“Perceptual Mismatches” and the Place of Culture and Politics in Teaching English: Perspectives of Six U.S. EFL Teachers in Japan

Kimberly McMillen

University of Colorado at Boulder, kim.n.mcmillen@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholar.colorado.edu/ling_gradetds

Recommended Citation
https://scholar.colorado.edu/ling_gradetds/12

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by Linguistics at CU Scholar. It has been accepted for inclusion in Linguistics Graduate Theses & Dissertations by an authorized administrator of CU Scholar. For more information, please contact cuscholaradmin@colorado.edu.
“PERCEPTUAL MISMATCHES” AND THE PLACE OF CULTURE AND POLITICS IN TEACHING ENGLISH: PERSPECTIVES OF SIX U.S. EFL TEACHERS IN JAPAN

By

KIMBERLY NICOLE MCMILLEN

B.A., University of Colorado, 2006

A thesis submitted to the
Faculty of Graduate School of the
University of Colorado in partial fulfillment
Of the requirement for the degree of
Masters of Linguistics, TESOL

Department of Linguistics

2012
This thesis entitled:
“Perceptual Mismatches” and the Place of Culture and Politics in Teaching English:
Perspectives of Six U.S. EFL Teachers in Japan
written by Kimberly Nicole McMillen
has been approved for the Department of Linguistics

(Maria L. Thomas-Ruzic)

(David S. Rood)

(Mark A. Knowles)

Date ___________________

The final copy of this thesis has been examined by the signatories, and we
Find that both the content and the form meet acceptable presentation standards
Of scholarly work in the above mentioned discipline.

IRB protocol # 10148
Colonialism has defined the past two centuries of English Language Teaching. Within the past half-century, researchers have identified this trend as problematic and have explored a number of new language teaching methods and approaches. The dominant approach used in the recent past and present is Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). Researchers have argued, though, that this approach still has remnants of a colonial mindset creating divisions and mismatches between teachers and their students, especially within EFL contexts (Holli
day 1994, 2005; McKay 2002). This environment neglects local knowledge and students’ autonomy - two important pieces of effective teaching in the rapidly globalizing world. In this global context, the emergence of English as an International Language and World Englishes is gaining traction with researchers and teachers alike (Kachru 1986, 1992, 2006; Matsuda 2009, 2011; Sharifian 2009).

English teaching in Japan can help contextualize these arguments. Currently, Japan’s Ministry of Education employs many native-speakers of English (Assistant Language Teachers – ALTs) to teach alongside Japanese Teachers of Language (JTL) in the school system. ALTs are often encouraged to utilize the CLT approach, yet they experience ‘perceptual mismatches’ with their students due to linguistic, cultural, and pedagogical reasons. These views were reflected in the interviews of 6 ALTs who were part of the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Program. Through these interviews, the ALTs’ anecdotes support researchers’ and methodologists’ call to create a more inclusive pedagogy and an increase in cultural awareness for more effective English language teaching.
## CONTENTS

### CHAPTER

I. INTRODUCTION..............................................................................................................1  
  Background of the Study.........................................................................................1  
  Arrangement of Ideas..............................................................................................3  

II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE..............................................................................5  
  The Politics of English..............................................................................................5  
  English Language at Present..................................................................................9  
  English in the Japanese Context...........................................................................14  
  Mismatches in ELT and the CLT Conundrum.......................................................15  

III. METHODS..............................................................................................................29  
  Backgrounds: Group 1............................................................................................31  
  Backgrounds: Group 2............................................................................................32  

IV. FINDINGS...............................................................................................................35  
  Curriculum Development and Attitudes...............................................................35  
  Activities: The Good and the Bad.........................................................................39  
  Beliefs about Teaching and Learning....................................................................42  

V. DISCUSSION............................................................................................................43  
  The JET Connection..............................................................................................43  

VI. IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION..................................................................54  

BIBLIOGRAPHY..........................................................................................................57  

APPENDIX

A. INTERVIEW TEMPLATE.............................................................................................60
TABLES

Table

1. Overview of Group 1 Backgrounds.................................................................32
2. Overview of Group 2 Backgrounds.................................................................34
### ABBREVIATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ALM</td>
<td>Audiolingual Method</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALT</td>
<td>Assistant Language Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BE</td>
<td>British English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLT</td>
<td>Communicative Language Teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EIL</td>
<td>English as an International Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EFL</td>
<td>English as a Foreign Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELF</td>
<td>English as a Lingua Franca</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELT</td>
<td>English Language Teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JET</td>
<td>Japanese Exchange and Teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JTL (*JTE)</td>
<td>Japanese Teacher of Language (*Japanese Teacher of English)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L1</td>
<td>First language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L2</td>
<td>Second language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NAE</td>
<td>North American English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NS</td>
<td>Native speaker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NNS</td>
<td>Nonnative speaker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TESOL</td>
<td>Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WE</td>
<td>World Englishes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

For better or for worse, it is commonly accepted in the world today that English is the first global language. English is used among nations where it is the dominant language. It is also used between nations as a tool of communication to conduct business, carry out science and create new technologies. More people speak English than any other language in the world both as a first language and as a second language. Statistics of the past couple of decades indicate that:

- English is used as an official or semi-official language in over 60 countries, and has a prominent place in a further 20. It is either dominant or well established in all six continents. It is the main language of books, newspapers, airports and air-traffic control, international business and academic conferences, science, technology, medicine, diplomacy, sports, international competitions, pop music, and advertising. Over two-thirds of the world’s scientists write in English (Crystal 1987 as cited by McKay & Bokhorst-Heng 2008: 7).

- Also, English has grown to include “[…] 375 million users of English in Inner-Circle societies, 375 million in Outer-Circle (ESL) societies, and around 750-1,000 million in the Expanding (EFL) Circle” (McArthur, 2001 as cited by Bolton 2006: 261). Through this ever-increasing demand for English ability, governments and school systems across the world have mandated the teaching of English for communicative purposes with a top-down policy mindset giving little thought into effective implementation strategies. However, with the knowledge and tools available today about English Language Teaching (ELT), it is very possible to establish a successful ELT classroom in any environment across the globe.
A vast amount of research has been done on language teaching methods in the past century, and traditional methods and approaches such as the Grammar Translation method, the Audiolingual method (ALM), and the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach have each been proven to be insufficient for students’ needs (Brown 2007; Holliday 2005; Kumaravadivelu 2003; McKay 2002; McKay & Bokhorst-Heng 2008). Each has its place in history but suffers from its own individual flaws. However, one of the shared criticisms leveled at each of these methods is that they lack cultural sensitivity, which can create frequent perceptual mismatches between teachers and students (Kumaravadivelu 2003). To use Kumaravadivelu’s term, mismatches ultimately affect the teacher’s ability to teach and the student’s motivation to learn. At this point, it becomes difficult to progress under conventional ‘wisdom’ that extols the beneficial values of trying to find and only use ‘the proper method.’

Japan is an example of a country that desires to be globally competitive and thus sees English language competence as instrumental to its goals. In order for Japan’s citizens to be proficient in communicative English, it has put into place various laws mandating obligatory English language instruction in the school system from grades five through twelve. The present Japanese context can be used as a way of exploring the history and future of the TESOL profession and ELT methodology by considering how these perceptual mismatches arise and can affect English language acquisition.

In order to research this area of concern further, I interviewed 6 individuals with experience teaching the English language in Japan, asking for their thoughts on the different teaching methods they used and the perceived effectiveness of those methods with their students. As such, this research is qualitative and not quantitative. My goal in this research was to connect what my interviewees reported seemed like successful language learning in connection with what researchers are suggesting about how to make a more effective pedagogy for the TESOL profession and ELT. My interview findings can hopefully help shed some light on this topic, but they are, by no means, an end in and of themselves to the issue posed above. The population for my research is also a very specific population. They are all native English speakers, from the United States, of a certain age group, with experiences in Japan at about the same time, and most of whom had little prior teacher training but various degrees of exposure to the
Japanese language and culture. For this study, I did not analyze the textbooks my participants used in their classrooms: *Eigo Note* (elementary school) and *New Horizons* (junior high school).

I began this project as a way to aid my own journey of personal improvement as a TESOL educator because my own experiences in Japan as an English teacher on the JET Program gave rise to questions about the appropriateness of my teaching methods in relation to my values and beliefs about their legitimacy and correctness. I delved into the research about this subject with the main goal of trying to understand how to become a more effective English language teacher while understanding that I have one cultural background and my students have another. Based on my experiences and my own mismatches with my students, the relationship between method, culture and language seems to be integral to the further development and improvement of this profession and my place within it.

**Arrangement of Ideas**

My discussion of ELT and methodology necessarily begins with an overview of spread of English and where it stands today as a world language. First, I present some of the researchers’ discussions about the spread of English through colonialism and the resulting political and social issues that surfaced. My discussion uses Phillipson’s (1992, 2009) idea of *linguistic imperialism* and Holliday’s (2005) idea of *native-speakerism* as examples of some of these issues. Following this section, I have included a discussion of the present view of English and the subsequent tensions between English on a global scale and in local contexts. This includes definitions and descriptions of *English as an International Language* (EIL) and *World Englishes* (WE). Next, I present the current state of English in the Japanese context.

Finishing the literature review is a presentation of the main approach used in language teaching, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), and arguments by researchers suggesting how the CLT is inadequate for global/local needs, which call for more cultural awareness. The discussion ends with the researchers’ appeals for more culturally appropriate methodologies including ideas for a push towards EIL and WE curriculum development and implementation (Matsuda 2009, Matsuda & Friedrich 2011; McKay 2002, McKay & Bokhorst-Heng 2008; Sharifian 2009) with a focus on methods appropriate for
local contexts (Canagarajah 2009). Finally, there is a presentation of Holliday’s (2005) idea for student social autonomy and his proposal for a shift in mindset valuing inclusivity and re-evaluating the current definition of ‘authentic’ material. There is a brief section following the main body of the literature review detailing how this literature relates to the current Japanese ELT context.

Chapter 3 describes the methods I used to gather the content of the interviews and the general backgrounds of my six participants. Chapters 4 and 5 present my findings and subsequent discussion of those findings. My participants referred to several mismatches dealing with pedagogic, cultural (attitude), and linguistic areas, all of which coincide with researchers’ previous observations.

Through this review of the past and present situation of ELT, specifically referring to the Japanese context, I hope to establish a clear vision of a mindset for the TESOL profession and ELT that will facilitate the greatest success for their students’ English language acquisition without compromising the identities that both students and teachers bring with them to the classroom.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The Politics of English

Colonialism and its Aftermath

Many current social and political issues in ELT arise due to the initial spread of English throughout the world on the tenets and policies of colonialism. With the spread of the British Empire, there was also the spread of English in tandem with colonialist policies that highlighted the importance of teaching English to the people of the colonies (Pennycook 1998 as cited by McKay & Bokhorst-Heng 2008). McKay and Bokhorst-Heng add that, “[…] the growth of the British Empire led many to associate the use of English with power since those who knew English had greater access to jobs” (p. 4).

With the development of this relationship between English and power, people believed they could live a better life if they knew and could use English. In perceiving economic advantages of English, the wish for improvement also applied not just to individuals but also to nations who then chose to promote English in their education systems because, in addition to being the language most used in international business contexts, it was and still is also viewed as the language with the most access to information and technological/scientific knowledge. In the postcolonial era, nations view English as the vehicle for modernization.

By promoting English to their citizens, nations hope to create globally competitive citizens that will be able to navigate the global market utilizing all their knowledge to create more and better opportunities for their nation’s development (McKay & Bokhorst-Heng 2008; Cha & Ham 2011). This tie between a political agenda and linguistic knowledge created powerful incentives motivating people to
learn English and still persists in today’s postcolonial world where students from China to Pakistan to Peru all wish to learn English in the hopes of bettering their lives (McKay & Bokhorst-Heng 2008).

One of the legacies of colonialism is not only that it imposed policies and language on its colonies, but it also imposed its culture. Ngũgĩ (1985: 118) states that:

Colonialism imposed its control of the social production of wealth through military conquest and subsequent political dictatorship. But its most important area of domination was the mental universe of the colonized, the control through culture, of how people perceived themselves and their relationship to the world (as cited by Pennycook 1994: 61).

Colonialism was able to de-value the culture of the people in the colonies, ‘the Other’, and replace it with the culture of the colonists, ‘the Self’, bringing in the theme of divisiveness that has plagued the globalization of the English language. Accordingly, concepts like Holliday’s (2005) native-speakerism and Phillipson’s (1992, 2009) linguistic imperialism are linked with culture in that the culture of ‘the Self’ is above that of ‘the Other’, resulting in the mindset that native speakers are superior and therefore it is necessary to share their language and their culture with those who are less privileged.

Because of the influence of colonialism, many discussions on the current state of ELT center on the notion of culture. The trend in the field of linguistics seems to be a movement away from solely studying isolated linguistic forms and instead taking a wider view of language and how context changes and shapes it. Therefore, a definition of culture seems to be in order before moving on.

This word is notoriously difficult to explain because it encompasses so many different concepts and ideas from so many different opinions. Culture can be described as a set of values and beliefs that inform artwork and other creative pursuits as well as the everyday way of life that helps people make sense of the world (Pennycook 1994). Culture can include all manner of constructs such as “mental habits, personal prejudices, moral values, social customs, artistic achievements, and aesthetic preferences of particular societies” (Kumaravadivelu 2003: 267). Due to the wide scope of this definition, Kumaravadivelu points out that there can be a distinction between culture, on the one hand, referring to the larger social constructs of a society that deal with its artistic and creative endeavors, and on the other,
referring to the motivations leading to everyday decisions and behaviors of individuals. There is a tendency when speaking about culture to focus on the more artistic cultural aspects of a society. One of the main issues in ELT, then, is to avoid this tendency to view the surface forms of culture by acknowledging all of the deeper cultural values that people bring with them.

Native-speakerism

Discussions questioning the role of English on a global scale tend to consider that the spread of English was “generally natural, neutral and beneficial and [was] concerned more with questions of linguistic description than of language, culture and politics” (Pennycook 1994: 35). Instead, Pennycook continues on to argue that the spread of English is intimately related to socioeconomic factors and the spread of certain cultures between and within nations. The development of the English language on the global level, then, critically depends on the discourse about English, which is based on the spread of English through colonialism. Pennycook (1998 as cited by McKay & Bokhorst-Heng 2008; 4 - 5) states that colonialism created and promulgated an ‘insider/outsider’ or ‘Self/Other’ dichotomy. In this dichotomy, the language and culture associated with the colonizers (a.k.a. North American and British English/culture) were defined as ‘the Self’ and were seen with a positive attitude as a vehicle for modernization and improvement. On the other hand, languages and cultures associated with the colonized, ‘the Other,’ were seen with a negative viewpoint in that ‘the Other’ was ‘backward,’ that is to say, unintelligent, deficient, and needing improvement.

The ‘Self’/‘Other’ division creates a danger for what Holliday (2005) terms native-speakerism. Native-speakerism refers to the widely held belief that only native speakers (NS) of English from English dominant countries can claim authority over the proper variety and the proper way to teach English. This makes a further division between the perceived abilities of NS teachers of English versus nonnative speaker (NNS) teachers of English, NS teachers being ‘the Self’ (capable, knowledgeable) and NNS teachers being ‘the Other’ (incapable, needs training). As a result, many NNS teachers of English tend to have very low opinions of their abilities to teach and speak English. NNS teachers often hedge their
statements when they speak and teach English whereas NS teachers are often very confident in their abilities using even just the evidence that they are NS for proof of their capabilities (Llurda 2009). Moreover, NNS teachers are especially hesitant about expressing their knowledge of English with their NS colleagues present even though many of those NS colleagues are under qualified to be teaching English and many of whom are hired over NNS teachers (or even those NS teachers whose appearances are more ‘NNS’) because of their looks rather than their qualifications (Ali 2009: 38-39).

The division between perceived notions of NS and NNS teacher abilities then creates competition and discrimination, which as Holliday (2009: 26) claims, can be traced back to the native-speakerist ideology that runs through the TESOL profession stating that NNS cultures “[…] lack critical thinking, autonomy, the ability to plan and manage, individuality, and so on […].” He goes on to point out that native-speakerist attitudes are not just limited to NS scholars and teachers and that NNS scholars and teachers might be also influenced and follow the tenets of native-speakerism because it is so prevalent in TESOL professional circles.

*Linguistic Imperialism*

The ‘Self/Other’ dichotomy also plays out in Phillipson’s (1992, 2009) theory of *linguistic imperialism* which states that English, due to the political agenda behind its spread, dominates other languages in more ‘advanced’ and ‘modern’ contexts (eg. science, technology, academia, etc.) creating linguistic and cultural inequalities. Phillipson sets forth a list of ‘tenets’ he believes came from British and American colonial policies which are now informing the present day TESOL profession and ELT methodology. He argues that these ideas claim English is taught the best if it is viewed through a monolingual lens. Simply, the more and the earlier English is taught by a native-speaker with no use of other languages in the classroom, the more proficient students will be in acquiring English, all of which fit under the tenets of *native-speakerism* proposed by Holliday (2005).

Academics in the ELT field have started many discussions about the importance of how global aspects of English interplay and are intricately connected with local contexts, which have created a
tension between globalization and local values (Canagarajah, 2005; McKay & Bokhorst-Heng 2008). The

dominant trend in ELT, as Phillipson (1992, 2009) pointed out with linguistic imperialism, is this idea

that English will replace local languages and knowledge as it continues the legacy of colonization. One of

the most systematic ways to de-value local knowledge for the benefit of the global role of English is the

concept of modernism which “is inspired by the values of enlightenment and resulting in empirical

science” and values “universality, standardization, and systematicity” (Canagarajah 2005: 5). Diversity is

seen as a problem and those who wish to continue with their own way of life may end up discriminated

against (Canagarajah 2005).

Linguistic imperialism has much to offer the ELT profession in terms of self-reflection and
understanding the underlying historical and political motivations behind some of the current tenets of

ELT. However, this discourse has its fair share of dissenters as well who say that linguistic imperialism
gives no thought to the agency of English learners to choose for themselves whether they will succumb to
or resist learning English. (Brutt-Griffler 2002; Canagarajah 1999 – from McKay & Bokhorst-Heng
2008). Some research even suggests that English learners may very well be aware of this linguistic
imperialism and choose to study English so they can appropriate it for their own benefit rather than resist
it despite their knowledge (Li 2009). Regardless of how this discourse will continue to develop, it is
necessary for any ELT professional to be aware of all the complexity behind the spread of English and the
political factors motivating current trends in teaching English. In just the last half of the twentieth
century, English has been legitimized in school curriculums around the world (Cha & Ham 2011).
Subsequently, the spread of English happened so rapidly that we are just now becoming aware of some of
the issues involved with this phenomenon and still coming to terms with them.

English Language at Present

EIL: “De-nationalized”

Scholars and teachers alike seem to be trying to overcome these divisive themes and so have tried
to define and understand English on a global level in a more inclusive fashion. The most current
definition of English in its role as the common tongue of the world is *English as an International Language* (EIL). Some definitions of EIL limit its scope. McKay and Bokhorst-Heng (2008) define EIL as the English that can occur between speakers whose first language (L1) is English, and speakers who have learned English at a later point in their lives as an additional language (L2) as well as English interactions between L2 English users. They point out that even this definition is not as limiting as some who equate *English as a Lingua Franca* (ELF) with EIL. To make a clear distinction, they define ELF as that which occurs between two L2 users who do not share a common native language and therefore choose to use English as a common foreign language. Simply, ELF is a sub-category of EIL.

Other scholars state that it is important to view EIL as a global language without national boarders because English is linked to the notion that every individual is a member of the larger global civil society and not just a member of a ‘bounded national territory’. All individuals in the world today are ‘supranational citizens’ (Cha & Ham 2011). As such, these global citizens are changing their identities through English learning that is beyond national boarders. A consequence of this for the definition of EIL is that no one nation owns it, and so, EIL has the capacity to encompass all of the different varieties of English that exist in the world today under one term, and scholars like Sharifian (2009) and Matsuda (2009, 2011) suggest that countries can then find their own varieties of English that will be of the most use for their specific context. To deal with all these varieties, EIL’s focus is more on what Sharifian (2009) terms *intercultural communication*, which is just as important if not more so than the actual linguistic forms used in communication. As Sharifian (2009: 13) describes it, “[…] success in the international use of English does not so much hinge upon a particular variety or lexico-grammar, but is instead tied to the nature of the negotiation skills and strategies interlocutors adopt.”

This necessarily means that EIL is not so much about the different varieties, although it is important to know that there are many varieties that do exist and should be legitimized, but EIL is more about creating new negotiation strategies between speakers of different varieties such that they minimize misunderstandings between ‘culture-specific’ assumptions for successful global communication (Sharifian 2009). If EIL exists to represent all the different varieties of English used in the world under
one term, it implies that there exists no one variety that is any more ‘standard’ than any other variety, and therefore, there exists no one variety that should be the only one chosen as a ‘lingua franca’ for world communication (Sharifian 2009). English would then be able to take on a truly international form free of historical and cultural constraints, which is what the scholars claim is needed for the globalized world and economy (his introduction, Sharifian 2009).

The definition of EIL is important to ELT and its methodology because the methods used in classrooms are based off of which variety of English is being taught. If a teacher wants his/her students to learn a specific variety, the definition of the variety will change the goal of the lesson and therefore the methods and cultures used in teaching the language. Researchers say that in many ELT contexts outside of predominantly English speaking countries, teaching a specific already standardized variety of English (either NAE or BE) is not necessarily appropriate, and therefore, EIL needs to step in and become the main focus of the curriculum.

Varieties and World Englishes

Another important facet to understand English in its current context and EIL, specifically, has to do with the concept of World Englishes, which is based off of Kachru’s (1986, 1992) models of English as described and used in what he terms Inner Circle, Outer Circle, and Expanding Circle countries. Inner Circle countries are those in which English is the dominant language used in public institutional contexts as well as in the home. Countries in this circle are those like the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia. Outer Circle countries are those with multilingual societies where English is an additional language used primarily for communication in public institutional contexts while many different languages are spoken in the home. In this circle, English is “an institutionalized second-language variety” (McKay & Bokhorst-Heng 2008: xv). Countries in this circle are ones like India and Singapore. In Expanding Circle countries, English is a foreign language not dominantly spoken in either public institutions or in the home. Countries in this circle include ones like China, Korea, and Japan. For McKay
& Bokhorst-Heng (2008), they use the definition of World Englishes to refer to those ‘institutionalized second-language varieties’ of the Outer Circle.

There has been a trend to define World Englishes through a focus, and rightly so, on Englishes that are not the dominant standard varieties such as those from multilingual countries like India, Singapore, and Nigeria. It was and still is important for the study of English in a global setting to establish and legitimize varieties of English that have thus far been on the periphery, and Kachru was the first to really bring this topic up and make it part of the discussion (Mesthrie 2006). However, to truly accept EIL as an umbrella term for all varieties of English, the dominant standards of global English today, ie. North American English (NAE) and British English (BE) need to be a part of the discussion. Further, there needs to be an acceptance from speakers of NAE and BE that there are other varieties of English within their countries that have become languages in their own right due to the systematic linguistic formalizing of grammar rules and pragmatics that differ from the ‘standard’ variety in those countries. An example of such varieties is that of the ‘African American vernacular’ variety. From one perspective, even NAE has a rightful place in World Englishes because it was developed through the context of British colonies and went through similar processes of linguistic systematization that has shaped other varieties (Schneider 2006).

Going back to Sharifian (2009), his definition of World Englishes does not hold to such a narrow view and keeps in mind the increasing importance of World Englishes to ELT in Expanding Circle contexts where teachers and students alike are becoming more and more aware of World Englishes and need to be included in the discussion. Even the idea of ‘three circles’ is no longer so easy to define and no longer so easy to use simply. There is so much international travel and communication that all of these different contexts can be represented in almost any country, which makes categorization difficult. Formerly termed ‘Inner Circle’ countries are also starting to become more and more exposed to various World Englishes, which are also affecting ELT in these countries (Sharifian 2009).

Kachru and Smith (1985: 210 as cited by Bolton 2006: 241) expand on the notion of World Englishes by saying:
‘Englishes’ symbolizes the functional and formal variation in the language, and its international acculturation, for example, in West Africa, in Southern Africa, in East Africa, in South Asia, in Southeast Asia, in the West Indies, in the Philippines, and in the traditional English-using countries: the USA, the UK, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand. The language now belongs to those who use it as their first language, and to those who use it as an additional language, whether in its standard form or in its localized forms.

Here, it appears that the definition of World Englishes includes all forms of English because all forms of English are influencing ELT and EIL. Scholars contend that if EIL is to unite English under one banner with a focus on intercultural communication rather than just ‘us’ versus ‘them’, all varieties of English need to be on equal footing. That means that the dominance of NAE and BE in today’s global ELT profession needs to relinquish some of its hold so that other varieties of English, such as the more standardized varieties of Indian and Singaporean English or still-developing varieties such as Chinese English, can be legitimized. This requires that all World Englishes are present and cooperating together to create a context and environment that will motivate students to learn the variety of English that best fits their needs.

To clarify and sum up the two definitions of EIL and WE, I propose that the main difference between them is that WE refers to all the different varieties of English used in their specific locations and contexts. On the other hand, EIL is without location and refers to English as one whole language connecting the citizens of the world with a common tongue. In other words, WE represents the local aspects of English whereas EIL represents the global aspects. From my experience in ELT, it seems that one term cannot be considered without the other term. They are two different sides of the same coin, neither being separable from the other but both representing different aspects of English as it currently stands in the world today.
English in the Japanese Context

After World War II, Japan implemented many policies developing English language instruction in the school system. Until 2008, English language classes were only mandatory in junior high and high school grades. Then, in 2008, the Japanese Ministry of Education (MEXT) implemented mandatory English language instruction starting in 5th and 6th grades in elementary schools through high school (Hino 2009). As such, ELT has been and will continue to be important for educational policies in Japan.

Current ELT trends in Japan seem to indicate that there is a move towards EIL and away from the Anglo-American Native Speaker model. In 2003, the Japanese Ministry of Education created a plan to develop the English communicative abilities of Japanese citizens due to the increasing importance for Japan to be able to compete on a global scale. Because Japan was never colonized, there is no history of an Anglo-Americanized English being forced on the Japanese people, allowing Japan more freedom of choice in deciding on which variety of English best suites their educational goals. As such, there are areas in higher education and government-sponsored programs that are promoting EIL, which is seen as much more valuable to the Japanese context rather than an Anglo-Americanized variety. As a result, more and more teacher education is focusing on the complexities of English through an awareness of issues in EIL, and many university campuses around the country are also starting to create EIL and World Englishes curriculum such as at Osaka University, Waseda University, and Chukyo University (Caine, 2008; Matsuda 2009, 2011; Hino 2009). Hino (2009) mentions that the World Englishes program at Chukyo University was in fact one of the first of its kind in the world starting in 2002, which implies that Japan is on the cutting edge of trying to implement the EIL paradigm suggested by researchers.

The spread of the EIL paradigm in Japan in recent years is also reflected through the hiring of Assistant Language Teachers (ALT) through the government-funded Japanese Exchange and Teaching (JET) Program. The Ministry of Education in Japan started the JET Program in 1987 with two goals in mind. One was, and still is, to help Japanese teachers of English teach communicative English and the other is for native-speaker teachers (ALTs) to be cultural ambassadors exposing Japanese students to many different foreign cultures. ALTs are traditionally native speakers of English and are co-
teachers/assistants to the Japanese teachers of English referred to as Japanese Teachers of Language (JTL). In the beginning, ALTs only came from native-English speaking countries, mainly the United States and the United Kingdom. It wasn’t until 1996 when they started hiring speakers of English from non-English-speaking countries (Hino 2009).

As of 2011, there are currently 4,330 participants from 39 countries around the world. There are still a majority of JET participants from the United States (2,322) with the next most ALTs coming from the United Kingdom (440), but there are increasing numbers of participants from countries like China and Singapore as well as JETs representing other varieties of English from countries such as South Africa, Jamaica, New Zealand, and Australia (JET Program website 2012). With this increase in the different World Englishes represented in public schools throughout Japan, Hino (2009) argues that there is more and more exposure to EIL and different World Englishes allowing teachers in Japan to be more aware of the current international status of English and therefore more flexible and open to different varieties.

Mismatches in ELT and the CLT Conundrum

Mismatches, Cultures of Learning and Culturism

So far, I have presented the discussions about the historical spread of English and where it currently stands in the globalized world, specifically in Japan. In this next section, I wish to clearly tie together and describe in more detail some critiques of the current methods in ELT as they relate to culture and politics. To do this, I will use Kumaravadivelu’s (2003) idea of mismatches, which addresses the need for teachers to be aware of the difference in perceptions between themselves and their students.

Mismatches, according to Kumaravadivelu, occur when the teacher’s perception of classroom management or activities is different than students’ perception of these same events. Oftentimes, this leads to confusion on the student’s part about what the eventual goal of the lesson is. If that perception of the end result of the lesson is different between the teacher and the student, then there might be conflict which affects successful transmission and intake of information. Kumaravadivelu lists several different kinds of sources for potential mismatches: cognitive, communicative, linguistic, pedagogic, strategic,
cultural, evaluative, procedural, instructional, and attitudinal. Six of these are highly relevant to the current discussion of ELT.

Communicative and linguistic mismatches refer to the troubles that may occur between teacher and student concerning the ability of either to fully communicate messages through appropriate stored linguistic knowledge. In essence, do both the teacher and student have enough vocabulary, grammar, pragmatic knowledge of a language to successfully transmit messages to each other? Pedagogic and instructional mismatches refer to issues arising out of different perceptions about objectives (short or long-term) of language tasks and how those tasks are guided. What is the teacher’s goal and how does the teacher achieve that goal through clear instructions? Do students understand the goals and instructions? Finally, and critically, cultural and attitudinal mismatches reflect perceptions about ‘cultural norms’ and attitudes towards the nature of learning and teaching and student/teacher roles. Kumaravadivelu (2003: 89) states that, “[…] there can be various types of attitudinal mismatches arising out of preconceived notions about factors such as participant expectations, classroom management, learning strategies and cultural stereotypes.” What are teacher and student attitudes and expectations about the above factors?

With all the different varieties of World Englishes and different cultural contexts that these Englishes come from, I would argue that all of these mismatches are intricately linked together, each one leading to the next. For example, linguistic mismatches may be caused because of instructional mismatches and then cultural mismatches might ensue. It depends on how teachers of American English frame and use terms like ‘pants’ (which in American English refers to the piece of clothing enveloping each individual leg reaching down to the ankles). If students don’t know this word, or more commonly know another meaning of this word, confusion could occur creating misunderstanding about the meaning of the word and what students are expected to do with it. I, myself, have run into problems with this sort of phenomenon to hilarious effect and some wonderful conversation starters, but in the classroom, such mismatches could create frustration and hinder learning.
Cultural and attitudinal mismatches, especially, have appeared indirectly in many discussions about ELT. Cortazzi and Jin’s (1996a) concept of *culture of learning* is one such example. They claim that:

Much behavior in language classrooms is set within a taken-for-granted framework of expectations, attitudes, values, and beliefs about what constitutes good learning, about how to teach or learn, whether and how to ask questions, what textbooks are for, and how language teaching relates to broader issues of the nature and purpose of education (169 as cited by McKay 2002: 104).

This concept helps facilitate discussions about cultural differences in teacher and student roles, roles of texts within the curriculum, and classroom management of any given society and its culture. However, both McKay (2002) and Holliday (2005), among many, warn against being too minimalist in terms of describing the *culture of learning* of any one culture on a broad scale. McKay maintains that such a minimalist view doesn’t take into account all the instances when one individual classroom might go against the preconceived notions of its ‘culture of learning.’ It does not take into account all the diversity of any one context. For example, McKay mentions research from Flowerdew and Miller (1995) stating the cultural differences between a ‘Confucian’ approach and a ‘Western’ approach to ELT.

They say that a ‘typical’ Confucian approach consists of a list of variables: “respect for authority of lecturer, lecturer should not be questioned, student motivated by family and pressure to succeed, positive value placed on effacement and silence, emphasis on group orientation to learning” (as cited by McKay 2002: 105). In contrast, the ‘typical’ Western approach says: “lecturer valued as guide and facilitator, lecturer is open to challenge, student motivated by desire for individual development, positive value placed on self-expression of ideas, emphasis on individual development and creativity in learning” (as cited by McKay 2002: 105). Even in one country, there exists a diversity that the cultures of learning view does not portray, let alone lumping several different countries, all with their own diversity, into one category. As even my experience teaching in Japan indicates, not every student within a ‘Confucian’ culture will fall simply within this paradigm. Indeed, I had many students who loved to ask me questions
and were very curious about how English worked and genuinely had an interest in English based on their own individual desires.

Holliday’s (2005) term *culurism* nicely captures the sentiment that general terms and stereotypes usually hide a wonderful sense of diversity. He defines *culurism* as being an “essentialist view of culture” and refers to any time an individual is reduced to only the stereotype of the culture they originate from. He gives the example of ‘the disciplined Oriental’ as opposed to ‘the lazy Arab.’ Such culturist views, as he argues, should be avoided at all costs.

A danger of this bare bones view of culture for ELT is that people tend to associate an individual student’s cultural identity with their national or linguistic identity (Kumaravadivelu 2003). There is much talk in ELT methods classes about trying to be aware of individual learner styles because there are so many styles and each individual is slightly different then the next. In a similar fashion, it would be out of place to assume that all individuals share exactly the same cultural values especially when taking into consideration all of the different factors creating a culture such as gender, age, education, socioeconomic status, and so on. When talking about the topic of culture, it is extremely difficult to avoid *culurism*. There is a tendency in human nature to categorize in order to understand the world from a wide perspective at the cost of seeing individual differences. However, an understanding of different cultures and the roles of teachers and students in those cultures may help to mitigate many kinds of mismatches that otherwise might occur between teachers and students who come from different cultures.

*The Pitfall of CLT*

In the 1980s and 1990s, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approaches developed in response to the previous language methods of Grammar Translation and the Audiolingual Method (ALM). This new approach to language teaching stressed communicative strategies using ‘authentic’ materials and ‘meaningful’ tasks to develop student fluency. With Grammar Translation and ALM, accuracy of linguistic structures was prized and produced many students capable of reproducing those structures but was not, however, able to teach “long-term communicative proficiency” (Brown 2007: 24).
Thus, CLT, with its focus on meaning and need for spontaneous oral communication, developed in a time when the nations of the world found themselves being forced to speak and communicate with people from all different language backgrounds (Brown 2007). The main idea behind a CLT approach is that language is used “to convey meaning in appropriate ways” (McKay 2002: 108).

To reach this goal, some of the shared characteristics of a CLT approach include a focus on all elements of language, not just grammatical but also pragmatic and sociolinguistic. There is also a focus on ‘authentic’ materials and ‘real-world’ contexts, fluency over accuracy, and teacher as facilitator. Learner autonomy and learner-centeredness are also important for CLT because they teach students to become aware of not only the language itself but also the process of learning as active participants learning through interaction. For many in ELT, including countries all over the world, the approach used most often and the most recognized is a CLT approach (McKay 2002; Brown 2007; McKay & Bokhorst-Heng 2008).

As widespread as this approach is, one of the critiques of this approach is that it is not culturally sensitive in a globalized world that needs this sensitivity. Scholars like McKay (2002) contend that CLT is not appropriate because it comes from the West with Western cultural values dominating local cultural values, which is directly related to the spread of English through colonialism and modernism, an offshoot of a colonial mindset. Modernization reflects this idea that Western ideas allow for better access to economic and scientific knowledge gains, and therefore, Western methods must be the best for ‘underdeveloped’ areas suggesting that Western methods are better than local methods (McKay 2002; McKay & Bokhorst-Heng 2008). This again brings up the concept of ‘Self’ and ‘Other’ where countries of the West (‘Self’) produce more knowledgeable English experts and cultural ambassadors who have to pass this knowledge on to others in need of improvement (Modiano 2009). This ties into the concepts of native-speakerism and linguistic imperialism that place structures of discrimination against local World Englishes, local teachers, and local methods through a subtle control and dominance of culture. This bias can be seen in CLT through attitudes about varieties and standards of English, use of and definition of

A common thought in CLT is that the best English to teach is one of the two global linguistic standards, NAE or BE. This gives rise to the English-only monolingual policy that dominates and downplays the role of the L1 in the classroom, which has been indicated to be a valuable resource in the classroom. Also, standard CLT methodology fails to introduce the concept of World Englishes, which is important to help validate and legitimize local varieties of English and therefore motivate teachers and students alike to teach and learn English in their specific context. Also, CLT stresses the heavy use of ‘authentic’ materials. The term ‘authentic’ is defined in standard CLT as any text or spoken communication that comes from North America or the United Kingdom. There are many instances when this use of authentic materials is difficult for teachers and students alike. Teachers may find that they don’t have access to these kinds of materials either because there is no funding or no physical access. Students, on the other hand, may find themselves without interest in their English language classes because the content of the lessons are too culturally removed from their local contexts (McKay 2002). By focusing on the American or British cultures to the exclusion of all else may create a barrier for students because they may have no interest and therefore no motivation to learn English.

An effect of the emphasis on NS English and authentic materials from NS culture is that many NNS teachers find it difficult to teach linguistic forms and cultural concepts because they have never been exposed to those forms and concepts and so feel they do not have a firm grasp of them. In addition, the dominant pedagogic model most NNS teachers must follow uses a NS methodology stating that local features of the English language are errors and there is a lack of knowledge and legitimacy about other varieties of English (Li 2009). So when NNS teachers find themselves needing to teach a language and culture they are not familiar with, they are disadvantaged to their NS counterparts who know the specific brand and culture of the language that is required to be taught.

In addition to the struggle with standards and authentic materials, Holliday (1994, 2005) brings up an idea that there are two forms of CLT, a strong and a weak version. The strong version of CLT
focuses on how language works in discourse where students communicate with a text to solve language problems. In essence, the text is used as the main input of a lesson, and any parts of the language learned are merely what students pick up for discussion. Consequently, students learn to produce new language through study and discussion of the discourse from the text and those items that they deem important. In this fashion, Holliday mentions that the strong version of CLT is suitable for many different contexts.

On the other hand, Holliday states that the weak version of CLT is the most commonly used version and therefore the one people usually refer to when talking about CLT. It places a high value on oral production and student participation through the use of group work. Teachers first present a language model (grammatical, topic, etc.), and then students are expected to practice that language model in group or pair work. He mentions that teachers are praised for their use of group work and that a ‘good lesson’ is one where the most amount of student-talk occurs. The weak version of CLT is like the strong in that communication is the focus and the goal of a lesson. However, the weak version uses specific models of language designed by the teacher or the curriculum for lesson input. Students then merely practice these models rather than truly thinking about and discussing how the language works. In contrast to strong CLT, the weak version is much less adaptable to differing contexts and therefore not as culturally sensitive (Holliday 1994).

Holliday (2005) also argues that while CLT places a premium on learner autonomy, the regimented fashion of a weak CLT class in which the teacher controls every aspect of a lesson (as handed down by the legacy of ALM), undermines true learner autonomy. When the teacher splits students up into groups to perform a language task, it appears that students discover their own answers, but teachers are in control of everything from the content of discussion to the duration of the discussion to the results. Teachers tell students when to start talking, when to finish, and when and what to share with other classmates or the class as a whole. Teachers will only move on through their lesson plan if and when students come up with the ‘right’ answer, in other words, the answer that the teacher deems to be right. Rather than actually giving control of the content of a class to students which actual learner autonomy
attempts to do, teachers create these highly controlled lessons where students follow through step-by-step instructions the teacher lays out through means such as elicitation and group work.

Holliday (2005) refers to the ‘hidden agenda’ of weak CLT as the liberation trap. Elicitation and group work, in essence, work together to control a classroom and control student thinking. Students’ thoughts are skillfully guided through the teacher’s agenda. When this happens without the students’ awareness, then this is a good lesson. He posits an idea that the weak version of CLT tries to correct ‘Other’ types of behavior in a fashion that suits ‘Self’ types of behavior. Holliday (2005) even admits that when he was teaching, he found himself thinking in a very native-speakerist mentality where his students needed to conform to ‘his’ ideas of what they should be doing. He implies that this form of thinking assumes that students (‘the Other’) need to be culturally trained as well as linguistically trained to conform to the teacher (‘the Self’).

The issue here is that the weak version of CLT seems to be more concerned about organizing student learning through exact control of a lesson from a specific point of view rather than on the student’s cultural and social position. It is focused more on the ‘liberation of language’ more than the ‘liberation of the student’. In this definition, CLT is shown that it does not in fact achieve learner autonomy even though it promotes the idea. As such, it appears that the weak version of CLT hinders true communicative and culturally appropriate learning (Holliday 1994; 2005).

While Holliday’s notion of a strong and weak dichotomy of CLT does seem to be helpful in discussing the differences between the theory and intentions behind CLT versus what many times actually happens in the classroom, I could argue that this dichotomy is unnecessary. Rather than create a divide, it might be easier to say that true communicative language approaches all have at heart Holliday’s definition of the strong CLT. Those practices associated with Holliday’s weak CLT are then not truly communicative and therefore could be re-defined as some other method or practice. It will be up to future research and thought to more clearly understand and define classroom practices that are truly CLT and those that follow regimented language models that add components of oral communication.
Finally, to add to these arguments, Canagarajah (2005) states that it is important to remember that what is now the global standard for English language and methodology came from Europe’s local knowledge, which was based off of several discrete nations that were very proud of their national heritages and languages. In this context, diversity was seen as a problem to be fixed. Hence, this local knowledge translated to the global context and created the conditions for the development of native-speakerism and linguistic imperialism. This has inspired the English-only movement and NAE/BE standards so popular in today’s ELT (Canagarajah 2005). In contrast, South Asia’s local knowledge is one based off of a multilingual society. People in this society needed to develop negotiation strategies in order to effectively communicate with neighboring areas and so the idea of how one language interacts with others is completely different from the European monolingual context (Canagarajah 2005). In essence, what South Asia believes to be effective language learning and teaching could be completely different from Europe’s beliefs. Pennycook (1994: 171) takes this knowledge in hand when he says:

[...] Both language and thinking about language are always located in very particular social, cultural and political contexts. How language (including silence, paralanguage, and so on) is used, therefore, differs extensively from one context to another, and thus any approach to language teaching based on one particular view of language may be completely inapplicable in another context. If particular language teaching practices (advertised and exported as the best, newest and most scientific) support certain views of language, then such practices clearly present a particular cultural politics and make the English language classroom a site of struggle over different ways of thinking about and dealing with language.

This passage is in reference to the fact that silence plays different roles in different languages. CLT comes from a culture that values oral communication to the point where talking is valued more than silence. It, therefore, disregards other cultures that use and respect silence in different ways and is, as a result, inappropriate for these cultures. It seems, then, that being sensitive to the cultural origins of CLT is important for teachers’ and students’ successes in language teaching and learning.
Suggestions for Appropriate Methodologies

Suggestions for appropriate methods begin with a desire to shift towards EIL and a proper exposure to World Englishes. Scholars say that the goal of any EIL curriculum should not be native-like competence but rather should encourage the acquisition of pragmatic features of EIL so that all speakers of English will be able to negotiate meaning with each other and therefore be involved in successful global communication. A focus on pragmatic negotiation strategies will help speakers communicate with people that speak various varieties of World Englishes without worrying about the issue of intelligibility (Matsuda 2009; Matsuda & F. 2011; McKay 2002; McKay & Bokhorst-Heng 2008).

In tandem with the shift towards EIL and WE, scholars say that there needs to be a shift away from the current idea of what an ‘authentic’ text represents. Texts solely representing the language and culture of NAE and BE should give way to texts that are more meaningful for students’ local contexts. This means that both teachers and students alike need to be involved in the creation of new authentic texts. Students can use their knowledge of their own previous research, connect it to their specific contexts, use group discussions and classroom tasks, and rewrite textbooks to create their own ‘authentic’ texts (Holliday 2005). The idea behind this is there is something to really talk about. Students are not just learning a language; they are making connections with other parts of their lives. While it is part of the teacher’s job to encourage students to do this, it is also the teacher’s job to, at the same time, open up their students to all the possibilities that English has to offer through EIL and WE. Again, there has to be a balance between global aspects and local aspects of English within the ELT classroom.

Another relevant suggestion for appropriate ELT methodology comes from Kumaravadivelu (2003). He writes about the move for teachers and researchers away from methods to a ‘postmethod era’ where there is no one ‘proper’ method that teachers should be employing. Rather, teachers are empowered to become ‘strategic thinkers’ as well as ‘strategic practitioners’ by awareness that the division between theory and practice is artificial and having only an awareness of theory does not create effective teachers. Kumaravadivelu (2003) also adds that teachers need, “an awareness that teacher beliefs, teacher reasoning, and teacher cognition play a crucial role in shaping and reshaping the content
and character of the practice of everyday teaching” (2). He advocates for teachers to be self-reflective not only in their teaching practices but also on what they believe to make up the processes of learning and teaching. The way to do that is to use what methods best suit the needs of the students for effective language learning.

ELT educators are also called on to readjust their attitudes about the English language and how to teach it first by raising their own cultural consciousness and keeping in mind that no one culture is the best and no one culture is the worst (Kumaravadivelu 2003). ELT educators also need to move away from the ‘Self/Other’ dichotomy, which is at its heart a divisive dichotomy pitting ‘us’ versus ‘them’, and more towards an inclusive approach to culture where ‘we’ consider what is best for ‘our’ profession (Holliday 2005). In order to do this, teachers need to receive proper training as well, which requires more access to proper education so they can be better prepared for their ELT classes (Llurda 2009). Once this training is in place, Holliday (2005) and Canagarajah (2005) propose that teachers should also be more involved deciding on what is best for their classrooms, and that this is best done at a local level by teachers all over the world embracing their own variety of English and looking to their own histories and literature to find content for their classes. This will then help re-evaluate the current dichotomy so that no one teacher is marginalized by the system and will hopefully improve the effectiveness of ELT.

Finally, Holliday’s (2005) idea of social autonomy also seems to be important. Social autonomy for students is created when teachers first assume that their students are already autonomous and capable of exercising this capacity regardless of what culture or background their students are coming from. Holliday contends that this is an ability students already possess, not an ability that has to be learnt from the teacher. The teacher merely has to draw out this innate autonomy, and that it is not a matter of imposing Western norms. Holliday points out that in his experiment at the Hong Kong university, he found he was able to draw out his students innate abilities and enthusiasm for learning by getting rid of his essentialist views of his students. In other words, he felt he was more successful the moment he thought of his students first as university students and not as Chinese students.
Methods in the Japanese Context

In 1989 and 1990, the Ministry of Education in Japan decreed that there would be a switch from the more traditional methods (a.k.a. Grammar Translation) towards a communicative approach where listening and speaking skills would be promoted. Teachers were being asked to implement CLT techniques in their classes at the junior high school and high school levels (McKay 2002).

In line with this government mandate, the JET Program was formed to further the communicative abilities of Japanese citizens by hiring native/fluent English speakers to help teach English alongside Japanese teachers. The benefits of this program are numerous and continue to be so. Bringing in native/fluent speakers of English allows exposure to various cultures and World Englishes that might not otherwise be possible for Japanese citizens who do not find themselves in a context where English is easily accessible. However, even though there is progress being made in Japan towards a more inclusive vision of ELT through EIL and an open mind set about the types of ALTs hired, the JET program still seems to be promoting a weakened version of CLT, one that has native-speakerist overtones and culturally fixed language models. This promotion can be seen in the 2011 version of the ALT Handbook published through the government agencies funding the JET Program and giving ALTs information about methods they should be using.

In the ALT Handbook, participants are encouraged to use as much English in the classroom and that “Japanese should be avoided in the classroom whenever possible” (p. 23). This harkens back the English-only/monolingual practices developed through a native-speakerist mind set. I call this native-speakerist because while being immersed in the target language can be beneficial to learners, there is no mention in the ALT Handbook that strategic use of Japanese, especially for beginning learners, can also be a valid option. Instead, ALTs are advised to avoid Japanese and use only English ignoring any help Japanese can be in mitigating mismatches.

ALTs are also encouraged to elicit as many student responses as possible in each class keeping the pace fast during and between activities with an emphasis on using group work as much as possible. A further suggestion is that, during these activities, ALTs should be walking around evaluating students to
make sure that they are “practicing correctly” (p. 24). This is reminiscent of Holliday’s (2005) weak CLT because it focuses on heavy use of group work and on the amount of student talk rather than the quality of that student talk. It also focuses on controlling the class atmosphere in terms of time management and making sure student output is done in line with the teacher’s culture all while restricting the use of the Japanese language.

A last sampling of some of the native-speakerist language in the ALT Handbook is language related to the relationship between the Japanese teachers of English and the ALTs. The JET Program has set up the ALT position as an assistant co-teacher who should be respectful of the Japanese teacher’s, oftentimes, more trained and experienced authority while helping with communicative tasks. There is a passage in the ALT Handbook detailing what is expected of ALTs regarding this team-teaching. It mentions that there are several times when Japanese teachers:

[…] wonder about the effectiveness of having an ALT. Often the ALT does not speak Japanese, has had no formal training in teaching, not to mention teaching English as a Foreign Language, and most importantly, probably has little or no understanding or experience regarding the educational system in Japan (p. 22).

In this same passage, the author continues by highlighting some of the true benefits of having an ALT and then says, “[The ALT] can also help improve the JTL’s language ability, confidence and teaching skills” (p. 22), and then concludes with, “It is through team-teaching with the JTL that the influence of the ALT can reach the greatest number of students, not just this year, but for as long as the JTL teaches” (p. 22). In the first passage, the handbook speaks of the lack of teaching ability that ALTs have and then immediately goes on to say that ALTs should be able to improve their JTL’s language teaching skills. This seems to be saying that the native speaker knows how to best speak and teach the language, regardless of actual teaching skills, and will transmit this innate skill to the nonnative speaker in need of improvement. The intention behind the explanation of this NS/NNS teacher relationship is not being called into question. All ELT teachers, regardless of their first languages, have the right to teach English
and should be able to cooperate with each other on equal footing. Rather, it is the rhetoric of this passage that is being questioned, and it is the rhetoric that calls to mind native-speakerist tendencies.

On the one hand, there are many areas in the ALT Handbook that indicate many of the positive attributes of CLT and JET in some areas seems to be promoting a more inclusive ELT teaching philosophy, but in other areas, JET still seems to be at times retaining a culturally inappropriate CLT mentality. The participants in my research are from the JET Program and so conducted their teaching within this context. In the next section, I will outline the methods used to gather the experiences of my participants, the backgrounds of my participants, and a discussion section in which I will attempt to tease out both the successes and areas of concern related to their mismatches, connecting these to the researchers’ suggestions about a more effective ELT pedagogy.
CHAPTER III

METHODS

For this research, I recruited 6 participants, 2 female and 4 male, through the JET Program’s Alumni Association network via a recruitment statement posted to that organization’s social media web pages and through active recruitment of volunteers of my own network from the program. All participants were very pleasant to work with and were very interested in being interviewed and sharing their experiences with me.

The participants all spoke English as their first language, were American citizens and were between the ages of 26 and 35 at the time of the interview. Each has had varying degrees of time abroad throughout their lives. For some, they had never left the United States until they went to Japan to teach EFL. Others had parents in the military or Foreign Officers Service and so traveled around quite a bit internationally. Out of all the participants, only one had had a formal educational background. The others received their ‘teacher training’ through their respective companies and programs, which varied from program to program and consisted of a few workshops over a week’s time to a few hours of ‘formal’ training.

Out of the six respondents, 4 were former ALTs on the JET Program (henceforth referred to as JETs) and are now back in the United States. The other two ALTs are currently working for two different private companies that hire ALTs to work in the school system filling in gaps where JETs are not available. Participants were spread out across Japan from the northern island of Hokkaido, throughout the main island of Honshu, and to the southern island of Kyushu in semi-urban and rural areas. In addition, all grade levels from pre-school through elementary school, junior high school, and high school are represented between all the combined experiences of the participants. Individually, participants each had
several different schools they taught at from two to seven or more and usually of varying school levels. For example, one former JET taught at six elementary schools and one junior high school. Another former JET had one base junior high school, which he would teach at half of the week, and then another school for students with physical and mental disabilities, which he would teach at the other part of the week and consisted of grades from junior high school to high school. The level of control over curriculum and lesson planning also varied across all participants such that there was even variation of individual participants between their different schools and different JTLs they worked with.

Each former JET spent from 2 – 3 years on the program. The first JET to go to Japan went in 2003 and the last JET to return to America came back in 2011. The two private ALTs are currently in Japan and have been for at least a year. They will continue their time there for at least another year, if not the foreseeable future. In the following two chapters, I will present the backgrounds of the individual participants by grouping the private ALTs currently in Japan as Group 1 and the former JETs as Group 2. Of incidental notice, but nonetheless useful for the eventual discussion, is that Group 1 ALTs and Group 2 ALTs each have similar exposure to the Japanese language and culture as the other members in these two groups.

To carry out this research, I felt that for such a small scale project as this is, the best methods for collecting experiences would be through interviews where I interviewed each participant about their experiences teaching and about their beliefs on teaching and learning languages. In these interviews, I first asked each participant about their backgrounds concerning ELT and their previous education. I also asked questions about how they became interested in the JET program and/or teaching English in Japan, what curriculum they used/developed while teaching, where the curriculum originated from, and what their views were about the curriculum they used. I also asked what kinds of activities and methods they used, and about their beliefs on whether those activities seemed to produce success in English language acquisition. Finally, I also questioned each participant about his or her views on language learning and teaching in order to understand the positions of each participant regarding their values and beliefs about education. I stress here that these are subjective views and opinions about the successes of each
participant’s experiences with ELT, but I believe looking at these views and opinions in a casual manner might help shed some light on some of the issues researchers mention regarding ELT.

**Backgrounds: Group 1**

I will refer to the two ALTs in Group 1 who are currently teaching in Japan as Nick and Charles. Nick has had several trips abroad (to Mexico for example), but no extended stays before Japan, and he had no formal teaching experience. His educational background and prior work experience was in cultural anthropology. Through his desire to travel and learn more about other cultures, he decided to live in Japan and teach English. Starting in the fall of 2010, Nick taught in six different high schools in and around the town of Kasaoka City in Okayama Prefecture for one year. Kasaoka City was a relatively rural setting with a population of 54,225 (2010 census, City Population website based on Statistic Bureau Japan). In the past half year, Nick moved into Okayama City to teach at a junior high school and an elementary school in Okayama City, population of 709,584. Prior to moving to Japan to teach English, Nick had virtually no Japanese language ability and little knowledge of Japanese culture but has since learned enough Japanese to communicate at a basic level.

The second ALT, Charles, likewise, has had a few trips abroad (Rome, Italy) but no extended stays. He received his bachelor’s degree in English literature, and while having only informal teaching experiences through his hobbies, decided he wanted to eventually become a teacher. He found his first opportunity through teaching EFL in Japan. Charles started teaching through a private English language company in the spring of 2011, and teaches at several elementary schools and at several adult business classes in the city of Sabae in Fukui Prefecture, population of 67,450 (2010 census, City Population). Charles had previously taken a couple of university Japanese language classes several years before his move to Japan, so he has a rudimentary knowledge of Japanese but is still at beginning levels of proficiency, although he still continues to study to communicate better with his colleagues and his students. Through these language classes, he also had some exposure to Japanese culture.
Table 1: *Overview of Group 1 Backgrounds*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Years Teaching EFL in Japan as an ALT</th>
<th>Location while teaching</th>
<th>Schools taught at</th>
<th>Prior teaching experience</th>
<th>Prior International/ Japan experiences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nick</td>
<td>2010 – Present</td>
<td>Kasaoka and Okayama City, Okayama</td>
<td>6 high schools, 1 junior high school, 1 elementary school</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Vacations, cultural anthropology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charles</td>
<td>2011 – Present</td>
<td>Sabae, Fukui</td>
<td>Various elementary schools, Business classes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Vacations, a little bit of formal Japanese study</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Backgrounds: Group 2**

Group 2 consists of the former JET participants, who I will refer to as Jenny, Mike, Josh, and Beth. Jenny’s parents were in the Foreign Service and so she grew up for the first 15 years of her life overseas, mostly in Japan and Germany, coming to the United States and attending high school. As such, she identifies strongly as a ‘third culture kid’, someone who has been raised in a variety of cultural settings and so does not identify with only one culture but instead with many. Jenny received her bachelor’s in Environmental Science and another in East Asian Studies, a minor in Japanese and another minor in Forestry and Wildlife Conservation. After graduating, she worked as a park ranger where she had informal teaching experience as a resource educator. Combined with an enjoyment of her informal teaching experience and her desire to return to Japan, Jenny applied and was accepted to the JET Program in 2003. She taught at various junior high schools and elementary schools in the area surrounding the town of Urahoro in Hokkaido, population of 5,460 (2010 census, City Population). This was a small fishing village and she taught here for three years, returning to the United States in 2006. Through living
in Japan with her parents while she was young, Jenny has developed a high level of proficiency in the Japanese language with much exposure to the culture as well.

Mike also had experiences living in Japan from ages 11 - 15 years old because his father was in the Navy and was stationed in Japan. While at university, Mike also did a study abroad in Japan. He received his bachelor’s in Japanese Language and Literature, which led him to discover the JET Program as a way to return to Japan. He started the JET Program in 2006 and returned to the United States in 2008. While on the program, Mike lived and taught in and around Fukui City in Fukui Prefecture, population 266,796 (2010 census, City Population). He taught at one junior high school and a school for students with physical and mental disabilities, which consisted of junior high school and high school grade levels. With his time in Japan during his childhood and study in university, Mike had a fairly good grasp of the Japanese language and culture.

Josh grew up in Iowa and did not have experience traveling to Japan prior to his time on the JET Program. However, he had studied Japanese language since high school and throughout college. He received an education degree for teaching Japanese in secondary education, and as such, is the only participant of this study with a formal education background. For Josh, the JET Program was the first time that he was teaching his native language. He applied to the JET Program in order to go to Japan since Japanese teaching jobs in the United States were hard to find. Josh taught in Isahaya city, population of 140,752 (2010 census, City Population), in Nagasaki Prefecture from 2006 to 2009. He taught at 3 elementary schools and 4 junior high schools. Likewise, Josh had a good command of the Japanese language and culture upon arrival to Japan for the JET Program.

Finally, Beth grew up on the West Coast of the United States and first traveled to Japan for a study abroad in college, later receiving her bachelor’s in the Japanese language. While at her college in the U.S., Beth had her first experience teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages through a tutoring program. Later, in her study abroad, she taught at an international pre-school. After graduating, she applied to the JET program and went over in 2007, staying until 2011. She taught at 6 elementary schools and 1 junior high school in Yamagata prefecture in and around the village of Sakegawa,
population 4,862 (2010 census, City Population). Similar to the others in this group, Beth had a good command of the Japanese language and knowledge of Japanese culture upon arrival to Japan for JET.

Table 2: Overview of Group 2 Backgrounds

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Years Teaching EFL in Japan as an ALT</th>
<th>Location while teaching</th>
<th>Schools taught at</th>
<th>Prior teaching experience</th>
<th>Prior International/ Japan experiences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jenny</td>
<td>2003-2006</td>
<td>Urahoro, Hokkaido</td>
<td>Various junior high schools and elementary schools</td>
<td>Informal: Park Ranger</td>
<td>Yes: Parents were Foreign Service Officers, lived abroad until 15 years old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mike</td>
<td>2006-2008</td>
<td>Fukui City, Fukui</td>
<td>1 junior high school 1 disabilities school (junior and high school levels)</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes: Father was in the Navy - lived in Japan ages 11-15, did a study abroad in Japan during college</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Josh</td>
<td>2006-2009</td>
<td>Isahaya, Nagasaki</td>
<td>4 junior high schools 3 elementary schools</td>
<td>Yes: degree in Japanese for Secondary Education</td>
<td>No, but studied Japanese language since high school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beth</td>
<td>2007-2011</td>
<td>Sakegawa, Yamagata</td>
<td>1 junior high school 6 elementary schools</td>
<td>Yes: tutored ESL students in college, worked at Intl. Kindergarten on study abroad</td>
<td>Yes: study abroad in Japan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Curriculum Development and Attitudes

Participants each individually had various degrees over the control of the curriculum they were expected to use. For Jenny, Josh, and Beth, who were all present in Japan before or at the time when the Ministry of Education decreed that English should be mandatory in elementary schools, they each had great flexibility with the curriculum in their elementary schools. In comparison, the junior high school curriculum was very set, and exclusively used textbooks published through the Prefectural Boards of Education. Mike explained that:

(1)
At my main school the curriculum came from a textbook called *New Horizons*, and there was a small textbook for each level of English, of which there were three. And essentially that curriculum was decided on by the local board of education.

Josh explained his experience in his elementary schools and then explained the difference with his junior high schools:

(2)
There is a term called ESID: Every Situation Is, Was Different. So elementary was initially very hands on, just whatever the teachers wanted. They basically said to me you’re the English expert. This class is yours. Here you go. And then when I asked for what I should do, they would give me ideas based off of how the ALT in previous years taught. So they’re like, here’s some
worksheets that they did on colors and animals. You can use these however you’d like. […] My junior high school was very different, and it was not only very different, it was different within itself depending on the school and the teachers. So one of my teachers my first year was older. So she was very grammar based teaching, so she would have me kind of sit in the back until she called me up to read dialogues for the kids or practice grammar points or read something out of the textbook, and then I would kind of take my role back. One good thing I did like about her, though, was she was very flexible. If I asked her for a period where I could teach them something, she’d give me, like, five or ten minutes to do whatever I wanted. So that was good, and then other teachers were younger, so they really wanted me more involved.

Josh’s statement seems to resonant with most other participants. All participants had various levels of involvement in the designing and planning of their curriculum from free reign to following the textbook and JTL lessons. Some, like Nick and Charles, relied more on the textbooks and JTLs’ lessons whereas others like Jenny and Mike were able to flourish and develop their own curriculum. Jenny was able to develop a progressive curriculum for her elementary schools where with a focus on phonics, slowly introducing the alphabet and sounds of the alphabet to her students. Mike, in his base junior high school, was able to develop two courses, a Phonetics course and a Conversation course.

In addition to developing or implementing their curriculum, most participants had opinions about its effectiveness or lack thereof. Both Jenny and Mike seemed positive about the curriculums they created, and overall the ALTs reported that they enjoyed it when there was flexibility for them to bring new ideas and activities to a classroom. This can be seen in what Beth reported about her junior high school situation:

(3)

For the junior high school, when I had a teacher that was giving me dictation and grammar points etc., she had a fairly strong formula that I liked because there was always a warm up. There was always a dictation. There was always a word gap, fill in the word-type deal, and I think the
children liked that pattern of knowing what was coming their way. But at the same time it allowed for a large amount of flexibility to change what they were doing and to allow new grammar to be introduced and make the lesson interesting and more interactive, so I think that was very good.

On the other hand, the ALTs reported that there didn’t seem to be effective language learning when teachers relied too much on the textbook and teaching just grammar. Nick explained that reading only the textbook and drilling the vocabulary from the textbook didn’t appear to have any effect on the students:

(4)

I teach from the *Eigo Note* series. *Eigo Note* is the basic Japanese government approved textbook for all elementary schools. It’s insanely low level. Some students get really, really bored after approximately one class. We spent 3 classes on most materials, so a lot of my students are bored.

Josh reported about his experiences that:

(5)

Junior high school, they had a textbook from the get-go, so we knew exactly the pattern which needed to be taught. I mean, as you know, Japan’s very teach-to-the-test-based, so it was a balance of finding flexibility to teach how you want to teach it, but teach within the time that you are able to teach it in, so that they can take this test, so they can pass and go on to high school or college. It was similar in that…I mean we had grammar points that we had to learn. Some teachers would just focus on the grammar points and kind of keep just the context to just the reading portions and grammar portions. Other teachers would take the same content and then make activities more communicative based more hands on activities using the same grammar points, which I think the kids learned a lot more.
From these excerpts, it appears that most ALTs enjoyed their flexibility and communicative activities over the more grammar based activities and lectures taught from the textbook. Mike’s opinion adds an interesting perspective on this:

(6)

It really depended a lot on the teachers, and how they led their classes. I think a strength of the *New Horizon* book that we were using in conjunction with a teacher who, not strict, but runs a very regimented classroom, the students were very good at assimilating the material, and that teacher was very good at eliciting response and getting correct answers. The test scores that were based on the textbook material of those classes was very good. However, a weakness of that class, I would say, was that the students in general had little interest in English and very little ability at producing their own English outside the examples in the textbooks. Comparatively, the other teachers at that school had very different styles. Another teacher ran her classroom very loosely, but tried to introduce a lot of her own material and discoveries in her process of learning English. She liked to incorporate music and other things, media and stuff that she had found during her time abroad. And I think a strength of her classroom, with the curriculum that she was using from the same textbook, was that her students were a lot more curious, a lot more interested in English, and had a lot better ability to produce new English and string together sentences based off of what they were learning in class. However, kind of a weakness of that class was that it was not as regimented, and the students were more chatty, and often scored lower on the school-wide English test that they had.

In this passage, Mike mentions that because tests were based off of the grammar in the textbooks, teachers who taught only the grammar were better able to prepare their students for those tests. Relating this to what Josh said, if students do better on tests, they are more likely to get into better schools and, ultimately, acquire better jobs. It is important to keep the goals and motivation of students in mind when reviewing whether a piece of curriculum or activity seems ‘successful’ or not. ALTs felt their classrooms
were more successful when they were able to bring in outside activities focusing on communicative aspects based on their goal of creating more communicatively competent students. However, Mike makes a very good point that it is not just about the ALT’s goal, it is also about the student’s goals which can be motivated by external factors such as a test.

Activities: The good and the bad

The ALTs in this study reported that, overall, activities seemed to be more successful in teaching and student retention of English when ALTs made activities that were personal, competitive, hands-on, something where students create an end product, and made the class material from the textbook relevant. For example, one of the activities Charles mentioned that he does every day is a flashcard warm-up with his elementary school students. He usually creates flashcards of words that are not only coming from the textbook, but also words that he doesn’t know in Japanese. He said that:

(7) I myself was trying to learn ‘north, south, east, and west’ in Japanese because I didn’t know them, and I go, well wait a second. If I don’t know this in Japanese, I bet my kids probably don’t even know ‘up, right, left, and down,’ so let’s teach them that. Turns out they didn’t, and got to interrupt their normal…they go into cruise control. “I’m fine.” “I’m great.” “I’m sad.” They just go into cruise control, but snap them out of it with some new information, and all of a sudden, they’re engaged in the class again. […] And teach them new information that they know is not in the book. So it’s coming from a place that’s not… It’s coming from an American, not from an English textbook. It’s coming from a foreigner. Hey, this might be, this might be something that I might use as opposed to in the book where you might not.

In addition to warm-up activities like Charles’, other activities that the ALTs seemed to enjoy and student’s seemed to learn more from were ones like Jenny’s mission quests, Mike’s cooking classes,
Josh’s maze of desks, Beth’s ‘selling a log’ essay, and Nick’s drawing activities. For brevity, I will summarize all of these activities.

Jenny created ‘missions’ where she would ask her students to form groups and together be given a clue. Students then had to hunt down where the clue led, which would then lead them to a new clue. She mentioned how she would have to create five or so different sets of clues so that her students would be forced to comprehend the English clues so they could work their way through the missions. She also said that a good point of this game was the fact that there were no overt winners or losers, so students with more abilities would continue finding new clues and the students with less abilities would be able to stick with their clue until they could figure it out.

Mike did cooking classes with his physically disabled students, which he said were especially good at getting students to remember and use new vocabulary and sentence structures. He said:

(8)

When [students] hold a fork in their hand and say, “Please pass me the fork,” by the end of that, they were just…it was really, really fast development versus having kind of like an introductory dialogue, which was the structure of the middle school textbook that had vocabulary and grammar that they were going to learn. That was typically introduced first, and the students would repeat it, or listen to it, and then repeat it, and then say it, and then the teacher would tell them what was going on with it. And I found that the retention of that was very, very low.

Josh created an activity for directions where students would reassemble their desks while a group waited outside the classroom. Once the desks were rearranged, the group would come back into the classroom with one student blindfolded and have to direct the blindfolded student through the maze of desks using directions learned from the textbook. Once that group was done, another group would walk out of the classroom and the students would rearrange the desks so students wouldn’t be able to cheat their way through by memorizing the set up.
Beth created an activity for argumentative writing where she would have the JTL tell her students that she would not be able to make it to class that day and then come into the classroom disguised as a salesman, carrying a cardboard log on her shoulder. She would then give her students a ‘big sales speech’ in which she extolled the virtues and wondrous uses of this log. After this, she would tell the students that she was looking for new salespeople and would bring in a box of other random objects like a Q-tip and have students pick and choose which object they would have to create a sales pitch for. In groups, students had to first write about why their object was useful and then give a presentation at the end. Beth said that this activity:

(9)

[…] was great fun. The children loved it. […] They got into it. They would really use a lot of English. They would get kind of excited about how they could make some random weird object appealing. […] And I think the kids felt accomplished at the end as well because, by the end, they had this little schpeel that they could give out to other kids. And the other kids would applaud. And if they said something funny, everyone would laugh. So it was pretty good.

In contrast to these activities, the ALTs reported that any activities relying on long dialogues, lectures, any activities where they could fall back on Japanese, memorizing lists of vocabulary and grammar without connecting it to real-life, and fill-in-the-blank conversation dialogues from the textbook seemed ineffectual. It seems important to mention here that memorizing lists of isolated vocabulary and grammar and reciting conversation dialogues from the textbook remove context and authentic use of those words, grammar, and conversation structures. This is reminiscent of the weaker form of CLT because there is no true communicative intent behind isolated lists of words and dialogues, which are merely language models that students are only expected to imitate.

There also seemed to be some cultural issues as well. The ALTs reported that putting students on the spot in front of the whole class and asking questions of students to which they don’t know the answers
worked against the teacher’s intentions of getting students to actively participate, as is encourage through
the weak form of CLT. This observation by the ALTs will be discussed further in the following chapter.

Beliefs about Teaching and Learning

There was a fair amount of consensus about what makes a good English language teacher and
what makes a good English language learner. Overall, the ALTs reported that good English language
teachers need to not only have a positive attitude and be prepared to be ‘goofy’, but they need to be aware
of different learning styles while still challenging students, be flexible in terms of finding new ways to
approach an activity or curriculum, not relying on the textbook too much, and have an interest in the
subject they are teaching.

In terms of language learning, the ALTs overwhelmingly said that students need to have some
level of vested interest in the language, either the language itself, the culture of the language, and/or the
teacher. This will then give students a proper amount of motivation to acquire the target language. They
also said that an interest in the language also depends on whether or not it has a direct impact on the
students’ lives. If there is real-world application, students seem more likely to be interested and motivated
to learn the language. These beliefs are commonly held in many fields of education, especially in the
foreign language field, but these beliefs manifest in how the participants saw their students and designed
activities and curriculum for their students.
CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The JET Connection

My participants’ mismatches and how they handled those mismatches point in the direction which the researchers are calling for - away from the weak version of CLT, an approach associated with colonialist principles in the form of native-speakerism and linguistic imperialism, and towards a more inclusive mind set utilizing an EIL paradigm and a postmethod era outlook. I want to start this discussion by looking at three of the main mismatches the participants had with their students related to use of group work, class activities, and communication issues. Because participants spoke often of the role of textbooks in curriculum and activity planning, this will also be part of the discussion.

To begin, all ALTs mentioned using group work with students, a standard technique for CLT, which, as discussed before, praises the amount and spontaneity of oral communication and active participation. Students are expected to either volunteer right away to answer a teacher’s question, or discuss with their group and share their answers. One mismatch related to students answering teachers occurred when the ALTs tried to spontaneously call on individual students. An example of this is when Nick mentioned:

(10)

When I first came to Japan, I would call on a student and expect an answer. That does not work. In fact, I’ve never had that work very well. At the middle school level, I try and get them to share in groups in a game where it’s one person’s turn to speak at a time in a group of five or six, so they get ridiculed less. If I call on a single student in a class of 30 to give an answer on the spot, they will probably just freeze. But if I call on a single student in a group of five or six and try and
get them to respond, they’ll probably do it. And if they make a mistake and everyone laughs, they
won’t feel as bad. And if I try and tell them how to do it in Japanese, they’ll laugh at me first.

This mismatch between Nick and his students seems to be pedagogic because it revolves around the
mismatch of the technique Nick was using to get students to answer his questions. Nick assumed at first
that students would be able to give some sort of answer to his questions even if they didn’t know the
‘right’ answer. This expectation probably comes from the widely held idea that ‘Western’ students are
supposed to ‘actively participate’ in class by raising their hands to answer questions without too much
teacher prodding. That is not to say that there are plenty of students in any part of the world that hesitate
to answer questions in front of the entire class. However, this is about the belief that students should
conform to this method by being able to answer questions, no matter how accurately, in front of the whole
class. Once Nick determined this method was not effective at pulling answers from his students, he
changed his tactics to try and find a way that would allow his students to feel comfortable enough to
answer his questions without ‘freezing’.

Mike also shared an experience similar to this:

(11)

Singling out students was really unsuccessful for the most part. Deer in the headlights to the max.
So, I learned to really not call on individual students with a difficult question. You know, if
you’re asking “How are you doing today?” or just real simple questions, “What was your
breakfast?” That kind of thing, the students were pretty good at doing that, but, if you said, “What
do you think about baseball?” Highly unsuccessful. Zero percent success rate, or 1 percent
success rate. You know there might be one student in an entire class year that would be able to,
able or willing to answer those questions. They really, really hated sticking out or showing off. So
that’s where … what was much more successful was when you put them in a group, and they are
able to consult with the other group members, and they elected a speaker for the group. And then
you ask the group any question you want. And then they consult, and they’re much, much, much more willing to be involved and be engaged in it.

In these two cases, group work was perceived as being successful for the ALTs. They took away an intimidating technique for the students and instead implemented a more ‘friendly’ technique, which would still get the desired student responses.

In contrast, an instance where group work did not seem to be useful was when, as Mike explained:

12

Pairing boys and girls together really didn’t work. I wanted them to be paired because I believed that men and women should be able to work together, but it just wasn’t effective because they would not work together and they wouldn’t be learning. I eventually switched ideas because students in groups of the same sex learn better from each other. You should know which battles to fight – the ones where students will learn better. I wasn’t there to teach social values. I was there to teach English. Basically, you have to be adaptable and not impose your own values on your students.

This incidence reflects Mike’s deeper value concerning the social roles of men and women. In the United States, there is a strong pull to create equality amongst the genders, which necessarily creates a belief where men and women should be able to work together from a young age. Mike indicated that, on one level, he felt the need to foster this social value in his students because he believed it would help develop their social skills, but on the other level, this seemed to hinder successful learning. In essence, Nick and Mike felt they had more success in helping their students learn English by being flexible and changing their methods and the values behind those methods to suit student personalities and values. In both instances, they seemed to struggle with the switch, but eventually put student learning above their own values and felt that there was a better outcome if they did change. At some point, though, depending on
student goals in learning English, it seems helpful for teachers to increase student awareness of cultural differences. This is the same concept that researchers are saying teachers need to be trained in. Therefore, it makes sense to say that students also should be trained in cultural awareness keeping in mind that many goals for students will take them into the wider world where they will need this to communicate effectively in English with speakers from other cultures.

Another area of mismatches occurred in relation to types of activities ALTs used. An area of perceived success for the participants was in creating an atmosphere where more ‘authentic’ communication could take place; a situation where students had something in common with each other that they could then actually use English for a true communicative purpose. Jenny talked about her experience trying to make truly communicative activities that utilized English:

(13)

Any sort of game that they could cheat on and I hadn’t thought about that yet, those went down pretty quickly. Then the whole thing didn’t become anything at all about language acquisition, it was just how to get to the end of the activity because they found a way to get around things. So every time I made an activity, I had to think about how I would cheat on it.

In addition to trying to make activities where students had no option but to participate, Nick also mentioned a frustration about the use of Japanese in the classroom:

(14)

I tried to do lots of pair and group activities to have students speak English with each other, but most students simply refused to do this activity and simply would speak in Japanese rather than speak in English. As my level of Japanese got a little bit higher, I understood sometimes, very rarely, they were explaining the grammar to each other, but they still wouldn’t speak any English.

From Jenny’s and Nick’s perspectives, it seems that activities had to be made with some thought to how students would, in the real-world of the classroom, understand and execute these activities. This could
relate to attitudinal mismatches between teacher and students when teachers want students to participate in an activity but students have a different opinion about how those activities should be done. By speaking in Japanese or ‘cheating’ on an activity, students might be showing their attitude that the use of English or the acquisition of English in these activities is not important.

In addition to creating activities that had true communicative intent, another example of when the participants’ experiences seemed to be more effective for their students was when the activities and games they used in class were created by the ALTs themselves in response to student interest. As Jenny said about one of her elementary students’ favorite activities:

(15)

This was so crazy to do, but it was really fun. So, the gym, remember there would be the top level where you could run around. It was almost like a track upstairs. So I would divide the kids into teams, and I would do this game where I would give them a fishing pole basically. And there was a magnet on the end of the fishing pole, and then there was a bunch of stuff down below. It would be anything like pictures of animals or pictures of fruit. And their teammate down below, I would whisper to them whatever it was. So I would be like watermelon or I would show them the picture. And then they had to yell that word up to their team member at the top, and then the team member at the top had to fish until they got that picture. There would be a magnet on the picture so it would connect and then they could pull it up. So that was a really fun [activity] that they liked to do, especially because I think I was out in the rural areas, and so fishing was a really cool activity. A lot of people’s parents were fishermen. So that was really fun.

In contrast, it seemed that the more the curriculum and activities relied on textbooks, the less effective it seemed for student language acquisition. This may seem like a commonplace statement, but some scholars have argued that part of the spread of weak CLT happens through textbooks (McKay 2002), which focus on cultures and situations that students may be completely removed from. This leads to a lack of interest and a lack of motivation to learn the language because these textbooks may focus on
topics that are not interesting to students. In junior high and high school, where the English curriculum is very set and usually revolves around the textbook, ALTs do not have as many opportunities to create curriculum and activities. A few participants reflected on the noticeable drop of interest in English when students move on to junior high school. Jenny talked about how she would have to try harder to get students to participate in junior high school because “[…] that’s really when the kids started to shut down.” She later went on to discuss the role of textbooks in her curriculum and lack of student interest:

(16)

I had nothing to do with the junior high curriculum. That was all decided by the textbooks. I remember the frustrating parts the most because that’s usually what we remember. I didn’t always understand why they had things in certain orders, or stuff that seemed harder to me came before things that seemed easier to me, but I don’t know if that was really an accurate assessment or not because I’m a native speaker. So maybe it was totally different for them. But I remember the textbooks being totally cheesy and boring. To me, if I was a junior high school kid, I wouldn’t care about this stuff. There was no pop culture in there or anything. That’s what, really, the kids start to care about at that age. They had certain characters that were always constant throughout the whole textbook. So it would be Jim and Mary and Tom. And it would always be, Mary would be this Asian-American girl, and Tom would be this black kid, and then Jim or John would be a white kid. So it was always kind of stereotypical. And then they would be a theme throughout the book. But I felt like, well, that’s ok I guess. It gives the textbook some amount of personality and character and consistency, but I just feel like it missed the mark on what kids that age care about. They don’t care about fictional characters so much that go to school and eat a peanut butter and jelly sandwich for lunch. They care more about the pop culture end of things, and I felt like that was really missing. And maybe part of the reason it’s missing is because that changes so often, so they feel like they’d have to change the textbooks so often. But I felt like there had to be a way to integrate that somehow, and maybe that would have made them a little more exciting. I don’t know. When you’re in junior high school, every textbook is lame I guess.
In the case of my participants, it seemed that there is much more interest in English for elementary school students as opposed to junior high school students. Elementary school students had the benefit of an almost completely teacher-made curriculum, which allowed for teachers to input their knowledge of student interests into activities and so gaining more student support and enthusiasm. There might be at least some association with this opinion and the fact that Japan is still forming its elementary school English curriculum having in 2008 decided that English instruction will begin in elementary school, grades 5 and 6 (Hino 2009). Before the implementation of this law and the textbook that came with it, and even still to some extent, there were more opportunities for ALTs to create their own curriculum based on their students’ interests and needs. Josh notes about his experiences with elementary school:

(17)

The strong thing about elementary school, I mean, it’s almost the strong point and the weak point at the same time. The strong point was, initially, my first year, they did not have a textbook. So what we could teach them was very flexible, and I think the kids liked that too because: A) they didn’t know what they were going to be taught next because they didn’t have a textbook to look ahead. So that was good. I mean, it was a lot more materials to be made and ideas to be thought up on my part, but I think I got the kids up and moving a lot more without the textbook. Once you get a textbook, the teacher thinks, alright, we need to do what’s written in the textbook, so let’s sit down and nail this out and go through it. […] But since then, they have gotten a textbook, so that has actually changed. […] Even with the textbook, it wasn’t terrible. Some teachers, and again it depends on the teacher (JTL), some teachers were all about the textbook, wanting to go through it, but a lot of teachers would allow flexibility in that. We would still do some of the old activities I would do, but we would just go along the lines of how the textbook teaches it. So it actually kind of added some structure, which was good, especially for those teachers that would let me bring in my old activities and then kind of put it in with this new structure. That worked great.
Finally, there seemed to be more success with student acquisition of English when ALTs were able to work collaboratively with Japanese Teachers of Language (JTL) in creating an atmosphere for optimal learning. I mention this because for any teaching situation, especially a co-teaching situation, working with colleagues is a necessary part of the job. Having the language skills for effective communication is therefore also important. In line with this, Charles mentioned that:

(18)

The best that I have is a small class. I think 15 kids with a teacher (JTL) who’s almost fluent, and the entire class is actively engaged in the class, speaking and asking questions. It’s wonderful. They have a question, I can answer it in English, get as much across as I can, and the Japanese sensei (teacher) will fill in the blanks and explain it more thoroughly, and you can see the lights going in kids heads.

Many times, it is the case that JTLs have no ability to speak English even if they have had prior English language education and even if they do know English grammar. In addition, many ALTs often have no Japanese language ability either. As Nick mentioned several times, he found the language barrier difficult to navigate, “There is a language barrier between planning my lessons, especially at the elementary school. I have to speak Japanese in the 5th grade class, and my Japanese ability is very low.” To add to this, Beth mentioned that:

(19)

The most difficult thing with the junior high school was that there was a more reluctance to communicate [between teachers] and a more pressed feeling for time, so it’s hard to communicate, which meant that sometimes it was difficult to create lessons where all the teachers knew what they were doing with each other, which I think, overall, ended up in a lesson that wasn’t as cohesive. Communication is the hardest amongst teachers, so that everybody’s on the same page. (This) was the worst thing. But even so, my teachers in general communicated fairly well. I could speak Japanese with them, so that helped.
Communication between the JTL and the ALT coincides with a larger global characteristic of ELT, one which reflects on the important relationship between local teachers and teachers from abroad. As is perhaps the case with ELT teachers globally in which communicating in a common language is vital to the formation of a relationship, the ALTs with more Japanese language ability, understandably, had more flexibility in communicating and planning lessons with their co-teachers, the JTLs. Good communication with JTLs was important in creating successful lessons and allowing ALTs to play more of an equal part in the classroom environment because ALTs could express their thoughts and experiences, and thereby had the ability to input their experiences into the lessons.

Also, some participants reported that using their Japanese language ability seemed to help develop relationships with not only the JTLs but also their students. Jenny mentioned that she would do some activities that would help develop personal relationships with her students because:

(20)

The more of a personal relationship you have with your students, the more they try in your class. […] In the classroom, I was pretty strict, and I only spoke English for the most part. Every once in a while, I would have to run the class on my own, and then I would mix it up. But in the classroom, it was almost always 100% English and then outside of the classroom, it was Japanese so that we could hang out and talk like normal people.

In addition to creating interpersonal relationships with students, Mike spoke about how his ability to speak Japanese seemed to help students to understand English that might be too linguistically difficult:

(21)

Speaking Japanese… It’s so difficult. Everything has two sides. I could see it visibly reduce the frustration and confusion of my students if the material was not comprehensible to them. If I was able to give an explanation in Japanese or help them with one word that they didn’t know in English that would kind of get them moving. That was helpful. That being said, I really never spoke Japanese in the classroom. Unfortunately, I don’t have any way to compare that to the
opposite where if I always spoke Japanese in the classroom. What I was just referencing was when I would see students outside of the classroom, and they would come up and speak Japanese to me because they knew I spoke Japanese, and I would try and answer them in English to give them a challenge. And when they really just didn’t get it, and you could see them get frustrated, and then I would offer some Japanese.

In using Japanese strategically, Mike was able to avoid some potential linguistic mismatches, which other ALTs perceived. Both Charles and Nick mentioned several times that their language abilities did seem to affect their students’ level of learning. So from these examples, it seems that knowing the language of the students not only helped develop linguistic abilities, it also helped develop more rapport with students. With more rapport between teacher and students, ALTs felt there was a perceived positive effect on the classroom participation and ultimately student language acquisition.

The end result of these interviews seems to be a positive one. The ALTs interviewed mentioned several mismatches they had between students and their fellow teachers, all of which they perceived as being detrimental to classroom learning. In the end, though, the ALTs’ experiences seem to indicate that a flexible mind set towards their methods helped them succeed in mitigating mismatches. The addition of linguistic and cultural knowledge also helped ALTs communicate with and create content in line with student interests, which was necessary for the success of their English language classrooms. Looking back at the research, these interviews indicate that the ELT experiences of these ALTs, at any rate, support the opinions of the researchers. Researchers are calling for postmethod approaches where techniques are pulled from an eclectic mixture of knowledge about methods both past and present. They are also calling for cultural awareness and linguistic diversity with a focus on local contexts and local knowledge with students at the center.

Time and again, these ALTs mentioned their concerns for helping their students learn English. At no point did they focus on the fact that their students were Japanese, which might have led to more mismatches. Rather, like Holliday (2005) proposed, these ALTs were focusing on the fact that their
students were just students and thinking in terms of how to help them learn a foreign language. There was no ‘Othering’ discourse in these interviews, which leads me to be hopeful. The picture I painted earlier about CLT is not so dire as might be expected. These teachers, at any rate, are showing that they are flexible and open-minded doing, in part at least, what the research suggests they should be doing for more effective ELT. They are using some of the tenets of CLT to their advantage, but when CLT doesn’t appear to be working for them, they make culturally and linguistically aware adjustments.
CHAPTER VI

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

For a further study, it would be interesting to interview other teachers from different countries who went to Japan or who had prior formal teacher training and experience before going there. Moreover, it would be interesting to interview Japanese teachers who chose teaching the English language as their career to see the ELT situation from a different perspective. Needless to say, there is still much more research, and research on a larger scale, that can be done to probe this question further.

The discussion about the textbooks in Chapter 5 evolved from the frequency with which the participants mentioned the textbooks in relation to how they developed curriculum and activities. Another study could analyze these textbooks to discover whether their design is indeed truly communicative or merely presents language models which exist only to be memorized. Also analyzing how teachers use the textbooks would be enlightening because even if a textbook is designed for true communicative purposes, the teacher may not use in this way. These kinds of analyses could help support my discussion and conclusion that truly communicative activities focusing on meaning and student interest would help foster language learning more than those that just pose as communicative activities but are not in actuality so.

While this study focused on political and cultural issues surrounding methodology in ELT, an important theme has emerged: student motivation. Student motivation is a common theme across any field of education, but the divide that can occur between teacher and students hindering motivation seems greater in a foreign language setting where cultures are different between the teacher and his/her students. Being aware of all the cultural values and beliefs that teachers bring with them to the classroom is an essential first step to mitigating mismatches and fostering interest and motivation to learn. The critical next step is understanding students’ values and beliefs and being able to build a bridge between any
differences. This can most easily be undertaken, as China’s first TESOL teacher performance standard indicates, when teachers know their students (2006 TESOL). Knowing one’s students implies that teachers are culturally aware of their students’ learning habits and goals and are consequently able to act on that knowledge to foster English language acquisition.

As for researchers’ suggestions about appropriate pedagogies, they were manifested in the successes my participants experienced. For one example of an ELT setting on the world stage, Japan seems to be taking many steps to improve ELT through EIL, and some ALTs are changing their methodology to meet the expectations of their students. Still, there are some mismatches between the goals of the government and what is successful. The intentions of the JET Program are in the right place, but there are some remnants of a colonialist mindset in what the JET Program is asking its ALTs, and consequently JTLs, to teach. Of importance is that the ALTs interviewed for this study are going beyond just a weak version of CLT and using whatever methods they need to help their students. So while it seems that the JET program still has some promotions reminiscent of the weak version of CLT and teachers, both JTLs and ALTs could be better trained in teaching skills, language abilities and cultural awareness. As the participants’ experiences seem to support the research, perhaps all of this training would be best if done with a change away from dominant Western methods like CLT and Western standards to a more inclusive mindset with flexible methods and acknowledgment of linguistic diversity and local contexts. The JET Program has an important role to play in this by not only increasing the English language ability and cultural awareness of the Japanese people through direct exposure to people from different cultures and English backgrounds, but also the development of ELT professionals.

Going back to a wider view of ELT, the overall suggestion by the researchers is that the appropriate methodology for any ELT classroom is one that integrates and keeps local knowledge as something important alongside knowledge on the global level. This means that for teachers in today’s world, the ever present struggle of ELT is to decide how much to focus on the local language and culture and how much to focus on the global role of English. McKay & Bokhorst-Heng (2008) propose that appropriate methodologies for specific locations should rely on local input when designing methods and
materials. Kramsch and Sullivan (1996) mention that appropriate pedagogies for ELT need to have ‘global thinking’ but ‘local teaching’. Local knowledge is the key to creating a successful ELT classroom especially when teachers share this knowledge with their students. No ELT teacher can escape who he/she is, but they can learn to be flexible and learn how to negotiate meaning with all kinds of different English speakers. With this flexibility, they can manage the mismatches better. As Kumaravadivelu (2003) says, mismatches are ‘unavoidable’, ‘identifiable’, but ultimately ‘manageable’. This is an important mind set to have when approaching ELT and its role on the global stage. As long as teachers are able to recognize mismatches, whether they are cultural, linguistic or pedagogic, they will also be able to find ways to repair those mismatches by being linguistically and culturally aware of their teaching context, student interests and student motivations.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


APPENDIX

INTERVIEW TEMPLATE

Conducted by Principle Investigator: Kimberly McMillen

1. Could you talk a bit about your EFL teaching experiences in general?  
   a. How did you get into it?

2. What institutions/programs did you teach at/through?  
   a. What was the curriculum like?  
   b. Where did the curriculum come from?  
   c. What do you think about the way your institution/program developed and implemented the curriculum? What were the strengths and weaknesses?

3. In which country(s) have you taught English as a Foreign Language (EFL)?

4. What was the type of school/ level of education of your students?

5. What kinds of students did you have in your class? Age, origin, gender, English proficiency level, etc?

6. What kinds of approaches or methods did you use to teach English? Specifically name examples from your classes that demonstrate these approaches or methods.  
   a. What kinds of activities did you do in your class?  
   b. What were the goals of these activities? What did you want your students to learn?

7. Was there ever a time(s) when you felt a certain method or approach really helped your students learn English? Please describe.  
   a. What worked?

8. Was there ever a time(s) when you felt a certain method or approach seemed to fall short of you expectations to help your students learn English? Please describe.  
   a. What didn’t work?
9. From your experience and/or from your background, what do you believe makes a good English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teacher? (peer or group work; tests; roles of teacher; roles of students; kinds of activities to use in class; lesson planning; etc.)

10. Are your beliefs about teaching similar to what your training/education taught you? If so, what specifically is similar? If not, where do you think your beliefs come from?

11. From your experience and/or from any training/education you have, what do you believe makes a good English language learner? (“listens” to the teacher; kind of participation in class; study habits; amount of work (either self-initiated or teacher-initiated) produced; etc.)

12. Where were you born/raised?

13. Talk about your education background a little bit.
   a. Where did you do your schooling?
   b. What about your parents/siblings? What do you parents do? Do they know other languages?

14. Please respond to this statement:
   - From Cortazzi and Jin (1996b: 74):
     o Both Western and Chinese English language researchers, teachers and learners have become aware of the differences in styles, beliefs, approaches, methods, emphases, orientations and expectations in the classroom itself, regarding English language teaching and learning among Western teachers and Chinese learners. Western teachers who have worked in Chinese educational systems have started to question whether current Western approaches are the most appropriate and effective ones for Chinese learners since they can see that Chinese approaches including grammar-translation and audio-lingual methods and the Intensive Reading Course, have produced successful English language learners and users despite their obvious weaknesses and inadequate learning conditions.