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**The Experiences of New Zealand Assistant Language
Teachers in Japan**

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ABSTRACT

The objective of the research was to gain an insight into the work experiences of New Zealand Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs) in Japan. Five previous ALTs who were hired through the Japan Exchange and Teaching Programme (JET) were interviewed on their experiences living in Japan and working in Japanese schools. I also provide insights from my own experiences as an ALT. Interviews were analyzed and recurring or major themes were identified; strengthened identities as New Zealanders, shared value with Māori in Japanese culture, very little conflict, different cultural acceptance of working many hours overtime and avoidance of conflict through being indirect, and the ALT being a native speaker celebrity and a joker/entertainer. The research has implications for future ALTs to be more informed and prepared for what they might encounter on the job, and for Japanese teachers to gain an insight into some New Zealand ALT perspectives, which may be illuminating for those who may not have been previously exposed to New Zealand culture.

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INTRODUCTION

In 2015, I worked for a year in Japan as an Assistant Language Teacher (ALT) in the Japan English Teaching (JET) programme. The aim of this thesis is to understand some of my work experiences, and those of other New Zealand ALTs working in Japan. I began my research while completing my year of being an ALT in Japan. I was interested in learning about other ALT's experiences and sharing them with future and current ALTs. I think there are things that can be learned from this which may assist this audience with understanding their situation within the Japanese context and contribute to better relations at work.

The experiences of ALTs have been looked at by several authors (Chandler & Kootnikoff, 1999; McConnell, 2002; Wada & Cominos, 1995), but there is a gap in the literature when it comes to New Zealand ALTs. New Zealanders have a unique culture, and I believe this affects our experiences working in Japan, and how we view those experiences. I believe I can help to prepare future New Zealand ALTs by sharing these work experiences, and by presenting background information on the programme and Japanese culture provide another layer of understanding of those experiences for the reader.

In the first two chapters, I begin by presenting background information. In *Chapter One: The JET Programme and the ALT Position*, the programme that I and my research participants went through in preparation to work as ALTs in Japan is introduced, as well as what being an ALT entails. Every situation is different, however the section in Chapter One on *A Day in the Life of an ALT* describes what school days were for me, as an ALT. In *Chapter Two: Japanese Culture*, the cultural context of where the ALTs are working is discussed. This is an important chapter for providing cultural information that allows an informed analysis of data in Chapters Four to Six from an outside, anthropological perspective. In *Chapter Three: Research Method and Participants*, I describe the methodology used in my research. This includes an introduction to the six participants, including why they decided to be ALTs on the JET Programme. Here I discuss my use of both interviews and autoethnography. I explain my use of pseudonyms and explain why I have chosen to do my research the way I have.

Chapters Four, Five and Six present research findings and discussions. In *Chapter Four: Being a New Zealander in Japan and a Japanese Welcome*, the increase in their sense of national identity by the research participants while in Japan is presented and also the care the participants received from their Japanese colleagues, which is linked to the Japanese cultural emphasis on interdependency. *Manākitanga*, a Māori cultural value shared with Japanese culture, is discussed as it was found to make adjusting to life in Japan easier for the one Māori research participant. The theme of feeling very welcomed at school is presented, which was an experience shared by myself and all of the research participants. Part of *manākitanga* and the Japanese care and interdependency, is attentiveness. I look at this philosophically drawing on Han's (2014) take on attentiveness that she developed after her fieldwork experience in the poor neighbourhood of *La Pincoya* on the outskirts of Santiago, Chile.

In *Chapter Five: Cultural Differences and Understandings in the Workplace*, I discuss the cultural emphasis on being 'indirect' in Japan and look at how this affected conflict at work is discussed. The other part of this chapter looks at the cultural differences in work-life balance between New Zealanders and Japanese, and how this affected the research participants. I look at how different socialisation and discourse is part of the difference in work-life balance in Japan and New Zealand, and I use the example of Mr Kamei, who officially died from overwork (*kurōshi*) to illustrate how his strong Japanese values and disciplined work ethic contributed to what occurred to him.

In *Chapter Six: Native Speaker, Celebrity, and Joker*, different roles the ALTs play and what they bring to class is discussed. I also present an argument against 'native-speakerism' (where native speakers' English is considered superior) and argue for Japan to make English its own. What English as a second language speakers can bring to the classroom is highlighted by my research participants in this section.

Finally, in the *Conclusion* I describe limitations in my research, implications of the fact that the ALT position is not a career for most ALTs, and the successes which my participants believe they had with teaching students or being a positive influence on

them. I also look at possible future research related to my own, and finish by summarising some of what I hope has been accomplished by my research.

CHAPTER ONE: THE JET PROGRAMME AND THE ALT POSITION

In this chapter I begin with background information on the JET Programme and the ALT position within this programme. In the section *a Day in the Life of an ALT*, based on my experience as an ALT I describe what being an ALT entailed for me, such as commuting to school, eating lunch with the students, class, school events and staff parties. In the subsequent section *English Teaching in Japan*, the context of how English is taught in Japan by Japanese teachers is presented, and the motivating role of ALTs is described. Lastly, relevant to *Chapter Six: Native Speaker, Celebrity, and Joker*, I discuss the importance of native English in the Japanese education system.

THE JET PROGRAMME

The Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) program has been running since 1987 “to promote internationalisation at the local level” (Embassy of Japan in New Zealand, 2015). New Zealand was one of the four original countries invited to participate (Embassy of Japan in New Zealand, 2015), along with the United States of America, the United Kingdom and Australia (The Jet Programme, 2015). The JET Programme offers the positions of Assistant Language Teacher (ALT), Coordinator of International Relations (CIR) and Sports Education Advisor (SEA) currently from 40 countries (The Jet Programme, 2015). On July 1st, 2014, of the 4476 JET participants from around the world, 255 were from New Zealand (approximately 6%). Of the 255 New Zealand participants, 242 were ALTs and only 13 were CIRs (Embassy of Japan in New Zealand, 2015). Americans comprised just over half (2457 of which 2364 were ALTs) of JET participants (The Jet Programme, 2015).

The programme is administered by local contracting organisations “in cooperation with” government departments; the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications (MIC), the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), and the Council of Local Authorities for International Relations (CLAIR) (CLAIR, 2014 p. 191). According to the JET *General Information Handbook*, the duty of a JET participant is to “promote international exchange on a grassroots level” and to teach people in the community

and workplace about your home and to learn about Japan, and it is an experience that allows you to learn about yourself too (CLAIR, 2014, p. 191).

Historical Overview

JET was initiated during “the height of the US-Japan trade war” and was a “gift” to the Americans at the 1986 Ronyasu Summit between the Japanese Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone and the US President Ronald Reagan (McConnell, 2000). The following year the Programme began with JETs from the US, Britain, Australia and New Zealand. In the early years, there was no shortage of criticism towards the Programme, and in the first year Japanese officials were pressured by 90 percent of JET participants to improve the programme’s policies (McConnell, 2000). Criticisms were expressed in the media domestically and overseas, including in the *Japan Times* which reported “Apathy Rampant in the JET Program”, and a dire appraisal in the *San Jose Mercury News* “The Japanese government is spending millions to create potential enemies” (McConnell, 2000, p. 3). Ten years after its inception the Programme was considered by many, including Japanese officials and participants, to be “one of the most successful policies in the post war era” (McConnell, 2000, p. 3). By the thirteenth year, McConnell found that “nearly 95 percent of JET participants would recommend or strongly recommend the program to a friend” (2000, p. 4).

The JET Programme is now 28 years old, and a lot has changed in the Programme and in Japan. In particular, the size of the Programme has grown from 848 participants from four countries in 1987 to, as noted above, 4,476 participants from 40 countries in 2014 (CLAIR, 2014). As a result of the success of the JET Programme, there are JET Alumni associations in all of the countries that participate in the programme, and many JETs continue on a career path that makes use of their time on the JET Programme. Jobs and graduate programs in Asia-related fields are popular choices for previous JETs (McConnell, 2000), and some JETs that I have met have gone on to work for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in New Zealand (a kiwi JET), to lecture at university (a Canadian JET), and to be an international student coordinator (an American JET).

JET Support

Airfares to and from Japan are paid for by the JET Programme and most contacting organisations assist with finding or providing accommodation for the participant. New Zealand participants have a domestic pre-departure orientation, and on arrival in Japan a more extensive orientation with JETs from around the world, which is held in Tokyo. The pre-departure orientation I attended in Wellington in 2014 included information on what we needed to prepare before we left such as *omiyage* (souvenirs) for our colleagues and what would happen when we arrived in Tokyo. There was a speech from Hamish Beaton, author of *Under the Osakan Sun* (2008) and a previous JET ALT, and there was an intensive beginner lesson in Japanese language. At this orientation we were provided with the *JET General Handbook* (2014) and the *Japanese for JETs* (CLAIR, 2014a) textbook. The Tokyo Orientation included seminars on teaching English, Japanese etiquette, and Japanese language lessons catering to beginner, intermediate, and advanced learners.

The Association for Japan Exchange and Teaching (AJET) was founded in 1988 and is an international volunteer organisation of JET participants. They provide support and information to JETs including a counselling service and an online magazine (<http://ajet.net/about-us/>). They express opinions and concerns of JETs to CLAIR and government ministries involved with the JET program (AJET, 2015).

Support post-JET can be found with a local JET Alumni Association. The JET Programme Alumni Association (international) was created in 1989, and consists of 52 regional Chapters in 17 countries. JETAA Chapters, such as the Wellington Chapter which I belong to, promote Japan in the region with social events relating to Japanese culture (such as Japanese conversation evenings) and support returning JETs to readjust and to keep their connections with Japan and JET (JET Alumni Association International, 2015).

What is an ALT?

ALTs hired through JET require a Bachelor's Degree or higher (studied in English), and many do not have prior teaching experience (Amaki, 2008; Embassy of Japan New Zealand, 2015; Ohtani, 2010). New Zealand JETs must be a citizens of New

Zealand (Embassy of Japan in New Zealand, 2015). According to Amaki (2008, p55), the duties of ALTs “include playing a significant role in the preparation of materials along-side staff English teachers, assisting Japanese students in elementary school, as well as in junior and senior high school, and helping the staff English teachers to elevate their own levels of English proficiency”.

JET ALTs work mainly at Japanese public schools. The 2014 *JET General Information Handbook* (CLAIR, 2014) indicates that ALTs take part in “team teaching”, with the goal that they, the class, and the Japanese Teacher of English (JTE) will participate together in communicative activities. According to CLAIR, having an ALT in the classroom can increase student motivation and can increase their understanding of English language and foreign cultures. The handbook includes the duties of conjointly planning lessons with the JTE and evaluating lessons, although due to the time of year some ALTs arrive the curriculum may already be planned (CLAIR, 2014).

ALTs can be hired through the JET program or without the JET program where they are employed from within Japan by the contracting organisation without assistance of the JET Programme. In both cases, the School, Board of Education or Prefecture directly hires the ALT, but for JET participants the JET programme stipulates the pay and ensures that tickets to and from Japan are provided (contingent on the completion of the contract) and other rules and regulations for organisations contracting JET participants, such as a limit of five years on the JET programme (after which, it is possible to work as an ALT outside of the JET programme) (CLAIR, 2014). In the area where I worked, private ALTs included people outside of JET participating countries such as the Philippines and Italy, and they worked part time. This is not necessarily how other contracting organisations work, but it seems that this is one way that non-JET ALTs can be different from JET ALTs.

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF AN ALT

I worked at three schools- One was an elementary school and two were junior high schools. Two were about one hour away, and one was about twenty minutes away from where I lived. For most of my time in Japan, I went to school by bus. Before the

school year began, a senior ALT would teach us which buses we could take and bring us to our schools to introduce ourselves.

On average, my school days consisted of being in three or four fifty minute periods out of the six periods a day. However it wasn't unusual to have two classes, and occasionally one or no class. Before each period, I would try to talk to the teacher about what we would be doing in class if I didn't already know. Japanese teachers are very busy, and this didn't always happen. It also depends on the teacher; some teachers would tell me in advance, some would even give me lesson plans, while others may have not been sure what we would do but provide me with a page number of the English text book. These discussions, when they happened, allowed the teacher or myself to suggest ways for me to contribute to the class, such as preparing exercises or a game.

On Monday and Friday mornings in all of my schools there would be a staff meeting. Teachers would report on news, events, how particular students were doing, and timetable changes among other relevant information. Teachers with specific responsibilities, such as coaching a school club, would speak about it, so there were only a few speakers at each meeting.

Teacher desks in my schools' staff rooms were organised with teachers working with the same year groups sitting at the same table. Every school year this would change. I was always seated near the front of the room, not too far from *Kyoto sensei* (vice principal) who kept the staff room in check.

At two of my schools, one or two students would bring me to class from the staff room. At the third school, a junior high school which I worked at the longest, most of the time I brought myself to class, but this depended on the teacher. This also occurred for eating lunch (*kyushoku*) with the students. In elementary school, they would play 'paper, scissors, rock' to decide who I would sit with. At classes in junior high school, normally I would be seated next to a particularly eager student or at a spare desk due to a student being away sick.

Eating lunch with the students could either be a huge success or half an hour of mild discomfort. Most of the time, it was a chance to get to know students more, especially some of the students that participate less in English class. I enjoyed learning about them and talking about everything from their life to my country and myself, and I feel that more important than practicing speaking English were the bonds created, and encouraging the normalcy of talking with a foreigner. I could speak Japanese at a conversational level from the beginning of my work on JET, and this really helped to form strong relationships with my students and put them at ease. However, when attending homeroom meetings, some teachers would remind the students to speak English, and because they sat very near to us I felt like the added pressure of the presence of the homeroom teacher on already nervous students was more inhibiting than conducive to English conversation.

After lunch, what I did depended on the school I attended. At Elementary school, I would talk to the younger children in the playground (the students I didn't teach), they would show me their skills on the playground and try out their English. At the junior high school I attended the most, I would walk the halls and stop to talk to students, in particular the older ones (3rd year) who tended to have the most confidence and interest in talking to me. At the other junior high school I would do the same, but would not talk for so long before going back to the staff room where I often had marking to do before the end of the day.

After school, as a mother I had to pick up my son and cook dinner, which all became quite late with the bus commute, so I didn't participate much in clubs that were available to ALTs. I joined tea ceremony club a few times, and when school finished early I would listen to the brass band club. However, clubs are a good opportunity for ALTs to get involved with the school and get to know students better, and some ALTs felt that this was more important than what they contributed in class.

Board of Education Days

The school year runs from April to December, with summer holidays from late July to early September. During most of the school holidays, in my area we were expected to work. This meant going to the Board of Education (BOE) office in the city and

preparing lessons, and also planning English camp and planning and providing fun English classes at the international centre. Holiday days were shorter than regular school work days, however six hours a day was more than enough to do the work we were delegated. ALTs also studied Japanese, and in my case I also worked on my thesis, others even played games.

The place we worked at the BOE were our own rooms (spare meeting rooms in the same building as the BOE) but at one stage we were moved to a building down the road where a few other government employees worked. There were sometimes complaints that we were too loud, which we were, and I believe they tried to keep us in places where we would be least disruptive (understandably). BOE days sometimes really did feel like holidays.

***Enkais* and Sports Festivals**

School *enkais*, or drinking parties, were a good opportunity to get to know teachers that I did not work with. The first *enkai* I went to, I was seated right next to the principal which was very daunting, but it allowed me to get to know him better. Due to having a partner and a young child, I never went to after school parties but I heard many good stories about Japanese teachers letting loose. I worked at one of my schools for only two days a month, but they still invited me to *enkais*, sports festivals and music concerts. They made me feel extremely welcome. Sports festivals are serious affairs, and I felt honoured to be running in the teacher relay race. It's a big event the students practice for, and being able to attend showed my support and commitment to the school, even though I was unsure what I should be doing a lot of the time.

ENGLISH TEACHING IN JAPANESE SCHOOLS

In order to prepare students for the university entrance exam, there is an emphasis on grammar and written English in Japanese junior high schools and senior high schools. English is taught at least partially, sometimes mainly, through the grammar translation method. The grammar translation method is where a grammar rule is explained, usually in Japanese, and then practiced by translating from Japanese to English and

English to Japanese (McConnell, 2000). This method is effective for preparing students for the senior high school English exam and the university entrance exam. This does not allow for much creativity or interaction, and that is where the ALT comes in and is most useful.

ALTs: Motivating and Fun

The grammar translation method is declining slowly, and ALTs are a resource for incorporating communicative activities and opportunities for students and JTEs.

JTEs who were taught through the grammar translation method may not know any other methodology, and ALTs can bring ideas from the school systems in their home countries to use alongside the JTEs methodology (JET Programme, 2009).

Language teaching aimed at improving reading rather than speaking skills may be a contributing factor to some students disliking English. According to one Japanese Teacher of English, the grammar-translation method should “not be the only methodology taught in language classes”, it is implicit that this Japanese teacher takes it as a given that grammar-translation method should be used (Muroi, 1999, p. 13). McConnell (2000) found when observing the English classes in Japan that teachers were mainly stationed at the front of class and students answered questions only when directly asked. The “sober business” of English learning in secondary schools is counter to how ALTs are trained at the Tokyo orientation (McConnel, 2000, p. 212). Instead of a passive student who can receive the knowledge imparted to them by the lecturing teacher, ALTs are taught the ideal learner is an active learner and the teacher is there to facilitate their learning. According to McConnell it is the ALTs who believe English classes need livening up, “From playing the guitar to turning the class into a dramatic scene to playing hangman and twenty questions, the ALTs seemed willing to try anything to energise the class...” (McConnell, 2000, p. 213).

Native English in Japan

While English is used in countries around the world, and is a common medium between native speakers of other languages, Japanese society continues to put the native English speaker on a pedestal as having “authentic” English (Saito & Hatoss,

2011, p.108). Perpetuating this are English conversation schools which advertise their “native speakers’ English” and portrays native English as what students should aspire to (Saito & Hatoss, 2011, p. 108). A “native speaker” is usually defined as a person who has spoken a language from birth or earliest childhood, as opposed to learning it later in life.

Ironically, by stressing being able to speak “authentic” English like that of the native speaker instead of aiming for fluency (defined as the ability to speak or write a particular language easily and accurately), negative perceptions of non-native English and its users may arise, including the view some Japanese people may have of their own English. For this reason, they may wait until they are proficient in English before they wish to use it (Saito & Hatoss, 2011). This could be a factor in the uneasiness one of my research participants found some Japanese had with being confronted by an English speaker and fearing speaking English, and the lack of confidence many Japanese school children have in speaking English. This lack of confidence is also compounded by the approach emphasising grammar and written English rather than speaking English in the language classroom.

English language textbooks authorised by the Japanese government emphasise native speakers as models of English speakers (Saito & Hatoss, 2011). Kirkpatrick (2007, p. 190) argues that using native speaker English as the model in the classroom devalues the fluency of non-native English teachers and for students “renders the goal of learning the language to appear unattainable” (p. 190). Honna (1995) also adds that aspiring to speak like a native speaker could lead to feelings of shame in speaking any other variety of English.

Many ALTs then, are in a prestigious position as actual native speakers. According to Amaki (2008, p.55), “public school students are in a position to benefit from the ALT system as a result of their exposure to native English in the classroom”. Despite this, not all ALTs are native English speakers (for example, ALTs are accepted from countries such as Singapore), and as one of my ALT research participants noted, some teachers may prefer American English or even request a non-American native English speaker to use an American accent.

Kirkpatrick proposes a lingua franca approach which aims for communication, across cultures and linguistic boundaries, rather than a mimicking of native speaker ‘norms’. In reality, Davis (2003) believes that native speakers and non-native speakers of English cannot necessarily be told apart. Thus, Japanese school students in Matsuda’s (2003) research saw themselves as being on the margin of the English speaking world, with native speakers practically owning English. Because Japanese learners may be marginalised in the global English world by Japanese homogenising and idealising the “native speaker”, the Japanese learner will remain a cultural and linguistic “other” (Saito & Hatoss, 2011, p. 110) lacking the confidence to use the English they have learned in school.

This chapter looked at the particular programme and position the research participants worked, and at English in the classroom. Next I present and discuss aspects of Japanese culture that mediate the context of the work experiences of ALTs in Japan.

CHAPTER TWO: JAPANESE CULTURE

My research participants and I feel it is important to understand particular cultural differences, so they are discussed in some detail. In this chapter, *Japanese Relationships*, *Japanese Communication* and *Conflict Avoidance* are discussed. Under the section *Japanese relationships*, I discuss the collectivistic and individualistic cultural divide, of which both Māori and Japanese are on the collectivistic end of the spectrum and Pākehā are on the more individualistic end. One of my research participants is Māori, Rochelle, and adjusted easily to Japanese culture. *Amaeru*, which is intimately linked to reciprocity and interdependency, was something which she felt was shared with her culture (as *manaakitanga*) and is brought up again in Chapter Four.

The other Japanese cultural aspects discussed are *Relationship Levels*, *Dependency*, *Restraint*, and *Obligation* because these provide a cultural context to better understand the relationships ALTs formed with Japanese people, and to be able to see possibilities in the relationships and experiences of ALTs beyond what the ALTs perceived themselves. In *time concepts*, the Japanese importance of the organization of time to be flexible for any change in circumstance of other people, to be time orientated towards people, tells us something about how Japanese relationships in that they are prioritized over keeping perfect schedule (although keeping schedule is still very important in Japan). Not all relationships are prioritized however, mostly flexibility is reserved for those higher on the hierarchy, which is discussed last in this section.

In *Group achievements over individual achievements* the priority of the group in Japanese society is discussed, something that mediates relationships. The section *Just Being Present Matters* is relevant to relationships in that it describes how even if we don't feel we are part of something, being present is being part of the group and ALT presence or absence may have an effect on our relationships at work. This section provides background information for Chapter Five, where the work-life balance experiences of ALTs and the perception of the Japanese work-life balance are discussed. *Hierarchy* is a factor of Japanese society that affects ALTs experiences, not

only because they lived in Japanese society but because they themselves were on the hierarchy (somewhere near the bottom at school).

In the section *Japanese Communication*, the tendency to be indirect for Japanese is discussed. Under the section *High/Low Context Cultures* I discuss how the language is linked to the indirectness of Japanese communication. In the section *Indirect Japanese: Politeness* is where the importance of being indirect for etiquette is discussed, and New Zealand's own 'tall poppy syndrome' is brought up as a sign of the humility we expect of others, which is linked to the suppression of talking about oneself. In the section *Indirect Japanese: Harmony*, closely interconnected with politeness, the role of indirectness in maintaining harmony is discussed. The section *Indirect Communication Styles* discusses particular ways of being indirect, which are also brought up in *Chapter Five: Cultural Differences and Understandings in the Workplace*. These may be recognized, as we may have used or experienced some of them (they are not unique to Japanese culture). However the appropriateness of them may be different to our own culture, as being direct is appreciated more in some places within different cultures.

The next section, *Japanese Communication*, has relevance for data presented in Chapter Four, where the direct communication of ALTs has been a possible cause of conflict. In the section called *Conflict Avoidance* the traditionally and contemporarily valued attribute of perseverance, *gaman*, is discussed, as putting up with things, to *gaman*, means issues don't need resolving. Therefore, conflict is avoided. *Gaman*, as well as the tendency of Japanese to be indirect, are contributing factors to the ALT perceptions of the few minor incidences of conflict they experienced (which is further discussed in Chapter Four).

JAPANESE RELATIONSHIPS

Collectivistic Cultures

Both Māori (Brougham & Haar, 2013) and Japanese cultures (Oshika, 2001) are more collectivistic than Pākehā (or Western or Euro-American) culture. According to Hui & Triandis (1986), in more collectivistic societies the good of the group is

emphasised over individual goals, and interdependence and a concern for others are modalities of being. In contrast, Pākehā culture being more individualistic has more emphasis on self-efficiency and personal autonomy (Ting-Toomey, 1999). While the individualistic/collectivistic dichotomy has “a smell of superficiality and false generalisation” (Hofstede, 1983, p. 77) in practical terms it can be useful in understanding behaviour patterns in different societies and it has been useful in, and supported by, studies on global workplaces (Spector et al., 2007). However no society is simply individualistic or collectivistic, but some have more emphasis on the individualistic characteristics of the dichotomy model and some have more emphasis on the characteristics on the more collectivistic end of the spectrum.

Amaeru

In order to explain the Japanese forms of reciprocity and interdependence, I will begin by describing the Japanese term *amaeru*. *Amaeru* has no direct translation in English but the verb form of *amae* means “to depend and presume upon another’s benevolence” (Doi, 1973, p. 13). It can be compared to the mother-child relationship, an affectionate dependant relationship, where the mother is attentive to the well-being of the child and creates a feeling of togetherness (Doi, 1973). It requires a certain amount of homogeneity between people in order for the feelings of togetherness to occur. If someone is too different they will not be in harmony with others. It is a state of closeness, a sense of togetherness and interconnectedness between people that is also present in more individualistic cultures such as Western and Pākehā, but is emphasised more. The stand alone, strong independent view of individuals is more emphasised in Western and Pākehā culture.

Amaeru is linked to conflict avoidance, because people adjust themselves to the other and nurture the relationship (Christopher, 1983; Condon & Yousef, 1974). Conflict avoidance is a tendency especially of people in more collectivist societies. What this may mean though is that some offence caused by the ALTs in my research, for example, failing to reciprocate or appreciate *amaeru*, it is unlikely we would know due to the fact the New Zealand participants would not have been confronted about it.

Japanese Relationship Levels: Dependency, Restraint and Obligation

Japanese relationships can be categorised as being in the inner circle, middle zone or outer circle. In the inner circle, such as relationships with relatives, there is *amae* with no restraint (*enryo*). In the middle zone which includes work colleagues, there is *amae* and *enryo*. In the outer circle, that is with strangers, there is no *amae* or *enryo*. Where there are both *amae* and *enryo*, in the middle zone, there is also *giri*, or obligation. When kindness is shown the recipient becomes indebted, and hence the relationship becomes reciprocal. The inner circle relationships do not contain the same amount of obligation as other relationships and there is less guilt as “they are so close that *amae* gives them confidence in any sin being forgiven” (Sahashi, cited in Davies & Ikeno, 2011, p. 18).

This is very similar to the classic model of (primarily economic) reciprocity presented by anthropologist Marshall Sahlins (1972), who identified three main types – generalized, balanced, and negative – which are also associated with degrees of social distance. As Sahlins stressed, all forms of reciprocity create social relationships and are ultimately based on the establishment and recognition of reciprocal social obligations.

Giri is what makes reciprocity, that is, makes people obliged to reciprocate. Antepara (1995) believes *giri*-related misunderstandings are rife between Japanese and foreigners in Japan. He describes the case of his friend, who was given CDs and video recordings by a Japanese English teacher. In return, the ALT offered to burn some CDs for the teacher several times, but the offer was declined every time. One day, the Japanese English teacher “unleashed a torrent of complaints” and then added, “And how about all those tapes I’ve made for you? Why is it that you’ve never done anything for me?” (1995, p. 177). This misunderstanding could have been avoided if the ALT had burned the CDs and given them to the teacher, rather than offering to do so. It is notable that the ALT understood reciprocity, as it is a concept in every society. However the way it is done in Japan is different. I discuss later in this chapter how Japanese may not accept offers in order to be polite, and the giver needs to insist and reassure the receiver that it is no trouble. Alternatively to avoid the face-saving banter between giver and receiver, giving without asking allows the receiver to accept easily, as the deed has already been done.

Antepara (1995, p.179) comments that Westerners may have trouble imagining interdependent lifestyles in their “atomized lives”. A Japanese expression is that Japanese stick together like sticky Japanese rice, and Westerners are like foreign rice, separate and flaky (Antepara, 1995). Dependency and obligation create interdependency, which is a valued way of being in both Japanese and Māori society. Interdependency is important in Western and Pākehā society too, however independence is more sought after, while it is viewed more negatively in Japan. Just like a mother and her infant who cannot yet speak, not needing to use words to express things to be understood is part of the ideal interdependent relationship. This requires attentiveness to the other.

Time Concepts: People Oriented Time

Nishiyama (2000) discusses the differences between how Japanese and Americans conceptualise time. From the author’s description, I would say that most Pākehā New Zealanders are similar to Americans in sharing the same view of time due to both being from more individualistic cultures. Both Japanese and Americans value time, however for Americans time can be broken into equal frames, such as hours for hourly wages. Japanese (and Māori) people, on the other hand, may use “people-oriented time”. “People-orientated time” is time that is flexible and appointments can change time and duration based on others. So if a social situation requires staying longer at work, or waiting a long period of time for someone who is late (only if they have a higher status than oneself), schedules are adjusted so that responsibility towards others is not compromised (Nishiyama, 2000, p. 28). Time is taken seriously, but appointments and deadlines are contingent on social circumstances. For Westerners this can create frustration.

Group Achievements Over Individual Achievements

In Japanese society, group goals are more important than individual goals. In the workplace, individuals’ responsibilities extend past their job descriptions, and they are expected to help the whole company or institution they work for by assisting with responsibilities outside of their jobs. For example, in Japan one will work to solve

problems in a company if they receive a complaint, whether the source of the issue is in their department or not. Oshika (2001) believes this difference in the Japanese group responsibility emphasis and Western (including New Zealand) individual responsibility emphasis models can cause serious conflict when Japanese and New Zealanders work together. The individual responsibility for the New Zealander and the group responsibility felt by the Japanese person are part of their habitus, “the set of learned preferences or dispositions”, and only when encountering someone who doesn't think the same way does it come to light (Bourdieu, cited in Edgerton, Roberts & Peter, 2012, p. 305).

Work is a place where solidarity and group achievements contribute to the Japanese persons' well-being, and due to this satisfaction at work it is not seen as taking up or competing with precious private-time. This is a potential source of conflict for JETs as people from more individualistic cultures may feel that staying over time is sacrificing their personal time, and for no legitimate reason as they have completed their work (Oshika, 2001).

Just Being Present Matters

JETs are informed in the JET manual (2014) that just being present is important in itself, even if we feel we have nothing to contribute: “Your physical presence is often as important as what you actually do... Attendance in itself is every important” (CLAIR, 2014, p 101). The JET participant is told to “remember this when you feel you could be doing something more useful elsewhere or when you feel that you have nothing to contribute” (CLAIR, 2014, p. 101). In my experience, at times when I had no lessons and had lesson plans made, I did feel that my time was not being used productively by remaining at work. But, from the Japanese perspective, leaving early would be like leaving the workplace conglomerate workload on everyone else's shoulders. However, in my area most days the ALTs would leave at their designated leaving time, which is earlier than most, if not all, Japanese teachers. The “strong expectation and willingness of each employee to be a good member of the group” is what Oshika (2001, p.32) describes as the reason for Japanese working late, and without extra pay.

Hierarchy

The power distance between superiors and subordinates in Japanese society is at odds with Western views of equality and freedom. Anthropologist Ruth Benedict (1946) famously argued that Japan has a strict hierarchy in every group, from the family to the company or school. Hierarchical social structures are accepted as natural, and people accept their place within them more easily than they would if the hierarchy was viewed as arbitrary. Knowing one's place is important. The rules defining normal/abnormal are stricter and the allowance of variation from norms is smaller in Japanese society than in more individualistic Western societies such as New Zealand.

In Japanese society, Ruth Benedict argued that everyone has a proper place. Whatever your social or occupational position in society, whether you are a company employee, a mother or father, or a teacher at school, you must do what is expected of you in that role. This maintains harmony in society. Belonging somewhere, to *have* a proper place is important. If your proper place is a teacher at school, you must fit into society's expectations of that role. If as a teacher you are expected to come to school early to plan lessons thoroughly and to stay and help after school with club activities, this is what they will do or risk punishment from deviating from the norm. Being what a teacher 'should be' in Japanese society solidifies one's identity and acceptance by others (such as other teachers) as a member of the school faculty, as one of the group. Japanese are conservative in maintaining the status quo and not making changes that could disrupt interpersonal relationships. So if the norm is to work late, a Japanese individual who were to go against that pattern of behaviour by leaving 'on time' would be outcasting themselves more than if someone were to leave at what would be considered an inappropriate time in a more individualistic society. In more individualistic societies, hierarchy still exists, and some hierarchies may be very formal and rigid. However, in Japanese society, hierarchy is more strongly emphasised throughout institutions and groups, and is more permeated throughout society than in Western or Pākehā society.

However, in Japanese society, along with privilege in the hierarchy also comes responsibility; just as the subordinate should know how they should be acting, the superior must also act appropriately. Despite the respect and final decision-making

power being with the head, subordinates' ideas and views still matter and the superiors need to avoid making decisions that may inconvenience others. Subordinates "keep an eye on" the appropriateness of decisions, with the normalizing gaze and judgements, to ensure that group goals are at the forefront.

JAPANESE COMMUNICATION

High/Low Context Cultures

According to Moriizumi and Takai (2010) situational factors play an important role in communication. In more individualistic cultures situational factors play a lesser role in conflict styles also (Oetzel, et al., 2001). This is in line with Hall's (1976) high/low context culture theory. According to Hall's theory, languages are either more high or more low context. Languages that are more high context rely more heavily on the context outside of language, while languages on the low context side of the spectrum are more explicit and context outside of language is relied on to a lesser extent. Japanese culture is a high context one, and New Zealand Pākehā culture is a low context one. For example, the Japanese language doesn't need a subject for a complete sentence, however English always does. The Japanese language allows for greater ambiguity and frequent use of implicit messages is characteristic of the language (Hall, 1976).

Indirect Japanese: Politeness

One reason for Japanese avoidance of directness, is out of politeness. An attribution of *busho* (the samurai spirit), politeness should be the "outward manifestation of a sympathetic regard for the feelings of others" (Nitobe, 2004, p. 18). *Aimai* has multiple meanings, but all of which are synonymous or related to ambiguity (Oe, cited in Davis and Ikeno, 2011, p. 9). Its use is considered a virtue in Japan and although Japanese are not all conscious of it, it is emphasised in Japanese language. It is the expected mode of communication in Japanese society (Davies & Ikeno, 2011). Talking directly can be considered rude as it could be from assuming the other person knows nothing. Speaking ambiguously gives the other person the benefit of the doubt that they can understand without needing knowledge spoon-fed to them (Morimoto,

cited in Davies & Ikeno, 2011, p. 11). For example, if someone comments that they are too hot, they may be using anticipatory communication, and really be asking you to turn on the air conditioning. They are giving the listener the benefit of the doubt that they can work out what is meant, which is in line with the Japanese ideal to understanding what is meant.

Being indirect is also important when talking about oneself. As a relatively collectivist society, homogeneity and harmony is strived towards, so saying positive things about oneself can be seen as putting oneself above the group and creates a bad impression (Oshika, 2001). In individualistic societies people being expressive is encouraged by acceptance of differing views and the belief that individuals are individual, and will have their own point of view (Nishiyama, 2000). In more collectivistic cultures there is an emphasis on homogeneity, therefore, self-expression which can break the perception of sameness can disrupt the harmony.

Although New Zealand Pākehā culture is considered more individualistic than collectivist, the existence of a “tall poppy syndrome” would indicate that speaking highly of oneself is not looked at positively in New Zealand either. A tall poppy is a “person who is conspicuously successful and (frequently) as one whose distinction, rank, or wealth attracts envious notice or hostility” (Ramson, cited in Mouly & Sankaran, 2001, p.1). Tall poppy syndrome is where a “tall poppy” is cut down to size (Mouly & Sankaran, 2001). Therefore, to avoid being seen as a tall poppy, being humble and indirect in expressing one’s accomplishments could put New Zealand’s culture of tall poppy syndrome closer to Japanese indirect expression of good things about the self, than American culture where being direct about these things is more acceptable. I would surmise that it is possible that the relationships of New Zealand ALTs at work may be less prone to conflict than American ALTs, due to the New Zealand culture of humility and tall poppy syndrome.

Indirect Japanese: Harmony

Restricting self-expression is part of maintaining harmonious relationships in Japanese society. In addition, indirect and polite expressions are valued over direct and friendly ones (Condon & Yousef, 1974). The ideal relationship for Japanese is

one of attentiveness, where verbal communication is not needed for understanding (Tezuka, cited in Oshika, 2001, p. 20). Being direct then, would put into relief the fact that the relationship is far from ideal. This is where *amae* comes in: because the relationship is one of attentiveness and relying on benevolence (like the mother-infant relationship), one does not need to explicitly ask for something, as the ‘attentive other’ will pick up on the meaning and feelings and will offer help, to which the requesting person will likely hesitate to accept the offer. The person offering help needs to guess the intention of the other and be persistent and reaffirm their offer (e.g. Gao & Ting-Toomey, 1998). This is what had occurred in the example discussed earlier in this chapter, where the ALT accepted the decline of his offers to another teacher, which led to conflict.

The shared understandings Japanese have allow for polite indirectness to be understood. *Enryo*, or constraint (as discussed in the previous section) is used in communication, suppressing the expression of one's true feelings, or constraining the expression. There is *honne*, true sentiments, and *tatemae*, which is what is actually said (with *honne* as the actual sentiment intended to be conveyed) (Doi, cited in Johnson, 1993, p.160). Japanese are used to picking up the meanings behind *tatemae*, but for foreigners it can be frustrating as expressions may be taken at face value. For example, a senior ALT in my area warned the new ALTs that being told you are dressed nice at school, could imply that you are dressed *too nice* for school (personal communication, 2015).

Indirect Communication Styles

There are particular ways to express oneself indirectly in Japanese culture, as outlined by Nishiyama (2000). Anticipatory communication is where the speaker expects the listener to understand the meaning of what is being asked without having to actually ask. This is where the listener must guess, the speaker may hint at, or bring up a related topic in order to guide the listener's guess. Self communication is where something is said to oneself, with the hope that someone will hear it and help with what is being implied. Another indirect communication strategy is an understatement: an open-ended ‘statement’, which the Japanese language allows as it doesn't require a subject and the affirming or negating verb comes at the end, by

which time the speaker can gauge from non-verbal cues how they should continue the sentence. Another way to avoid conflict and be non-confrontational is to delegate: to convey a message as though it is from someone else. I was talking with a Coordinator of International Relations (CIR) who told me of his strategy to turn away work when he was too busy; he would delegate. Instead of saying no, he would forward the call to his supervisor and get his supervisor to provide an excuse.

Obliging and avoiding conflict styles were found to be the most prevalent conflict management styles used with acquaintances at work in Japan (Moriizumi & Takai 2010). “Obliging emphasizes preserving the relationship with another person by conceding to the other’s demands and renouncing one’s own needs and interests” (Cai & Fink, cited in Moriizumi & Takai, 2010, p. 522) and “avoiding attempts to dodge topics that may admit the existence of conflict” (Leung & Kim, cited in Moriizumi & Takai, 2010, p. 522). Avoiding and obliging may be very hard for ALTs to pick up on, as if used by teachers, their dissatisfaction is hidden from the persons involved. Conflict was not perceived by the research participants to be a big issue, but possibilities of why there was so little conflict perceived by the research participants.

AVOIDING COMPLAINTS

In this section, I discuss *gaman* a characteristic which can encourage the suppression of complaints. *Gaman* means to tolerate, or persevere. A capacity to endure difficult situations is a valued skill in Japanese society. Its value as a characteristic is promulgated by folklore, aphorisms and in everyday conversation and is part of *bushido* (the way of the warrior), the samurai code of conduct. Included in the perseverance of *gaman* is the ability to suppress complaints. If one perseveres, the hardship may recede, “almost as if endurance itself can produce such effects” (Johnson, 1993, p. 89).

Nitobe (2004) also discusses the samurai spirit (*bushido*) of bearing (*gaman*). Traditionally, Japanese parents used sternness sometimes nearing cruelty in order to build stoic children-to-be-warriors who could bear testing circumstances. Just like “bears hurl their cubs down the gorge”, samurais’ sons were taught to endure: “For a samurai, when his stomach is empty, it is a disgrace to feel hunger” (Nitobe, 2004, p.

12). Not only was endurance important, but to endure stoically was also required. Stoicism and having composure is a courageous response to hardship for the samurai spirit. These are still valued ways of being in Japanese society. Emotional and aggressive self-expression are considered childish and show a weakness of character. They contribute positively to avoiding conflict (Zimmerman, cited in Oshika, 2001, p. 24).

Japanese deal with conflict by avoiding it before it happens, so when it does happen they may not have effective strategies to resolve the issue, as talking directly is not a usual communication mode. Obuchi (1991) found that when university students faced conflict, they tried to bear it for a while without taking any positive action, and later they withdrew from the relationship. Relationships that teachers have with ALTs are mostly temporary, and bearing the conflict or misunderstandings, could be a strategy for the duration of the ALTs stay. I believe some relationships ALTs had with particular teachers would have played out this way. For me as a New Zealand ALT, I feel this was a strategy *I* used, so it is very possible that some Japanese teachers did too. For example, there was one teacher who left me to teach and supervise students while she attended other duties several times. I did not work with her often, and it wasn't until near the end of my tenure that this began happening, so I felt it was better to persevere. There were other factors too, like I really did want to help her, and I knew she had a lot of responsibilities outside of English class, in particular with her home room students. But if I were to be teaching with her for another year, I may have considered speaking up. What concerned me was not the teaching but the supervision aspect, as I did not feel equipped to deal with behavioural issues if they arose (fortunately the only issues were sometimes some students talking or not working, which sometimes occurred when she was there too).

CONCLUSION

This discussion of Japanese culture and values provides a backdrop for the experiences of the New Zealand ALTs in Japanese society which I discuss in the following chapters. The experience of the research participants was only of minor conflict. But an understanding of how Japanese manage situations of potential conflict

gives an insight into the possibility of what may have been occurring that the participants did not perceive.

New Zealander ALTs need to navigate Japanese relationships, communication and conflict avoidance which although not disparate with New Zealand culture, are different in some respects. Knowledge of these differences could make the ALTs tenure more enjoyable as they could understand situations that without the knowledge, may lead to negative feelings towards Japanese and vice versa. For example, being 'present' when there appears to be no work to be done (from the ALTs perspective) may be easier to accept when the reasoning behind it is understood.

At the Tokyo orientation ALTs are taught some aspects of Japanese culture that is different from Western culture. My intake, for example was taught about cultural differences in poses and gestures, such as sitting cross legged for a woman is considered inappropriate and crossing legs is also not good. Mostly though, we were taught how to teach English. I believe learning more about Japanese culture would be of great value to New Zealand ALTs, to assist them in successfully navigating work in Japan and their relationships at work. This would allow them to better fulfil their potentials as ambassadors for New Zealand, and to strengthen the bond between Japan and New Zealand on a grassroots level. By building positive relationships and showing good work ethic and adaptability to do so in Japan, we can broaden our horizons for intercultural understandings.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHOD AND PARTICIPANTS

In this chapter, I describe how my participants were recruited and the interview process. I then discuss ethics, the implications of informal interviews, narratives in interviews, autoethnography, and thematic analysis. Finally, I introduce the research participants, including myself, and why they decided to participate in the JET Programme.

Recruitment

Five research participants were found by posting about my research on the Wellington JET Alumni Association Facebook page and the Kiwi 2014 incoming JETs Facebook page. The Wellington JET Alumni Association monthly newsletter also included a section on my research and my contact details for those interested in participating. I was the sixth participant, and my own experience as an ALT from August 2014 - August 2015 informed my research and I include my own experiences and analyse them alongside the other five participants' experiences. Although I originally wanted all face to face interviews, due to a shortage of participants in Wellington where I live, I widened my search to include Kiwis from anywhere in New Zealand who went to Japan in 2014 at the same time as I did, but have finished their JET contract. The participants residing outside of the Wellington region had interviews conducted through Skype. Two participants resided in Wellington, one in Southland, and two were still living in Japan. I was contacted by email and corresponded through email to organise meeting times and places.

Ethics

A notification of low risk research involving human participation was approved by the Massey Ethics Committee before I commenced my research. Interview transcriptions were sent to be checked by participants and edited if they wished. Only one participant chose to edit but I felt it was important to have the approval of the participants and for them to have control over their contribution to my research. Andrews (2014) describes how she lets her research participants check what she has

written and edit if they wish to do so. They are given the last say over what is written about their life. I think this is particularly important, because subjects share personal details of their lives and this allows them, to a certain extent, to hold on to ownership of their shared experiences. My role was to provide the starting point for discussion, and from the answers I received I continued questions along lines of what the interviewee had a lot to say about. I then let the themes that arose from the initial interviews guide the second interviews with questions relevant to further exploring those themes.

Pseudonyms have been used to protect the identities of the research participants and the people they worked with. This means that not only are they not anonymous but others associated with them, such as family, friends, and colleagues, even with pseudonyms will be recognizable if appearing in the text. Because I am part of the research, bringing an auto-ethnographic component to the research, I have had to take extra precautions to protect the privacy of the schools I worked in and teachers I worked with. The schools I worked with may be able to be found from my name. However, as I worked at three schools, it may not be detectable which one any particular experience I refer to occurred at.

Furthermore, I worked with three or more teachers at every school, and as I do not describe any teacher I may bring up in any detail, I feel identities are relatively protected. There is the possibility of people being hurt by what we say, or even their reputation being tarnished if they are recognizable to readers. For example, in the previous chapter I refer to a teacher who sometimes left me alone to supervise and teach classes. To her face, I never raised the issue as a problem so it is possible if she knew it was her reading it could possibly hurt her. However, because I do not believe she is easily identifiable to others I believe her reputation will be not be tarnished.

The Interview Process

Three research participants were interviewed through Skype, one was interviewed at her workplace, and one was interviewed at a café. Two interviews were conducted per participant, and the medium or place was the same for both interviews for every participant. Initial interviews took between 30 minutes and an hour, secondary

interviews took between 10 and 20 minutes. They were recorded and transcribed, with transcriptions returned to the participant to check and edit if they wished as I have noted. These final transcriptions were then used for this study. All personal names, city names and school names were omitted or pseudonyms used. Interviews were informal and I brought along a list of questions and broad areas to ask about. This was used as a guide for me, but due to the informal nature of the interviews they followed their own sequence and what was actually covered depended on the direction the interview was going in. The list I used in the first interviews covered eight general areas or topics

(1) *Who are you?*

- How do you identify yourself in NZ? What's integral to your identity?
- What kind of Schooling and community background?
- New grad or experienced?
- What did you do before JET?
- Did you study Japanese before going or in Japan, or not at all? How often did you study?
- How long were you an ALT/on JET?
- Why did you leave?

(2) *Identity*

- National identity (e.g. Kiwi)
- Identity as a "foreigner"
- Identity as JET or ALT
- Identity Contentions (e.g. Does your identity fit with what others think of you?)

(3) *Relationships at School*

- Where did you work (Elementary, JHS, HS;)-rural or city)?
- Meaningful relationships
- Role/Purpose as an ALT
- Role contentions: Did what you thought your role was fit with what others (English teachers, other teachers) thought it was?

- Japanese teachers and ALT relationships (English teachers and other Japanese teachers)
- Staffroom/workplace belonging, dynamics and role
- Student relationships
- Teaching English

(4) Conflicts/Cultural Misunderstandings

- Conflicts/cultural misunderstandings with teachers
- How you reacted to these conflicts/misunderstandings and how were they resolved
- Conflicts/misunderstandings with students and how they were resolved

(5) Good Times

- Good times: Things that teachers did/moments with teachers that made you feel good/included/happy
- Good times: Things that students did/moments with students that made you happy

(6) Difficulties

- Difficulties (in general) and were you expecting these?

(7) Japanese Perceptions

- How did you perceive you were perceived (what did you think others thought of you? Students, English teachers, and other Japanese teachers)

(8) Before and After Jet

- When did you become interested in Japan and the JET program?
- Expectations vs. reality of the job
- What are your plans for the future?
- What do you take away from your experience as a JET?
- What did you expect to get out of JET?
- Would you consider working in Japan or doing a job that keeps you connected to Japan in the future?

With regard to interviewing as a primary research method Atkinson (1998) argues that both interviewer and the subject are inevitably collaborators involved in a meaning making process. According to Park (1998), in semi-structured interviews like mine, both parties reach an agreement on what to discuss, and it is therefore, to a certain extent, a joint exploration. I provided the starting points, but for some questions that received curt answers, those areas were not followed up. What the research participants themselves chose to discuss, is what influenced the follow up questions.

How the interviewer responds to the subject influences what the subject decides to share or not share. The layout of the interviews and how they are organised or conducted influences their content. As Okely (2015) found, formal interviews can put people off from sharing more information. She found that it was after a formal interview when the interviewee relaxed, that they sometimes said more than during the interview itself. In the formal interview they gave the politically correct, formal answers. I tried to make the interviews as informal as possible. However, one research participant discussed conflict casually-after I told her I had finished recording. While during the interview, she had reassured me there was no conflict. When I pointed this out to her, she consented to repeat the casual conversation for me to record to use as data for my research. Burgess (1984) re-named interviews as “conversations”, and this is how my interviews were conducted. They were exchanges of experiences and ideas, and the dynamics between myself and the participants, having all been on the JET Programme as ALTs in Japan, and all but one being relatively young, meant that we could talk as friends and equals rather than more formally as ‘researcher’ and ‘subjects’. However, I still had a sense of the researcher-subject power imbalance as I was asking for them to share feelings and experiences they may usually share only informally, as in without being recorded or having the possibility of their experiences being on show for an audience, and they had to trust that I would represent them fairly and anonymously.

Narratives

Interviews were not narratives in the strictest sense (with a beginning, middle and end) but contained mini-narratives that loosely fit the definition. According to Moen (2006, p. 60), “A narrative is a story that tells a sequence of events that is significant

for the narrator or her or his audience” and our worlds are organized into narratives because “human experience is always narrated”. Personal narrative research can provide insights into the worlds of others, through their eyes. Everyone’s perspectives are subjective and therefore subjectivity of the research participants is always acknowledged: It is *their* story, not *the* story.

Personal narratives present the subject as an agent like ourselves, motivated actors in life. However, Maynes et al. (2008) contend that the social and historical setting the subject is embedded in influences how they view selfhood and agency and this should be explicitly acknowledged. Personal narratives can remind us of the variation between individuals, especially of those who are grouped together in social and cultural categories. Personal narratives can complement quantitative research by providing a deeper understanding of issues and how they are experienced.

Autoethnography

As I was a participant in this research, there was also an autoethnographic component to the research. Autoethnography is ethnography with the researcher as their own research participant. According to Ngunjiri, Hernandez, & Chang (2010) it combines biography, self-analysis and ethnography. Unlike memoirs and autobiographies, autoethnographic research is systematic and involves data collection, analysis and interpretation on the self and other subjects of inquiry. Unique to autoethnography, the researcher has access to the most personal thoughts and feelings of the subject. True to the social sciences, the self is not viewed as in a vacuum, she or he is situated within the social, cultural and historical context. How the subject’s self is influenced by the milieu in which it is situated, and how they respond to these forces can teach us not just about ourselves, but about these forces and how they can translate into people’s lives.

There is a continuum of autoethnography: According to Ellis and Bochner (2000) there can be varying emphasis on the research process, culture and the self. Autoethnography can contain data from others, as mine did, which can be good for providing context for one’s own personal narrative. Emotional experiences are popular

topics in autoethnography, as are explorations of one's identity and family relationships.

As a research participant my own experiences sit alongside those of my other research participants. Because the research topic is not overly personal as I focus on work relationships, I don't believe my own narratives provide more depth than the data I collected from the other interviews. Experiences and feelings are personal, however by focusing on work experiences and relationships, research participant's home sphere and more personal areas of life were not delved into. I did begin this research wanting to learn about JET experiences inside and outside of work, however from the first two interviews I conducted I felt the research participants did not want to talk too much about outside of work, and were more willing and provided more information on work experiences. Hence this became the focus of my research.

The vulnerability that autoethnographic writers open themselves up to can help readers identify with them. By sharing intimate information, readers can experience "emotional and cognitive resonance" with the author, and can increase understanding across cultures (Chang, cited in Ngunjiri et al., 2010 p. 9). I believe my research participants, although unidentifiable, by sharing feelings and experiences make themselves vulnerable and relatable also. In my own research, I hope to encourage cross-cultural understanding between the Japanese teachers and the New Zealand Assistant Language Teachers, by sharing the perspectives and experiences as lived by myself and other Assistant Language Teachers, including how these experiences fit within the socio-cultural context.

Thematic Analysis

According to Park (1998), thematic analysis is a requirement in any qualitative analysis. Interview transcripts were analysed by coding individual themes and then looking for recurring ones and also variations. Park also suggests finding relationships between themes, which in my research seemed to appear as if by themselves, that is, they seemed 'obvious'. Most interpretations I made focused on what the research participants directly told me, and I use many interview excerpts as I want their voices to be heard.

Research Participants Introduction

In this section I introduce the New Zealanders who have worked as ALTs and consented to act as my research participants, and I also introduce myself as the autoethnographer. In each case, I also describe why we chose to become ALTs. Apart from Rochelle, all participants were in their twenties and apart from Robert all had lived overseas before going to Japan on the JET Programme. While the participants in this research are not a representative sample of New Zealand JET ALT participants as a whole, this study is qualitative and aims to look at the individuals' experiences as something valid in itself, but also presented in context and sometimes corroborated with secondary data. Included in the introductions of the participants are their ethnic/cultural identity, previous overseas experience, schooling/community background, previous occupation/s, Japanese language level, and how long the participant worked as an ALT. I have included transcript excerpts of why the participants decided to join the JET Programme so that participants' voices can be heard in their personal introductions. My own self- introduction is included last.

(1) Nate

While Nate identifies as New Zealand European he also identifies with the international community because he grew up in Japan and moved to New Zealand as a pre-teen. Nate attended an integrated school in a small city in New Zealand. He went on the JET Programme fresh out of college. He worked part time since his 2nd year of university as a swim instructor, a census collector, a life guard, in advertising and also as a stevedore, among other general jobs. Because Nate grew up in Japan his Japanese was fluent. He was an ALT for 2 years.

I've actually kind of known about the JET Programme for a long time. Even from when I was pretty young I think I had it in the back of my mind as something I could end up doing, ... at least from when I was 15 I knew about it... I suppose since I was a kid, ever since I went back to New Zealand I figured I will be back at some point and check out the country again, and coming back as an adult you get quite a different perspective of the country too.

(2) Ella

Ella identifies as New Zealand European, and was an exchange student in Japan for one year in high school. Ella was studying at post-graduate level in human resource management before JET. She also volunteered for St Johns ambulance service and worked at a supermarket. Ella studied Japanese formally for five years at high school and majored in it at university. She was an ALT for 2 years.

I went to a small high school that offered only Māori and Japanese [languages], so Japanese was my choice ... so that's when I started studying Japanese and became interested in Japan and the JET Programme, so maybe 2006 or 2007. I had a lot of *sempai* [senior] students that had done the programme, so that's when I first heard about it and I always kind of thought like that would be cool to do... I studied it [Japanese] at high school and I did an exchange [in Japan]... I've wanted to for a long time.

(3) Sarah

Sarah identifies as New Zealand European, and lived in the UK for a year. Sarah has been a student for a long time and loves travelling. She described herself as an outdoor person and before JET she was a hiking guide. She did a science honours degree at university, and then a Masters in science communication. She studied Japanese at high school for two or three years. She was an ALT for one year.

I don't know when I first heard about the JET Programme... I picked up Japanese as a subject at high school. My hometown is a very touristy town, and we have a lot of Japanese tourists visiting the area... and there are actually a lot of Japanese families in the area. So maybe I sort of became interested in Japan then and I really became interested in Japan when I was working as a hiking guide because 20% of the clients were Japanese. Because they love nature and they love hiking, so it would be very rare that we would have a trip without someone from Japan. And so I got to spend a lot of time with Japanese people and have always thought they were just such lovely people, and they all sort of told me, 'Sarah you should come to Japan, come visit, you know do some hiking in Japan it's so beautiful'. I've just always wanted to visit and I thought it would be such an awesome experience to live and get to know

Japanese people a lot better than just if I'd went on holiday there... I don't know how I heard about the JET Programme, but one of my friends was doing it and sort of reminded me of it and he was having a really great time and I thought, 'oh maybe I'll just apply too', so I went a year later.

(4) Robert

Robert identifies as New Zealand European. In terms of ethnic heritage, he has some Irish background. He grew up as a Catholic and received a Catholic school. He studied philosophy at university and worked in a government office on a short fixed term contract before JET. He studied Japanese for two years at high school. He continued to study the language informally before and during JET, and gained an advanced level on the Japanese Language Proficiency Test while in Japan. He was an ALT for three years.

I went on JET for a number of reasons. I wanted to live overseas, but I didn't want to be poor and I wanted to have a real chance to learn the language and culture. I was also toying with the idea of a career in education. I was pretty keen to go to Asia, and out of Asia, Japan was the country I was most interested in at the time. The JET Programme offered a pretty good opportunity and so I applied for it.

(5) Rochelle

Rochelle identifies as Māori, her upbringing was a little bit more global as she spent one year in Honduras on an exchange programme. She got a Masters in Applied Linguistics. Sports, marae, and family are important to her. She went to Japan with her musician husband and two children. She studied some Japanese in Japan through the language course that CLAIR offers. She was an ALT for three years.

I became interested [in JET] when I was at university. I was going out with someone and he didn't want to go to Japan so that was that. But then my friends that I was working with, they were talking about it and they were going to apply and I thought, that's right I wanted to apply for that so many years ago... and I've done a lot of travelling and I've lived in different countries before that, and I really wanted to go and live in a different country with my family and the JET programme offered that. So

it wasn't necessarily that I wanted to go to Japan, it was the opportunity to live in another country with my family that I really wanted.

(6) Stephanie (researcher)

I am New Zealand European/Pākehā. I spent half a year in Japan as a high school exchange student in 2008. I went on JET about one month after graduating with a Bachelor of Arts majoring in Sociology and Social Anthropology. I studied Japanese up to NCEA level 2 at high school and while I was in Japan. I have continued informal study of Japanese since I left JET. I was an ALT for one year.

When I was 15 years old I went on an exchange for 5 months at a high school in Tokyo. I'm not sure but I think at that time I may have heard about JET. When I got back from the exchange I was planning how I was going to go back. JET was always in my mind as an option. When one of my friends from Canada who was an exchange student at my school in Tokyo went on the programme, I knew how much fun she was having and I thought it was my best bet at working in Japan.

CONCLUSION

We have learnt the direction I have taken the interviews in and a bit about the research participants. Also the methodology guiding my study such as being on a joint journey of exploration with my research participants, rather than the extraction of data from the subject by the researcher. I now address the data in the subsequent chapters.

CHAPTER FOUR: BEING A NEW ZEALANDER IN JAPAN AND A JAPANESE WELCOME

The overall aim of this chapter is to present the data showing the participants' national identities strengthening, and the Japanese welcome and shared emphasis on caring and reciprocity with Māori, *manākitanga*. It is about being a New Zealander for some of the participants, and for one of the participants it is about being Māori, in Japan. In the section *Going Overseas: Culture into Relief* I look at the identities of the Pākehā research participants and how going to Japan didn't affect their notion of being New Zealand European/Pākehā but it did make them understand more of what it means to be a New Zealander as a result of being confronted with another culture. In the subsequent section *Pākehā = New Zealander*, I look at the preference of a national identity over an ethnic identity for the Pākehā participants. From my experience as an exchange student in Japan for half a year during my third year of high school, being confronted with Japanese culture led me to understand how *my* culture was not *natural*, it was specific to where I was from, that is, it is cultural.

By understanding and appreciating difference in ethnicity, or culture, I could see why other ethnic groups may not be happy following the ways of doing things based on what another ethnic group does, especially indigenous peoples whose home may be predominantly governed by another peoples. Being in Japan made me see that I have 'culture', and on returning to New Zealand I was more able to recognize and appreciate that my culture is not 'common sense' or 'natural', so in appreciating the differences of other cultures in New Zealand I began to identify as Pākehā (and still as a New Zealander). This, however, did not happen with my research participants as I had expected it may have. It's not a right or wrong way to identify as Pākehā or as a New Zealander, but it is interesting that my view changed, from me being a New Zealander to being Pākehā on return to New Zealand. In contrast, the research participants were comfortable identifying as New Zealanders. This, and the following issues will be discussed in this chapter.

In the next half of this chapter, the section titled *Our Welcome and Reciprocity* I look firstly at what Rochelle, the only Māori participant in this study, defines as

Manākitanga (reciprocity and caring) and the way in which she relates to Japanese culture. I then look at whether the other participants knew what *manākitanga* is, and whether they felt obliged to reciprocate favours at work (thus following Japanese custom and showing *manākitanga*). In the section, *Kindness Experienced by Research Participants*, the research participants talked about times they have felt welcomed and looked after. The kindness experienced by research participants is an example of the attentiveness linked to Japanese interdependency and also fits with the concept of *manākitanga*.

In the section, *Attentiveness*, I look philosophically at attentiveness and reflect on the attentiveness in Japanese relationships and the attentiveness Han (2014) observed in *La Pincoya*. Looking at ‘kindness’ outside of anthropological theories that emphasis giving in order to get, Han provides a refreshing and hopeful perspective on kindness. Given that ATLs are in the schools only temporarily, and some schools were visited only once during time on JET, the teachers who welcome us and wrap a “blanket of care” (Rochelle) around them, are not likely to be doing so for a return. Although reciprocity is emphasised in Japanese culture, I believe that the attentiveness valued in relationships, of ideally not even needing words, encourages a closeness and care for one another that is not explained in traditional anthropological theories of reciprocity, so I look for others ways of explaining it in *Attentiveness*. This care for others is comparable to the Māori concept of *manākitanga*. Pākehā and westerners have ways of welcoming and also of caring for others, but we can learn from other cultures, and especially for New Zealand ALTs in Japan, to try to share *manākitanga* and reciprocate the kindness we receive.

NEW ZEALANDERS

Going Overseas: Culture Into Relief

I was interested in reactions to being a minority, and wondered if people who are usually part of the majority may broaden their world view, in response to experiencing being ‘white’ as ‘other’. Robert found being a minority was a “refreshing” experience, “It was very refreshing as a white person, especially as a

white male, to experience racism, to experience being a minority. It was awesome. I think it's something that every person should experience to know how horrible it is".

Mentioned by Hepi (2008), sometimes it is not till Pakeha travel overseas that they realise their distinctiveness. Nate found his New Zealand identity was "enhanced" in Japan:

I guess like any personality that differentiates you is kind of enhanced depending on how strong that environment is. For example, in New Zealand I'm more of a foreigner because I haven't lived in New Zealand my whole life. Whereas in Japan, the fact that I look foreign and have lived in another country at all, makes me stand out strongly as a foreigner. I think my New Zealand identity in many ways increased... I associate with other New Zealanders in Japan rather than with other foreigners.

Nate's case is interesting because in New Zealand he identifies more with the international crowd in New Zealand, which he attributes to his upbringing overseas in Japan:

Just having lived away from New Zealand so long I think I share quite a lot with the international students... I find it really easy on a casual basis to get along with a lot of the international students in the city, so when I was at university half my friends would be people that were part of some kind of Japanese group or just international group of any nationality, the other half would just be kiwis.

When asked if he learnt more about what it means to be a New Zealander while in Japan, Robert answered:

I think so. I certainly became more sensitive or aware of the question of, "where do you come from? Who are you? And what does that mean to you?" and that was just based solely on being a foreigner somewhere. I think it makes you more introspective about where it is that you come from and what it means to you. It made me more aware, it didn't necessarily give me any answers, it just made me think about it more than I would have when I was in New Zealand. You don't really have a reason to think about it when you're in New Zealand because you're already in NZ I

suppose. I don't know if that's a good thing. Maybe we should be thinking about it more, even if we are in New Zealand.

As Robert points out, there isn't really a need to think about what it means to be a New Zealander while in New Zealand. It's only when immersed in another country and culture that we might ask, exactly what does it mean to be who I am as a national.

Ella found that being in a different cultural environment allowed her to see what makes New Zealanders unique:

It has helped me to become more aware of what makes Kiwis unique. This position helped me to become more knowledgeable about my own country and culture by taking me out of New Zealand and putting me in a different environment, so now I can see what makes New Zealand special more clearly. The questions of students and teachers about where I come from have made me do more research and presentations on my country. So I am grateful to have had this opportunity.

Sarah already had a good understanding of what it means to be a New Zealander, but her experience of cultural differences when confronted with another culture increased this awareness:

I sort of realised the differences between Japanese culture and my culture. I already knew a lot about NZ culture anyway, but the more that you talk about it, the more that you see the differences and you're more aware of what it means to be a New Zealander and how unique it is. I also realised how lucky we are to live here [in New Zealand] because the lifestyle is very different. I just noticed the cultural differences, so I understood more of what it means to be a New Zealander.

Pākehā = New Zealander

A preference for a national identity over an ethnic identity was found in all of the Pākehā research participants. Given that Pākehā culture is 'normal' in New Zealand, as in it permeates institutions and many areas of society, making it unrecognizable as a specific culture to many Pākehā, because it is the norm.

Ella considers herself a New Zealander, saying: “I’m a New Zealand European... I guess that I’m a New Zealander”.

When asked whether he learnt more about what it means to be a New Zealander or a New Zealand European/Pākehā, similarly to Ella, Robert begins with the assertion that he is simply a New Zealander:

I would like to say that I’m a New Zealander, without the European tag. But at the same time that's denying quite a large slice of New Zealand's biculturalism and multiculturalism. Something about calling myself a New Zealand European makes me uncomfortable but I can't deny that I come from Europe or the UK, Ireland in specific.

Robert associates being more than “New Zealander”, being “New Zealand European” ties one to their immigrant ancestors, and ties one to being an immigrant:

It's going to be interesting when you get down to people who are 10th, 11th 12th generation New Zealander's and how they'll feel about being called New Zealand European. Because my grandad was an immigrant, on my dad's side. His dad was an immigrant too so you still have those ties to being an immigrant I suppose.

Sarah felt being New Zealand European and being a New Zealander are the same, and considered only “different” New Zealand Europeans might have a stronger sense of ethnic identity:

I don't really know, what do you mean? To me being a NZ European and being a New Zealander are the same. New Zealander is a New Zealander to me.

Nate also didn't see the difference, saying: “I don't get a strong sense of the difference [between Pākehā and New Zealander]”. Nate “supposed” he identified more as Pākehā from his experience in Japan, and his answer as to whether he had learnt more of what it means to be Pākehā from his experience of living in Japan, suggests that he sees the term Pākehā as encapsulating aspects of Maori culture, “I suppose so.... I've been asked to do a haka, but that's about it”.

Nate and Sarah were asked the same thing, “Did you identify more as Pākehā from your experience in Japan?” However, they had different understandings of what being Pākehā/New Zealand European means. Sarah feels it is the same as being a New Zealander, while Nate sees it as encapsulating some of Māori culture.

Our Welcome and Reciprocity

“...It was like a blanket of care, that’s what they wrapped around us...” (Rochelle).

Manākitanga, a component of Māori culture, means to give and receive (McDowell, 2009), to look after each other, a “reciprocal nurturing of relationships with kindness and respect” (Gray & Murphy, 2013, p. 243). Reciprocity and interdependency are also very important in Japanese culture, as I discuss shortly.

Rochelle was the only participant who identifies as Māori, and she made the connection between her culture of reciprocity and that of Japanese culture, allowing her to easily continue (even “strengthen”) this way of being and living, from New Zealand to Japan:

We stopped using Māori [language]. We couldn’t do it completely because there are just some things that are completely ingrained into what you would say. So maybe we lost some of that Māori habitual practice in the language, but we maintained it in the way that we welcomed our friends because it’s so similar to Japanese... That *manākitanga* and the way Japanese do things... And the *manākitanga* is so similar that the language part was gone but the underlying parts were strengthened.

Rochelle’s definition of *manākitanga* is about making people feel welcome, cared for and valued. It’s about creating a “shared frame” for being together and even meetings, people don’t lose their value as *people* and become just another employee, as Rochelle explains the introduction and closings of meetings where people’s feelings are acknowledged, rather than a sharp jump into a meeting. She explains what she means:

I think it is being attentive to making them feel valued, but I think there’s that easy frame of... We both know what it’s like to have a cup of tea, it provides a nice safe starting point and then you can talk and talk from

there out, rather than get to the topic. This is what I find is the same between Japanese and Māori. There is a topic, but there's definitely an introduction, like an opening to this topic, there's the topic, and then there's a closing. So there are quite distinct components to it.

Rochelle describes finding connections with others, and taking relationships from strangers to whānau:

Manākitanga. So what it is all about is looking after other people's *mana*, so there's the word *mana* and *aki* which means kind of like to nurture, so it's *mana aki tanga*. What that would look like in behaviour and real life practices if people come to your home, you do all you can to make them feel as relaxed and welcome as possible. And that happens when people come to your *marae*, there's a formal welcome that takes them from being a stranger and then you find connections with them. Then they become part of like the whānau... Really it is just about making people feel welcome and making them feel valued.

A practical example of *manākitanga* Rochelle provides is as follows:

Ever since I was little and growing up, in our house, in our family, if someone was driving up the drive, and my mum saw, she would say 'put the kettle on', that means, put the kettle on, make a cup of tea, get some *kai* [food], to welcome the people who are coming. They'd come in and sit down, and while they're sitting there you're laying the table, so they can be comfortable to have a cup of tea and something to eat, while they are talking about whatever it is they want to talk about. It gives a nice, shared frame for interacting and an easy way into talking about whatever it is. Whereas in where people just come in, and they sit down, there's that kind of "how do I breach from being someone just driving up the drive to talking to you about what it is [I want to talk about]?".

Just as the ideal relationships in Japanese society anticipate others' feelings, the guests arriving at Rochelle's house do not need to ask for a cup of tea, or be offered one, the kettle will already be boiled and everything is ready to make what the guest wants. It is not treating the guest as a stranger, it's setting up the environment for

them to be incorporated into the home. It's set up for them to belong, with a place for them to sit and to share drink/food with the people of the home.

Apart from Rochelle, none of the other research participants (including myself until I looked into it) knew what *manākitanga* is about. Although not highlighted by Rochelle, *manākitanga* goes both ways, it is given and received, it is reciprocal (and sometimes referred to as reciprocity e.g. McDowell, 2009). These research participants' comments highlighted the fact that reciprocity is an emphasised value for both Japanese and Māori. When asked about whether he felt obligated to return favours at work, Robert answered:

Trying to think of an instance, I definitely felt obligated to do things that I was less vocal about than I would have been here. Sort of just 'don't ask questions just do it'. But I don't know if I ever considered, if the word favour ever came into my mind or whether I was conscious if I do something for this person whether they're going to do something for me or not. I just did, I just tried to do what I was told. Try not to ruffle too many feathers.

Robert's example does not illustrate reciprocity, however just by doing what was requested he felt was to be doing the right thing. The concept of reciprocity requires more than doing what is asked, and so I take this answer as meaning that favours were not considered to need returning. Doing only what one was asked could be a problem for Japanese teachers who may not like to ask directly.

Sarah and Nate did not feel pressure to reciprocate favours, Sarah said:

I don't think I felt like it was one for one, like if someone gave me something I didn't feel like I had to give something back. I realised that it's something that they like doing. Like if they had been away on a trip, I understand that they share *omiyage* [souvenirs], and I did that if I went away because I felt like that was the thing to do. But I didn't feel like if I didn't do it they would be like 'ooo, she didn't give us *omiyage*', so I did just little things like that. But things like White day, where you're supposed to give chocolates to the guys. I didn't do that. Some of the male teachers gave me chocolates but I didn't give it to them. I just felt weird

about it. But it's not like they were like, 'she didn't give us any chocolates'. Some things I did and some things I didn't.

Nate replied to the question of whether he felt obligated to return favours at work with, "Not too strongly".

However Ella was conscious that she made an effort to reciprocate:

When someone did something for me or gave me something, I often felt like I should do something in return. Sometimes I gave a small souvenir from New Zealand or something. I didn't feel like I needed to return favors that I didn't accept though.

Kindness Experienced by Research Participants

The importance of interdependency and reciprocity in Japanese culture means that caring and looking out for others is also emphasised. This high level of care encourages attentiveness to others. All of the research participants, including myself, felt very welcome and cared for at our schools. This was especially the case when teachers who didn't have a work responsibility to look after us (such as our supervisors and English teachers) went out of their way to make us welcome.

When asked what her relationships were like with the other teachers at school, excluding the English language teachers, Rochelle said:

I had great schools. At my academic school, I was friends with the maths teacher, he's one of our [my family's] best friends. He's visited us here [in New Zealand], Nakamura sensei would often come to talk to me and invite me to tell me about this or that, or he'd say, 'the best place to get free water is here...'. Then there was Hara sensei, I had nothing to do with any of his classes but he would often give me things and want to have a conversation. And then there was the *shodō* [calligraphy] teacher who'd let me come in to watch, or the cooking teacher who'd let us use the cooking room. I had really good relationships at the academic school, really good. At the technical college, the *shodō* teacher there, he let me come into a class and participate in that activity. I was lucky, they were really open and welcoming.

Rochelle discussed how the teachers at her school ended up inviting her whole family to the end of year party (*bōnenkai*):

So in my first year (I started in July) and then in December, at the *bōnenkai* [end of year party], one of the teachers heard that Terry was a good singer and guitarist. From that time, something happened, and our friend Yuki, said, ‘why don't you come in?’. So Terry sang in the school cafeteria one lunchtime. And the other teacher, she heard him and thought, ‘oh he’s fantastic, we should get him to sing at our *bōnenkai*’. And so she asked the deputy principal, “I think we should have him sing at the *bōnenkai*.”

The deputy principal said, ‘no, he’s not a staff member, and then what will happen with their children because he has to look after the children because Rochelle will be there’. So she said, ‘oh the children can come’, so he said no. Then she did the typical Japanese thing, and she talked around, she talked to everybody. Next thing I know, Kinoshita sensei and another teacher, they offered their wives to come and look after our kids while we went to that. So it ended up being sorted that, if he’s coming, then all the kids should come too... They welcomed us and during the night they had a lucky draw and someone won this cute little Winnie the Poo blanket and they gave it to us, our son and daughter. That’s what they would do.

Rochelle’s relationships with some of her teachers has continued, which is in contrast with the idea that Japanese teachers can endure and avoid conflict with ALTs because they are only temporary. As she said: “We had such good friendships some of the teachers, one teacher has been here to visit us and we’ve been back twice and visited three of them that we would see”. Rochelle was given second hand clothing and a baby car seat by teachers, she was cared for without having to ask. She uses the word “considerate” when referring to them. Being considerate is being attentive to another, and Japanese and Maori cultures encourage this, both draw on the concepts articulated by the terms *manākitanga* and *amaeru*.

Nate found teachers attentive too, “Many teachers will drop by and come to talk with you and that’s really good. I think it’s easy for ALTs to kind of feel a bit lonely so it’s good when they do that”.

Sarah felt the teachers who she wasn’t going to be working with in class went out of their way to welcome her. By sharing her photo book, Sarah made an effort to get to know the teachers too:

When I first arrived, the teachers, not even [just] the ones that I was going to work with directly, one by one came up to me and introduced themselves. It was a bit daunting going around the whole staffroom with sixty plus teachers, so I had actually brought over a book of photographs of my family and New Zealand life to show them. So that was a really nice sort of bonding moment with a lot of them because the language barrier was there with some of them, so it was just nice for me to show them something about myself that didn’t involve someone translating. The teachers were all extremely welcoming, and right from the word go I felt very welcome to the school. It was a nice school, and just even like the welcoming *enkais* [drinking parties] and the PE teachers would have barbeques and invite us along. We were always very much a part of the staff. And they would always talk to us, even if it was just in Japanese and just gestures and facial expressions. I always felt like a part of the school. I think the ALTs that came in the past must have been really great and I never felt that we were on the periphery, or that we were a burden or annoying to have. We were just always very much a part of the staff.

In my experience, I made a good friend with a teacher who was also a mother. Our connection was our lives as mothers. I remember asking what she was doing in the weekend, and she said cooking and cleaning. Outside of my relationships with teachers, my relationships with ALTs had got me accustomed to hearing exciting weekend plans by mainly single, all childless, young adults. It was refreshing to hear someone who had a life like me. A lot of ALT events where I lived were not family friendly affairs, and to have a friend who worked at school and at home, meant we could discuss school and we could discuss domestic and family life. After our first catch-up together with our children at her house, I thanked her for her hospitality. She

said she is not from Kumamoto, the area we were working in, and understands what it's like to be new to a place. I feel she was quite aware, as a mother herself, of my busy lifestyle. Her friendship and assistance was one of the highlights of my experience in Japan.

Attentiveness

Han (2014) discusses attentiveness in *The Ground Between: Anthropologists Engage Philosophy*, looking in particular at the ordinary lives of women in the poverty stricken *La Pincoya*. She found 'hidden kindness' pocketed in the everyday, and she encourages the reader to rethink the value of studying the 'ordinary' and the everyday.

A key component of her discussion focussed on attentiveness. To be attentive is to be more than present. The truth of perception depends on our attentiveness in the world; it is not due to our inherence in the world. From analysis of literature and my data I believe *amaeru* and *manākitanga* require attentiveness. With interdependency we should be aware of how others are and that their business is our business, their well-being our well-being. When relying on another's benevolence, or *amaeru*, it is required that they are attentive. However, like Leonardo's painting *Virgin and Child with Saint Anne*, with Jesus slipping off Mary's lap and Saint Anne reaching towards him, we see we cannot be attentive all the time. Silverman (2009, as cited in Han, 2014) analyses the artwork and remarks, "For those who understand their limits to be the doorway to relationality, the mother ceases to be 'good enough' and becomes, quite simply, 'human'" (156, 89). Although we cannot be perfectly attentive to others, it is our attentiveness and fellow-feeling that opens doors for interdependent relationships.

Han (2014) found current anthropological theories didn't fit with the hidden kindness she observed in *La Pincoya*. She mentions Bourdieu's concept of "symbolic violence", for example, and explains that one of Bourdieu's sociological concerns was that of power relations and domination (Bourdieu, 1984). Symbolic violence refers to the way in which social and cultural control is maintained by one party over another (Bourdieu, 1977; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Symbolic violence is misrecognised

as kindness, and the subject is complicit, and even those who exercise it may be unaware of it (Bourdieu, 1991). There is no force or coercion with symbolic violence. Bourdieu (1990) developed this concept while researching the Kabyle in Algeria, where he found gift exchange created “bonds of debt, obligation and social co-operation”, so those who cannot reciprocate equally are dominated. Bourdieu considered this an act of “subliminal ownership of another person” (Thomson, cited by Parkin & Coomber, 2009, p. 391).

Symbolic violence needs complicity and the misrecognition of the domination to continue (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). In Japanese society, *toriiru* means to place someone in emotional debt. This is driven by the psychological mechanism of wanting *amaeru*, by giving to others and indebting them (Doi, 1973). Perhaps a direct explanation of wanting the *amaeru* relationship may not be acknowledged, but instead one party attempts to render the other party emotionally indebted so that they will give *amaeru*, attentiveness and benevolence. Rather than relying on another’s benevolence, one places the other in debt and hopes to receive the benevolence as payment. This is someone purposefully exerting symbolic violence, by *not* relying on the other as is done with *amaeru*. Similarly, with *manaakitanga*, reciprocity and interdependency means that others are not in a debt they can’t escape, the relationship continues and dependency on both sides means both are indebted to each other. People look after one another in *amaeru* and *manaakitanga*, and now I will move on to discuss kindness outside of charity and symbolic violence, kindness that my research participants experienced from teachers at school.

In *La Pincoya*, Han found women had a deep sense that they should endure hardships, and asking for help in times of need is shadowed by shame, as the boundaries between asking and begging can be fine and easily overstepped. With intimate relationships, asking for something is a part of reciprocity, but with others who are not so close, it can be seen as begging, or requesting charity (which brings shame). In Japanese relationships, people are indirect with requests in order to avoid shame or discomfort if the request is denied, hence the need for others to pick up cues, and one has to be attentive in order to do so. Foreigners in Japan are notorious for not picking up on Japanese ‘hints’.

Because my research is on the New Zealand ALTs' perspectives, if they missed hints they are also missing from my research. Some of the indirect requests from Japanese I feel are recognizable by Westerners, as it can be polite in certain situations to act in this indirect way in the West also. For example, I worked with one teacher who would tell me I "could" read out a script in class, if I wanted to. I took this as a polite request to do so. On the other hand, I had a teacher who told me I could join class if I wanted but I didn't need to. I was scheduled to be in her class, so I wasn't sure if that was a reminder we had class and she was being polite by sounding like she didn't want to inconvenience me if I had other things I might need to do, or if it was a polite way of saying I wasn't needed for the lesson. Given all the free or lesson planning periods I had during the week, I felt my time would be spent best in her class. Even if she didn't have any material specifically for me to cover, I could still help students with the (mostly writing) activities and have a presence in class. So, unsure of her real intention, I just did what suited me, and what I felt was best for the students: I went to class. That is an example of when I believed there may have been another indirect message in opposition to the actual linguistic meaning. In addition there were probably many others that I didn't perceive at all.

In *La Pincoya*, Han observed several instances of families' critical moments (moments where help was needed, such as having no food, job losses) being witnessed by neighbours. Without acknowledging that the moment had been exposed, neighbours would help each other. The others' dignity was spared as they didn't need to ask/beg, and the embarrassment of the exposure of the critical moment, the exposure that their social support had failed, was not felt. Ideally, a woman's endurance and intimate relationships that help reciprocity would conceal critical moments from the outside. With intimate relationships, the critical moment can be explicitly acknowledged, and the friends/family have mutual obligations.

The kindness that Han found in *La Pincoya* didn't fit Bourdieu's symbolic violence, or even Christian ideas about giving in order to obtain salvation. Han asks us, instead, to look at kindness as something that can exist outside of gaining something for oneself. Relationships with some, or most, of our teachers will not continue. With many ALTs staying a short time, and in their 1-5 years in Japan their schools may change, teachers still invest in these temporary relationships. As shown above,

teachers would go beyond being just friendly and welcoming, they were attentive to us as colleagues, and sometimes as friends.

Attentiveness is making the others present ours. Cavell (cited in Han, 2014, p. 86) discusses how acknowledgement in theatre can be representative of how acknowledgement is in real life:

In failing to find the character's present we fail to make him present. Then he is indeed a fictitious creature, a figment of my imagination, like all the other people in my life whom I find I have failed to know, have known wrong.

Being attentive to others is making them present. Being present without attentiveness, we can fail others, especially because of the shame that can come from asking. As Nate found, loneliness was eased by Japanese teachers dropping by, Rochelle received children's goods from considerate teachers, and myself and my son received social support from a teacher and her family. I hope that as ALTs, especially those from individualistic cultures like most of my research participants come from, can be attentive to the people around us, even as we are adjusting to a different culture and work situation. As Cavell would say "We are endlessly separate, for no reason. But then we are answerable for everything that comes between us" (cited in Han, 2014, p. 91).

CONCLUSION

In this chapter I have looked at the strengthening in national identity of the Pākehā participants, but not a strengthening in ethnic (Pākehā/New Zealand European) identity. I believe if New Zealand Europeans/Pākehā can appreciate they *have* culture (that is, that their ideas and ways of doing things are not *normal* to everyone) then I believe a fairer, bicultural and multicultural New Zealand can be striven for. *Manākitanga* is something I believe we could all benefit learning about in New Zealand, and is not only good for intercultural relationships in New Zealand but would assist New Zealand ALTs in Japan.

CHAPTER FIVE: CULTURAL DIFFERENCES AND UNDERSTANDINGS IN THE WORK PLACE

In this chapter, I look at instances of conflict or misunderstanding my participants reported, and at how these may have related to cultural differences. The first part of this chapter in the section, *No Problem*, addresses the issue of why there were few conflicts perceived by the research participants and questions whether there was more conflict that they did not perceive due to the indirect and conflict avoidance tendencies in Japanese culture. I do this by looking at the characteristic direct communication style of the research participants which may have contributed to conflict with Japanese teachers.

In the second part of the chapter in the section *Work-Life Balance* I look at the experiences the research participants had regarding the use of time at their workplace, in the context of working with teachers who regularly work overtime. I also look at the issue of ALTs needing to appear busy, despite having very little work to do. To illustrate the Japanese work ethic, I discuss an example that demonstrates the pressures Japanese feel to succeed at work. I look at this from a Foucauldian perspective, specifically with regard to discourse and technologies of power.

NO PROBLEM

Direct New Zealanders

As discussed in Chapter 2 in the section *Japanese Communication*, being direct can be considered rude and the norm of being indirect in Japanese comes easily as the language allows for greater ambiguity. According to Morimoto (cited in Davies & Ikeno, 2011, p. 13), the Japanese vague and indirect way of communicating contributes to troubles between Japanese and people of other countries. In fact, communication is one of the biggest issues between Japan and other countries, with many misunderstandings (Davies & Ikeno, 2011). The conflict, however minor, perceived by some of the participants could be linked to the idea expressed as a 'direct refusal' or an 'honest opinion'.

Sarah was aware of the indirect communication style of the Japanese teachers, however she felt her own directness worked for her and didn't try to change. She stated that "Like I can be quite direct. I guess the Japanese teachers can sometimes say things in a more subtle way and you know I just get the job done and be direct about it". She felt being direct meant things could be understood better and work could happen more easily. Given that she did not know the Japanese way to be indirect and understood, being direct may have been a good way to ensure clear communication. Sarah felt it worked.

Ella reported that when she declined a request she deemed unfeasible, she perceived that it damaged the relationship with her teacher:

I only really had like kind of very minor conflict, like, for example, my teacher would ask me for a game for five minutes before class, so I said, 'oh, please give me more time', and she kind of took it very offensively and then it was kind of awkward... I tried to be good about it but she didn't take it so well so I think, it's difficult, maybe it's our cultural differences. She didn't seem to appreciate the confrontation about it, at the same time I wasn't very impressed with having to make a game five minutes before class.

Rochelle recounts how she shocked her teacher by being honest with his students. When she walked into his class on the first day:

I said, 'good morning!'. And they went [groaning] 'good morning'. I went, 'oh my god that was terrible! It's terrible, do it again! Good morning!'. What I remember was looking at my teacher friend and the fact that I'd said 'that was terrible'; he was a little bit shocked that I would be so blunt with his students. And later on, he said, 'oh I was a little shocked that you said that was terrible', and I was going, 'but it was', and he was going 'yeah'.

Despite following a teacher's orders to wear a suit, Robert was honest and told him that while he would do so, he didn't want to. He perceived that things went downhill with that teacher after that:

The deputy principal who was an ex English teacher seemed to sort of rule with an iron fist... Everything was fine and then he decided that he wanted me to wear a suit. Yeah, he didn't like the way I dressed so I got taken in for a meeting with him... and he was like, 'you're going to have to wear a suit'. I asked 'why', and he couldn't really answer me. Just like, 'that's the Japanese way', and I was like, 'I have a tattoo that I don't want to show so I can't wear a short sleeve shirt. And I don't want to wear a suit but if you want me to I will'. And then after that meeting my invites to go out there [to visit that school] just got pulled back and back... [An] English teacher would put the application in to get me out... and he would just say, 'no we don't need you'... I said, 'I'll wear a suit of that's what you want me to do', but I let him know that I thought his reasons were not very well thought out.

The deputy principal was unable to provide a reason for why Robert should wear a suit, other than "that's the Japanese way". The deputy principal understood his request as asking Robert to wear attire appropriate to his concept of the Japanese way. Although many teachers don't, in the *Jet Manual* (2014) we were advised to wear a suit or business attire: "Dress in business attire... A blatant disrespect of these dress rules may be interpreted as disrespect for Japanese culture or for your workplace, and this may hamper your ability to encourage a respect for foreign cultures in your Japanese colleagues". (2004, p. 99).

In my experience as an ALT, I began wearing business attire then changed to more 'smart casual'. However, there were ALTs senior to me who would wear casual attire including jeans, or even ripped jeans, leather jackets, and sports wrist bands. It was also my experience that part time Japanese teachers and teachers in training dressed to a more formal standard than the regular Japanese teachers, that is, they wore suits. It could be that as ALTs, with our part time presence in a particular school and our non-teacher status, we were on par status-wise with these teachers. As semi-visitors, dressing more formally was a good way to show that we took the school and our opportunity to visit and work there very seriously and not as a casual matter.

Apart from Sarah who found it worked being direct, the directness, or honesty expressed by Ella, Rochelle and Robert led to either a moment of shock in Rochelle's case, or a quite serious change in relationships in Ella and Robert's cases. In my experience, I was unaware of any conflict resulting from my being direct. This may be because I don't consider myself to be very direct and my time in Japan as a high school student had prepared me for their communication style, or perhaps I didn't notice when it occurred.

While New Zealanders may be direct because they appreciate, and maybe expect, others to be direct with them, Japanese do not expect to be told "no" directly even if the other person wishes to convey a no. In Ella's case, it is possible that it was not the disagreement about organizing a game with five minutes notice but more the way she conveyed her response because it may have been too direct and not *aimai* (discussed in *Chapter Two: Japanese Culture*) or indirect enough to save her colleague's feelings. Because of the more indirect style of communication in Japanese culture, how do ALTs know whether their actions are considered okay by their colleagues? When it comes to working overtime, next I look into whether the ALTs felt they were expected by the Japanese teachers to work overtime like their Japanese colleagues do.

WORK-LIFE BALANCE

ALT Time Use

Robert acknowledged how tough it was to become a teacher in Japan, "because you have to sit some really hard exams". After which I noted, "You have to give up your life", to which he added, "Yes, exactly. So I didn't really get in on that". Robert recognised the teachers as professionals, and with their professional, "trained teacher" status came the responsibilities to provide quality education, to work hard, and to sacrifice time. In contrast ALTs do not have the same responsibilities and don't 'give up their life' for the job. I also didn't feel the need (nor did I want to) work overtime to the extent the Japanese teachers did. However, we were still expected to work our designated hours, whether there was a class or not. Nate felt that the extra time he had could be put to better use than 'looking busy', for example, it could have been spent on strengthening the cultural exchange. We are not in Japan just to teach English, we

are there on a cultural exchange, which as Nate highlights it's not just about ALTs sharing their culture, it's also about them learning about Japanese culture. As he said:

I often wonder if there's a bit of disconnect between the people that make the JET programme and the people on the ground level. I kind of feel like the people at the top that make the programme probably don't think it's going to do as much as the people on the ground think it's going to do... because we are also here on some sort of cultural link as well... I don't feel like BOEs [Boards of Education, direct employer] really use that, because it's not really on the agenda. The BOE's purpose is just to get the education side of things going. During the BOE days I think it's an absolute waste how they haven't got us to do something more in the community. We do summer English things where we teach English or we have the camps... they should have us go to the folk museum for a day or go to the history museum or at least give us an option to do that.

To put Nate's argument in context, in my experience as an ALT, BOE days are days at the office, with no class or sometimes small classes in the community. There is a lot of time to prepare lessons, giving ALTs what amounts to free time. So Nate's idea that we go out into the community and maybe learn more of Japanese culture is not instead of teaching English, it is a suggestion for better use of the free time ALTs at some BOEs have over the school holidays.

In contrast, some research participants were quite comfortable with the status quo. When asked how they dealt with any expectations to be present at school when there was no work to be done or to work overtime, Robert, Rochelle, and Sarah all said that they did some overtime and felt comfortable with what was expected of them.

Robert, for example, even took on responsibilities that required overtime work:

I did a bit of over-time. I chose to do it. I chose to be organiser of the school festival every year which required that I put in quite a few hours just for two or three weeks of the year. And speech contest time required a little bit more of extra effort. It never really bothered me if there's nothing to do at work, but you have to be there. Expectations didn't bother me at all. The employer requires that you are there, you're being paid for being

there, you have to be there regardless of whether you have to do work or not. I wonder how the teachers in New Zealand who went and did the JET programme felt. Maybe they're less happy about it because that's even more of their own time here. I'm sure they still have to go in during holidays and work but maybe there's less expectation for them to be at work. When you turn up to work it's really awkward in summertime when no one's there and it's just you and the teachers. Everyone's just sort of nosing around doing something but you're not really sure what they're doing and you're not really doing anything. It's quite strange. I worked in the holidays but a lot of the time my boss told me to go home early, so I got a lot of finishing at 12, or finishing at 1.

Rochelle felt the overtime expected of her was minimal compared with the Japanese teachers:

So the first one about being at school when there's nobody else: well that's just what they do. I would sit there in the staff room in my first year and I'd just go on the internet and do stuff and the office staff would always invite me for a cup of tea downstairs so it was really cool. But in the second year and third year you realise you can be at school, but you could be in the gym, you could be in the pool, or you could do other things that were fun. But I guess that's their rules and that's similar with the overtime. I have to come to ESS [English club] on a Tuesday and a Thursday night, and I have family. So sometimes when my husband wasn't there I'd bring my kids to the school because I had no other option, but that's what you had to do. If you look at what Japanese teachers are expected [to do] you look at yourself and you go 'oh they've 20 tonnes of expectations and I've got 20 grams'. It's not really hard to recognise that it's different from New Zealand. Oh yeah it is.

Sarah felt the teachers were grateful for her working overtime, and the overtime hours were allowed to be used to extend her leave from work. However, she did need to request for this to happen:

My school were pretty good. We did a lot of overtime for debate, and I wasn't entirely happy with doing such long hours outside of my contract.

My supervisor went ‘look, write down the hours and you can redeem those hours later’. So we got them back so I added them onto some of my *nenkyu* [annual leave] and managed to get a lot more time off when I finished. So it wasn't like they took us for granted. I think that's the first time it happened. I know not all schools would do that. I think they did realise that we did help out a lot. Compared to other ALTs I definitely stayed after school a lot more. Some would just go off when they had to, but the teachers were always acknowledging the fact that we were helping out and they were very grateful that we did that.

Nate found ways to deal with the copious amounts of free time, however some days it was “soul crushing”:

On the days you don't deal well with that it's really soul crushing. I think it just takes a bit of practice and experience getting used to that. I think I am now. I have things to read up on, I bring that kind of stuff with me to work. I might just research a topic or if they want me to make a presentation and I'm just reading up on a topic I'll read it. Something that fits to my own interests as well so it kills a couple more hours until its time.

Ella wasn't expecting so much free time on her hands:

I guess the job [I had imagined] was more like the senior high school ALTs, they have a very major role in teaching English. I didn't expect to be so free...lots of time. I thought that maybe I'd have to plan lessons more. I didn't really plan lessons much, I just did games and stuff.

She had fewer responsibilities than she had expected, and more free time. But how free is free time? ALTs in my area, hired through JET, had beginning and finishing times which we had to follow, regardless of whether or not we had classes or work to do. In contrast, privately hired ALTs were not expected to stay if they didn't have class and would sometimes go to the BOE office if they had finished classes for the day. At the BOE office ALTs could have the company of other ALTs, and in my case when I was there I felt less pressure to appear busy because in the office people would be stationed at their desks whereas at school teachers would come and go and walk past. I felt I was being checked on more at school than at the office.

As well as being asked how she dealt with free time at work, I also asked Ella how she dealt with the expectation to look busy:

I was present when my contract required me to be, and other than that I worked late only a couple of days a year to help with the recitation contests. My teachers definitely knew that ALTs generally don't stay late or work weekends (perhaps a predecessor of mine made this clear) so when I did stay late or work at lunch to help the students they always expressed their appreciation. I only had one teacher who seemed to expect me to work at lunch or stay late at her discretion but I only did so when it suited me. Generally, I wasn't expected to do so, and only did when I wanted to.

As for appearing to look busy, this was one of the problems of the job. The job in its nature often doesn't usually require much out of class preparation, so there were times when I had nothing to do. I know of some ALTs who would read or do personal work a lot, and I think this reflected badly on my position. So in these cases I would make it clear I had nothing to do to my JTEs by asking if they had some work for me to do. If they said, 'yes', then I could help them, but if they said, 'no' I would do my own thing. I admit I did mostly try to look busy, as I didn't want to look bad next to my hardworking co-workers.

While everyone's situation is different, I believe other ALTs also believed they had quite a lot of free time on their hands. For example, at the pre-departure orientation in Wellington a previous participant said she became very good at angry birds on JET. In my situation, I didn't feel it was appropriate to be playing games on my phone (because it would look bad) and I tried to work on things appropriate to my work, including learning Japanese, but there really was a lot of free time. Due to the free time, and also the lack of satisfaction I got from being in a job which wasn't always seen as real job by other teachers, and at times didn't feel like a real job (being paid to just be present), I began my Masters with the aim of contributing to the improvement of the JET Programme; for future ALTs.

Another issue regarding free time is surveillance. Ella was asked whether she felt watched at work, and exemplifies why ALTs need to be model ambassadors we stand out:

I definitely felt like I was under their watchful eye a lot of the time – both teachers and students. I would often hear comments that proved so – like if my bus ran late I would be asked, in a way that I felt was passive aggressive, by several teachers throughout the course of day if my bus ran late that morning, or my students were always interested to see what was in my lunch. And I know it was because I was foreign and different and therefore stuck out like a sore thumb, so it's something that definitely got on my nerves, sometimes but that I tried to ignore.

Sarah felt the teachers' long working hours was an issue as it infringed on home life:

I think for me it's especially the work-life balance. The people that I'm basing this off is the way I grew up, and my parents worked full time... sometimes they would be at work late if they had meetings or something but usually get home by five/five thirty and then you've got the evening free to spend time with your family, and usually you've got the weekends free too. Luckily I grew up in a family where my mum's a teacher so she had lots of holidays and so we had lots of family holidays. It seemed to me that everyone works way too hard and they don't have enough time with their family and I also think the student's work too hard sometimes. There's just so much pressure on them and I think that they need to have much more time to be teenagers. I didn't like how much time the teachers spent at school. It was awesome how much passion and effort they put into school life but they were teaching and doing club activities, and coaching baseball teams or whatever... I think for the most part New Zealanders have a better balance, and know how to relax and have down time, and I'm sure there are probably plenty of people like that in Japan but just from my experience, it seemed like the majority worked way too hard.

On the other hand, Ella saw the positives of the dedication of Japanese to their jobs:

Well, from my viewpoint as a foreigner, I know I am not alone in thinking that Japanese teachers and students are definitely “more dedicated” to their jobs than those in our own cultures, but this isn’t necessarily a bad thing. I personally wouldn’t be keen to be so involved with my job, and in my opinion their work life balance is definitely not balanced at all. But it’s part of their culture and the norm in Japanese society – it’s this attitude towards work and life, always doing one’s best – that helped them recover so quickly after World War Two and has kind of been the norm ever since. Plus, their commitment is amazing, I would definitely hire these people.

From my perspective, I agree with both Sarah and Ella. The Japanese work ethic is admirable. However, it comes at a cost. Whether the benefits outweigh the costs is something that will vary between individuals and isn’t something others can really judge. Because ALTs leave at their designated time (most of the time) it is generally accepted. Therefore the issue of working overtime and overworking in Japan did not affect us to the same extent. In the next section, I discuss the issue of overworking in Japan, and how it is normalised. I include an extreme case, of death by overwork (*kurōshi*) and I look at how discourse and surveillance influences the different work cultures in Japan and New Zealand.

Kurōshi

Traditional values and cultural practices push some Japanese into *kurōshi*, death from overwork. *Kurōshi* can look like stress-induced cardiovascular disease, major depression, circulatory ailments, suicide and suicide attempts and is recognized by the Japanese Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare. Excessive working hours is what is emphasised in medical explanations of the phenomenon, however other causes include intensified workloads and a lack of control over the work environment. In Japan, long work hours have been recognized as a national problem but campaigns to reduce work hours have not changed the normalisation of working overtime (North, 2011).

For example, North (2011) analyses the *kurōshi* case of Kamei Shuji, a 26-year-old stockbroker who had a fatal heart attack in October 1990. That year, his working hours averaged out to 10.17 hours per day with no days off. The Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare recognized uncompensated service overtime as the major contributing cause of his death. Mr Kamei had been a model employee, and his timetable, “One Day for Mr Kamei” was given to new employees to show a good work example. From 6.50am till 10pm were blocks of activity with no scheduled breaks. The timetable even noted that Mr Kamei was “often too busy to eat lunch” (cited in North, 2011, p. 149). According to his wife he went into work on Saturdays and Sunday and would make work calls from home during his time at home. However, Mr Kamei had other stressors at work such as problems with being singled out and given responsibilities that would usually go to more senior employees, and more bad feelings towards him from co-workers occurred because more was expected of them: If he could do so well, so should they be able to. Also the political instability in the Middle East at that time that put Japan’s oil supply in jeopardy and decreased stock prices which meant Mr Kamei had to work harder to maintain his account balances, and then Iraq invaded Kuwait and the fear of oil supply disruptions caused stocks to fall further. Mr Kamei’s customers made angry demands for the promised returns and compensation for their losses. He wrote letters and visited his clients to apologize. These happenings would have added stress, but they also meant Mr Kamei worked even longer hours after these disruptions.

This cultural milieu Mr Kamei was embedded in shows the company’s high expectations of him and his co-workers by using him as an example. The importance of living up to those standards was so great, the socialisation to self-sacrifice and the work loyalty, cost Mr Kamei his life.

Working with teachers who work long hours and have many responsibilities towards their students in and outside of school, the fact that we are outsiders saves us from losing much of our free time. I think Japanese teachers are aware that we have not been socialised to sacrifice so much for work, and that it’s different in New Zealand. Working overtime may have been genuinely appreciated by the teachers, as research participants reported, because we are not Japanese. Furthermore, the temporary nature of the position in contrast to Japanese teachers, means that it would make less sense

for us to sacrifice too much for a short tenured job. Next I look deeper into the differences between New Zealand and Japan's culture and work practice.

A Foucauldian Lens

As discussed in Chapter Two, contributing to the work-leisure balance of time in Japan are: people-orientated time, group responsibility where work extends past one's own job description, and loyalty to the company that pays one's livelihood for normal (fulltime, possible lifetime employment) employees. Another factor which plays a large role is religious and traditional Japanese values, such as tolerance/perseverance (*gaman*) and self-sacrifice which I mention in relation to discourse and is discussed in the previous chapter. In this section, I look through a Foucauldian lens at the powers creating and continuing the practice of overworking in Japanese society.

Foucault's term "technologies of power" refers to "specific social practices that determine the conduct of individuals and submit them to certain ends or domination" (cited in Markula & Pringle, 2006, p. 24). Under the rubric of technologies of power are modes of objectification that function to classify, discipline and normalise people through social processes that are outside of their power to change. One of these modes, referred to as 'dividing practices', divides people into categories, for example 'hard worker'; and 'lazy worker'. This categorisation of people justifies their treatment and control (cited in Markula & Pringle, p. 25).

Teachers in Japan who sacrifice their personal time to work could be seen as good teachers, and normal Japanese people. Teachers who don't, who leave 'on time' everyday, could be seen as deviating from the norm, and possibly not befitting of the label 'good teacher'. With categories comes their 'appropriate' treatment in line with the knowledge that created the category. The knowledge that decides what's normal or abnormal, good or bad, is socially constituted. It is particular to a certain period of time, a particular *episteme*, and makes sense because it fits into a *discourse*. *Episteme* is knowledge of the time-period, and *discourse*, a very broad term, can refer to "the general domain of all statements, sometimes as an individualizable group of statements, and sometimes as a regulated practice that accounts for a certain number of statements" (Foucault, cited in Markula & Pringle, 2006, p. 29). The 'good teacher'

is not simply a good teacher who is named through language, because social and political discourse *creates* the “good teacher” category and decides the category rules. These rules define what is sayable or thinkable about a topic, and knowledge in popular discourse acquires authority as ‘the’ truth.

For Japanese, as is evident in Mr Kamei’s case, employees are taught that a good employee timetable includes overtime and is very productive. Due to the normalised practice of working overtime in Japanese society, whether an employee is productive or not leaving early while others are still working is deviating from the norm. As discussed earlier, responsibilities extend past personal job descriptions and as a member in the workplace it is expected that loyalty to the company or workplace means going beyond what is written in the contract.

For a New Zealander, it might look like sacrificing personal time that doesn't need to be sacrificed. If the job is done, the time just being present could be spent on being productive outside of work, or as Nate argued could be spent increasing the ALTs cultural knowledge. To the Japanese worker, what is paramount are responsibilities to the job, and responsibilities to co-workers, supervisors and the company or institution. In Japan, sacrificing one’s own time is honourable, it has professional worth for creating acceptance and belonging at work, and personal worth in line with traditional Shinto values that can bring one closer to “ultimate nature” (Bellah, 1957, p. 194-6). Within the cultural discourse on work, the practice makes sense. For New Zealanders who do not see the ‘truth’ of the Japanese discourse that is a given to the Japanese employee, the practice does not make sense. The idea of the ‘good employee’ and the ‘good teacher’ are found in both New Zealand and Japanese cultures, but there are different rules in the two countries regarding who can be accepted as such. Unfortunately, if foreign ALTs cannot see the logic of the Japanese way of thinking, they may fall short of being the best ambassadors they can be. I hope by describing some of the influential cultural factors in this context, ALTs can better adjust to a Japanese perspective.

Another of Foucault’s ideas that can be usefully applied here is that of “disciplinary power”. He argued that ‘disciplinary power’ is exercised by the powerful in order to compel and control subordinates, and that power structures not only directly control

people's actions but indirectly whereby people come to control and discipline themselves (North, 2011, p. 153). Foucault suggests there are three basic techniques of disciplinary power: hierarchal observation, normalising judgements, and examinations. An example from my research of hierarchal observation is teachers at school always being watched and leaving early or working overtime being noticed. Antepara (1995, p. 118) describes a "neighbourhood watch" where the surveillance of teachers and students by each other keeps everyone in line. The normalizing judgements are where through hierarchal observation the individual is appraised against norms. The distance between the individual and norms is punished and conformity to norms is rewarded. The examination is a "normalising gaze" and through "ceremonies of objectification" and record-keeping the subject is made continuously visible or even more visible for the purpose of control (Foucault, 1979, p. 184).

In Japan, when teachers leave school they should say *osaki ni shitsurei shimasu*, (I am being rude for leaving before you), or they may acknowledge the hard work of their colleagues staying on, with *otsukare sama desu* which means 'to be tired out'; by saying this to a co-worker, you show that you know and appreciate their hard work (roughly equivalent in English to 'Thank you for your hard work'). This is the normal, polite thing to do and happens to make one's departure markedly visible. With surveillance and normalizing gazes, a norm in line with a discourse of duty, self-sacrifice and group loyalty, the employee who leaves on time (earlier than everyone else) must let everyone know when they leave, and so they cannot escape the normalising, judging, gaze of supervisors and co-workers. As Ella described, she stood out due to her foreignness and definitely felt people were watching. Like me, she didn't want to look bad next to hard-working colleagues, and I think due to our foreignness and conspicuousness we felt a duty to ask teachers if they had work we could do we did our best to find productive things to do.

North (2011, p. 154) describes the path of Mr Kamei's as largely fate "because it was the product of processes of normalization that constituted him as an individual of particular standing", as a model employee. Through socialisation in a Japanese society that sanctifies suffering and endurance, his commitment and self-sacrifice was honed earlier in his life by sacrificing time in order to succeed in his university

entrance exams. It is worth noting that two of my participants – Sarah and Ella – noted how hard they thought students work too. North (2011, p. 154) describes how, tragically, in the last few months of Mr Kamei's life "the temporal strait jacket he wore reduced the flow of blood to his heart, even as he was pressured to persuade his fellow employees of the fashionable utility of the garment". In contrast to the type of disciplinary self Mr Kamei was, most New Zealanders are not socialised to that level of self-sacrifice with regard to work. In our culture we are socialised to believe it is healthy to try to balance our work with the rest of our life. For example, Sarah worked overtime but tried to create balance by requesting she regained those hours later as holiday hours. Also, we are not, or don't perceive to be, held to the same work standards as Japanese employees. As Robert found during the term holidays he was told he could go home early. That Sarah felt the teachers were grateful for her staying overtime shows it wasn't simply expected. Ella also recognized the teacher's appreciation of her staying overtime when she did, because it wasn't usual for ALTs to do so.

In New Zealand, while we are not taught to be loyal to our workplace to the same extent as Mr Kamei, we have our own strait jackets. While we have a life at work, it is generally our life outside of work which we consider more legitimately our 'real life'. Only when we can see that our way of doing and thinking is not the only way, and that a good employee may come in many varieties depending on the person judging, we may loosen our 'jackets'.

CONCLUSION

The experiences of the research participants were predominantly positive; and, in my opinion, it wouldn't have detracted from this if more conflict had been reported. Conflict occurs within all cultures, and is not inherently negative. When it occurs, we can learn from it, we can resolve it, and have positive relationships with those we had conflict with. To me, this is more constructive for relationships and intercultural relationships than simply *not* having conflict, because that means we are not engaged with the other.

The work-life balance of Japanese teachers is admirable, but as an ALT I was grateful to not have to work the same hours. Although some of the research participants felt it wasn't expected for them to work overtime too often, and that when they did the teachers were grateful, it is something I feel decreased our status as educators. We did not make our work our *life*, and we didn't sacrifice nearly as much for our job. As most ALTs are not qualified teachers in their home countries, we have not invested in our position in Japan as much as the Japanese teachers have. I believe if ALTs were more qualified in the particular position of ALT, and if they had more responsibilities, they would have higher status and be expected to work overtime more like Japanese teachers. Sometimes I felt we are there to be the international part of the school, to be the proof that Japan is open to the world and embracing foreigners. The impression I had is that we can be interesting because we are different, and with this we can be strange and funny. While we may be unqualified, we are experts in 'genuine' English, particularly if you believe, as the Japanese do, that a *native* speaker English is superior. In the next chapter, I look closely at this issue, and argue against native-speakerism, and for Japan to make English their own.

CHAPTER SIX: NATIVE SPEAKER, CELEBRITY, AND JOKER

In this chapter, I look at the roles ALTs can find themselves in at school, how stereotypes of foreigners affect how they are seen there, and how they are expected to contribute in class as ‘native speakers’ of English. I begin with a discussion of the stereotype of foreigners in Japan as *henna gaijin*, or strange and funny. I present data showing the experiences of the research participants being expected to entertain, motivate and be fun in the classroom. I then discuss the other side of the coin in the section *Western Reverence*, which has relevance to the *Native Speaker* section, where the perceived importance of being a native English speaker, which is linked to being a Westerner, is described by the research participants. In the subsequent section *We Can be International*, I present data, including my own experiences, illustrating the authority or position ALTs are sometimes in to know and speak about other countries. Presented in the next section *Celebrity*, I show that ALTs treatment is likened to celebrity treatment. In the *Joker* section I present data showing the experiences of the research participants being expected to entertain, motivate and be fun in the classroom. In the section *Not Just a Joker* I show that the research participants felt they were taken seriously and treated like individuals. Lastly, in the section *For Non-Native English* I provide a discussion where I argue that instead of aiming for ‘native-speaker English’ Japanese education could try to make English their own and have Japanese teachers fluent in English.

Henna Gaijin

According to Prieler (2010), *henna gaijin* is a common phrase in Japan. It means “strange foreigner” and it is a stereotype. Stereotypes often seem superficially reasonable (Oshika, 2001) although according to Ting-Toomey (1999) a stereotype is an overgeneralisation about an identity group, without considering individual variation. ALTs who work in many schools, may visit a particular class only once during their time on the JET Programme. I don't believe this allows for students and teachers to get to know the ALT on an individual level, and so stereotypes are more likely to prevail. Sloss (1995) believes that the ALTs who visit a class only one time understand most, the ALT as joker or performer situation.

Prieler (2010) analysed 20,000 commercials shown in Japan, and found that one of the ways foreigners were depicted was as strange, and differing from Japanese norms. From “funny to demeaning”, the othering of Westerners via “caricature, stereotype and humour” is instrumental in constructing what is Japanese, by showing what is *not* Japanese (Nederveen Pieterse, cited in Prieler, 2010, p. 516). Japanese have traditionally, and today still do, define themselves in contradistinction to others (Prieler, 2010). There is a strong “we” and “they” dichotomy between themselves and the rest of the world (Reischauer, 1981, p. 33) In the mid-1800s, Japan was forced open to trade and the Japanese quickly adopted Western knowledge, including hierarchal racial theories with European people at the top. According to Prieler (2010), the forced opening of the country created a sense of inferiority among Japanese as their confidence was shaken. The mocking portrayal of Westerners in Japanese media began in the late 1980s when Japan was prospering economically and beginning a “global cultural ascendancy” (Holden, cited in Prieler, 2010, p. 516). Paradoxically, there is still the contradistinction of foreigners as funny/strange, while the historical acceptance of the Eurocentric racial hierarchies has not been entirely erased. The Eurocentric racial hierarchies contribute to the next section’s topic, the reverence of the West.

Western Reverence

According to Iida (2002), membership to being Japanese rests on ethnicity rather than civic national values, which means only if you are ethnically “Japanese” can you be called “Japanese”. Immigrants cannot become “Japanese” in the way that they can become New Zealanders in New Zealand, where civic national values allow for many ethnicities to belong. This exclusive ethnic membership to being “Japanese” is linked to Japan’s preoccupation with ethnicities and conceptual hierarchies resulting from their struggling to accept their placement on the Western hierarchy. For over two centuries, white westerners have been cast in a ‘golden light’, for example in 1885 Fukuzawa Yukichi (who is on the 10,000-yen note) argued for Japan to disassociate itself from its Asian neighbours and “cast our lot with civilized nations of the West” (Fukuzawa, 1885/1997, p. 353).

Japanese views of other nations and ethnicities are influenced by their belief in the idea of a “ladder of civilizations” with Euro-American societies at the top, Japan somewhere in the middle, and other Asian countries at the bottom (Sugimoto, 2003, p. 183). In line with Halls (1995) view that in Japan foreigners are viewed as experts on the world outside of Japan, Prieler (2010, p. 515) found that in Japanese advertisements ‘white people’ often signify “a world beyond Japan” and represent a “citizen of the world”.

Native Speaker

Since being a native speaker of English is usually identified as the main contribution the ALTs make, it is interesting to observe that the research participants for this research had mixed views about how important this really was and pointed out that they thought they made other equally important contributions. While on the one hand we are there as native speakers of English, on the other hand, as Nate recognized, with our natural speech we can show how flexible the rules really are:

What we do teach is really simple like how English is spoken in the real world which is something they don’t get as much from the teachers. So I think just showing how casual it [English] can be.

Ella felt we could show “natural” English, “Modelling pronunciation is a big part of it, also teaching natural conversation, natural grammar”.

Sarah saw our native speaker status it as one of the main reasons for us being in class: “At my school, I think the main focus for them was for the students to be exposed to a foreigner and to have a native speaker in the class”.

A “human tape recorder” is a role some ALTs find themselves in, where their only function in class is to dictate. This role might reinforce the inflated value of native speakers, as students see that a foreigner has come all the way from their home country to their school, to their class to dictate (and only that). Of course ALTs do more than this, but if a school is rarely visited then the children in classes that have ALT ‘human tape recorders’ may think the ALTs main role is to teach “native” English. This depends on the Japanese teacher, as Rochelle went from working with a teacher that gave her class planning responsibilities to being an instrument: “And then

that shifted to the next year with a teacher who just wanted me to be the human tape recorder”.

When asked whether being a native speaker is an important part of the ALT position, Robert replied:

Right now it is because it's the prerequisite, it's pretty much the prerequisite for getting the job, one of the main prerequisites. Although it's not necessarily true it can be your second language but you can have a degree from an English speaker university, I'm pretty sure you can get in. Do they have to do a test? Or they have to prove their proficiency in English maybe. It's important, I don't believe that it's integral to teaching English, I haven't done any research on education so I could be completely wrong but I think the passion of the teacher for the subject is probably a huge factor of teaching anything.

Rochelle also felt quite clearly that being a native English speaker isn't an important part of the position: To the same question she replied: “I don't think so. No”. However, she felt that its perceived integrity was important:

I think it adds to the integrity of your ability to do the role. I think it's important, and I think that perceived integrity for Japanese is extremely important. To do the job, not necessarily, but to maintain that perception of integrity it is.

Sarah felt being a native speaker added to her status at school, however she didn't think it was necessary for the position:

The other English teachers would come to us, even though their English was brilliant and a lot of them had lived in America or Canada. They would always come and ask us something like a grammar question, or sometimes if they weren't quite sure how they'd pronounced something, or if what they'd said to the students was correct. So it wasn't like ‘I know everything, and you just happen to speak English but don't have an education background’. No, we were sort of equals.... If they are fluent in English, if it's not necessarily their first language in English, I don't think it really matters. They [ALTs] teach them the language, but they're also

bringing some of their own culture to the students so I don't think it matters. As long as they're still getting the same information, it's not like they're being taught incorrect English so as long as they're fluent. I don't think it matters that it's not their first language.

Nate felt it added to his status at school and that it was important for the role. When asked if it added status at school he replied: "A native speaker of English, certainly". When asked if he thought it was important for role he replied, "Yeah I think so. I suppose you see a bit more of the finer points of English and the JTEs should already be filling the role of non-native". Nate was the only participant who felt being a native English speaker was important for the ALT role, in terms of teaching.

Ella felt being a native English speaker added to her status and meant she had intuition with English, but that there were benefits that ALTs who had English as a second language could contribute that native English speakers can't. In reply to my question, "Do you think being a native English speaker added to your status at work?", Ella said: "Yes, in regards to my position as an English speaker. When dealing with English, I think the teachers appreciated having the advice of a native speaker". In reply to "Do you think being a native speaker is an important part of the ALT job position?", Ella said:

I think that it was important only in the sense that I had the benefit of 'intuition' with English – for example knowing when a sentence or phrase sounds natural or strange. But, this advantage could be attained by a non-native speaker. Actually, a large proportion of the ALT position is introducing foreign countries and culture, so I think those ALTs who have second languages can provide an even more interesting international experience for the students. Also, these ALTs are a good role model for students as they show that learning English is doable and useful.

If ALTs are not needed for "native" English, they can still have a role of sharing their culture, and as I discuss next they can teach about other cultures too.

We Can Be International

Described later in this chapter under *Celeb*, Western foreigners can be viewed as international people, as being of not only their country but representing and knowing about other Western nations. Although this belief is erroneous, and ALTs do not embody a concept of the international person, we may have knowledge of other countries that is not known by our students or is not included in their curriculum. We may find ourselves in a good position to broaden our students' views of the world, and even though we may not be experts, we may be regarded as more expert than they are. This view of ALTs as cultural experts provides them with opportunities to increase cultural understandings about our culture and others too.

For example, Rochelle found at the technical school she worked at her role was more internationalisation, and she would present mini lectures about the world which the Japanese teacher would translate:

At the technical college in my first year, the role was very much about internationalisation. I would go to these four classes, and the teacher who had the whole four classes would say to me, 'OK what would you like to talk about next week?'. We would plan and I'd have a topic, and he would ask, 'would you like to talk about that in small chunks, and I'll translate then we'll ask some questions?'. So it ended up being more a little lecture with him translating, but the role [purpose] was thinking about the world.

As Ella and Sarah expressed, because ALTs can bring cross-cultural knowledge to the class, something which non-native English speakers do, the ALT position is not all about English. We are foreigners in flesh, individuals rather than the generalisations that we make when describing foreign cultures and people. However, we still have an element of novelty, and of possibly being not quite real, which I cover in the following section.

Celebrity

The novelty of foreigners and the status of native English speaker can mean we get treated like celebrities sometimes, with students lining up for autographs and shaking our hands. As with the inflated value of native English, the sometimes inflated status of ALTs is a non-personified signifier of the outside world, not a real person. Hill

(1995), a previous ALT, analyses the double edged sword of being treated like a celebrity at school, noting that with the reverence also comes disrespect. He describes students zealously collecting his autograph, something I remember being very time consuming when it's a whole class. Hill states, "There is no conception of the fact that foreigners are people too" (1995, p. 55). As discussed above, as foreigners we may be seen as experts on everything outside of Japan and our views expressed in casual conversation in class may "stand for the totality of Western opinion" (1995, p. 154).

Hill (1995) describes how with the disrespect also comes with the reverence. Something that I believe many foreigners will relate to, is the concept that only Japanese can understand and appreciate Japanese culture. The example Hill uses, is the absence of using honourifics for foreigners. Unless someone is family, an honourific (for example *san* after their name) is used. For children, friends or cute things (e.g. a pet) *chan* or *kun* can be used. It would be extremely disrespectful to not use any honourific towards another Japanese person (who is not family), but to do so to a foreigner is not considered malicious. It is not accepted that the foreigner understands the significance of the honourific, or it may be considered okay because in the foreigners' country honourifics aren't used.

This view, that foreigners come and keep their same mindset from home, or that foreigners expect to be treated as they were in their home country, may be relevant for tourists. But for people who learn the language, who learn about the culture and are aware of norms, to have honourifics omitted can be offensive. They are very important to use with non-family, and to exclude foreigners who use honourifics themselves (which shows they understand them and know the importance of them) further 'others' foreigners.

I didn't experience having honourifics omitted. I was usually *sensei* (teacher honorific) but sometimes other teachers would use *san*, which among colleagues can be acceptable. However, I have heard of ALTs having the honorific omitted, and it was felt, contrary to Hill's argument, to be malicious. As an exchange student in Japan, I remember one roll call in PE. The Japanese students' names were read out with *san* at the end of each name, then at the bottom of the roll the exchange students' names were read out endearingly with *chan*, to which the students laughed. I don't

believe it was malicious at all, however it was inappropriate and when looking at a New Zealand school, for example, if students' full names were read out, and then the Japanese exchange students nicknames were called out, it would be inappropriate in the same way.

The non-human construct that allows foreigners to be celebs and disrespected, and the history of Japanese racial conceptualizations that deem them inferior to white Westerners, could contribute to the Joker role some ALTs find themselves being expected to, or choosing to, play outside of Japanese society's rules and needing to be brought down a rung.

Joker

Language teaching aimed at improving reading rather than speaking skills may be a contributing factor to some students disliking English. With the ALT comes a communicative learning in teaching, an "interest" (Rochelle) and ... fun. Sarah also felt her students needed motivating: "The only problems I had [with students], were trying to get some of them actively participating in class rather than just sitting there like stunned mullets". She was aware that English was a "chore" to many students, and saw it as her role to make English fun: "I felt it was just to get the kids exposed to the language and just to try and make it fun, and to get them engaged and to make English not be a chore". Similarly, Nate and Robert viewed making English fun as part of their role in class. Robert described his role as an ALT, in some cases, was "to entertain the students probably". Nate felt ALTs are there to "be fun and do the games side of things".

McConnell (2000, p.214) said some Japanese English teachers complain in private of ALT lead classes as "classes without rigor" or "just a playtime". For Japanese teachers who are under pressure to prepare students for entrance exams which require grammar and translation and are writing and reading focussed, it is understandable that communicational activities may be considered play. However, not only did ALTs think their role was to make English fun, but that that was expected of them.

Nate found it taxing at times when he was expected to make games focussed around grammar points:

A lot of my schools would go ‘we’ve got to do this grammar point, please make a game for it’...It’s a bit ridiculous to make a game looking at some of the grammar points they want us to do, but I suppose they’re not too sure what else to do [with us].

Outside of class, at times Robert found himself playing the joker. When he felt he was being stared at or was patronized with “wow, you can speak Japanese” when he used minimal Japanese, his way of dealing with it was “to just muck around with it, with people, to laugh, to try and make it funny. So I would say strange things to strangers”.

Foreigners being portrayed as funny, could be a reflection of the view that they are, in fact, funny. Or, through another lens it could be viewed that they are portrayed this way not because they are inherently strange, but because they need to be put in their place. This is linked with the celebrity role we can find ourselves in, we are distanced from the average Japanese teacher.

Not Just a Joker

In contrast to the “circus animal entertainer” (Antepara, 1995, p. 127), in particular Sarah who worked at only one school, felt accepted on an individual level. Although ALTs are sometimes expected to be entertaining, none of the ALTs in my study felt reduced at work to the *henna gaijin* (strange foreigner). Sarah said “I don't ever feel like it was just Sarah the foreigner, the ALT”. Sarah in particular shared a lot about herself with her students and colleagues, showing photos to all the teachers, even ones she didn't work with, and even though she doesn't speak Japanese and they didn't speak English she felt that allowed them to bond. Sarah surprised her teachers with the amount she shared, “Especially you know from the word go I had that photobook of my family and you know some of the teachers were quite surprised. Even from my self introduction I was showing them inside the house and my bedroom”.

For Rochelle, even though she was invited to class as an “interest” (to make class more interesting), she had many positive close relationships with teachers and

students and enjoyed being part of the class. She did not complain of being treated like a circus animal as some ALTs outside of my study did (Muroi, 1999). Although they felt they were in class to be motivating, fun or as an “interest”, my participants all felt their role was taken seriously by the other teachers.

Ella felt she was useful to the teachers and students:

Yes, I think my role was taken seriously. Most of the time I felt I was useful to teachers and students both inside and outside of class. I know there is kind of a stereotype that ALTs have it very easy, especially in comparison to the dedicated Japanese teachers, but I do think there was an understanding that my role in the workplace was different from the other teachers. They understand my role is to assist with English classes and introduce my culture, and I do exactly that.

Nate felt working within the Japanese system he could only do so much, possibly implying that whether it is or isn't taken seriously by others, it may be out of the ALTs control:

Seriously, in a Japanese way. Which is all you can hope I suppose...A lot of people complain about how we do the job, but at the end of the day we're working within the Japanese system and this is what they want I suppose.

Sarah felt she was an “integral” member of the teaching team:

Yes, very much so. My school was a very good school, we were treated very well, just like a very integral, important part of the teaching team and we were very much involved with everything. I never felt like it was, ‘oh, those ALTs we have to look after them’. We were always made to feel very welcome and always invited to meetings and things. There were three of us, so we were very important because the school that I was at specialised in English and global studies.

Rochelle felt there were varying degrees of how seriously or valued having an ALT at school was:

I think there were the teachers who could see value in it and they took it seriously, so we would regularly have classes. And there were teachers

who saw limited value, but within that limited scope they still took it seriously. So we've got an ALT student here, if I'm a Japanese teacher, do I take that seriously? Maybe, it depends on whether I think they've got something to offer. So I think in my personal experience because I have family, I was a little bit different. And they could see because I was a little bit older, that I might have a little bit more to offer than a younger person. But just on paper, 'oh, there's an ALT coming in to our school', I could see a few teachers going 'I'm going to use this person. I think it's a great resource'. And there are others who think 'I've got no time for that because it doesn't fit in with my teaching style and program and goals'. So those who can see value will take it seriously.

Robert felt respected in his role, but did not know whether that is inherent in the role or because of the personal relationships he had:

I felt like I was respected and like I had a role at the school, I'm not sure if that was related to being an ALT or related to our personal relationships at school. So I could understand how some people could feel not respected or feeling worthless.

Although unqualified for the specific job of teaching English, our native English status seems to excuse this. I believe there is a place for ALTs as cultural ambassadors and for teaching communicational English but in the next section I argue against the emphasis in Japan on the importance of "native" English.

For Non-Native English

In many schools in Asia and Africa, English is used as the medium of instruction and these students who become *non-native* English speakers may become "functionally native speakers" (Yano, cited in Yamada, 2010, p. 491). In countries where English is taught as a foreign language, English is localised to suit local needs, creating new varieties of English (Honna, 2000; Yano, 2009). According to Honna (1995), English does not only belong to native speakers, it belongs to the non-native speakers who localise it. As Ella pointed out, English as a second language speakers "can provide an even more interesting international experience for the students" and "these ALTs are a

good role model for students as they show that learning English is doable and useful” . As Kubota (1998) argues, there is potential for new meanings and identities to be created in new varieties of English but this potential will be harder to realize if native English is the target.

The ALT position is about more than English, but especially the fact that a non-native speaker has reached fluency would be an enormous incentive and motivation to Japanese students. But as Nate pointed out, there is already a non-native teacher in the class, who is an expert on the language. If Japanese students had Japanese teachers who spoke fluently, and ALTs were not used as tape recorders because their English pronunciation was not seen as superior, wouldn't that be good for Japanese students, who may think English is inherently hard for Japanese? ALTs could still be cultural ambassadors and assist with English teaching, but if our native speaker status were to be muted then fluent Japanese teachers could prove to their students that you can be Japanese *and* you can speak English. In saying this, I do not know how many Japanese English teachers would be classed as fluent, I suspect that regardless of how fluent the teacher is, unfairly they may be expected to utilize a “native” speaker. Hence, I am arguing for a shift in attitude and belief by the contributors to the JET Programme, for more emphasis on cultural exchange.

CONCLUSION

As ALTs we have more to offer than native English and an ‘international’ presence. We can share with our schools about our country, and provide another perspective on classroom activities, for example by sharing some ways we learn and teach in our own country. As individuals we extend past our nationality and we can bring our own set of skills, ideas and personality that we can share with others. Although we represent our country, we are individually unique and although the temporary nature of ALTs may encourage our guest and celebrity treatment, it also means the students and teachers can see the diversity in foreigners, and in New Zealanders.

CONCLUSION

I conclude with a look at some of the limitations of my research, discuss the concept of the ALT position not being a career, and provide ideas regarding possible future research. I highlight how seriously the job was taken by the research participants and the positive impact they believe they had on their students.

Limitations

The work experiences of New Zealand ALTs in Japan is experienced individually, however there are similarities in their experiences. Through qualitative research, their individual experiences do not become tallies and statistics, they are presented in more contextual detail. However, as a qualitative research project, the results are based on the individual experiences of the six research participants and are not necessarily representative of New Zealand Assistant Language teachers as a whole. Also, because the research was based on limited interviews I was not able to gain a high level of rapport or greater depth of data collection and analysis. If I had come to know the research participants over a longer period of time a higher level of trust could have been established and the interviews could have been more relaxed and more may have been shared.

Not a Career

While it was not an area I explored in depth in my thesis, another theme I noted, which I discuss briefly here, is that the ALT job was considered to not be a career by most of the participants, including myself, though they did consider it to be relevant to their possible future plans and they felt they gained skills that are not limited to the job, such as patience. However, I believe that because it's not a career-we are taken less seriously. Not that we weren't taken seriously, but in comparison to the Japanese teachers who professionally train for their particular position, and who are already likely in the career field they want to be in (because it's what they trained for), we were there for some other reason and therefore had a different and less serious status. Nonetheless, despite the temporary nature of the job and the reasons for the ALTs

teaching English in Japan being other than to teach English in Japan as a professional career, they took their roles seriously and felt they had successes with students.

With that in mind, at this point I believe it is useful to briefly reflect here on why they left JET, the nature of their role as unqualified teachers, the success they believe they had with students, and how the experience and skills they gained not only may fit with their long term plans but also contributed to their personal development.

Although not considered a career, my participants all spoke earnestly of their joys of teaching English, especially one-on-one and small group activities, and although teaching English wasn't what drew them to the JET programme, my impression was that they were interested in teaching in their time as an ALT, but also understood that the programme aims are broader than that.

Why Did They Leave?

That it is not a career is the main reason why ALTs leave the programme, but there are other considerations as well. Robert said that he left the ALT programme because, "I was pretty tired of the job. The job wasn't very challenging anymore and I thought if I didn't leave then every year I stayed longer it would get harder and harder to leave". Ella said that she left "because I really feel pressure that I want to start an actual career". Sarah explained that "It was sort of for personal reasons nothing to do with Japan, just things that were happening back home. And because I sort of felt like I need to move into a career that was more focused on what I had studied. So it was awesome for one year, but it wasn't something I felt I wanted to do for a long time". Nate stated that he left because "I don't think the job offers too much growth in some ways. It's a comfortable job in many ways but I can't stand doing nothing over summer. Maybe I just feel like I don't get enough out of it" (Nate). Finally, in contrast with the others, Rochelle left because she had recontracted for three years, which at the time was the limit for JETs. My reason for leaving was because I wasn't happy with the local daycare options for my son, and moving while on the JET programme can be applied for but only in certain circumstances, such as moving to live with a spouse. Otherwise, I would have left after two or three years in pursuit of a job where

I would be more in charge, i.e not an assistant, and to have a regular place of work and routine (instead of moving around different schools on the JET programme).

ALTs are Not ‘Real’ Teachers

As I have noted, ALTs do not have the same responsibilities as teachers because they are not professionally trained as teachers. The research participants believed this had various impacts on how they were used by the Japanese teachers. On teachers who didn't utilise her in class, Rochelle thought that was okay “because they’re responsible for those students and I’m not. If they can’t find a way to utilise this resource, then that’s okay”. Nate recognized that despite being native speakers we are not experts on the finer points of English, observing that “When it comes to teaching English I don't think I’m there enough to teach English, and also ALTs probably aren’t the best qualified to teach the finer points of English as well”. Robert also recognized that we are not qualified to be teachers:

I would do what the teacher wanted. If they wanted me to plan everything, I would grumble and moan and try and come up with something. If they didn’t like it and wanted to change it I was like, that’s OK, you’re the professional. My thought was, these people are trained teachers... It wasn’t really my place to tell them how to do their job.

From their perspective, some Japanese teachers of English complain that some ALTs “are not really interested in teaching” (Ohtani, 2010, p. 38) and others have not known what to do with the unqualified foreigner thrust on them (Wada & Cominos, 1995). According to one Japanese teacher there are good and bad ALTs; the good ones are “serious” and “friendly”, and the bad ones “just come to Japan for the money, without any motivation to teach their language and to learn about a different culture and try to reap the advantages from being a foreigner here” (Muroi, 1999, p. 10). However this view is not representational of how Japanese teachers as a whole view ALTs, and I would expect it to be on the cynical end of the spectrum of what Japanese teachers think. For example, Nate felt our usefulness was recognised and that, “I do think they view us as some sort of genuine teaching resource”.

Success with Students

While being an ALT is not a career, it was certainly not a waste of time for either the research participants or their students. Here are some examples provided by my participants that express the positive impact they felt they had on their students:

Ella formed some great one-on-one relationships with students:

Definitely some of the students, we are good friends I think. There are some students who I write letters to, and we have our handshakes and stuff. It's really cool that I got to know some of the students quite well.

Sarah made herself accessible to students who might wish to talk with her:

I've had quite a few one-on-one experiences especially with students who really just wanted to learn English, so they would come up and talk whenever they could. I was of the opinion that, I just wanted to make myself as approachable as possible and accessible as possible, so I would often go and eat lunch in the cafeteria. I didn't have to, but I quite enjoyed it. Or I would just go and sit outside, be in places that the students would be able to see me and have the opportunity to come up and talk to me. I know some ALTs didn't want to do that and would have preferred to just sit in the office. But the best part of my time in Japan was the students, and so I felt like the more time that I spent with them, the more likely that they were to want to talk to me, and find me less scary. So I formed some really good relationships with the students and even in the time I was there I noticed that their English just got so much better. Especially with one on one speech practice with some of the really good students who got into competitions and the debate team, and the ESS club members.

Robert found spending so much time working in the school English Club allowed for more meaningful relationships with the club members:

The girls that did the English Club, they were doing it for three years so some of them, my last year students, I'd had them for three years so we were pretty close. When you have to see each other like three or four times a week, and you help them with their homework, you do activities together. For the school festival we made a short English Club movie for two of the years, so that was definitely one of the positives.

Rochelle's relationships with some students extended to outside of class. By being involved with setting up neighbourhood activities that included students from another school, her positive influence was not restricted to within the class walls:

I think I had only been there for three months but it was definitely around October, and in one teacher's class, where he would let me have conversations with students, I started having really good conversations with one girl called Sayumi, and another girl called Aki, and it turned out that they were good friends. And one day, I had about four students turn up at our apartment. And so we just hung out... I can't even remember why they were there, but we were just hanging out... The other ALT, he's been there for a couple of years, he came down to visit. He said, 'You've only been here for three months, and you've got students in your home. I've been here for two years and no-one has visited'. And I don't know what it was, maybe it was that opportunity to talk to them one-on-one for that amount of time that teacher gave me. That let me make that connection, and the ESS Club [English Club] we would have a Halloween party and the ESS Club would come to our house with some other ALTs. Everyone in our neighbourhood that our kids would play with, we sent them a little thing to let them know what's happening. And we did a little Easter day and our ESS Club would again come to our apartment and we even invited some ESS clubs from another school and they all came together. We did things like egg throwing, egg painting... We did it with the kids in our area.

Future Relevance of the JET Experience and Skills Gained

Although the ALT position is not considered a career by my participants, it was a relevant experience to their life and career path, and some of them were aware of how they had developed new skills. Robert, who is looking into working in Education and using his Japanese language skills in a future career, discussed what he had gained from the JET experience:

It's really hard to quantify. A couple of my flatmates...they haven't really done their OE [overseas experience] and they're in their late

twenties now and you can really see them craving for that overseas experience... You learn about yourself. You learn how to deal with other cultures and other people, you get more understanding and more patience.

Patience was something Ella also felt she improved:

One of the main things [I take away from my experience] is being able to work with people from different countries and an increased cultural awareness of myself, not only myself but also others as well. You kind of learn to overcome the language barrier, you can still make relationships with people despite not being from the same background or not speaking the same language. You learn patience from that kind of thing.

In the future, Ella wants to work in Human Resources, and her next step is more study. She is not interested in working in Japan again, however she is interested in working for a Japanese company; “I would be interested in working for a Japanese company, like in New Zealand or Australia, or a company that deals with Japan, where I could use Japanese”.

Sarah is looking into a job in education and outreach, however despite her happiness to work in Japan again, she doubts the appropriate position (in English) would be available in Japan:

I really enjoyed teaching, more so than I thought I would. But I realise that teaching in Japan is a very different kettle of fish than teaching anywhere else. I’m not going to put that aside, I might end up doing teacher training one day. I’m really interested in environmental education, especially for children, so that is kind of my dream to get into that field, education and outreach.

Nate was able to improve his Japanese language skills and became more confident in front of class. Japan is somewhere he is looking at working in again. In fact, he applied for a JET Programme position as a Coordinator of International Relations (CIR). CIRs organise and assist projects related to adjusting Japanese society to an increasingly multilingual, multicultural, and international world such as international

exchange programmes, school visits, language classes, cultural lectures, translating, and interpreting:

I've been doing a lot of reflecting lately⁵. I was getting to do the odd bit of translation on the job. I did originally apply for CIR ... One thing I do notice, I feel okay and confident being in front of the classroom... Now that I look back, I remember being in front of like forty kids looking back at you. It felt a bit weird to be standing there. It felt like I shouldn't be in front of them. But then I became confident to be there and just do my thing... I'm okay working in any country. At this stage I think Japan's certainly one of the main countries I've been looking at.

Similar to Nate, I originally applied for a CIR position and wanted to improve my Japanese language skills. These didn't improve as much as I had thought they would (it would have required more work on my part than I was eventually able to manage) but I felt my confidence in front of students increased as did my understanding of the culture. I think as a foreigner being able to work in a Japanese workplace is a wonderful opportunity to learn about Japanese culture and to practice the language. However, I was caught between wanting to fit in and do things the Japanese way, and being there for my family so not wanting to forfeit too much of my free time away from them.

Rochelle loves the idea of going back to Japan on the JET Programme. She said, "I'd love to go back, definitely. I know it wouldn't be the same [as it was in Japan on the JET Programme last time]".

PERSPECTIVE ON FURTHER RESEARCH

Presenting the experiences and views of six (myself included) previous ALTs can assist with preparing ALTs, to learn from our experiences, but as is often said by JETS, every situation is different. Mixed method research with both quantitative (to see how often particular roles ALTs are in) and qualitative approaches on the roles, from both the perspective of the ALTs and also the Japanese teachers, would provide a bigger picture. This would assist understanding between the two groups, so ALTs may be utilised to their full potential in class. I think qualitative research into

Japanese teachers' perspectives and experiences of working with ALTs would be complementary to the ALTs views and experiences, and would probably reveal perspectives both similar and different to those described by the participants in this thesis. For ALTs to be the best they can be, input from Japanese teachers who have experience of working with ALTs in their classes would be important as they know the culture, the school system, and their students very well.

The work experiences of the New Zealand ALTs I interviewed have similarities, as shown by the themes I have identified and discussed, and my presentation of their experiences has allowed their voices to be heard and their experiences to be recorded. It is my hope for future and current ALTs that, like myself and the others reported here, they will gain insight into their identification as a New Zealander, appreciate the care and welcome of their Japanese hosts, learn from cultural differences and how this may affect them at work, understand the role they are or will be playing in the classroom, and enjoy the experience of being a foreigner in Japan.

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