friends. Even that however is complicated because of the importance of the position of their husband within the company and the wife's position in the hierarchy of company wives. The most important role of the mother in a typical Japanese family then is to support the education and upbringing of the children. White states

The family, a woman's source of influence and value, is embodied

in the vertical ties of parent and child, rather than in the Western nexus of husband and wife. This Confucian-based ideal is strongly supported by Japanese women themselves, 76 percent of whom in recent polls say that their first responsibility is to their children (White, 1987: 34).

For the Japanese family living outside of Japan there are many changes in their roles and life style. These are discussed below.

7.3 The Effects of Change - *Otosan* - the father

For the Japanese fathers whose children attend the international school, the situation is not so very different from living and working in Japan. The living accommodation is more spacious and cheaper than in a large city in Japan but the hours of work remain long, with frequent travel required so that the fathers tend to see little of their wives and children. This was brought home to me by a piece of writing by an eighth grade Japanese girl. The assignment was to write a fifty word mini-saga, with a beginning, middle and end and if possible, a built-in surprise. As a class we had examined models of the genre and discussed them. The content was left up to the student. The student's work is entitled "Stranger".

Stranger

Who is that stranger?

He arrives and stays for nine hours, sleeps and disappears.

*I never see him. Just on special Sundays - finally I can see him I have lots to say,
but he looks so tired.*

LISTEN TO ME!!!!

(Although you can't, I still love you, Dad.)

(Mini-saga, written by M.Y. March, 2005)

As this mini-saga demonstrates, Japanese fathers are often only at home to sleep and when they do have more time they are often tired. One of the reasons could be that Japanese employees generally meet after the official office hours to eat, drink and talk and this is seen as a requirement rather than an optional extra. These evening meetings often involve heavy drinking. Even weekends are taken up with work, as the children often tell me about spending time with their fathers at the office on Saturdays when the children are on the internet and chat pages, or talking to friends in Japan. The fathers' employers or job has generally not changed significantly, so that the only real difference for the Japanese businessman now working in Germany is the need for a secretary who is fluent in Japanese and German. The students do not often mention their fathers in their journal writing, unless there is a problem. Some students, who have difficulties with their homework, wrote in their journals that they waited until very late when their fathers came home for help. Fathers rarely come to school, again, unless there is a problem. In Japan the fathers have minimal contact with schools as that is the mothers' responsibility, but often the mothers do not have sufficient command of English to communicate effectively with the teachers and so the fathers have to take the responsibility.

7.4 *Okasan* - The Mother

For the Japanese mothers of students who join an international school, the change is enormous. They usually have little knowledge of German but are expected to continue to care for the family and deal with the everyday events of life in an unfamiliar environment, an unknown culture and a different language. In fact, once

the mothers find their feet, they do extremely well and are busy with language courses, golf and tennis lessons and meeting friends for lunch, so that it is often difficult to catch a Japanese mother at home during the school day. Some of the Japanese mothers of my students express their regret when the time comes to return to Japan. They tell me they will miss the freedom which living in Germany gives them, the cheaper access to many facilities, as well as being away from the scrutinous gaze of Japanese neighbours and other relatives. During the study visit to Japan I met up with a Japanese family who had, unusually, lived in Düsseldorf for a total of seven years. The following are notes taken after our meeting.

Mrs M. explained that she had been terribly depressed when she first came back to Japan, it was a combination of the children being away at school (university) and missing her friends and way of life in Germany. She said she missed playing golf most, her husband agreed she had been very depressed and had to find something as he put it 'to kill her time'. She had renovated their house, which was inherited from her family and is now, as a result of their seven year stay in Germany, furnished in European style. Although she and her husband are both university educated, when I asked if she would think of looking for a job, now that the children are away for months on end, they were both quite adamant that she would not.

Mrs M had enjoyed her experience in Germany so much that the return to Japan led to depression and she was unable to remember being unhappy or at a loss when she first came to Germany. She was one of the very active mothers and her two children, a boy and a girl, were very successful students. The daughter spent a relatively short

time in ESL and went on to complete the full IB. The son took entrance examinations while he was a middle school student at ISD for Keio High School in New York. This is a very prestigious high school which is attached to one of the best Japanese universities, Keio. Once a student has been accepted for the high school, progress into the university is guaranteed which almost automatically leads to a job in a prestigious company, just like his father. So although the children were both very successful their mother suffered in the process.

Unless the mothers of children who attend the international school have had first-hand experience of a western educational environment, the expectations, academic and behavioural, and every other aspect of their children's education are unknown, unfamiliar areas. The education mama, *kyoiku mama*, is out of her depth and finds herself unable to help and support her children as she would do in the Japanese system. The Japanese mothers at ISD are keen to ascertain just what the children are learning, how their English is progressing and why they seem to have so little homework. At ISD we hold regular Japanese tea mornings where the mothers have the opportunity to express their concerns and talk to the director and teachers involved. However the questions, which are collected and written up in English and Japanese in advance, often display the lack of understanding and confusion which exists within the Japanese community. The same questions are repeated regularly and even when the answers are concisely given in English and then translated into Japanese, there still appears to be confusion. For example, questions about permission to smoke for students are clearly addressed in the school policy and there are strict guidelines as to who, when and where smoking may take place and yet the

same question gives rise to endless debate. The mothers also regularly ask why students are exited from the ESL programme after only one year, which is a misconception as they are exited when they are ready to succeed in mainstream and it is almost unheard of for a Japanese student to exit after one year, yet the same question is raised again and again. These questions are answered in English, and then translated into Japanese by either a competent mother or a Japanese teacher and yet there is still discussion and evident confusion. The mothers are reluctant to ask any questions other than those which have been submitted in advance and even after the answers have been given and they continue to discuss the questions avidly in Japanese, they are reluctant to ask for further clarification or to share with us just what is still being discussed. The Japanese translators are equally reluctant to explain the discussion so we are left none the wiser. However it appears to be that the mothers, robbed of their position of influence and authority within the familiar Japanese educational situation, still wish to express their concerns and opinions to each other as this is only platform available. The mothers find themselves unable to help and support their children with schoolwork, unable to understand the language of school well enough to get to grips with the curriculum being taught, the way of teaching, learning and especially the assessment system.

The picture which crystalises from interviews, discussions, students' journal entries and emails from mothers who have left Germany is that the Japanese mothers of students at the International school go through a very difficult learning phase which can last up to two years. Some mothers admit that they never master the system. The conventional mother's role in Japanese society is taken away while they live in

Germany and it is difficult to replace it. In the end tennis, golf, shopping, learning German or English and other free time activities take up their time. Very, very few mothers are able to give the children the kind of support which they would normally give in the Japanese education system. In fact this is quite dramatic. The children are in a school system all day long which they do not fully understand, being taught in a language they do not fully understand and the lifeline which would be supporting and encouraging them in school in Japan is not there either. It is no wonder that the children struggle. During the course of my research I met several mothers who were able to support their children effectively. Two of them had studied in America themselves and were familiar with the kind of curriculum and expectations of a western school.

One of these mothers, Mrs K. talked to me in December, 1999 shortly before they returned to Japan, so I made a special note that her head was full of packing, the examinations her children had to take before entering Japanese school and leaving Europe. Her son Go was one of my students. This was one of the interviews which I could have tape recorded as Mrs K. was so open and receptive to my questions. In the event however I just took notes.

P.M. When you came to Europe you had the choice of sending Go to the Japanese middle school, a German school or to ISD. Why did you choose ISD?

Mrs K. We thought about a German gymnasium because he was 11 years old but he only spoke a little German and would have been too hard so we sent him

to ISD. His sister went to German kindergarten and cried every day for two months.

P.M. Why did you leave her there, there's a Japanese kindergarten in Düsseldorf?

Mrs K. I know but we knew it was only hard at the beginning and would be alright.

P.M. Why did you choose ISD and not the Japanese school for Go?

Mrs K. We thought it would be his last chance to learn English. I learnt English at middle school and high school in Japan but did not learn to speak until I went to America to university for two years. We wanted Go to learn now.

P.M. If you had sent him to the Japanese school it would be much easier for him and you to return to Japan.

Mrs K. We know it will be difficult for both children, our daughter doesn't speak good Japanese and will have a lot of problems and Go must go to a good high school. He must learn the Japanese way of learning. In ISD it's totally different and he must learn to study both ways. Go studies at private Japanese school every evening till 12 o'clock and then I have to pick him up from the school. I want him to come straight home after school at ISD but he wants to stay and play basketball with his friends for one hour. He has high school end of semester exams next week but he has no time to study for them as he must study for the entrance exams for Japan.

P.M. What does that mean 'the Japanese way of learning'?

Mrs K. For university and high school they have very hard entrance exams in math, Japanese and English, but it's not like English at ISD, it's only grammar and just sometimes some other kind of writing. They don't have

to speak or write essays.

(Mrs K. showed me a book at this point with examples of the kind of questions they have for entrance exams for prestigious high schools, beside each question it says in brackets which school's exam paper the question was taken from.)

P.M. So really there are a lot of disadvantages for Japanese students attending ISD. But you still sent him there, why?

Mrs K. I want him to learn the language, another culture and to have friends of other nationalities. But it is also very expensive if the company doesn't pay. It is difficult for them to really learn English when the surrounding environment is German and they only speak English in school.

P.M. I'm sure you can help him at home as your English is so good?

Mrs K. Yes, but we have a strange family, my husband learnt good English, seven years of grammar but he can't speak, my daughter is almost German and Go speaks a lot of English, we are really international.

P.M. Your English is so good because of the time you spent in America then?

Mrs K. Yes, and we also had conversation lessons once a week in high school where the teacher made us repeat and repeat to get the rhythm of the words. I still remember how it was 'she had a camera in her hand'

(Mrs K. repeated these words several times with added emphasis on the words *camera* and *hand*)

we had to repeat it again and again. But in America it was difficult to be with native speakers because they thought we were so boring. Japanese people are so shy you know and often we don't speak because we don't understand and a conversation must be like a ball, throw and catch. When

I talk with American mothers at ISD I can't throw and catch because often I don't understand, I don't catch the topics or understand words. In America I learned how to speak but not how to understand the jokes.

P.M. Going back to the Japanese students who will return to Japan for a moment. Would it be better for the Japanese students who are returning to Japan to study more grammar?

Mrs K. No because they need the oral expression, that's the advantage. I would never regret sending Go to ISD, it's a totally different education but I would never regret it. Now he has to get to a good high school so he can go to a good university. In Japan it's not important what you study, what counts is which university you attended, because of the company, they only want people from the best university. But the entrance exam is only grammar. We knew a boy who was so quiet he could never speak but he studied and got to go to the best university. I didn't believe it because he couldn't speak.

Mrs K. had an excellent understanding of what it meant to study at ISD compared to studying at a Japanese school. She fully appreciated the differences in learning styles and the different expectations of each system but she was quite naturally still immersed, despite her apparent openness, in the Japanese way of thinking. Her next priority was to get Go, who at that time was thirteen, into a good high school and to this aim he was attending cram school till midnight every evening. This had several knock-on effects; he had to be picked up at midnight every evening, he had no time to study for the ISD semester end exams and of course he was tired every day in

school as a result. Her only real concern was that he wanted to play for an hour after school, rather than go straight to cram school. In some ways, she seems very hard; why did her daughter have to go to German kindergarten and elementary school especially as this had a seriously detrimental effect on her Japanese competence? Did Go really need to go to cram school every evening? In fact he was successful, he got into the high school of his mother's choice, continued to the university and is now in his final year. Clearly Mrs K. fulfilled the requirements of an *education mama*. Go is doing well and visited ISD a few months ago to see his teachers and share his progress with us.

7.4.i The Role of the Mother outside of Japan

How then do Japanese mothers maintain their position of influence within the family in a completely new set of circumstances where their previous knowledge and expertise are irrelevant, they do not necessarily speak fluent English and are not fully aware of the requirements of the school? In my research I discussed this problem with a number of Japanese mothers but once again problems occurred due to their reluctance to speak openly or spontaneously to me. In Japanese culture it is considered disrespectful to speak too spontaneously or directly, comments must be carefully considered and appropriately formulated. The Japanese people I have interviewed are generally unwilling to speak, unless they have given the question due respect and consideration. They then need to give the same consideration to their answers, even in Japanese. The time lag between my questions and any sort of answer is uncomfortable for most westerners as we are accustomed to speaking and

thinking at the same time, or even organising our ideas through speech. I found three fluent English speakers who were willing to talk to me and I communicated with other mothers via email with the help of their children. Using email to correspond with Japanese mothers from ISD proved to be quite successful. Their answers were considered and thoughtful and they clearly did not feel as pressured as they would be if I were in the room with them with a tape recorder or taking notes.

The fluent English speakers had all studied in America themselves and so were familiar with western culture and education. For them the school presented no problems, they were able to help their children with their homework and fully supported the education of their children. They were all keen for their children to be internationally minded and have good language skills for their return to Japan. They all shared concern about their children's Japanese language development but the children all attend Japanese cram schools several times a week and cover much of the Japanese school curriculum in mathematics, language and social studies there. They also have Japanese lessons at the International School. However, each of these mothers pointed out the level of concern expressed by other mothers who were less fluent English speakers and unfamiliar with the system. Uniformly, these mothers were also anxious to know what the children were learning and how they could help them.

7.5 Home-School Communication

In Japan, elementary and middle school home room teachers visit the homes of each of the students in their class at the beginning of the school year to meet the parents and observe the home situation. They maintain contact during the school year with open days when the parents can visit classes and through the PTA, which is modelled on American lines. Japanese mothers at ISD expressed their surprise to me that the only contact with the teachers was on the *Back to School Night* and an annual parent teacher conferences. At the *Back to School Night*, parents visit each of their children's classes and see where the students will study, meet the teachers and hear a brief overview of the year's programme. Not all of the parents are able to follow this whistle stop tour as each teacher only has approximately ten minutes available to explain the upcoming curriculum and general expectations. There is no time in this forum to discuss individual students, although some parents do attempt it. When we talked about the parent teacher conferences, the mothers expressed surprise that they were able to speak to every teacher as in Japanese school all of their contacts would be with the home room teacher. Although we offer parents time to talk to individual teachers about their children's progress, the lack of English competence coupled with a lack of understanding of the curriculum, learning goals, teaching and assessment methods, as well as the individual teacher's frequent lack of understanding of the Japanese culture and communication style all lead to a no-win situation.

Although the comments from all of the parents I talked to were positive about the

teachers in the school and the amount of help the teachers were willing to give, these comments focused on their friendliness and kindness rather than good meaningful communication. Parents who become involved in other activities at ISD, for example the Booster Club which provides refreshments for sports meets, or the library which always has a band of willing helpers to cover books or laminate work, helping with drama productions, or organising the annual International Fest, all find these activities ways to maintain informal contacts with teachers.

Mrs F. (by email from Japan) wrote

parents in Japanese school keep away from them due to historical reason teachers and school have great authorities against parents in Japan (which kind of trend has been getting less recently). Thus I could have good experience to be involved in school activities in ISD and I would hope such a way to be taken in Japan (email June 10th 2004). (Appendix 5)

One mother (Mrs M.) described to me how she sits beside her daughter while she does her homework and helps her but she admitted that other mothers often have to wait until the husbands get home from work to help their children. Often it is just too late, so the children have to manage alone. Some of these parents have engaged private tutors who help the children with their homework and give them extra grammar lessons. This is in addition to a full day of school and cram school on at least two evenings per week and Saturday morning Japanese school (Mrs M. telephone interview, June 3rd 2004).

Many of the problems described to me by mothers confirm the worries expressed by a mother in Yamada-Yamamoto and Richards' book *Japanese Children Abroad* (1999: 114). One of their informants, Mrs Shibata, states

our worries seem endless because of our lack of knowledge about the National Curriculum, and lack of enough up-to-date information about his school. I find it very difficult to appreciate how much he can understand, what he has studied, how the boys are behaving at school, and how my son is coping with his friends.

This comment realistically reflects the feelings of many of our Japanese parents, especially the mothers, as they have very little idea about the Middle Years Programme of the IB or truthfully any other aspect of their child's education.

Another mother at ISD who was so unsure of her ability to express herself in English agreed to communicate with me via email, with her daughter as the translator. When asked how she thought her role had changed when S. and her brother began attending international schools (the children were first at the International School in Bonn), S. wrote about her mother

(It took a lot of time for her to answer this, she kept on) Her worries about school - will they get on well, etc- grew bigger when we went to international school rather than Japanese school. At home she took more time listening to her children (us!) talking, and she was also paying more attention to how we were. She also spent more time working with us on our homework. Her children relied on her more, and so she thinks our relation grew

closer (Email from S. June 27, 2004).

In contrast to this my communication with another Japanese student, who has now graduated and is attending university in Japan, revealed the darker side of the intense mother/child relationship. She wrote

When I was in Japanese school, she thought her role was to keep an eye on me, to control me and to support my study but after moving to Germany she could not do any of those because her English was not good enough (at least she thought so) to understand what was going on at school nor to help my study in English. Therefore she decided to accept what I told without criticism and to do her best keeping my physical and mental health. As she was on my side, she tried to provide me a place which I could relax.

She did not feel comfortable with her situation but she did and do think she could establish a better parent-child relationship than the one which she could have established if we had not moved to Germany. She strongly agreed to the image of a good mother in Japan (just like the one she did when I was in Japanese school) and this made her attitude overbearing. If she had not moved to Germany and continued her attitude, it could have repelled me more and the relationship could not have been good (Y's email June 13, 2004). (Appendix 6)

Y had begun to describe the role of a Japanese mother and clearly believes that if the relationship of a dominant mother forming a child had continued it would have been detrimental to their continuing relationship. I then asked her to ask her mother more about her beliefs of what a good mother and child are in Japan. She began her next

email by assuring me that as her mother began her child rearing twenty years ago, her beliefs may be different from those today and that not all Japanese people think the same way about it. She then went on

Since mother has an entire responsibility for children's health, growth and future, mother of course should concern for the food they have so that they can keep health but she also should concern how much time they sleep and even concern for the clothes they wear making sure they don't catch a cold. Also good mother should be able to understand what the children think of and should be able to advise when they are in trouble before they ask her for help.

Good mother can help children to study. Beside studying mother has to take some lessons to refine their sensibilities if she thinks they need ones, no matter whether they want to take the lessons or not. Mothers tend to believe that children have exactly the same sense of values and believe what parents believe as good fortunes are good fortunes for their children too. Good fortunes are, for example, graduating the top-ranking college, working at the top-ranking company and getting married with well-educated person at proper age (Email from Y. 4th July, 2004). (Appendix 7)

Clearly Y's mother has very traditional views of child rearing and yet what she has described is also evident at ISD. There is great concern about the children's eating habits. Nearly every Japanese child brings a beautifully prepared *bento* box to school each day for lunch. A *bento* box is a square plastic container, wrapped in a special cotton cloth which contains tiny portions of rice balls, fish or meat, pickled and fresh vegetables, all beautifully arranged. It is rare that a Japanese student will be seen

eating the kind of French fries-with-everything food served in our school cafeteria or ordering a pizza from the local delivery service for lunch. There is a pride in the variety and attractiveness of the food presented in the lunch *bento* boxes, which few western mothers would be inclined to imitate day after day for the whole of a child's school years. Many Japanese mothers also get up early to prepare their children soup, fish or rice for breakfast as well as prepare the *bento* box each morning. Japanese mothers also pay very close attention to the state of the children's health. It would be unusual for an American or western mother to give me exact details of an absent child's temperature, unless it is excessively high, or the state of the child's bowel movements on the phone, but this has happened often with Japanese mothers, or even fathers, when the mother is reluctant or unable to communicate in English on the telephone.

In the email Y's mother talks about "refining the sensibilities" of children and without doubt this is something which is evident in Japanese and lacking in many western children. It is manifested in various ways, in the work ethic, their attention to detail, their attitude to their peers and teachers. The work ethic, for example, is one of the major differences between Japanese and Western children in the classroom . It is extremely unusual to find a Japanese student who is not on task in class and doing their best to give one hundred percent attention during lessons. Y describes the image of good children which incorporates the "refined sensibilities"

*image of good children is tame, cheerful, obedient to adults,
keeping rules and not conspicuous at class in good way or bad*

way.

Many of the tasks which a Japanese mother considers to be her full-time assignment, are those fulfilled by mothers in every culture. The difference lies in the attitude to these tasks and the single-mindedness of the Japanese, both of which cause them great problems when their children are no longer in the familiar Japanese school system which the mothers themselves have mastered previously. Suddenly the mother's previous knowledge and understanding of school becomes less important compared with the baffling new system which confronts them. Due to limited language ability and a lack of knowledge about the system and its expectations the mothers are unable to fulfill the roles which they believe are so vital for the wellbeing and success of their children. Now they are unable to give the children the support which they need even more than ever before.

7.6 *Kodomo* - The Children

For the children who attend the Japanese kindergarten, elementary school or middle school, life is not so different. The children walk to school with friends as the majority of Japanese families choose to live very close to the Japanese schools, the lessons are the same as they would receive in Japan, with the addition of German lessons, and their mothers are always on hand and able to help and encourage them with their studies. After school the majority of students also attend *Juku*, Japanese cram school, which is conveniently situated a couple of tram stops away. Those who are allowed to go into town can shop for the same Japanese toys, CDs, pencils or

comic books as they would find in Japan. These things just cost more and so tend to be kept as treats. The children have some access to Japanese television and plenty of Japanese videos. Both comic books, *manga*, and videos are exchanged and shared with friends.

The Japanese students who go to ISD face a greater challenge. The most obvious difference is that all their lessons are taught in English and their teachers and classmates are from many different nations. But that is only the beginning. The support system of the *education mama*, which plays such a dominant role for so many students and their mothers in Japan, is no longer effective. Most of the key ideas which underlie the Japanese culture of education are no longer relevant. The atmosphere of learning is different and the goal posts of success have shifted. Their parents have very little idea of what happens each day in school and can only encourage them in the way they know which produces success in the Japanese system. The students also eventually reach a level of English competence which their parents cannot share and this can tilt the balance of power within the family with respect to school. This becomes evident at parent-teacher-student conferences. In the first phase of the student's career at the international school, the father dominates the conference as he generally speaks English more proficiently than the mother. She would normally take on this role in Japan but the language is an obstacle for most of the Japanese mothers who then whisper their questions and comments to the father who conducts the conversation. With time however, the student's level of proficiency and confidence overtakes the father's, so that the conference discussion is dominated by the student who then translates, often freely

or at least selectively one feels, what the parents need to know.

7.7 Japanese Family Structure and the Importance of the Family

Much has been written by researchers about the importance of vertical relationships in Japanese families (White, 1987, Condon, 1995, Shields, 1989). The dominant relationship is between the mother and her children. In fact the fathers are sometimes referred to as if they are just another child, as their role and responsibilities within the family are limited to earning a salary and making brief appearances at weekends.

As Condon states in her work on the roles of Japanese women today

A woman's most important work is taking care of the children, the home, and her husband, in that order (Condon, 1995: 13).

One of my students, Eri, once told me the reason she works so hard to be a good student is so that she can help her children with their school work when she is a mother. She was in grade seven and thirteen years old at the time. Japanese mothers encourage their children to persevere, *gambare*, in all they do as this will bring results. They encourage their children to work diligently and in an organised manner, and to learn with sincerity, *seijitsu*. In fact at the International School we witness the effects of these ideas on a regular basis. The Japanese students put an enormous effort into their learning, they are always on task and their work is beautifully presented and they keep their possessions neatly. These qualities are supported and taught in Japanese schools. In moral education classes in Japanese schools, there are five objectives which the teachers are expected to address in this order; diligence,

endurance, ability to decide to do the hard thing, wholehearted dedication and cooperativeness. The Japanese mothers and Japanese school continually promote the same qualities. When students come to ISD this is no longer the case. Our priorities are different, we encourage independent learning, risk taking, original thinking, active class participation and discussion skills. Consequently there is a difference between what the students have come to expect is important in school, those attitudes which their parents, especially their mothers encouraged and nurtured and what counts at ISD.

7.8 Summary

Many of the qualities which the Japanese culture values highly are not actively promoted and, in fact, are frequently lacking in the culture of ISD. These are qualities which Japanese mothers accept and reinforce at home; learning to do things the right way with sincerity, working diligently, paying close attention to detail and presentation and persevering. We see new Japanese students lining up their pencils on their desks, staying fully concentrated in class, always presenting their work beautifully and concentrating even though they understand very little, but at the same time the contrast to the students from the west is very clear. The non-Japanese students often come to class ill-equipped, despite all our best efforts, and frequently need to be called back to attention during lessons, beautiful presentation is not a priority and yet they succeed. It must be very confusing for the new Japanese students.

When a Japanese mother has little idea of what is happening in school and often lacks the language ability to support her child, her role loses much of its validity. In fact, the longer a Japanese child is in the international school system and the more their language and their awareness of western cultural norms grow, the less powerful the mother's role becomes. In their efforts to fit in to the international school culture, Japanese students must develop one set of rules and code of conduct for school and another, very different one for home. The set of rules for school almost negates that learnt at home, it certainly does not supply a real alternative. It can be no wonder that the students feel as uncertain of themselves as their mothers do and that this lack of confidence and lack of confident support must contribute negatively to their learning. Due to the mothers' uncertainty and inability to help the students with their school related problems, the fathers are often required to take over the role of mentor and communicator with school which in Japan would be the mother's responsibility. For fathers who are frequently away on business, this is an extra burden. However they cannot lose face by avoiding the challenges and so the father's role increases and the little free time he may have will be taken up with supporting his children in their studies, visiting school for conferences and communicating with teachers. Much of the written and oral communication from home to school and vice versa also becomes the responsibility of the father.

This shift in responsibilities offers an additional source of stress combined with the important fact that the parents have very little idea of what is happening at school. They are unable to communicate easily or comfortably with teachers and administrators and so have to rely on their children and the Japanese network for

information. They are unaware of so much, ranging from the school's real educational goals to what the children have to do for homework. School for most Japanese parents is an unknown quantity. Although the parents are without doubt keen for their children to learn a very good level of English and they accept that to do this the children must become part of the international school, in fact they have very little idea of what this involves and consequently are unable to adequately support their children's educational experience. As a result, we are confronted with teachers who do not understand the culture, language, learning needs and expectations of Japanese students, parents who have little idea of what their children are required to do in order to be successful and students who have little or no support system to guide them on their path to academic success because parental expectations of academic success and those of the school and teachers are separated by a sea of confusion.

Chapter Eight

Gakkoo - School

8 Introduction

In this chapter I examine the key differences between the Japanese national education system and the international school system, with special reference to the International School of Düsseldorf (ISD). These differences shed light on the confusion of differing expectations which separate the parents of Japanese students from the reality of ISD. These two systems of education differ quite surprisingly at each stage and show, in many ways, a reverse mirror image. Whereas the Japanese school system appears to progress from great freedom in the elementary years to rigid control in the secondary section, ISD begins with strongly exerted control in the early years which is gradually released, culminating in the relative freedom of the high school. As a result, the expectations of Japanese parents and students entering the school at any stage will be far distant from the reality. These expectations are related to the *what*, *why* and *how* of teaching and learning and their outcomes. The disparity of expectations can, I argue, only lead to confusions which must have a negative effect on a Japanese student's academic success at ISD.

8.1 “kyo gakkode naniwo yatta” - “So what do you do in school?”

English speaking students who come from western countries with predominantly white, Anglo-Saxon cultures, may well find ISD very different from their previous school, but at least they understand the culture, recognise familiar procedures and are aware of what is or is not acceptable. There is no generally agreed definition of what an international school or an international education really means. Richards (1998) gives four criteria of an international school; English is used as the medium of instruction, standards are aligned with American or European schools, the qualifications obtained by students have international acceptance and the school has a western focus. In addition to these criteria, although international schools offer education in English, this is not necessarily the language of the host country. Non-native English speakers from other cultures, especially those students with developing English language skills, enter a bewildering world where very little is familiar. School plays a major role in a young person’s development. At ISD a child spends an average of seven hours a day for 182 days of the year in school. New students, English speakers and non-native English speakers, who join international schools have often been uprooted, generally because of a parent’s career, at short notice from their familiar world. A number of studies have been made of these children who are often referred to as *Global Nomads* or *Third Culture Kids* (Useem & Downie, 1976, Schaetti, 1998). These students suffer a multitude of emotions; some are just angry, others welcome the challenge, but most are quietly apprehensive or afraid of what is to come. Often within a matter of days of arriving in a new country, these students join a school where even the language of instruction

may be unfamiliar. The new students in an international school face culture shock which is caused by the stress of moving into a new culture and a new location. On any new student's first regular school day, the support system of the family is missing and it is up to the student to identify as much as they can of what is familiar and recognisable and find their way through a jungle of new impressions. This is the case for all new students, but for the Japanese students it is particularly challenging.

8.1.i The First Challenge - the Elementary school

In the Japanese elementary schools I visited both in Japan and in Germany, the classrooms were lively, the children were highly engaged and there was exciting work going on. The following is an excerpt from my field notes taken during a visit to an all boys Japanese elementary school in a suburb of Tokyo, Thursday, 25th June, 1997.

As we entered the school the first thing we noticed, in complete contrast to the middle school from the day before, was the abundance of students' work in the entrance area. It was on the walls, hanging from the ceiling and there were tree branches in a pot with notes and pictures hanging from the branches. There was a high level of noise from excited children rushing past and adding more notes to the tree. The braver ones tried a cautious "hello, how are you?" but then giggled and rushed on before they could be answered. The teachers were completely unfazed by either the noise or the fact that the boys were running wildly through the corridors.

After the usual green tea with the head teacher, who was slightly amused by the fact that we wanted to visit his school, we were taken to a first grade classroom where an English lesson was taking place. There were 25 boys already busy with singing games. The desks had been moved back to make a large space and the young female teacher was using her finger to draw the rhythm of the song on a large piece of paper and in the air as she sang. After several verses, she then took a coloured pen and drew the rhythm of the song on the paper. Some of the boys copied her movements. Then she gave them paper to try it themselves. The teacher sang and smiled all the time and exerted no pressure on the boys to join in. One boy was crawling around under the desks and trying to distract his friends but she took no notice and carried on singing and speaking in English. She then used flash cards with pictures and the boys called out the names. The boy under the desks gradually became bored and reappeared to join in.

Between each class the children had a five minute break. We were surprised to see that during the break after the English class, most of the boys went outside to play. They were completely unsupervised, running around wildly, some kicking a football but not a teacher in sight.

The other classes we observed, mathematics, science, swimming and crafts were also all hands-on active classes with teachers who appeared to be very tolerant of noise. We heard no teachers' voices raised or any signs of discipline being exercised. The students were happy and the atmosphere, without exception, warm and gentle. We spent the whole day there and joined a third grade class for lunch, in their classroom with their teacher. The students fetched the lunches from the kitchen, served and cleared away afterwards. No one complained or criticised the

food or seemed to think they should have or do anything else. At the end of the day the teacher and students in the class we were in all worked together to clean the classroom and the corridor outside their classroom.

8.1.ii In contrast

The Japanese elementary school was very different from ISD in several immediately obvious ways. Our children are always closely supervised. It is unthinkable for elementary children at ISD to play outside unsupervised or be in the classroom without a teacher present. Although the atmosphere in our elementary classrooms is generally warm and kind, teachers' voices dominate the classes and can be heard through the corridor. Children are expressly forbidden to run or shout and naughty children are dealt with by the teachers. There is very little tolerance of noise. Lunch time, for all three hundred elementary children, takes place in a general purpose space which also functions as an eating area, with frustrated teachers trying to keep the noise at an acceptable level and ensure that the students eat in an orderly way. Our students frequently complain about the quality of the food and strongly object when asked to clean up their own space.

8.2 The Good Japanese Child

The good Japanese child has been described by White (1987:28) as mild and gentle, able to cooperate, bright-eyed and active, but ready to persist and endure hardship and undertake reflection of all they do in order to improve. All of these

characteristics are actively promoted and discussed in schools and children displaying them are praised. During my visits to the Japanese kindergarten and elementary school in Düsseldorf I am constantly surprised by the quiet gentle voices which the teachers use when talking to the children. Often the children have to strain to hear which automatically makes everyone quieter. If the students are too noisy the teacher begins to talk to a small group, ignoring the others, then a few more students realise that the teacher wants to speak and gradually the word is passed around so that the children become quieter and attentive. All of this happens without the teachers ever raising their voices. The teachers' behaviour can only be described as mild and gentle. In Japan we ate lunch with the students on several occasions in the classroom. Each class has monitors who fetch the food and serve it out. The other students rearrange the desks and wipe them off before the food arrives. When I watched the ease and naturalness with which every child in the class undertook their duty I was surprised and could not help comparing it to the grumbling and complaining that goes on at ISD when the children have clean-up duty at lunch-time. The students in Japanese school do it every day, at ISD the students have to clean up no more than three times a semester. Similarly at the end of each day in Japanese schools, the students and their class teachers clean the classroom; the floor is swept, the blackboard is cleaned thoroughly, the desks are wiped, and the corridor outside of the classroom is swept. I witnessed this several times on our study trip to Japan and not one student complained or tried to shirk, everyone joined in as if it were the greatest fun and cooperated to get the jobs done. My observations showed that the teachers both modelled and reinforced these attitudes.

These attitudes are also reinforced in the students' reading books where the heroes and heroines suffer hardship but persevere. When students are studying for tests or having a difficult time with learning, the key phrase used by their friends which I hear frequently is *gambare*, or persevere. The positive attributes which the students aspire to are also displayed around the rooms in Japanese classrooms in motivational slogans.

8.2.ii In contrast

The International School of Düsseldorf is an IB (International Baccalaureate) school and so the the Primary Years Programme (PYP) is followed in the elementary school. This programme (PYP) describes the characteristics of a PYP child as *being aware of and sensitive to the experiences of others*, as well as *inquirers, thinkers, communicators, risk takers, knowledgeable, principled, caring, open-minded, well-balanced and reflective*. All of these characteristics are actively discussed in classes and eagerly propounded as desirable by the teachers. Some of these characteristics concur with those of the good Japanese child at the elementary level. Other features would be seen as less desirable in the Japanese school system, especially at the middle and high school level where inquirers, communicators or risk takers are not necessarily encouraged, as can be seen below.

8.3 Japanese Middle and High Schools

In contrast to the warm, relaxed atmosphere of Japanese elementary schools, our visit to middle and high schools showed life becoming more serious. The classes were conducted in a totally different way and the change was quite remarkable. Every middle or high school class I visited was dominated by teacher talk. This was in contrast to the low key, almost facilitatory role of the kindergarten or elementary school teachers. The middle and high school students did not ask questions and only spoke if the teacher addressed them directly. But at the same time, on many occasions, I watched students whispering amongst themselves and explaining ideas to each other, as well as just chatting while the teacher was continuing the lesson.

Japanese classes tend to be large and nearly every teacher we observed taught from the front of the room, often using a pult. Again in contrast to the highly decorated elementary schools, the walls in the upper level classrooms were almost completely bare, except for an occasional motivational slogan. I was told that the walls were not decorated with children's work or other illustrations as these could distract the children from their work. As the rooms were almost always very crowded, there was no possibility for the teacher to move around the room. Consequently the students at the back could pay attention or not, and even chatter or sleep. I was continually surprised by the high level of tolerance the teachers showed to continual chatter amongst students and to students who were asleep in class. It has happened on occasion that Japanese students have fallen asleep in classes at ISD, but this is so unusual that it becomes a talking point among students and teachers. Many Japanese

students are tired in the day-time because they also attend cram schools in the evenings. I was told by teachers in Japan that often the students had already studied the material being covered in class in cram school, so it was not a problem if they slept through the class. Cram schools are private schools which prepare the students for examinations. Often the lessons continue until late at night, as in the case of Go, described in chapter seven, who went to cram school in Düsseldorf every day after school and was picked up by his mother at midnight. The following are extracts from my notes taken during visits to three middle and high schools in Tokyo, Kyoto and Düsseldorf.

English class, about 40 students in rows of desks in pairs,, silent, no interaction. Students stand to read from the text book, all others follow closely. This class was also being observed by ten Japanese student teachers (22.6.97, Kyoto, a middle school).

Mathematics class, also a large class, teacher talks from a pult, no questions, no hands up, two students sleeping (24.6.97, Kyoto, an escalator high school).

Another English class, students are being trained to read and look up often, some pair work but only reading practice. Students stand up to read aloud, then choral speaking with a tape recorder (24.06.97, Tokyo, a high school).

Science in the laboratory. Teacher lectures, talks at the board while writing, students copy notes from the board, no questions addressed to the teacher but some

discussion between students (26.06.97, Tokyo, middle school).

English Oral class, students practise choral speaking and reading out loud.

Instructions given in English, students told to stand and read as fast as possible, if they make a mistake the next student continues (26.06.97, Tokyo, high school).

In Japanese middle and high schools the students stay in their classroom most of the day and the teachers move between classes, except for subjects such as science which are taught in special facilities. Between each class there is a five minute break and the noise during this time is astounding. The students are left completely unsupervised. As soon as a teacher enters the room the students all stand beside their desks and greet the teacher. Then the lesson begins. School is taken very seriously by Japanese students from middle school onwards and many of them also attend the cram schools, *juku*, described above, which prepare students intensively for the selection examinations for high schools or universities. In one of the schools we visited in Tokyo the head teacher told me that more than two thirds of the students attend cram school in the evenings.

8.3.i The contrast

Unlike the lecture, chalk-and-talk style of teaching, which I witnessed in Japan, at ISD there is far more emphasis on communication and sharing of ideas through whole class discussion, group work and hands-on learning. The demands on the students are quite different as we expect students to communicate, demonstrate and

share their knowledge. This can lead to some confusion for students who have been used to learning off by heart and seldom being required to contribute to a class. In addition classes are small, on average around twenty, so that the students are called on more often, there is no safety in numbers at ISD. Students are required to be proactive learners, the teacher is not the all-knowing imparter of wisdom but a facilitator leading the students to knowledge and understanding. This way of working is of course especially challenging for students with limited English knowledge. We place less emphasis on learning by heart but a lot of emphasis on seeing relationships, making connections, understanding big ideas and seeing how other knowledge contributes to the big picture.

A further area which is very important in Japanese schools but given relatively little consideration in ISD is that of ethical or moral development. In Japanese elementary school in particular, but also at the higher levels, emphasis is placed on feeling empathy with others, caring, being a good role model and so on. The results of this teaching can be seen in the free writing and written responses which our Japanese students produce. They show a noticeable difference in their writing from western students in the amount of consideration for others which is mentioned. The following are examples from the journals written by ninth grade students who joined ISD in January, 2005 from the Japanese International School in Düsseldorf. From a graduating class of 47 students, 15 came to ISD and the others returned to Japan to take entrance examinations for high schools. The experience of losing so many classmates at once is clearly painful for those left behind.

March 25th , 2005

M: *Today was very sad day for me. My best friend came back to Japan. I went to seing her off. She will go to Japanese high school. I want to meet her this summer because I will go to japan about a week in August.*

March 20th, 2005

S: *I went to hotel Nikko to say goodbye to my friends. Many friends of mine left Germany recently. It is not happy to leave friends.*

The teachers at the Japanese International School are only allowed to stay in Germany for three years so that as well as saying goodbye to a lot of friends, the students have to say good bye to their teachers. The leaving day is always known in advance and many of our Japanese students do not come to school as they go together to the departure point to say a last farewell to their teachers and friends.

March 20th, 2005

H: *I saw my teacher off today. Many his students came there. I shaked hands with him. He encouraged me to do a lot of things in ISD. I was very sad therefore he came back to Japan.*

The students are also very concerned about their English:

3rd March 2005

A: *Today in maybe MrH. class teacher was not in ISD, then it was proxy teacher. And we had to make some questions for her. And we asked them*

for her. I said to her. But she asked me again. And I said, and she asked me again. ... I said three times. But she couldn't understand or heard it. And I showed the question for her. Then I thought my pronunciation is too bad. And I think so. It was shock a little occurrence. So, how can I practice pronunciation? And I can rest tomorrow because I have any plans after the school.

29th February, 2005

Today we had another teacher for our IT class. Our group had a little misunderstanding with her but I couldn't clear it up because my English is so poor. I felt a little discomforted because of this misunderstanding. I was a little sad also that I could not tell her the truth.

It is hard to imagine any of the western students in ninth grade writing in this way about misunderstandings with teachers. They tend to be far more aggressive and assertive, even if English is not their native language, and conclude that if the teacher does not understand them that is her problem, not theirs. Both of the students quoted above were able to explain the problem they faced relatively fluently, so that the importance they attach to it is clearly understood. The students had not been asked to write specifically about learning or school problems in their journals as they have free choice of what to write.

8.4 Japanese Students and their studies at ISD

persevere - *gambare, gambare*

In the middle school at ISD there are relatively few Japanese students, usually only two or three in a class, because there is an alternative Japanese middle school in the city. However the students who come to us also tend to take considerably longer exit the ESL programme than students of other nationalities. A Japanese teacher at ISD asked her sixth and seventh grade classes, most of whom were in the English as a second language classes, to keep journals on their school progress for a term, from August to December 2003. These journal entries were of course written in Japanese. Five journals were selected at random and the entries were translated by a high school Japanese student who was also a helper in the class. The high school students are required to do some kind of service as part of the IB programme and a popular choice is to support the Japanese teachers with the students in the middle school. My translator, Kei, had been the helper in this class so she knew the students well and could translate effectively as she understood what they wanted to say. I have left the translations as she made them and made no grammatical corrections. The students are referred to as Student A, B etc. The teacher asked the students:

What did you work hard on? Your achievement, evaluation and resolution for next time.

This kind of reflection process is also an important element of Japanese education. The answers given by the students all revealed an extremely high level of motivation and a very positive attitude to learning, combined with a will to succeed. The Japanese attitude that success comes from effort not ability is also reflected clearly

in these comments. (An example of this work is shown in appendix 8)

Effort - gambare

We are now studying about cells in Science but it is difficult to understand for me. To catch up the topic, I asked my father for help and studied about cells with him at home. The next day I studied at home, I successfully answered to a question, which my teacher asked me. I want to study Science more so that I can answer questions of my own accord (Student C. 1. - 5.09.03).

I strived for studying Math as I studied the words and phrases for math at home (Student A. 1. - 5.09.03).

I prepared for ESL test so hard, but I made a mistake with one question and I got 99 percent. I also studied hard for Science test (Student A. 6. - 10.10.03).

Every day I studied Kanji little by little (Student A. 18. - 28.10.03).

The work I have done at the tutorial school is now worth while because I got a better grade with Japanese test (Student D. 13. - 17.10.03).

I want to improve my reading skill because I do not understand any single sentence (Student E. 28.08. - 5.09.03).

While each response also shows quite clearly the positive attitude and spirit of perseverance which the student brings to their studies, the answers also demonstrate the extra load the students have to face in studying language and content together. Whether through waiting for father to come home and help or by studying *Kanji* “little by little”, being irritated at getting one mistake after studying so hard or profiting from the extra work at tutorial school, the students are single minded and positive in their efforts. All of them refer to studying and the amount of effort they have put into their work. The last comment would weaken a student with less determination. It is hard to imagine the feelings of a child in school who cannot understand *any single sentence*. The same student also wrote

I listened English with a tape recorder but I could not catch any words from it.

However in the same entry she shows her determination to persevere yet again-

I paid attention to the mouse (sic) and expression of teacher when she was talking so that I could understand better.

Science and Mathematics present many problems to ESL students, but in addition to the many content problems, the students often mention problems they have understanding the teacher.

I want to work hard Science because I do not understand all those scientific words and what a teacher says in class. I want to concentrate more and more in class

(Student A. 1. - 5.12.03).

I do not get clearly what math teacher and science teacher are talking in class

(Student A. 8. -13.12.03).

I got a good grade with math test, which was given back before the fall break. It was, I think, because I did listen what teacher said and I studied hard. I am really happy about this (Student A. 18. - 28.10.03).

I had a science test but I could not answer any of the questions (Student D. 6. - 10.10.03).

I got my report card. Though the grade of science was so bad, the result was better than I imagined overall (Student D. 3. - 7.11.03).

I had a lot of homework from science which has tough to understand. Airi and Minami helped me do the homework (Student D. 10. - 14.11.03).

I want to memorise the periodic table as much as I can (Student D. 10. - 14.11.03).

I concentrated on the class and studied math hard at home for test. I am getting used to it but math teacher's English is difficult to understand for me (Student B. 10.10.03).

My math teacher's English is difficult to understand but he is really nice and he helps me when I have a problem with math. I want to keep asking question so that I can improve my math understanding (Student B. 10.10.03).

The teachers at the international school are also multi-national. However, few of them speak a foreign language to the kind of advanced level which our students require to be successful at ISD, so that the majority of teachers have only a vague idea of what this entails. Some of the teachers unfortunately continue to teach as if they were facing monolingual classes with the same cultural backgrounds as themselves. We do have a training programme in place to support the teachers in their dealings with other languages and other cultures but it is not mandatory. The Japanese students do not at any time complain about the unfairness of the system or the lack of support they receive. Their comments consistently demonstrate that they feel the effort is theirs to make. Whether they talk about memorising the periodic table or concentration levels, the comments always put the onus on themselves. The idea that the teacher could speak more clearly or slowly or make a more effective attempt to support the learners does not occur to them. The teachers are often frustrated by the lack of participation of Japanese students in their classes and what they see as their unwillingness to answer questions, join in discussions, or take an active role in group work. The whispering which often takes place, and which the students assure me is sharing their understanding of the material being taught, is also a constant source of irritation, especially when the teacher demands to know what they are talking about and is answered by blank faces and silence. A teacher recently asked me where to find a crow bar to prise their mouths open: a real sign of

frustration. Not only do the students sometimes have problems with what the teacher is saying, text passages in books and written questions but also with the work the teacher puts on the board. Then at least their friends can help them.

Some of them pointed out the part of the blackboard where we had to copy when I did not know what to copy from the board (Student E. 18. - 22.08.03).

Perseverance against all odds - *gambare*

Although the students are faced with enormous challenges, the Japanese attitude of perseverance is overwhelming and shows through continually. The students never blame any one else for their problems but always seem to want to strive harder to succeed.

I want to do more practice of spelling so that I can get good mark on the next spelling quiz. I did not get a good mark on the last spelling quiz (Student A. 1. - 5.09.03).

I did OK with homework but the tests ... the score was so bad that I could not believe that the test, which was returned, was mine. I was really shocked. Well, I will try to get a better grade with a next test (Student D. 8. - 12.09.03).

I memorised all words and phrases, which I summarised for the presentation because science teacher said that the grade would be different between talking and

reading notes. But on the day the teacher said that ESL student did not have to talk without notes. I was disappointed. But now I think it was a good exercise to improve my English. I want to talk without notes at the next presentation, no matter if it affects my grade or not (Student B. 10.10.03).

I got a 100 per cent on the homework and I got a confidence that I can do whatever I want to if I try hard enough for doing it. I want to aim 100 per cent again (Student B. 10.11.03).

For science test I studied the topic about half hour per day and before night I studied it more than four hours. The result of the test made all my work worth while because i got the highest percentile I have ever got. I want to keep it up, but at the conference the teacher told me that four hours was too much. I do not agree with him. I got ME with ESL test. I thought I could get EE but I could not. I should have studied more. I want to study hard enough so that I do not have to be disappointed every time (Student B. 10.11.03).

I practise my weak part of the song so many times and now I have improved so much that my fingers automatically moves and plays the song correctly (Student B. 10.11.03).

The Japanese ideals of effort and practice are reflected in every comment made. Whether for spelling words, a science test, an oral presentation or piano skills, the emphasis remains on study effort and practice to the extent that when a teacher hears

about how much the student has studied, four hours on the night before a science test, even the teacher says this is too much. This particular incident is reminiscent of the Japanese expression fail with five, pass with four, which refers to the number of hours of sleep a Japanese student should need while studying for examinations. The ideal that study and effort are the key is so strong particularly because the Japanese tests and examinations test discrete facts which are learned by heart and then regurgitated without any need for explanation or expressed understanding.

Exhaustion - *and gambare again*

The Japanese students at ISD also attend cram school during the week or at weekends. There they study, what my students refer to as Japanese English, Japanese mathematics and of course *kanji*. Although in all of the literature about Japanese education, *juku*, is referred to as cram school, my translator chose to call it tutorial school and I have left this term unchanged in the extracts. In addition to cram school many of the Japanese students also have private tutors. These factors, together with working in a foreign language for up to eight hours daily, frequently result in exhaustion.

The first day of school was a long day as if a week has passed (Student E. 18. - 22.08.03).

I thought I could relax during fall break but I had an achievement test of tutorial school on Saturday, so I had to go to tutorial school everyday except Thursday to

study for it (Student E. 20-26.10.03).

I tried to wake up on time no matter how late the time I went to bed (Student E. 10.10.03).

I took a shorter time to finish my homework. I think it was because I am getting used to English (Student E. 10.11.03).

I had a tutorial lesson for English on Monday and Thursday.

Wednesday was exhausting day because I had a lot of homework and swimming club. It took a long time to finish my homework and I finished it at 11:00 am getting used to English.

I normally do not go to the tutorial school on Sunday but I went there because I did not get the proportion and inverse proportion. Now I understand them quite well and I can deal with the problems all by myself (Student B.10.10.03).

We had a lot of test this week. That made me exhausted (Student A. 6. - 10.10.03).

I went to Kumon, tutorial school, private English school and swimming club (Student D. 6. -10.10.03).

I was too tired to concentrate on the class and I could hardly understand the classes

(Student D. 6. - 10.10.03).

I worked on the homework from tutorial school. I have done more work than usual.

I want to finish my homework as quickly as possible so that I can have enough time for sleep.

I want to sleep! But I cannot.

I want to sit up straight and pay attention in the class but I am too sleepy to do so

(Student D. 29. - 31.10.03).

I was used to play the piano but now I am too busy to study English and have no time to play the piano. I might start playing the piano again sometime.no matter how late the time I went to bed.

I cannot sleep until 12:00 at least and sometimes I had to stay awake until 2:00 to finish up my homework. I wonder if it is a standard life of elementary school student

(Student D. 1. - 5.09.03). I presume when she wrote elementary she actually meant middle school student.

I AM EXHAUSTED!! (Student A. 18. - 28.10.03).

I have included a large number of these comments on tiredness as this is such an important issue for the Japanese students. Anyone who has spent time in a foreign

country and had to cope in the language without being fully proficient is aware of how exhausting this is. These children are coping with an eight hour day in English before they have reached proficiency; they are studying the language and content concurrently, and doing the relevant homework which takes them far longer than native speakers, attending cram school several evenings a week, doing homework for cram school, and many of them also have a private tutor which many parents, despite my pleas, think is essential. It is no wonder that they are always tired and yet they try so hard and are so determined to succeed.

Research by Collier and Thomas (1997) emphasises the importance of Mother Tongue maintenance for students studying in a second language. For students in international schools this has added importance as they will be returning to their home country at some stage. We are very lucky to be able to offer both Japanese and Korean mother tongue instruction at our school during the school day. One student reflected on the value of having Japanese classes within our school day,

Though we do not have many days for Japanese class, I am relieved to go into an atmosphere where everyone speaks Japanese (Student D. 11. - 22.08.2003).

The Japanese teachers at ISD are also very aware of the need for the students to be able to unwind and relax to some extent during Japanese class and middle school Japanese classes tend to be boisterous and fun compared to the high school classes which are seriously academic in content and tone.

8.5 Learning by Heart. The Preferred Japanese Learning Style?

In the Japanese education system the greatest emphasis is placed on learning by heart. This begins in the kindergarten years when the children start to learn *hiragana*, the first and easiest of the Japanese syllabaries. *Hiragana* has forty-eight symbols which always relate to the same sound. Dots and dashes can be added to change the sound but they are always consistent. After *hiragana*, students have to learn *katakana*, another system, which is used for the foreign words (like *coffee* or *television*) in Japanese and then the most difficult part begins: learning *kanji*, the main writing system. Examples of *hiragana*, *katakana* and *kanji* are included in the appendices. The only way to learn these symbols is by practising them continually until they are mastered.

After the relaxed style of Japanese elementary school, a change seems to come over the system and all of my field notes tell a story of teacher-dominated, lecture-style teaching. I discovered that this is due to the intense pressure on the students to have amassed a fund of factual knowledge which can then be repeated in examinations. This need to accumulate discrete facts affects the whole Japanese education system and culminates in the university entrance examinations. Once a student has a place at university they can relax. Compared to the stress of high school, university is easy. The pressure is greatly reduced and according to most of the Japanese university students I have spoken to, life at university is a relaxing reward for the years of effort needed to gain entrance. Some middle and high schools are attached to universities and a place in one of the schools guarantees a place at that university.

This only means that the prospective students face entrance examination stress at an earlier age. These schools are referred to as “escalator” schools and once a student is on the escalator, their university place is guaranteed.

8.6 And What Comes Next? After Graduation

Teaching and learning in Japanese middle and high schools, at least for students heading for a university education, is geared to passing the entrance examinations. These are generally taken in mathematics, Japanese and English. However, students from international schools, outside of Japan, have special entrance examinations which are not based on the mastery of discrete facts, and a main component of the English section is an essay.

Mrs A., a Japanese mother with two daughters at ISD, talked to me before she left to go back to Japan. Her younger daughter has passed the entrance examination and will be joining the 10th grade of a prestigious escalator school in Japan and her older daughter will be going to university. The girls have been at ISD for three years. The following extract followed several minutes of general conversation, unrelated to education I then asked her about the girls’ continuing education in Japan.

P.M. Which school will A. be going to?

Mrs A. She has a place at ... ah ... Doshisha ...

P.M. Oh really, I have visited Doshisha!

Mrs A. (Incredulously and looking straight at me for the first time in the

conversation) *You have. You know Doshisha? How you know it?*

P.M. I was there ... I was there in 1997, it's a great school, wonderful facilities.

It's an escalator school, isn't it?

Mrs A. Yes, escalator school, she can continue to university, if she likes.

P.M. And your older daughter, AT. What will happen to her? She has just graduated from ISD hasn't she?

Mrs A. Yes, she graduated, but she can take entrance examination for university.

P.M. I have heard she can take a special exam because she comes from an international school?

Mrs A. (looking straight in front of her, with no expression whatsoever) people, they say, ahm, people they say ... exam for international school student is easier than for Japanese school student, but I don't know.

Her daughters are not unusual. Of the twenty-five Japanese students from ISD who graduated in the summer of 2003, all but one went back to university in Japan. The exception, a girl, went to university in America. This was the class which first raised my concerns about the lack of success at the end of their middle school years. They spent much longer in ESL classes than students of other nationalities who had far less stringent attitudes to work but who exited the ESL programme much more quickly. Some of the Japanese students attempted the full International Baccalaureate diploma but others just took some IB classes and the other classes at basic level. In fact none of this counts for very much. In order to enter a Japanese university, they will have to sit entrance examinations for that particular university. Our students at ISD graduate in June and the entrance examinations are taken in

Spring of the following year, so they have some months between the two to prepare for university entrance examinations.

8.7 Summary

In this chapter, I have given evidence to show that from elementary school onwards, the differences in the *what*, *why* and *how* of teaching and learning at ISD contrast strongly with that of a Japanese state school. Whereas at ISD the students are kept on a tight rein, controlled and led in the early years and then given more freedom as they mature, the Japanese system seems to give the greatest freedom early on and then become gradually more rigid as the students get older. How do Japanese students cope with this different way of working? My evidence points to the fact that this hinders their learning at ISD. Although they expend inordinate amounts of energy and effort in an attempt to succeed, they are often unable to deal with the “informality” of teaching at ISD. Their full effort goes on succeeding in tests and homework assignments, yet the in-class discussion and group work which the teachers consider important is beyond them often both linguistically and culturally. The rules and expectations are very different from those in Japan but are never explicitly stated. The students are just expected to understand how ISD works; its goals and expectations.

Japanese students work extremely hard. But they continue to work in the way they have learned - “the Japanese way”. They excel in learning by heart, but display problems with spontaneous speech, free writing, or expressing their opinions. They

show the way with regard to effort and commitment. Their level of application and perseverance is exceptional. They do far more than other international school students. In addition to regular school they have private tutors and attend cram school. They are often still doing their homework till late in the night and yet they maintain their positive attitude and reflect on how they could do better.

While there seems to be a major difference between the understandings of teaching and learning at ISD, there is also a major difference in the final goals. The teachers in the English as a Second Language department are working towards the goal of the students successfully exiting the ESL programme to join mainstream classes and take the International Baccalaureate. Could it be that the Japanese students' expectations are limited to avoiding the madness of "examination hell", while acquiring a level of English fluency and understanding which will be of major benefit in Japan? And then going on to complete their education at a Japanese university of their choice without the rigours of a stringent entrance examination? Are the Japanese students and the teachers at ISD working towards totally differing goals? And is the frustration felt by the teachers with what they see as a lack of success misplaced?

Chapter Nine

Social Influences or How to make friends

9 Introduction

In this chapter I examine the importance of social interaction and the role of friendship in successful English learning for Japanese students at the International School of Düsseldorf (ISD). I show how and why this tends to be difficult for many of these students. Through a variety of ethnographic research methods; case studies, students' writing, email communications, my field notes and extracts from an action research project written by a Japanese student at ISD in 1986, a holistic picture of the process is revealed. I underline my own findings with references to a number of sources from research literature which validate my observations and conclusions. Research conducted by Cummins (1981) shows that second language learners of English take between one and a half and two years to reach a good level of *basic interpersonal communication skills* (BICS) and then between five and seven years to reach *cognitive academic language proficiency* (CALP). I argue below that the Japanese culture contributes to the difficulties students have in acquiring communicative competence in a second language for a number of reasons. Japanese students often describe themselves as “shy” or “boring” because they are reluctant to speak and hesitant to form opinions. In this chapter I show that this is due to both linguistic and cultural reasons.

9.1 Learning or Acquiring English? That is the question

The language development process which occurs through social interaction is part of what Krashen (1981) describes as *acquisition* rather than *learning*. Most Japanese students at ISD tend to lack confidence in speaking English, not only when they first arrive but for a considerable time after that. In my opinion, there are two main reasons for this; one is related to the teaching and learning of English which predominates in Japanese schools and the other to the effect of Japanese culture on social interactions.

My observations from visits to schools in Japan and the Japanese schools in Düsseldorf are described in some detail in chapter eight. Japanese students generally have very little opportunity to speak English in classes as the lessons are focused on grammar and translation. My field notes describe classes which I observed where no English was spoken for the main part of the lesson, grammar points were explained in Japanese, the oral element was confined to choral speaking or speed reading, and few or no spontaneous exchanges were witnessed where the students had the opportunity to communicate in English without a script. Consequently the first stage of second language development, which Cummins calls Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS), tends not to be addressed in the Japanese teaching of English. The students' learning focuses only on Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) without the opportunity to communicate.

In addition to the disadvantages of the non-communicative, grammar/translation

method of learning English, there are a number of aspects of Japanese culture which inhibit spontaneity or any kind of risk taking. Firstly, many Japanese students are often reluctant to speak because they fear making mistakes, looking foolish, and losing face. Secondly, Japanese communicative style tends to be less verbal and more reliant on empathy, that is understanding without words. In addition new Japanese students arriving at ISD typically know very little about western popular culture, which is after all the topic of choice in many teenage conversations. Japanese students often tell me that they do not know what to talk about to non-Japanese students as they do not share the same interests. The majority of Japanese students who come to ISD directly from Japan have also led very different lives from students growing up in the west. One example is the fact that Japanese high school students rarely have dates with the opposite sex and they spend most of their freetime in single sex groups. Compared to western teenagers, the Japanese students at ISD seem very childish. In fact in Japanese there is no word for teenagers who are still referred to as *kodomo*, 'children'. They have not usually experienced the relative freedom of western youth, and although they quickly adopt the outward signs of fashion, all of which are forbidden in most Japanese schools; long hair below the collar for boys and for girls, dyed hair, pierced ears and the latest styles in fashion, they still tend to remain childish in some ways compared to their western peers.

The way the Japanese students have been taught English leads to problems with the *how* needed for effective communication and their different social experiences lead to problems with *what* to talk about. Consequently, the average Japanese student arrives at ISD completely unprepared to communicate easily with English speaking

peers and find friends of other nationalities. They have had no experience of communicating in English spontaneously, although they are generally competent in dealing with easy textbook-based language and discrete grammar points or vocabulary. One example of this situation is described in the following case study from my field notes.

9.2 Case Study One: What is a friend?

At the beginning of the school year, in August 2003/4, a new Japanese girl arrived in my eighth grade class. We were told she had been learning English for three years in Japan. Unusually for our school she was the only Japanese girl in the class, although there were four Japanese boys. Two girls, one English and the other American who were already good friends, volunteered to be her “buddy” together and take care of her. Due to the frequent arrival of new students in international schools, most schools operate a buddy system by which a student who is already established in the school takes over as a friend, a buddy, for the new student. This involves showing the new student around, helping them to understand the schedule and find their classes, introducing them to friends, making sure they are not left alone at break or lunch times and so on. For the first few weeks everything went smoothly and the three girls were always together. I received frequent updates from the two native speakers which confirmed that although she did not say very much she was clearly understanding more each day. I observed that the Japanese girl (M) often smiled and as her English was making some progress in class I thought everything would be fine. M’s mother had been very concerned about her attending

an international school and she told me she felt unable to help her daughter because of her own weak English. To reassure M's mother and keep things running smoothly, the mother and I met every Monday after school for fifteen minutes to discuss her progress. This went on for months and we monitored her English learning in class, her ability to deal with increasingly difficult texts, her comprehension in all areas of the curriculum and I gave her mother additional subject-based information so that she could support her daughter's learning at home. She regularly mentioned the two buddies and what a wonderful effect they had on M's feelings of being accepted and happy. This appeared to be the most consistently positive aspect of her move to an international school in her mother's opinion.

However in November, the two native speakers asked to speak to me in private. It appeared that they were getting frustrated with their Japanese friend who still would not speak. They felt she was just hanging on and they did not know what to do to try and integrate her or involve her in any conversations. I made some practical suggestions and talked to them about the "silent phase" of language learning. At my next meeting with the Japanese student's mother I again asked her how her daughter was feeling and how she was getting along with her two buddies. In her opinion everything was still wonderful and the girls were such good friends to her daughter.

Unfortunately by the Christmas vacation the two native speakers had had enough. They told me that the Japanese girl was just hanging on and they were tired of it and they thought that she should find some Japanese friends. After the holiday I asked M if she would like to play basketball at lunchtimes, she was clearly uncertain and felt

she should stay with her friends but said eventually that she would really like to play. So, with some behind the scenes manoeuvring, we arranged for a couple of girls from another class to include her in their team. After that the whole situation gradually changed. M became much more friendly with the other basketball girls, especially as some of them were Japanese, and she then started to eat lunch with them on a regular basis.

This case study demonstrates several problems. Firstly and most prominently was M's lack of proficiency in English communicative skills which did not allow her to join in conversations or play any kind of active role in the friendship. Secondly, the cultural considerations; M could not spontaneously chat because she had not learnt basic communication skills and for her, friendship would not be just chatter but also empathy and silent understanding, the Japanese feeling of *amae*. But there was no common ground for this to be built upon. M was a very athletic student but her two buddies were passive and enjoyed just sitting and chatting with each other about music, shopping and clothes. None of these were topics of much interest to M; she did not know the groups or singers, she did not know the shops in Düsseldorf or the chain stores from Britain or America which the other girls talked about and also she dressed in a very different way from them. They had both been in trouble for showing bare shoulders and stomachs and wearing skirts which were just too short. M wore knee length pleated skirts or jeans and her shirts were always buttoned up to the chin. As M had been "assigned" these buddies, she clearly felt that she was expected to stay with them although she probably would much rather have been doing something active, but she could not express these ideas, because of linguistic

and cultural limitations. There was also a fairly clear clash of personalities as the two buddies were outgoing, talkative and risk takers whereas M was quiet, reserved and concerned to be doing the right thing all of the time. They were not a natural choice of friends, although that could not have been fully anticipated beforehand. The buddy process is an important one in an international school and often the more outgoing students, who are also risk takers, are the ones most likely to volunteer to be buddies. In addition, there is most often a natural process by which the new student slowly finds other friends and the buddy relationship becomes less important.

Social Interaction

In the research discussion on second language learning versus acquisition Krashen, in particular, has shown that the effect of learning language consciously, that is to say language taught through the medium of grammar exercises, comprehension exercises and drills, as the Japanese school system does, is not as effective as language acquired through comprehensible input, achieved in part through social interactions (Krashen, 1981). Closely related to the fact that the Japanese students tend to take longer to reach the level of English proficiency required to succeed in mainstream classes, is the fact that the Japanese students, particularly in high school, are socially isolated from the main body of international students. This can be observed at ISD on a daily basis. When the students arrive at school, socialise between classes or in breaks but also on sports teams, field trips and in other non-academic contexts, the Japanese students tend not to integrate with the main body of

students but apparently choose to remain as a recognisably isolated social group. Many teachers and other students are very aware of this fact and several initiatives have been started to try to break this pattern of behaviour with a notable lack of success. When the Japanese teachers are asked about the phenomenon, they recognise that it exists and find it regrettable but seem to feel there is nothing that can be done to change it. In a similar way, the Japanese teachers tend to keep themselves apart from the rest of the faculty, socially and academically, and without any initiative from them it does not seem likely that the pattern of behaviour will be changed easily.

9.3 Why are we here?

When asked why they want to come to ISD, almost all Japanese students reply that they want to learn English and make friends with students of other nationalities. They soon discover that neither of these goals is as easy as they had anticipated. Both the students and their parents want them to learn good English and extend their knowledge of other nationalities. The father of a Japanese boy wrote to ISD requesting that his son should be considered for our school. He described the Japanese mind in a way which is unusual but illustrates the Japanese preoccupation with their own identity and would be most unusual and certainly unexpected from any other nation. He wrote

I, personally, feel that, generally speaking, Japanese mentality is rather weaker than other nationalities. We should say we are too

much hesitated to open own opinions strongly against other persons. Japanese trust this is one of beautiful behaviors, but it is true that this is one of the weak points among other nationalities. We are expecting to make my son to learn how other nationalities doing and he will be able to state his opinion forthrightly in English at ISD.

(Excerpt from a letter to ISD, from Mr H. 06.05.03)

This father recognises the Japanese reluctance to state their opinions openly, which is considered *beautiful behaviour* in Japan but a weakness in other cultures. It is his stated hope that his son will learn to be more forthright and direct at the international school. One wonders how the father imagines these two ideals can be combined in a teenage student, when the culture in Japan where he has grown up and also within his family will be Japanese.

9.4 How do we find friends?

A Japanese teacher from ISD sent me the following via email as the result of a discussion about the Japanese students, their language learning and social relationships.

They think that if they can make friends with non-Japanese students and have more chances to practice speaking, they can improve their English. BUT the problem is that it is very hard to make friends with the other students due to their limited command of English. It is a vicious circle, isn't it. They would like to make friends with non-Japanese students but the groups are formed

already (do you see what I am trying to say? You know that girls tend to stay in the same group) and it is hard to have a chance to get to know non-Japanese students. As I mentioned, they also might think that other students might be thinking that Japanese students are a bit boring because they seem shy. They also commented that it is easier for them to make friends with other Asian students such as Koreans (Email from E-C., 18.12.03). (Appendix 9)

My colleague draws attention to a number of relevant points. It is indeed difficult to make friends with someone if you cannot speak the language fluently and cannot make your ideas understood. This is the case in any situation between speakers of different languages. All the good will in the world cannot replace language for the exchange of meaningful information. Furthermore, styles of communication differ and the responsibilities of being a friend also vary between cultures. The Japanese culture, as mentioned in other places in this research, depends greatly on *amae*, the feeling of being indulged and passively loved. *Amae* does not need words as it is a state of being and a reciprocal feeling experienced without words (Doi, 1981). In addition in Japanese culture *silence is golden*. Consequently it is not always necessary to express ideas verbally, as often as some of our western students seem to do. There is just not so much talk going on. One should be able to feel what the other is thinking and feeling.

In Japanese society, friendships are important as they give a feeling of belonging and identity without which Japanese people tend to feel at a loss. Friendship groups are necessary and are relatively fixed. A friend is always a friend and cannot drift off

into another group to join them for lunch or even a conversation without it being thought of as a break in trust. There are expressions for the in-group and outside-group. Friends belong together, they travel to and from school together, wait for each other after class, eat together and gossip together, mostly about the students outside of their group. My Japanese colleague makes reference to this when she assumes that it is the same for the girls in western culture. She assumes that, just like in Japanese culture, since the groups are already formed, no other girls will be accepted into the group. In fact, this is not the case at all because international school students tend to belong to a number of groups of friends. Although they often eat lunch with the same people, these groups can and do vary and are by no means fixed. There may well be some friends who are important because they are on the same sports team, or because they live nearby, but then there are other friends who are in the same class, or maybe they play together in the orchestra. Certainly they do not wait for each other after school and there is a mass exodus after school as students rush off to extracurricular activities or just to catch the tram home. After 4 pm, ISD is empty except for students involved in late after school activities and the Japanese students who hang around by their lockers in groups until everyone in the group is ready to go home.

With an average turnover of thirty percent of the student body, most international school students learn very quickly that the students in this kind of school come and go continually and that intense, close friendships which exclude others are not good because if that person leaves, and they may well do so, then you are left alone. It is far better to be friends with a lot of people.

There are two distinct groups of new Japanese students who come to ISD; individual students who arrive during the school year directly from Japan or, as happens occasionally, from other international schools and the students who come as a group at the end of ninth grade from the Japanese International school in Düsseldorf (JISD). The first group of students, those who arrive individually, have their own set of hurdles to overcome and often the biggest of these is isolation. Depending on their willingness to take risks and join in with a class, but also depending on their English language ability, they will be able to make contact with their peers and continue the language learning process or be isolated. The following case study describes the situation of a student who arrived directly from Japan and suffered terribly.

9.5.i Case Study Two: The Loneliness of Isolation

A new Japanese girl M. arrived to join seventh grade at ISD in September 1999. The results of her entrance test showed minimal proficiency in English. She appeared unable to answer simple questions orally and produced, what appeared to be, carefully prepared sentences for her writing sample. This student graduated from ISD in June, 2005 with a full IB diploma. Not only was her English fluent, but she was exceptionally strong academically and had mastered the phase of English learning which Cummins refers to as Cognitive Academic proficiency (CALP) extremely effectively. She now prefers not to remember her first few months at ISD when she was desperately unhappy and found any kind of communication in English totally impossible. At that time the Japanese teachers only taught in the high school and as they were all male, they did not feel comfortable trying to comfort an

unhappy seventh grade girl. Lunchtimes and breaktimes usually saw M. sitting on the floor in the corridor with her arms curled around her knees, sobbing bitterly. She would not let anyone comfort her and pushed away the high school Japanese girls who wanted to help. It was not until she eventually gained more confidence in her English language ability and began to communicate that she would allow the other girls in her class to befriend her. In fact she was an extremely capable student and everything worked out well, but the first months were painful for her and for everyone who saw her. Despite all our best efforts and the support of the Japanese high school girls, the stress of being in a strange cultural and linguistic environment were a terrible strain for her. She found herself unable to communicate and the situation only improved when she had developed enough language and the courage to communicate tentatively with the other students, unfortunately this took several months. Although in her case she was finally successful, not all students do as well.

A third case study compares the language acquisition or learning of two students with striking similarities but also huge differences in their processes of English language development.

9.5.ii Case Study Three: A Comparison

This third case study, follows the progress of a Japanese boy, D, and a Belgian boy, S, who joined seventh grade at the same time, in August 2000. The boys had both been learning English in their home countries for two years. New students who may need English as a second language classes are always tested on their first day. The

test consists of an informal interview followed by a short grammar test and a piece of writing on a set topic. This could be, for example “All about Me”, “My Family”, “A Book I like”, “My Hobbies”, “Something I will never forget” or something similar. The topics vary in the hope that the students will not come with a prepared text. The two boys did their entrance tests on the same day and the topic was “My Best Friend”. The Belgian student’s work is more imaginative and creative, and he is able to use more complex sentences compared to the Japanese student’s carefully taught simple sentences. The texts are transcribed exactly as the boys wrote them with no corrections made.

S, the Belgian boy, mother tongue French

My best friend

Her name is Alexandre he is 12 years old. He are the same adventure of my. All her family are Belgians. I’m gooing to Germany Alexandre is gooing to England with her family. He is going on the French secondary school. Since I telephone and sei English is fany Alexandre reget that he is not gooing to a English school. Luckily he learn English when he go to shop. We have all the kindergarten and the Elementary school. When we where in the classroom he was very fany and sei tricks and set good atmosphere into school he is with for boyscouts. Now we are very put off but we keep contact.

D, the Japanese student

My dood friend

My good friend is name Ryugi Hamada. He lives in Japan. He is 13 yearsold. He

likes to play track and field. He has a dog. He can speak Japanese. He is very tall. and he has big house.

The boys joined my ESL class. There were ten other students from different language backgrounds, German, Korean, Norwegian, Finnish, French and Japanese. From the very beginning the Belgian student, S, maintained his linguistic creativity and willingness to take risks which he showed in the writing sample above, while the Japanese boy kept to simple structures and familiar patterns. Outside the classroom the Belgian student ran after the other students, interrupted their talk, took away the ball if they did not let him play and took every opportunity to speak English. He not only took every opportunity, he avidly seized every language opportunity with both hands. Within a very short time he was communicating fluently and having fun in English. In contrast, D was quiet and every word had to be drawn from him in class. In the breaks and at lunch, he spent all his time conversing with other Japanese students. Within a year, during seventh grade, the Belgian student was ready to work in the mainstream classes and left ESL. He is now in tenth grade and fully integrated in every way.

D, the Japanese student, always gravitated towards other Japanese students and appeared to make little effort to speak English or maintain any contact with native speakers. He was still in ESL classes and making very slow progress when he left ISD at the end of ninth grade to return to Japan.

According to Ellis (1994) the importance of personality in language acquisition is

not yet clear but *the evidence linking extroversion to the acquisition of BICS is fairly substantial* (521).

S. is a good example of a student who was extremely outgoing, a real risk taker and who was very confident. He was quite comfortable making mistakes, even when the other students laughed. In fact, he built on his mistakes and continued to learn from them. D. on the other hand was withdrawn, lacked confidence in English and was obviously very uncomfortable having to speak English. Consequently he spent every opportunity with other Japanese boys and avoided speaking English as often as he could. Although progress in second language learning is subject to numerous variables, a major part of the progress S. made was, I believe, due to his efforts to speak English outside of the classroom and communicate continually with native speakers. In these situations he was acquiring English as opposed to learning it (Krashen, 1981).

9.6 Second Language Students who arrive in a Group

As mentioned above there are two situations for Japanese students who come to ISD. The first concerns the students who arrive individually from Japan or occasionally from other international schools. Both of the case studies above refer to such students. The second situation is that of the Japanese students who come to ISD after graduating from the Japanese school in Düsseldorf at the end of ninth grade in January each year. These students are in a very special position since they come as a group and so scheduling limitations, together with considerations of their English

language ability, German knowledge, and mathematics level mean that they often end up together for many of their lessons. Over the past years the number of students who come from the graduating class at the Japanese International School of Düsseldorf (JISD) has grown steadily and now in 2006 we are expecting nineteen students in this year's January intake. In the Japanese schools the students remain in their class groups and in the same room for nearly all subjects and the teachers move from class to class. At ISD the students move between classes, the class groups are not constant and so they work with a variety of students during a typical school day. Many Japanese students have mentioned this as an additional cause of stress. They say that they much prefer being with one group of students and that they want to be with their friends. They miss the security of a regular class. They also find the friendships formed through changing groups superficial, although in fact it seems the ideal opportunity to meet new friends which was usually one of their original goals. As these students come together from the Japanese school and already have their firm friendship groups, it is very difficult to persuade them to socialise with other students. They already feel secure and comfortable with their old friends but in fact there is also considerable pressure exerted from within the group to remain in the group or risk being a victim of group gossip and ostracised.

9.7 Group Pressure and *Waruguchi* (malicious gossip)

In Japanese culture, harmony is a key objective and although the members of a group will not always agree with each other on an individual basis, it is important to accept the will of the group. Of course in any relationships and in any culture there

are feelings of dependence on others coupled with a desire to maintain harmony. These are generally balanced with the individual's self esteem and ability to stand alone. In Japanese society the balance is quite different and feelings of *amae* and the desire for group harmony dominate. These influences affect the friendship groups of students in school so that students who belong to a particular group are then bound to each other in many little ways. They travel to school together, sit and gossip together and always have lunch together. The members of a group have little contact with non-members and even if individuals want to break away, they are usually afraid of what the others will say. In contrast, friendships among non-Japanese students tend to be very fluid and relaxed. After a short time at an international school, students quickly learn that friends can be "here today and gone tomorrow" and so friendship groups tend to be more flexible than perhaps in a neighbourhood school where students and their parents are part of a stable, well established community.

Teachers at ISD who have large groups of Japanese students in their classes, particularly the ESL department, find their teaching can be affected by the in- and out-groups of Japanese students within a class and the kind of gossiping which takes place. This can be very hurtful for the victim and difficult to deal with for teachers who are non-Japanese when the victims come to us for support. Many conversations are held at lunchtimes and after school, with the teacher grappling with a strange culture and the distraught student often in tears, trying to explain what is happening. Phrases such as *just ignore it, they will soon pick on someone else, sticks and stones etc* provide little comfort; we are left with feelings of inadequacy and the student is

left frustrated and misunderstood. The following is an example of one such situation taken from my field notes which demonstrates the pressure the group can exert on an individual student negatively affecting their learning and the difficulties teachers and students sometimes have in communicating, especially when they have different agendas.

Monday, 10th March, 2003

A group of three high school Japanese girls came to the office at lunch time and asked to speak to me. The two friends are fifteen and the girl with the problem, K., is sixteen years old.

The background

Although I don't teach them I know them by sight and tested them as new students.

A colleague had told me there were some problems in his class with K. often refusing to come to class and when she did come, she whispered with her friends, disrupted the lesson, refusing to stop whispering or join in the lesson constructively.

K. is actually in grade 11 but her English is very weak. When this particular class meets she has no other commitments, so in order to give her extra instruction time, I had decided to give her this additional class. The class meets seven times in the nine day cycle for fifty minutes and is a literature class, working on reading, interpretation and writing. She has been in the class for seven weeks.

K. and one friend were crying and the third girl seemed to be there to give moral support and do the talking. They asked if we could talk privately, so we found an empty classroom. We all sat down and I asked what the problem was. At first no one spoke to me, they whispered in Japanese with much sniffing and dabbing of tearful

eyes. I waited and then pointed out that I couldn't help if I didn't know what was wrong. There was some earnest discussion, then one of the friends said K. wanted to leave the literature class. I asked why. There was much further whispering before I was told again, she wanted to leave the class. She could no longer go to this class. I pointed out that students did not decide which classes they went to, but if they would tell me the problem we could try to find a solution. The conversation continued in this way for several turns as the girls were not prepared to tell me what their problem was. It seemed to be only that K. wanted to leave the class. I had already heard about her frustrating behaviour in the class from the teacher who was trying to deal with it but had been sufficiently concerned that he had brought up the topic in discussion. He was also completely at a loss as to the cause of the problem. I tried a different approach, asking if the class was too easy, or too difficult, if she liked the teacher, if there was another class meeting at the same time she wanted to go to. I was told eventually that the teacher was kind, the work was difficult but alright and there is no other class. By now it was almost time for the next period so I asked them to talk again to each other and come back the next day ready to let me help them by telling me the problem.

I spoke to the teacher and he was as clueless as I was as to the nature of the problem. He had that class the next period and K. did not appear. When he asked where she was the students all looked blank and no one offered a reason.

Tuesday, 11th March

The three girls duly appeared at lunchtime and we trooped off to an empty classroom.

I waited for them to begin, but was not prepared to wait as long as they were. I gave

in first and asked them to tell me what was going on. Again I was told K. wanted to leave the class, could not possibly stay in the class and she would no longer go to the class. I pointed out slowly and carefully that the teachers assigned the students to the classes they need in the ESL programme The students agreed that in the Japanese school it would not be possible to leave a class either. I explained that as her English needed more work, I had decided that she should get as much instruction time as possible and that the level and content of this class were both beneficial to her. In order to graduate from ISD a student must collect a certain number of credits and have been out of the ESL programme for at least a full year. K's time was running out and she was going to have to complete a thirteenth year anyway in order to graduate. I had real concerns about her ability to cope in a mainstream class. (K. joined our school in September 2002 and in January 2003 there was a large intake of students from the local Japanese school, most of whom were in this particular class.)

The conversation continued with me asking for a reason and the girls stubbornly insisting that K. must leave the class. Eventually, feeling frazzled as they were really wearing me down, I told them for one last time they had to tell me why or I could do nothing.

By now I was beginning to wonder if there was something in the translation of my question, did I really understand what they were saying, and how could we be so unable to move on? I also wondered if we should involve one of the Japanese teachers. The students were adamantly against that idea.

I gave the girls an ultimatum, with a bad conscience, to tell me what was wrong or I was going back to eat my lunch!

Then the truth came out, but first I had to promise faithfully not to tell anyone. K. had been dating one of the Japanese boys in the class. They had broken up and now whenever she went into the room the other boys and some of the girls sniggered and said unkind things and she could no longer cope with it. The only solution as she saw it was for her to leave the class. I then sent the other two girls away in order to do some serious talking to K.

I explained again that in her situation, needing help with English in order to graduate, it was essential to get as much quality teaching time as possible and that there was no way I would take her out of the class. I made some suggestions as to how she could cope with the comments and sniggers of the others by ignoring them, talking to her own friends, sitting nearer the front so that the others could not distract her and so on. I had been sworn to secrecy so was not allowed to tell her teacher what was wrong and had promised I would not. As it was the end of the lunch hour and I had classes, and had not had time to eat, I began to bring our discussion to a close. I asked K. if she understood, she said yes. Did she understand why she should stay in the class, she said yes. Did she understand what she could do to make her life easier, she said yes. So I said "OK, back to class!" and she picked up her belongings, looked at me and said "When can I change my class?"

Wednesday, 12th March

Before school, K. was waiting outside my classroom to ask if we could talk, I asked her what about and she answered, changing my class. I replied that I would be busy during the week, we could meet on Monday. I was now truly confused by her as I was sure she had understood.

When I told my colleague the whole business was personal and confidential, girls

stuff, he said oh, it's because she broke up with M.

A week later we all laughed heartily as we saw K. and M. leaving school hand-in-hand, together again. Problem solved but an awful lot of time wasted. However, the question lingers on, what did we do wrong? Why were we completely unable to find out what was going on and give the help and support that was needed? How could this situation affect her school work so dramatically?

9.8.i An action research project by a Japanese student in 1986

Many of the conclusions drawn from my observations and case studies bear a surprising similarity to incidents and observations described in a case study undertaken by a Japanese girl student at ISD in 1986. Known at that time as AISD, the American International School of Düsseldorf, the school was much smaller than it is now but the Japanese population was steady at thirty percent in the high school. There were the same two situations for Japanese students joining the school, some who had come separately and others who came in the ninth grade as a group from the Japanese school in Düsseldorf.

The Japanese high school student investigated the affect of *amae the feeling of dependence, the desire to be passively loved*, (Doi, 1981:7) on the Japanese girls and their social interactions in high school as part of her IB sociology course. At that time there were thirty-five Japanese girls in high school at ISD and the Japanese students made up thirty percent of the high school enrollment. Although she was not

concerned with second language acquisition, many of her findings, twenty years ago, underline the results I have found. This is rewarding particularly as she is Japanese and so able to view the situations from within and against her own experience of Japanese culture. It is also very disappointing because it would seem to indicate that the school has not been able to improve the situation and that the same educational and cultural limitations on successful second language acquisition by the majority of Japanese students at ISD are still in place. She concluded that after a year and a half, or longer, at ISD the effect of the Japanese culture, of *amae*, and the need to preserve harmony grow less important and the students become enculturated into the international system and become more independent of group pressure. She stated

Although I had definite advantages, for I had much prior insight into the cultural scene in addition to the students' trust, the fact that that I myself had gone through the change of social relations may have influenced the study in restricting ways. It is important to notice, therefore, that the author considers herself a socially independent individual, who has gone through the changes from group-orientated to westernized relations, the latter with foreigners (A., 1986:2).

She used participant observation, interviews and questionnaires to look closely at patterns of friendship and the importance of hierarchy in Japanese culture in the international school at that time. She describes in great detail and from inside, the kind of behaviour which I also describe in my field notes, from the outside. We both focus on some of the difficulties many Japanese girls have in acting independently, and she gives examples which westerners may consider unimportant; the strange

feeling and reluctance many Japanese girls experience if they have to walk along the corridor alone, the need to wait at the lockers for another student to walk to class with, the reluctance of Japanese girls to go to the bathroom alone, patterns of travelling to school together in fixed groups, of eating lunch at set places and in set groups. She also describes the agonies of working out the rooming groups on field trips, despite in-group conflicts so that group harmony prevailed. She explains the importance of the group and the pressure it exerts on the individual with numerous examples, one of which explains how one student on the ski trip *did not respond to their (the group's) rules of waiting for each other to go down from the slopes together*. As a result the girl suffered what she calls *systematic gang isolation* for a whole week. Her description of the kind of malicious gossip, *waruguchi*, which goes on is also fascinating, and she explains how many Japanese students who try to make friends with westerners are mocked by the others who laugh at them, whisper behind their backs and generally make life unbearable. It seems clear to me, from the incident described in detail from my field notes above, *waruguchi* is still a problem. She maintains that this kind of gossip is also prevalent in the adult Japanese population in Düsseldorf and acts as a kind of watchdog on the behaviour of everyone. She mentions the well known expression in the Japanese community in Düsseldorf, which is clearly still evident as I have been told about it by some mothers, 'Düssel(dorf) three seconds' meaning gossip only takes three seconds to get around. This expression acts as a warning to all members of the community that they are being watched.

9.8.ii Reactions to the 1986 research in 2006

I shared the research written in 1986 with Japanese girls in my 12th grade class in 2006. First of all there was a lot of laughter and surprise because of course this was written before they were born. They read the research carefully and talked about it amongst themselves before writing an individual response to it. Below are some extracts from their writing, written in January 2006. I have made no grammar corrections, but left them exactly as the girls wrote them.

I agree with what she said and this kind of relationship still exist in Japanese society. I thought even worse nowadays, I mean. Japanese are sticking together more and more. It is because there are so many Japanese in school and less responsibility to talk English. Only they should do is keeping quiet during the class and hang out with their friends during free periods or lunch time. Even we attend to international school, Japanese are getting not care about other non-Japanese students.

This essay is quite interesting for me but at the same time I can't believe she could really write those stuffs openly. The base of Japanese society in ISD doesn't change a lot from 20 years ago. However nobody can write our real relationship like her. I guess Japanese girls relationships are getting more complicated. Now I would like to read same kind of assignment written by western girl and I also want to know how they think about Japanese society.

Even though this research was written in 1985 I found several similarities between girls. For example in my case I'm joining in one group. We eat lunch together, go home together and spend time together. I sometimes spend the time with other groups friends but mostly I'm with my group all the time. I do not know why and how the groups were built but I think the most important thing is no betrayals in one group. Sometimes some girls say "waragushi" at a person who is in the same group. I understand what she felt but I think it's better to refrain from saying those kind of things.

Most Japanese girls like to be in a group and like to do same things or like to have same opinions. It is because belonging in one group is safety and is protected from bullying. Compare to western girls, it seems to not have own individuals. However, I think it's because of Japanese culture so I don't think it's bad habit.

Japanese girls have conflicts between each other comparing to western people. The most important thing in Japanese girls are stated as "groups." I am sure that to be alone in school makes people fear and make stress bigger. I think one or two friends are necessary to be together so mentally I will be relieved.

I was surprised at the girls' confirmation of the same ideas and thoughts as their predecessor twenty years ago. It would seem to show that Japanese society has not changed very much so far. The girls from this class belong to two very distinct groups, one of six girls and the other of three. The larger group is louder and more extrovert especially when the two groups meet. The latest trend is for the larger

group to come to school dressed identically. They go shopping together and all buy similar, but not absolutely identical, outfits. None of them, sadly, has very much contact with any of the western girls although they have been at ISD since the middle of ninth grade.

As one of them wrote

Many people have so many different backgrounds. That makes people think and act differently. The cause of "group" is coming from the fact above. The opinions and characteristic break people into small groups and people who are able to understand each other will become in a same society.

It is very difficult to get along with people who have different backgrounds.

9.9 Attempting to break down the barriers

As long as group pressure prevails and the Japanese students only socialise with other Japanese students, they lack the opportunities to practise and improve their language and social skills with students from other countries. The new students from the Japanese middle school who arrived in January 2004 were each assigned a "buddy" to show them round, meet with them at break and lunch times, introduce them to others, take them to extra-curricular activities and generally befriend them. The buddies were highly motivated and prepared beforehand by the grade level leader and school counselor and after the first four weeks they had a pizza lunch together. However apart from the structured joint activities, no further progress was made. The buddies felt frustrated as they complained that the Japanese students did

not talk to them and they always had to instigate contact and conversations. In the long term, the venture was felt to have been less than successful, although the Japanese students definitely appreciated the support of their buddies during the first few weeks. Some months later, when I asked the Japanese students if they had any contact at all with their buddies, none of them did. When I asked the international buddies the same question, most of them could not even remember who their buddy was.

The students who do not come in a group from the Japanese international school, but join the school individually seem to make friends more easily, but this is probably simply because there is no one else. In the journals which some of them kept in Japanese, student B wrote

I tried to be freind (sic) with classmates, I ate lunch with them and chatted (25. - 29.08.04).

These students actually have less choice as if they are to find friends and contact they must relate to non-Japanese students.

9.10 Summary

The importance of social interaction is one which is continually emphasised in second language acquisition (Gardner, 1985, Cummins, 1983, Krashen, 1981). In this chapter I have used case studies, observations, email correspondence, a letter

and extracts from an action research project in my data investigating the role of social interaction and friendship in the acquisition of English as a second language. I maintain that the lack of social interaction of the majority of Japanese students at ISD, combined with what appears to be their generally low language level on entry and the pressure to behave in a culturally determined way, result in a considerable delay in English language acquisition. The cultural norms of Japanese society which encourage empathy and silent understanding as a form of communication, together with the fear of losing face by saying something foolish and the lack of any kind of previous experience in English oral communication, deprive the students of valuable language experiences and result in a delay in language acquisition which is greater than that experienced by most other nationalities. Most importantly Japanese students generally see learning English as a process which happens exclusively in the classroom consisting of grammar exercises and other discrete language learning exercises with the input provided by the teacher. They do not recognise the importance of language acquisition through social interactions. Despite the years previously spent learning English, the Japanese students who come to ISD generally do not have basic, interpersonal communication skills in English. This leaves them, for an unnecessarily long period, unable to converse with their peers or respond spontaneously to simple questions in the classroom. The present students are however not the first generation of students with this problem as this same situation is revealed through the research from 1986, discussed above, and notably their teachers and parents often have the same problem.

Chapter Ten

Unfinished Business

10 Introduction

Why should Japanese students at an international school in Europe appear to take longer to acquire the level of English required to achieve academic success than students of other nationalities? What is the role of culture in the rate of second language learning or acquisition?

The International School of Düsseldorf has over 900 students of 41 nationalities. (Appendix 10) The school population consists of 25 % native English speakers, 25% German and 25% Japanese students. Students joining the school who do not have English as their mother tongue are routinely tested to see if they need additional English as Second language (ESL) classes. In the middle and high schools these classes generally take place during English and humanities when the ESL students are withdrawn from mainstream classes, otherwise they take part in a full programme of study. The ESL students receive content-based instruction so that when they exit the ESL programme they have similar background knowledge, skills and concepts as well as the vocabulary necessary to deal with English and humanities texts and assignments successfully in the mainstream classroom. In the past an ESL exit test was used to determine a student's readiness to exit the ESL programme. My research questions arose as a result of the consistently disappointing

ESL exit test results achieved by my Japanese students which showed that students of other nationalities were generally more successful and exited the ESL programme more quickly than most of the Japanese students. There was a discrepancy between the amount of sheer hard work which the Japanese students expended on learning English and their lack of success in the exit test. Even after the exit test had been abandoned as culturally inappropriate and inefficient, the Japanese students still languished longer in ESL classes than students from other nationalities who often had a less industrious attitude to English language learning. From the beginning of my research I was convinced that it could not simply be the differences in orthography or grammar between Japanese and English which led to such a delay. Using ethnographic methodology and a process of layering I have investigated the role of culture in second language acquisition. I have examined the influence of the family, the school and friendship on Japanese students at the International School of Düsseldorf (ISD) in an attempt to discover the reason for the delay in acquisition of the level of English required to succeed in mainstream classes. In my review of the extensive literature which describes Japanese child-rearing beliefs, the Japanese school system, problems of the Japanese students overseas, the problem of returnees, and the Japanese culture I was unable to find any research which related to difficulties or otherwise in second language learning. Thus I feel that my work presents an original contribution to research on second language acquisition and the role culture plays in this process. My research has revealed one major theme which recurs throughout; the influence of Japanese culture on verbal communication, that is talk, both in and outside of the classroom in second language acquisition. Within this theme, other Japanese specific cultural influences play a role; the importance of

the group, and group harmony, the Japanese understanding of teaching and learning, the final goal of education and the role of the Japanese mother in the educational process,

10.1 Language Differences

The most frequently proposed answer to the question as to why many of the Japanese students at ISD take longer to reach English language competence than most students of other nationalities is that the difficulties are due to the considerable differences between the two languages. English and Japanese are written in different orthographies and read in different directions. In addition, Japanese children have three different syllabaries to contend with, *hiragana*, *katakana* and *kanji*. (Examples of each are included in the appendix) Of these the first, *hiragana*, is learnt before school even starts, at home and in kindergarten and consists of 46 different symbols which can be altered very slightly with one more stroke to produce even more sounds. The second syllabary *katakana* also has 46 symbols and is used to reproduce non-Japanese words loan words in Japanese. Finally students must learn *kanji*, with approximately 2000 Chinese characters, which frequently have different pronunciations depending on the meaning. The whole process involves endless learning by heart, continual repetition and meticulous copying. The Japanese and English languages have no shared roots, consequently unlike students of other mother tongues who may recognise a significant number of words and be able to guess at the meaning in English, the Japanese rarely find familiar words. Words borrowed from English are written, of course, differently and the Japanese

pronunciation often makes them almost unrecognisable. For example: *terebi* for television, *biiru* for beer, *hafu* for half. In addition, the sentence structure in Japanese is completely different from English. The verbs are mostly at the end of a sentence, markers for the negative or a question are tagged on at the very end of a sentence, prepositions are post-nominal and words can be omitted from sentences and frequently are. The following example shows the differences in word order which can cause major problems for Japanese students learning English.

In English:

Last Sunday, I went to Düsseldorf with Harry Potter by train.

Last Sunday, I went to Düsseldorf by train with Harry Potter.

I went to Düsseldorf with Harry Potter by train last Sunday.

In Japanese:

Last Sunday I Harry Potter with train by Düsseldorf to went.

Last Sunday I Düsseldorf to Harry Potter with train by went.

Last Sunday I train by Harry Potter with Düsseldorf to went.

In fact, all in all, Japanese is notoriously difficult and very different to English in every way.

Bostwick quotes a Japanese writer, Kuwabara, who wrote

In countries where the writing system is simple and there is nothing difficult like kanji, it does not require a lot of time to learn orthography - in Italy it takes children approximately 900 hours of study, in Germany, 1300 hours, and in England 2300 hours - that is, it takes only three to six years from the time children enter elementary school until they can sound out words. In Japan, it

takes more than ten years (Bostwick, 2001:273).

Because of the difficulty of the Japanese language, Japanese elementary students spend more hours on literacy skills and language development than students in English medium schools. The requirement for the first grade of Japanese instruction is for 306 hours, second grade 315 hours which then drops to 280 hours in third and fourth grade and to 210 hours from 5th to 8th grades (Lewis, 1995 quotes statistics taken from Monbusho, 1989). Many students also spend hours in special evening cram schools to master the *kanji* needed as they continue through secondary education. Surprisingly, according to the Japanese education authorities there is almost 100% literacy in Japan (Maher and Yashiro, 1995:3). Dyslexia is as good as unheard of or at least it appears to remain unrecognised. Rohlen (1983:116) refers to the *near absence of dyslexia* in Japan and bases his comments on the findings of Japanese researchers.

Given that Japanese students master this difficult language successfully, one would expect English, with just 26 letters of the alphabet even with the variations of sounds, as in A, or ah, but also the variations in single letters, *e* in *elephant* or *take* which result in the child having to learn 26 symbols but 44 sounds (Ziegler 1986, in Tokuhama-Espinoza, 2003) to be simple for them. In fact the process of decoding proves to be simple, but the technicalities of constructing a sentence present additional problems. These compound even further the problems which Japanese students at ISD face in becoming successful students of English as a second language. In addition many authors blame the predominant method of teaching

English in Japan which is geared towards passing university entrance examinations rather than linguistic competence for the poor English speaking ability of many Japanese people. As Reischauer wrote (1977:399)

The chief problem is the more than 50,000 teachers of English at present in Japanese schools, most of whom are not actually able to speak English themselves.

Honna (1995:59) also blames the teaching methods in Japan and calculates that

The average number of hours spent by individuals studying English for six years is 10 hours/week x 52 weeks/year x 6 years = 3,120 hours.

But concludes that the only result of so many hours of English study is the number of loan words which have appeared in the Japanese language. Honna also refers to the international comparison of TOEFEL scores for 1990/1 which lists Japan as seventh from the last with by far the most test participants but a very low average score. He gives two main reasons for these poor results. Firstly as there is a lack of opportunity for Japanese people to communicate in English in Japan, motivation to learn English is low and secondly the goal of the Ministry of Education for students to *acquire native-like proficiency is unrealistic and should be held accountable for underachievement* (Honna, 1995:57).

In fact none of these factors mentioned above apply in the context of an international school where students are surrounded by the English language which they also need

in order to communicate effectively, so motivation should be high. All of their teachers and many of their peers speak perfect or nearly perfect English and no one expects native-like proficiency from second language learners. The goal of English teaching at ISD is not just to pass an entrance examination to university but to be able to communicate and study in English. The difficulties of learning to read and write English for speakers of distant languages do not only apply to Japanese students. We have a number of Arabic speaking students who also use a different writing system and direction and yet in their case delay in English acquisition is not noticeable. Generally they master oral English quickly and tend to be pro-active in their English learning. Korean and Chinese students also face problems in learning English but although they do suffer from some delay, they tend to be more successful than their Japanese peers.

The orthographical and grammatical differences between English and Japanese, therefore, do not even begin to explain the depth of the problem which the Japanese students typically face in acquiring fluency and competence in English as I discovered during the course of this research. The truth seemed to be far more complex and needed to be examined from many different aspects.

10.2 Inherent Dangers

One of the dangers of examining one discrete group of students closely and comparing this group to others, as discussed in chapter five, is the risk of generalising or stereotyping all of those students and ignoring the fact that each is an

individual. Although the Japanese students at ISD who have been the subjects of my research, have much in common, they are all quite definitely strong individuals with their own personalities. In research on Japan and the Japanese, there are continual references to and discussions about the homogeneity of Japanese society. Due to their geographical isolation, the difficulty of their language and the closed door policy of the Meiji government, Japan remained relatively isolated, culturally and linguistically, for hundreds of years and it is only now that post-modern Japan is becoming more open to foreign influences. Maher and Yashiro (1995:8) call *Harmony: The Invented Tradition* and appear to be inclined to ignore the theories of *nihonjinron* which abound in the literature about Japan and the Japanese to be found in the works of Reischauer, 1977, Vogel 1983, White, 1988 and others. Goodman (1990:60) explains the message of the Nihonjinron genre to be that

Japan, the Japanese, and Japanese society are unique in the world - topographically, linguistically, structurally, culturally even anatomically.

The students in my research have a lot in common. They share a Japanese upbringing, years of experience in Japanese kindergartens, elementary and middle school systems, as well as parents who are all successful middle class Japanese citizens and themselves products of the Japanese education system. They have shared knowledge about the way things are done, what is important or not, as well as a common language which is more comfortable for them than English. They share knowledge of Japanese popular culture, music, entertainment, fashion and so on, and at least at first, they share a lack of knowledge about the things that count in an

international school. All of the above result in a feeling of belonging to a group which is not only visibly different from most other students in an international school, but has a shared understanding of behaviour and communication. Not to be underestimated is also, in 99% of cases, a shared intention to return to Japan to study at a Japanese university. These students are only at our school for a short time, often not more than two or three years, before they return to their home country. Throughout this study I have made a conscious effort to avoid stereotyping the behaviour and attitudes of the Japanese students by concentrating on individuals. However I have continually found similarities and common attitudes which are so strong that they cannot be ignored.

My results and conclusions are based on detailed observations of numerous individual students recorded in my field notes, students' own observations shared with me, colleagues' shared observations, and an in-depth research into the culture over a period of seven years, all of which lead me to make cautious generalisations. However, there are and always will be exceptions; Japanese students who learn English remarkably fast and well and produce final examination results which outshine many native English speakers, others who deliberately set out to wholeheartedly embrace international education, Japanese parents who demand that their children do not mix with other Japanese children and many more who break the mould and do not behave in the way which predominates. However, although these observations are based on examples from one international school and as such on a small sample, the fact that the same observations have been repeated continually and consistently over the course of at least seven years would seem to imply that there is

room for cautious generalisation and that they may be more widely applicable.

10.2.i The Advantages and the Disadvantages

There are many advantages to be enjoyed when teaching Japanese students. First and foremost they are almost all diligent, consistently on-task in class, their homework gets done, they do not forget any equipment required for class, they are organised, polite, friendly, they listen, their behaviour is excellent, their work is always beautifully presented and they do not argue or answer back. Their parents are cooperative, supportive and respect the teachers as experts in their field. But on the other hand, the students do not take risks, they will not try to give an answer unless they are sure it is 100% correct, they will only answer if called upon, class discussions are doomed to failure if the class is predominantly Japanese and the language is English, and they are reluctant to demonstrate their understanding in a way which we in the west expect, they will not tell you honestly when they do not understand, and they will not ask questions to clarify their understanding. A continual complaint from teachers of Japanese students is that they never offer an answer or join in a lesson actively. This is a phenomenon which we witness on a daily basis. When I asked my Japanese colleagues about this problem they said

The Japanese culture which does not encourage us to do something different, definitely prevents us from learning English effectively.

Another factor which is not ideal in English learning is the Japanese school system, I think In Japanese junior high

schools, where they are learning to be Japanese, basically they are molded in to a Japanese at this level. They have to wear uniforms, follow a lot of school rules and learn to put more emphasis on harmony. Of course they don't want to do something different in English lessons! In most of the lessons, they are told to listen quietly. There is no way to persuade them to be active in English lessons. They don't learn to take risks, which does not definitely help in language learning.

The influence of the Japanese culture of conforming to the group and not being in any way different is a very deep-rooted phenomena.

10.3 The Story so far

In this ethnographic research I have focused on three important areas of influence in every student's life; the family, the school and friendships, in an attempt to discover what is going on with the majority of our Japanese students. In each of these three areas I discovered notable differences in values, attitudes and behaviours between those which western students and teachers tend to share and those of the Japanese students and their families and friends. In my opinion these differences all influence the process of acculturation and language learning. In my field notes I recorded detailed observations of my own classes and other classes at ISD as well as in schools in Japan and at the Japanese schools in Düsseldorf. I observed interactions out of school time, for example before school, break times, at lunch and after school. I conducted interviews with parents, students and colleagues, with varying degrees of success as described in chapter six. I used diaries and journals written by students

and correspondence, mostly email exchange, with ex-ISD students and their parents. I also examined samples of the students' reflective and creative writing. Through case studies, I followed the progress of students who succeeded and those who were faced with enormous difficulties because the language of instruction is English. I compared the learning processes of a Japanese and non-Japanese student over a period of three years. The students who were my first subjects, seven years ago have now graduated and are at university in Japan and yet the same patterns of difficulty and delay in English language achievement continue to be displayed by many of the Japanese students who are currently studying at ISD. Throughout my research the role of verbal communication and the importance of talk in second language acquisition, is a recurring theme. Below I review the three areas which I examined closely.

10.3.i The Family

In his book on Japan's high schools, Rohlen (1983:117) writes,

Education provides a standardized experience that shapes all children in a common direction, but its content does not present a radical change from what children are learning at home. Family and school reinforce one another easily.

My research shows that this is not the case for Japanese students studying in an international school. A typical Japanese family living temporarily in Germany faces a number of areas of potential conflict or dissonance when the children attend an

international school. These clearly affect a child's academic progress and well-being as so many aspects of their lives are thrown into question. In order to learn well a child needs to feel accepted, respected and supported not only by their peers and teacher but also by their family.

When new Japanese families come to ISD, the traditional, familiar roles of the mother and father undergo major changes. In Japan the mother is traditionally the person who has most contact with school. She oversees the homework and school progress and can even become, as described in chapter seven, an *education mama* whose whole life revolves around her child and their school success. Failures of the child are considered to be failures of the mother. When her child enters the international school, the mother in particular loses her influence and importance as she is unable, firstly through her lack of knowledge of the system and secondly often through a lack of sufficiently fluent English, to support her child effectively. Her role as *education mama* is lost. This has been demonstrated time and again in my research, through comments made by mothers and their children. Whereas in Japan the parents are very familiar with the school system and requirements, when the children come to a new system the parents are at a disadvantage. This is of course the case for all parents whose children come from any national system to the international system but few other systems are quite as distant in their methods and final goals as the Japanese system, compared to the international system. Few education systems are so united in their approach to education and life as the Japanese school system is with Japanese family life. This will be addressed in more depth in the following section on schools. The basic facts are that Japanese parents

have great difficulty understanding the requirements and goals of an international school. Consequently the students have neither support nor guidance when they need them. Quite the opposite, the parents need the children to explain the situation to them. The parents are in the uncomfortable position of being complete novices with no way of becoming experts. Primarily for this reason, communication between the disenfranchised Japanese mothers is intense and often leads to complex shared misunderstandings, which they mutually reinforce. This situation can play a crucial role in the academic success of the Japanese students. The lack of understanding of the parents, the conflicting messages about what is expected and what is acceptable or unacceptable at an international school, the lack of any kind of guidance or support results in a confusion of mixed messages which can only bewilder the student.

Some recent examples of this which have shown up in my research have been misunderstandings about the curriculum, academic expectations, the grading system, report cards, homework, school rules and discipline generally. A significant part of the problem is the fact that few of the mothers understand English to a level which allows them to communicate effectively with the school. From the side of the school, few of the teachers are able to communicate in Japanese and the Japanese department cannot always take over the role of translators.

Measures have been taken to improve communication between home and school, for example some letters home are translated into Japanese, and regular coffee mornings for Japanese mothers are held where questions can be raised with teachers and the

administration. But in the final analysis, the Japanese parents relinquish their role as advisors and mentors for their children and remain educationally ineffective as long as the school system is a closed book to them. In time the children become fully competent and then the roles are reversed because the child is all-knowing and can in fact select the information parents should receive. But long before this happens the confusion and misunderstanding have taken their toll. How can a student, who has always been accustomed to serious academic support from his/her mother, study successfully when that support system has been rendered useless? Not only has the student lost the support, but nothing is offered in its place which makes sense to the Japanese understanding of school. And how can a family function harmoniously or even effectively when the parents are so severely disadvantaged in such an important area of their children's development, their education?

A further cultural challenge is verbal communication. In Japanese culture *silence is golden* and communication is based heavily on empathy and sensing how the other person is feeling. Chatter and extended conversations are not part of the communication style in the way they are for many other nations. Goodman (1990) describes a popular theory of Japanese communication called *haragei* meaning the *art of the belly* which suggests that Japanese people share an in-born ability to communicate silently through the centre of their bodies. At the beginning of my research I was often surprised when asking Japanese students how their mothers had reacted to a problem or difficult situation in school, when the students told me unfailingly 'She did not say anything'. My frequent rejoinder was 'Don't you talk to your mother?' and they invariably replied 'No'. As a westerner brought up to discuss

and air differences or problems, I was dismayed that the students did not appear to communicate to the same extent with their parents. My understanding of a mother not reacting verbally to a school problem, as a westerner, was quite different to the Japanese reaction which is non-verbal but none-the-less effective in a different way. However, this normal Japanese communication style is, of course, in no way deficient, just different. What we in the west perceive as a lack of communication is in fact a basic difference in communication styles. This practice of non-verbal communication is continually practised and reinforced in the family but negated at the international school. Students are expected to adopt our communicative style and when this does not happen they are criticised and in fact frequently penalised for something which is part of their culture. Oral participation is an important part of assessment at ISD and the typical Japanese reluctance to communicate verbally, to demonstrate knowledge and share ideas is unfortunately reflected negatively in their grades and on their report cards. As this style of communication is not practised or appreciated at home, there is a conflict situation for the student who is confronted with such extreme differences which are not explicitly addressed or openly discussed by either party.

From my research I conclude that there are two major areas of dissonance between the family and the international school both of which contribute to the lack of progress in the acquisition of English which is the basis of this research. Firstly, the Japanese students are seriously disadvantaged by their parents' lack of knowledge or understanding of the international school system of education which is so very different from the Japanese national system in every aspect of its educational goals

and methods. Secondly, of major importance in the world of western education is the role of talk. Children learn by talking, they demonstrate and develop their knowledge and understanding through talk at every age, yet in the Japanese culture which is the culture of the parents at home, verbal communication has a different role. Too much talk is thought to be foolish, silence is golden and communication does not require talk to function effectively.

10.3.ii School

As described in chapter four and five, the Japanese school system is very different from that of international schools. The concepts of teaching and learning, the *what*, *how* and *why* of each are fundamentally different. These differences in educational philosophy are determined by the final goals. The final goal for many Japanese school students is entry to a prestigious university with the promise of employment in equally prestigious companies almost guaranteed. Each university has its own entrance examinations and the main subjects tested are generally Japanese, mathematics and English. These examinations are tests of discrete facts learnt off by heart. There is little demand for higher level critical thinking skills, discussion or originality. The English examinations are largely tests of discrete grammar items, vocabulary and translation. Oral communication skills are not required. These examinations have an important back-wash effect and dictate, to a very large extent, what is taught and how it is taught in Japanese high schools and even middle and elementary schools. Japanese students who have studied outside of Japan, in other national systems or international schools take different university entrance

examinations. For example for the English entrance examination for Japanese universities, our students are required to write an essay in English rather than only complete grammar and translation test questions. After studying for a number of years in an English medium school, writing an essay should present few problems. However, in the process of second language learning, Japanese students and their parents persist in their belief that the only way is to study seriously and focus on discrete grammar points, complete endless grammar exercises, translate and learn vocabulary lists by heart. These views have been formed by the way English is generally taught in Japan using the grammar and translation method and with minimal emphasis given to oral communication.

Students at ISD prepare for the International Baccalaureate Diploma examinations which place great emphasis on independent learning, critical thinking skills, originality and very little, in fact, minimal emphasis is placed on learning discrete facts. For the IB diploma, students are required to study six subjects from the areas of mathematics, sciences, humanities, a mother tongue language referred to as language A, a second language, Language B, and Theory of Knowledge. The student has to study three of these subjects at a higher level and three at standard level. In addition, they are required to write an extended essay and work for CAS credits, completing hours of Community, Service and Activity, to demonstrate an all-round education. According to the student's choice of science or humanities and whether the courses are higher or standard level, each student has their own schedule which means they are in classes with different colleagues for each subject. In Japanese schools the classes group remain constant and the class remains static, not even

changing rooms for different subjects with the exception of sciences or physical education, and the teachers move. At ISD everyone moves around, rooms change, teachers change and the composition of the class changes as each student has their own personal schedule, according to the subjects and level studied. The Japanese students often comment on this as they find it very strange and feel insecure, especially at the beginning of their career, because they cannot rely on their friends to be with them all day.

The biggest difference between the international system and the Japanese system has to be the final goal, the examinations at the end of the twelfth or thirteenth year. Whereas the International Baccalaureate is an internationally recognised, accredited examination system, the Japanese universities each have their own individual examinations. As mentioned previously these are tests of discrete facts learnt off by heart and not as in the International Baccalaureate an examination of the students' knowledge and understanding as well as their ability to think independently, and use higher level thinking skills and reasoning. In order for the students to reach this level of independent thought, great emphasis is placed on oral work, the development of discussion skills and the students' ability to express their ideas logically and clearly. None of these skills, apart from the knowledge, is required by the Japanese university examiners not are any of these skills fully recognised by the Japanese students or their parents whose expectations have been formed by the Japanese education system. This leads to a clash in expectations of just what education should be. This clash of expectations contributes to the difficulties faced by the Japanese students generally with any kind of oral work. The Japanese students have great

problems taking an active role in the kind of interactive classroom situation which they face at ISD. Their general reluctance to express their opinions or participate in class discussions is negatively viewed by most teachers and this is also reflected in their grades. My findings also show that most teachers in international schools are not equipped to teach the culturally diverse student population.

These basic beliefs which Japanese students and their parents bring to ISD contrast dramatically with western theories of education and second language acquisition. The culture of the western classroom is based on effective, on-going verbal communication between the students and their teachers. There is a strong belief that students learn through talk and that they need to discuss their thoughts, share and exchange ideas on a continual basis, all of which leads to active learning. While Japanese kindergartens and elementary schools are hotbeds of verbal interaction, the method of teaching and learning changes into lectures and chalk and talk when students join the middle schools. The student changes from being participatory and active to silent and receptive. Learning is changed from a two-way or more action packed adventure to a one way system with no interaction.

10.3. iii Friends

An international school population is subject to continual change. This affects both teachers and students as the turnover each year is approximately 30%. Consequently international school students develop good interpersonal skills and make friends with people quickly as they meet so many different people. Closed friendships of

two or three, or even best friend relationships, are difficult to maintain as one of the friends could leave the school at any time. This makes for very outgoing students who are welcoming and open. There is an acceptance of everyone as we are all so different anyway that no one is really different. The population of the International School of Düsseldorf is multi-national with over forty-one nations represented. In complete contrast, as with most national schools, the turn-over in Japanese schools is minimal but also in Japan it would be highly unusual to have any non-Japanese at all. The Japanese students who come to ISD have had minimal experience of people of other nationalities and are very hesitant to make contact at first. The feelings of empathy and the silent understanding of each others' feelings mentioned above also play a role in the relationships formed between the Japanese students at an international school. When asked why they stay together with other Japanese and do not make an effort to make friends with students of other nationalities, the reply is often that they prefer to be with people with the same interests who understand them. Because of the importance of the group in Japanese society and the pressure which is put on friends to remain loyal to the group, it is very difficult for individual students to break away and form new friendships. In addition, the lack of any kind of experience in dealing with other nationalities leads to a great reluctance to take the risk and maybe be left friendless and a complete outsider.

The Japanese students who arrive individually eventually begin to communicate with native and fluent bilingual English speakers simply because they have no choice. In my research I described the agonies of a seventh grader who wept bitterly every lunch time and refused to be comforted until she finally was able,

linguistically and socially, to take the step and begin to communicate. After this her English competence went from strength to strength. I talked to her again when she was in high school and she admitted that all through middle school she only had non-Japanese friends but when she was in ninth grade and the new Japanese intake arrived, she joined them and began to speak much more Japanese during her free time. In the end she only had Japanese friends although her English language competence had already benefitted sufficiently to allow her to be very successful academically.

The language learnt or acquired outside of the classroom by second language students from peers and friends is very important. In my research I compared the progress made by a Japanese boy and a Belgian boy who arrived at the school with a similar level of English proficiency, at the same age and in the same grade. Because the Belgian boy was unable to communicate in Flemish with any other boys he very quickly, almost aggressively, began to learn English. He absorbed English at every opportunity whereas the Japanese boy refused to make any attempt to speak English and spent every possible second with other Japanese boys. The result was that the Belgian boy exited the ESL programme very quickly and went on to be successful in the mainstream classes, but the Japanese boy was unable to benefit as his English was so weak and when he left in ninth grade he was still officially taking the ESL classes. An additional challenge at ISD is the fact that each year a large group of Japanese ninth graders come from the Japanese middle school in Düsseldorf with friendship groups already established. These students find it very difficult to integrate with the English speaking peers firstly because of their

reluctance to try and speak English but also because of their low oral proficiency and their feelings of loyalty and dependence on the group.

As already discussed Japanese schools teach minimal oral skills, often because the teachers themselves are often deficient in these skills but also because the final goal is not communication in English. As a result the Japanese students come to our school convinced that the way to learn English is through grammar and translation and believe that talking to friends can not help them. Japanese parents, of course, support their children in these beliefs and encourage them to continue learning in this Japanese way. The parents often ask for extra grammar homework, for private tutors to be recommended, and they fully expect their children to be studying the language at home using text books. Unlike students of other nationalities who may not have had as much grammar/translation practice as they have, the Japanese find themselves in a most uncomfortable situation because they are expected to communicate from the moment they arrive. New possible friends ask them their names, where they come from, if they would like to play football at breaktime or eat lunch with them and the Japanese student is left in total panic because they are expected to do something which others find easy, even those with considerably less English learning. The Japanese students rarely even try because in their culture the possibility of making a mistake is more embarrassing than not speaking. The non-Japanese often persevere for a few days but then go off and look for people who will talk to them. When the students have been at the school for some time, at least a year but generally longer, and their English competence and communicative skills have become sufficient, they begin to make friends and communicate with non-Japanese

but already so much time will have been lost. The language proficiency which they could have acquired through contact with native speakers and being part of non-Japanese groups has been missed and the time required for language learning process greatly extended.

10.4 The Big Picture

From my research I conclude that there a number of factors which influence the delay in the successful learning of English by most Japanese students at the International school of Düsseldorf.

The first and all-pervading factor appears to be the *role of talk* in learning a second language which can be identified in each of the areas of the students' lives I examined, the family, the school and friends. The difference in communicative styles and the role of talk are also mentioned by other researchers, although not in relation to second language learning. I will relate my findings on the role of talk to two of the most influential researchers of second language learning whose work has great relevance to this study.

Krashen (1981) describes the differences between learning and acquiring language. He distinguishes between *learning* which emphasises grammar, vocabulary and comprehension exercises and is dominant in some foreign language classrooms and *acquisition* which he says is the natural way that a child learns the native language by listening and experimenting with the language. He maintains that the first method

only teaches the student about the language, through the latter the student acquires the language naturally. The communicating non-fluent speaker hears language modelled continually, the learner receives what Krashen calls *comprehensible input* and absorbs the patterns of language sub-consciously. Because the message is more important than grammatical accuracy, the *acquirer* continues to try to communicate and so continues to effectively acquire language. Krashen has shown in numerous studies that second language learners need comprehensible input which can be in the form of oral communication or as in his most recent work through reading (Krashen 2004). The Japanese way of teaching English emphasises only consciously studying grammar, vocabulary and translation as a *learning* process.

During a conversation with Stephen Krashen about my work he suggested

Japanese students learn English, they do not acquire it. That is their problem (Krashen, March, 2005).

This is a major part of the problem, but not the whole picture.

Cummins' work (1983) on *Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills* and *Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency* also has relevance for the learning/acquisition debate and the way the Japanese students learn English. Japanese students, because of the way they have previously been taught with minimal communication, have great difficulty forming even simple sentences orally. Strangely enough, if the question were written down and they had time to consider, the answer would often be grammatically perfect. The new Japanese students who come to ISD, even after

three or more years of learning English, generally arrive with minimal *Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills* because they have never learnt to communicate. Thus the first phase of language learning, which according to Cummins and others, takes between one and a half and two years, has been missed completely. The Japanese students then have to acquire communicative competence before they can go on to be effective learners in an international school classroom.

There appear to be two main issues involved in the difficulties which most Japanese students experience in acquiring communicative competence. Firstly the Japanese communication style does not emphasise talk or encourage chatter, but from birth onwards, as explained in chapter five, emphasises non-verbal empathetic communication. These non-verbal interpersonal communication skills rely on culturally defined mutual understanding, empathy and the ability to quietly sense what the other person wants. Secondly, because of the way English is predominantly taught in Japan, communication skills are not considered to be of great importance. The emphasis is on grammar/ translation as this is required for university entrance examinations and as this is also the way the teachers were taught, they often lack the skills required to teach communicatively.

Problems with the western way of communication, through verbalisation, affect the students both in and out of the classroom. Their reluctance to speak affects their grades negatively and leaves many teachers in doubt of their ability. Their reluctance to speak makes forming friendships with students of other nationalities difficult. The Japanese students are often considered to be 'shy' due to their reluctance to talk and

so the basis for a friendship as we know it, sharing ideas and mutual sympathy and understandings, is hard to establish. The problem is, of course, further compounded by feelings of inadequacy caused by their relative lack of English communicative competence.

In addition to the difficulties faced by Japanese students in communicating in English, there are other, culturally determined, difficulties which hinder their success in learning English in an international school as quickly as students of other nationalities. The importance of the group and group harmony as described in chapter nine, limit the individual student's interactions with non-Japanese students and so negatively affect their language acquisition as well as their willingness to demonstrate their knowledge without showing off in the classroom situation. *The nail which stands up will be hammered down* is a popular Japanese expression implying that those people who try to stand up and be different from others will be put down again.

A further major consideration in the progress of Japanese students learning English is their understanding of teaching and learning and *how, what* and *why* of the whole process which lead to confusion and misunderstandings. These are even more complicated by the fact that their parents, especially their mothers, are unable to support them effectively as they themselves have so little understanding of the system. This also leads to a clash of expectations between the home and school. As Stoicovy (2002:80) described in her article on schools in the United States

too often, the culture of the school experienced by the child is very different from the culture of the family and community in which the child lives. The result is that schools frequently become discontinuous or out of sync with the population they serve.

And she adds

Much of the difficulty ethnic and language minority students encounter in school is due to a mismatch between their culture and the school's culture (81).

This is indeed the case for Japanese students studying in an English medium international school. A further consideration is the lack of understanding and knowledge of most international school teachers about the students they teach. Very little inservice training is offered to new or experienced teachers to prepare them for the new challenges to come.

10.5 Summing Up - the story so far

In conclusion, the reasons for the delay in acquisition of English language competence by most Japanese students to a degree which allows for academic success at the International School of Düsseldorf would appear to be a deeply layered combination of factors, The role of verbal communication and silence in Japanese culture compared to western culture negatively affects English language acquisition. The Japanese experience and expectations of teaching and learning,

their cultural influences which discourage putting themselves forward or taking risks, the pressure of the peer group, their reluctance because of cultural norms to talk easily or gladly, the differing expectations and behavioural norms of home and school, the parental lack of understanding of the international school system and the teachers' lack of knowledge and understanding of the cultural differences all contribute to hinder their rapid acquisition of English. Although a great deal of research has been written about the Japanese education system, their approach to second language learning, in particular to learning English, has not been addressed in depth in any of the work I have read. Research and discussion about the differing norms of communication and the roles of talk and silence are easily found but these have not been related to the acquisition or failure in acquisition of a second language, in this case English. So I believe that this research is a new and valuable contribution to our knowledge and understanding of the influence of culture on second language learning or acquisition. An understanding of the effects of these culturally determined differences is of vital importance in our efforts to educate young people. It is essential that all students have equal access to the curriculum and the same right to a full education as their peers from other countries.

10.6 The Way Forward

Although the norms and values of societies are changing in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries with a speed unknown in the past, it appears that within the Japanese culture, some values are as yet unaffected and these appear to affect students' ability to succeed as quickly as they should, in the environment of an

international school. For almost two hundred years Japan's borders were closed and there was only minimal influence from the outside world, however Japan moved successfully into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and took on an important role in the world. The influence of international trade has made it necessary for the Japanese to open themselves and their country to the world and establish centres, offices and factories, outside of Japan. This in turn necessitates sending Japanese nationals to live and work in other cultures. In order to preserve family life for these workers, their families also travel abroad. Parallel to this development, the Japanese technological boom is creating a generation of computer literate internet users which also means that the borders of Japan are wide open to the influences of the west, and every kind of cultural influence is invading the traditional Japanese way of life. Although my research has shown that as yet there is very little change in the Japanese way of teaching and learning or culturally determined attitudes to talk and silence, it would be an area worthy of research to investigate how quickly these norms too are changing. The situation I have described at the International School of Düsseldorf would then seem to be just a moment in history.

Epilogue

This research began in 1997, after reading Eve's book *Making Sense of a New World*. It put into words so many of the ideas which were at that point unexpressed. I discovered from the back cover that she was lecturing at Goldsmiths College, London where nearly forty years ago I completed my initial teacher training and it seemed that fate was calling me to go back and try to solve this mystery which was causing me so much frustration. It has been a strange feeling to go back to Goldsmiths, but an enormously rewarding experience.

Since the beginning of my study, ISD has grown from just over 800 students to the present 955 and the Japanese population is keeping pace with the general growth. We have a new purpose built high school and a new elementary school building. We have become a full IB school and adopted the Primary Years Programme as well as the Middle Years Programme to complement the Diploma Programme which has been in place for over twenty years. Many teachers and even more students have come and gone.

There have been a number of initiatives introduced since I began my study which are intended to support the Japanese students. We now have regular Japanese tea, or coffee mornings for parents where problems can be discussed, parents are also invited in to school to talk about second language learning and how they can support their children, contact with the Japanese International School continues to grow, although the fact that the teachers are only in Germany for three years makes it

difficult to build up meaningful, on-going, educational relationships. They are willing to accept our visits to their classrooms, but as yet none of their teachers have visited our classes.

It has become clear to me during my research that one area which needs to be developed is that of in-service training for teachers at international schools to address the issues involved in working with ESL students in mainstream classrooms and increase understanding and awareness of the needs of students from other cultures. At ISD we have 41 different nationalities so we cannot afford to be complacent and the turn-over of teachers makes it imperative that this is an on-going initiative. The adoption of the PYP and MYP have necessitated the introduction of regular in-service training days and I am grateful that some of the time has been given to training teachers to work with ESL students in their mainstream classes and also raising cultural awareness. Of course the Japanese students are not the only non-native speakers of English at ISD and so the area of cross-cultural awareness extends beyond the limits of one single culture.

This research has taken over seven years. During this time I have steadily grown in my understanding of my Japanese students and their culture, especially their understanding of what learning and teaching means. Although I am still truly an outsider and as such have my own understanding of their culture, the journey has been enriching and rewarding both personally and educationally and I look forward to sharing my insights with colleagues in an effort to improve teaching and learning for our students. That is what this is all about.

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Appendices

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A 1 Examples of Hiragana

ひらがな
Hiragana

あ a	い i	う u	え e	お o
か ka	き ki	く ku	け ke	こ ko
さ sa	し shi	す su	せ se	そ so
た ta	ち chi	つ tsu	て te	と to
な na	に ni	ぬ nu	ね ne	の no
は ha	ひ hi	ふ fu	へ he	ほ ho
ま ma	み mi	む mu	め me	も mo
や ya		ゆ yu		よ yo
ら ra	り ri	る ru	れ re	ろ ro
わ wa				を o
ん n				

A 2 Examples of Katakana

カタカナ
Katakana

ア a	イ i	ウ u	エ e	オ o
カ ka	キ ki	ク ku	ケ ke	コ ko
サ sa	シ shi	ス su	セ se	ソ so
タ ta	チ chi	ツ tsu	テ te	ト to
ナ na	ニ ni	ヌ nu	ネ ne	ノ no
ハ ha	ヒ hi	フ fu	ヘ he	ホ ho
マ ma	ミ mi	ム mu	メ me	モ mo
ヤ ya		ユ yu		ヨ yo
ラ ra	リ ri	ル ru	レ re	ロ ro
ワ wa				ヲ o
ン n				

A 4 The original script of 'The Family.'

Family

* えりか 父 (F)

* ちか 姉(B) ^{Victoria}

* りさ 母 (M)

* みなみ 妹(L) ^{Emily}

F: I'm home!! Mum, please give me beer.

M: There is no beer because you drunk all yester day.

F: What!? I always drink after work. You know it!! Why didn't you buy it?

M: I was so busy today. You ^{drank} drink too much these days ^{haven't} don't you?

It isn't good for your health. You should not drink too much...

F: Shut up!! Who do you think earn for you?? You should be grateful for me!

《B is coming》

B: So noisy. Can you be quiet guys?

F: What!? Don't oppose me. My stress builds up because of you!!

By the way, what do you have in the hand??

B: This? It is cigarette.

F: Did you say cigarette? You can't smoke yet.

B: It is universal. All my friends are smoking too.

F: You must ~~don't~~ do it. Give it to me!!

B: No I don't, because I bought it myself.

F: Give it to me.

B: I said no!! I don't like you. Okay, I go to my room. Don't come my room.

~~Bye!~~

M: Victoria. (子供の名前)

《B leave》

F: She is like that because you don't take care of her.

M: I'm sorry.

《L is coming》

L: What happened? You guys ^{were} ~~are~~ noisy.

M: Victoria and Dad had a quarrel.

L: Again?? Where's she?

M: She is in her room.

L: Okay. I go ^{are} to see how things ~~go~~.

《L is go to B's room》

L: May I come in?

B: Are you Emily ?? Yeah. Come in.

«B open the door and L come into B's room»

B: I was surprised because I thought you are a parent.

L: Is it beer? Did you drink it??

B: Yes. Do you want to drink some?

L: No thanks. So, Will you make up with Dad??

B: I don't think so, because he doesn't say sorry.

L: Victoria. Please make up!! Dad is a heavy drinker because of you!!

He didn't drink like that before. ^{because worried}

And then he said ~~he~~ that ~~but~~ he is worry about you!! And ^{Mum} ~~mother~~ too...

Why don't ^{you} say sorry?

«B&L go to F&M»

B: I'm so sorry. I didn't know you are worry about me.

F: That's all right. And I drank too much. Sorry. (M):

L: Be nice to each other.

F&B: Yes...







M: Time to go to (sleep. or bed)

L: Yes mum. Good night.

M, B: Good night.

E N D

A 5 Email from a mother in Japan, discussing differences between Japanese schools and ISD

From : Reiko [REDACTED]  |  |  |  |  |  Inbox
Sent : Thursday, June 10, 2004 1:34 PM
To : "Patricia Mertin" [REDACTED]
Subject : Dear Mrs.Mertin

Dear Mrs.Mertin,

It's very nice to talk to you again. I believe you are fine.
Sorry for my belated reply to your question regarding difference between ISD and Japanese school.

I would make frank comments as follows;

(1) Although Japanese school has PTA (parents & teachers association) which is a similar organization

as PFA in ISD, there are quite difference in the way how parents get in touch with the school.

It's a very common way in ISD that parents often support the class lesson such as CHIGIRI-E and

the library, but parents in Japanese school keep away from them due to the historical reason

teachers and school have great authorities against parents in Japan (which kind of trend has been getting

less recently). Thus, I could have good experience to be involved in school activities in ISD and I

would hope such way to be taken in Japan.

(2) Due to the rapid globalization, Japanese government and parents finally feel it's very important for

the children to have skillful conversation in English, so that English curriculum is getting change in Japan

for example, English lesson starts from middle of elementary school (instead of Junior High school) and also

focus on conversation (instead of just reading). In addition, Japanese parents are getting to have common

sense to let their children get in touch with different cultures and thinking way in other countries.

But, in case family returns to Japan from overseas like my family, their children face difficulties to enter into

High school and University in Japan, due to lack of know-how how to solve questions in examinations in Japan.

Therefore, it's a kind of pity there are still parents living abroad to let their children go to Japanese school there.

(3) I have big surprise with the different way of coaching and teaching to the student in ISD compared with

Japanese school. Japanese school mainly focus on letting the students make correct answer, even though

ISD focus on the way of thinking and approaching to solve the questions/quiz. I suppose my children could





have creativity through school life in ISD. In addition, I would appreciate ISD who respects each personality of

the student and has the mind such as "Teachers respect students, and Students do teachers".

I would hope ISD to strengthen such kind of educational trend.

A 7 Email from an ex-student continuing the discussion

 Reply |  Reply All |  Forward |  Delete |  Block |  Junk ▾ |  Put in Fol

From : Y [REDACTED]  |  |  |  Inbo
Sent : Sunday, July 4, 2004 9:40 AM
To : [REDACTED]
Subject : Finally!

I'm so sorry that I have made you wait such a long time.
I finally started to write the answer to your question.
I'm sure it is long enough to give you some ideas what the
good mother and the good child are in Japan.

Before you start to read the rest of this, I want to mention
that my mother started her child care more than 20 years ago
and it means her values about child care might be different
from the ones which are common today. Also she mentioned that
this is her own opinion and it doesn't mean all Japanese
people think the image of mother and child in the same way.

Since mother has an entire responsibility for children's
health, growth and future, mother of course should concern for
the food they have so that they can keep their health but she
also should concern how much time they sleep and even concern
for the clothes they wear making sure they don't catch a cold.
Also good mother should be able to understand what the
children think of and should be able to advise when they are
in trouble before they ask her for help.
Good mother can help children to study. Besides studying
mother has them taking some lessons to refine their
sensibilities if she thinks they need ones, no matter whether
they really want to take the lessons or not.
Mothers (or parents) tend to believe that children have exactly
the same sense of values and believe what parents believe as
good fortunes are good fortunes for their children too. Good
fortunes are, for example, graduating the top-ranking college,
working at the top-ranking company and getting married with
well-educated person at proper age.

"Children should think individually and act independently, and
mother should value children's individuality and
independency." This is (or was) the common idea in Japan but
in reality children are often considered selfish, if they
really do so.

Image of good children is tame, cheerful, obedient to adults,
keeping rules and not conspicuous at class either in good way
and bad way. I (Yasuko) think being not conspicuous at class
could be one of the most important things because if a child
attracts too much attention from class, no matter what the
reason is, the child could be bullied by other children. It
implies that children have to study hard enough to make their
parents happy but they have to act as if they were at average.
If you are not good at studying that could be the reason for
bullying too. Back to the main subject. The reality is that
good child is the one which is convenient to control for the
society.

That's all. I hope this helps you some how.

A 8 An example from a student's learning journal in English and Japanese

Student B (M)

August 8, 2003 – August 22, 2003

Your attitude toward studying at school and at home:

- We studied Kanji in Japanese.
- In Drama we played theater game.
- In Science we learned the solution for the time when you are in an emergency.

What did you work hard on?

- I tried to remember the name of all new classmates.
- Next week, I want to talk to friends as much as possible because this week, I did not talk to many friends. There were so many new people that I did not get chance to talk.

Others:

- I want to heal my elbow injury as soon as possible so that I can play baseball again. I play baseball in a club team.

September 1, 2003 – September 5, 2003

Your attitude toward studying at school and at home:

- We learned about cells in Science.
- In Math we studied equations.
- We learned how to improve speaking in Japanese.

Self-evaluation

- I tried to get 100% on the test of ESL because my ESL teacher told me that my English have not been improved since last year.
- Good thing was that I learned a lot of new things about cells in Science.
- Math teacher did not show up to the last Math class. I thought I should go to the office and tell about it, but I did not. Now I think I should have done it. Next time I will do so.

Others:

- I have not started to play baseball yet because I played catch and it made my elbow injury worse. I know I must not play catch but I cannot help it. I will not play catch any more until my elbow injury heals completely.

September 8, 2003 – September 11, 2003

Your attitude toward studying at school and at home:

- In German we studied with a workbook. It was a little difficult for me.

What did you work hard on?

- I did my best for my Japanese test but I got only 81%. I want to study more so that I can get a better grade.
- I learned more new things about cells using microscope in Science.
- I asked my friend about German I did not get during the class but now I think it might have been a better idea to ask my German teacher a questions. What do you think about this?

Others:

- I read my essay aloud. I thought I read too fast. I should have read more slowly.

学習の記録 (Reflection Journal)
(8)月(18)日~(8)月(22)日

シターでやるゲーム!?!

~~シターゲーム~~

シターでやるゲームのこと
シターゲームって
何なの?

授業や家庭学習で取り組んだこと:

授業で、日本語では、漢字、ドラマでは、シターゲーム、その他に
英語、理科では、緊急のときの流れは1111のがをならしました。

どうすれば1111の? 教えて!

努力したこと、学習の成果^{は?}、反省、今後の目標:

努力したことは、クラスの新生の名前をおぼえること。😊
今週はあまりいろいろな人と話さなかったのもっといろいろな人と
話したいと思います。

どうして話すチャンスがなかったのかな?

週明けだから新しい人ばかりで話せません。

学習の成果は、とくにありません

😊K!

その他:

日本で野球をやっている人ですけど、おじをこわしてはったから早くおあした1111
どことで野球をしているの? ポジションはどことなの?
日本のどの野球が好きなの? これとも又リーグのチームなの?

野球のリーグスネックというチームでやっていてポジションは
ピッチャーとピッチャーです。ピッチャー!!! とても重要なポジションだね。

日本の野球のほうが好きです。

私も日本の野球の方が好きよ。

学習の記録 (Reflection Journal)

(9)月(1)日~(9)月(5)日

名前: ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~

授業や家庭学習で取り組んだこと:

授業では理科でまた糸細胞の事を習いました。ESLでまあたまたの英
 数学ではまた方程式。日本語では、漢字と教科書の話がたは、^{むずかしうだね。}
 読みました。体育ではフリスビーとサッカーをやりました。^{どっか}
 体育でフリスビーをするの? 日本の学校でフリスビーなんて
 しないような気がするけど。楽しそうね!

努力したこと、学習の成果、反省、今後の目標:

あら、どうしてなのかな?

よく書けています。

ESLで去年より英語がへたになっているといわれたのでテストで百点を
 とれるようにがんばりました。理科でやっている糸細胞の勉強で
 しらなかったことをいっはいしたのでよかったです。😊

この前の数学の時間で先生がなくて、言川に行こうかなと
 思ったけれどまあいいやとほたらかしてしまっただけで、
 思いました。今度からは言川に行きます。

そうね、呼びに行き方がよかったですね。でも頑張って、
 その他:「授業がつかれておいた、ではなく「次は先生を呼びに行こう」と思うように
 なることばいいことだと思おう。

野球の練習がまだできません。なぜならば、ひじをこわしているの
 にボールを投げたりしてあそんでいるからできません。投げるとはいいけれど、
 思うんですが、なげとしまうんです。今度からはなげないほうがいいです。

ま、
 ② フックボールを投げで越えてしまうという
 気持ちもわかるけど、まずは完全にひじを治して
 ほう方がいいね。好きなことができないのはつらいね。

A 9 An email from a Japanese colleague discussing friendships

— Original Message —

From: [REDACTED]
To: Patricia Mertin
Sent: Thursday, December 18, 2003 2:31 PM
Subject: Re: The Japanese students and English

Pat,

We talked about English learning and it was very interesting. Basically, they do NOT really think that a language distance between English and Japanese is a factor which makes their English learning difficult.

Most of them think that it is the Japanese culture that prevents them from learning English effectively. In Japan, they are not encouraged so much to speak out in the class. Therefore, they tend to be quiet in the classroom. They also think that the other students might think them shy and very boring because of their quiet attitude.

They think that if they can make friends with non Japanese students and have more chances to practice speaking, they can improve their English. BUT the problem is that it is very hard to make friends with the other students due to their limited command of English. It is a vicious circle, isn't it. They would like to make friends with non-Japanese students but the groups are formed already (do you see what I am trying to say? You know that girls tend to stay in the same group.) and it is hard to have a chance to get to know non-Japanese students. As I mentioned above, they also think that the other students might be thinking that Japanese students are a bit boring because they seem shy. They also commented that it is easy for them to make friends with other Asian students such as Koreans.

They also said that the students from the same country tend to have the same kind of interest and easy to make friends with. But they are aware that being friends does not mean having the same interest or sharing the same culture. They also told me that they find it interesting to get to know about new culture.

They also said that speaking is the most difficult. They would like to say something but it takes time to come up with the right words on the spot. Sometimes they cannot get the meaning across, which makes them lose their motivation to try harder.

Well, this is what we talked about. I think it was a bit hard to ask them to identify what exactly makes their English learning difficult. They talked about how to make friends a lot, as you noticed. But I myself think that a language distance does play a big role and I thought it was interesting to know that

