

スクール・インターンシップ・プログラム(GSIP)による
新たな学びの可能性 (2)

—Reminiscence of a Teacher Trainee—

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Much of our life is guided by the hand of destiny and I think it was my destiny that brought me to Japan. Before coming to Japan I had an absolute interest in its international standing when it comes to science and mathematics as revealed by the result of the Third International Mathematics and Science Study. I readied and convinced myself that I would spend one and half years under teacher training program but I did not expect that I would be teaching English. It was beyond my imagination. Yet seventeen months have indeed passed and Japan is very much part of my life as a teacher.

One can say that I came to Japan by way of my interest in studying elementary mathematics education in Japan courtesy of Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, Sports and Technology (MEXT) Scholarship. I had majored Social Science during college and my graduate studies in the late 90's was focused on teaching elementary mathematics. As an elementary public school teacher back in my country, I have been teaching English for about ten years. Since I want to improve the teaching of mathematics in the Philippines I followed the advice of my superiors, colleagues and friends to pursue my interest in uplifting and improving mathematics education particularly in our school.

On October 2005, I went to Japan with only courage and God's guidance that I had with me. I spent the first winter of my life in Morioka, Iwate where I was assigned as teacher trainee at Iwate University. In truth, my knowledge of Japan prior to my arrival was distinctly stereotyped and my conclusions both negative and positive were based on judgments I made from stories I heard and learned from history books. I know that stereotyping prevails everywhere but I had no well-defined image of Japan except that of a highly organized society and world's leading in economy and technology.

My first impression of the real Japan occurred immediately upon my arrival. Japan is really a very progressive and systematic country. We were welcome by JASSO members and I felt that I was that very important person well taken care of. In that day the impression I had before about Japanese eroded and when we were met by AVIS members in Morioka station, I was gradually filled with admiration for the wonderful people of Japan. There seem something unique in these people I told myself.

It was the beginning of my involvement with Japanese and became more closely integrated into the life of this country. During the first month I had many chances of meeting the people, learning the language, visit temples and experience a totally new different culture. It seemed and I knew I wanted to come back to those places and meet again those people and spend more time with them. These circumstances, opportunities and choices led me in finding happiness and comfort to live in Japan. For almost nine months I tried to study the language, learn the culture and observe somehow their educational system.

As teacher trainee at Iwate University, my main focus was to study the elementary mathematics teaching strategies and methods that can be adopted in the Philippine educational setting. However as part of Education Department of Iwate University, an opportunity was given called GSIP Fellowship and it was about a half-year agreement. I worked in Fuzoku Junior High School (Fuzoku means the school affiliated to the state university) as team teacher with Japanese English teacher. This meant assuming the secondary role in the classroom and being a speech model and grammar consultant rather than a teacher. I was never trained as team teacher. It was a kind of baptism. Yet, what made the internship so exciting was that, I was able to introduce my country to Japanese students. It became the medium through which English conversation began where the range of topics include sport, music, dance, history, travel, culture and foods.

This was the way we explored the English language during the first semester of my internship in Fuzoku Junior High Scholl. Hence, I considered this a unique and privileged opportunity to integrate myself into the system and to learn about Japanese education which was my main purpose of coming

to Japan although I need to concentrate on elementary mathematics education. I had been placed into a position where I could both observe and participate in the educational system which many countries admire.

This was not an easy task I borrowed tapes of spoken Japanese and posted Kanji, Hiragana and Katakana characters to learn the languages so I can communicate effectively. But I soon found that as much as I tried to master Japanese I was surrounded by people who wanted to practice English and those were the students. I considered myself very fortunate to experience becoming an English team teacher.

During my second semester of internship I recalled one article I read from the internet about the life of team teachers in Japanese schools. I read about some complaining that they were being used as “human tape recorders” to give model readings or who felt they were not free to control their own lessons. But in my whole internship I never had that feeling of being used as human tape recorders, I felt the opposite instead. The Japanese English teachers in Fuzoku made me feel I was important and that I was playing a great role in the classroom I felt very emotionally satisfied when I saw Japanese students learning from me.

As an intern, I found myself the intrigued observer taking notes of what I saw and experienced and analyzing the inter-relationships between students and teachers, teachers and colleagues, colleagues and administrator. Rather than feeling used as tape recorder I found myself amazed at the structure of society and the hierarchical powers which generated order and respect in the classroom. Those were the times to examine the Japanese elementary and junior high schools, to admire its strengths and recognize its weakness.

When I began my internship in Fuzoku I set a goal and that was to develop the students' self-esteem in speaking English. I felt very sad meeting students who can speak English well but lack the courage to speak. Why do I say this? I often met students along the corridor who were eager to speak with me in private when their peers were not around yet when called upon in class to respond, they often choose to remain silent and refused to reply. I told them that they can speak well but what they need is constant practice, so I encouraged them to speak English whenever there is a chance to do so. I

advised them to read an English newspaper or any article for twenty minutes day or listen to English songs or even watch English program on TV. These activities will help them little by little learn and appreciate the language. They may not see the importance of English in their lives now but sooner when they enter the work force they will realize how important it is.

The last day of my internship in Fuzoku, I expressed what I sensed regarding the feelings of students towards English. I told them that they should not study English for the tests or to please the teachers. ***Rather they should study for themselves.*** They should study for their own growth and maturity. I explained to them that if they study for the teacher, it is not them who will fail but the teacher because they will lose the important point of the lesson that is to become a lifelong learner.

In some ways I wanted to effect change but I also knew that as a foreigner I am culturally restricted in what I could do and say. Language and culture are so integrated that one cannot fully understand without a mastery of the other and I often felt that the longer I stayed in Japan the less I know.

Aside from the internship in Fuzoku Junior High, GSIP also gave me the opportunity to go to elementary schools. My visits to elementary schools added insights how the elementary school system in Japan works. I was able to interview some teachers regarding discipline and teaching strategies in mathematics. The teachers and students were very enthusiastic when they introduced the different Japanese games, traditions, foods, and festivals. That was the time I learned not only about Japanese education but also its cultural. In the last elementary school I visited, I was able to hear the ku-ku song or multiplication table song which I have been longing to hear since I heard about it last year. At last, I had the chance to hear it and I can share this strategy to teachers in the Philippines because I believe it is the most effective way for the pupils to memorize the multiplication table at a very early age. It was really a great opportunity.

I owe many things also from my teaching fellow who was always by my side since the GSIP began. He was always in touch with me and shared his insights in everything we did. He was my constant partner. He was honest and gentle in giving his comments because of these I was able to do what was

expected from me. He was always boosting my morale, made me confident and performed the assigned task. So even though how mountainous the job is, when there is somebody like him you can do it to the fullest. From his also, I learned some rudiments of Nihongo.

I have learned another thing from this internship. For a thing or a program to be successful, **partnership** is very important. The task becomes easier and lighter when there are two people doing it. This thing is not eminent in the school where I belong. I think this is again another thing that I should suggest to my administrator and colleagues.

Being part of the GSIP of Iwate University really helped me broaden my perspective of Japanese educational system and culture. I was able to view from different angles the life of the Japanese students. These experiences had enriched my experiences as a teacher and as an individual person. The conversations I had with my superiors in the program made me more understanding and patient. Cultural differences and language barrier should not be a hindrance to make the relationship flow smoothly. As Marcel Proust (1934) once said, **"A true voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new lands, but in seeing with new eyes."**

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