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English Immersion at Katoh Gakuen Elementary School: the Program and the Children

Rayco Yokota

Introduction

Increased attention has been given to English immersion over the past several years, as many local school boards are accepting and adopting English as a foreign language (EFL) education in elementary schools. This report will portray the English immersion program at Katoh Gakuen Elementary School (KES), which is the first immersion program in Japan, introduced in 1992. I was involved in this program as an immersion teacher during the school years 1999 through 2003. EFL issues have been argued by many people over the years since the government first allowed elementary schools to teach English. As the first immersion school for Japanese children, KES has had many visitors, including media crews, to observe the program. A brief overview was broadcast many times on TV, usually showing some aspects of the program, young Japanese children learning in English from foreign teachers, and the good pronunciation of some of the children. But whenever I spoke to my friends who were interested in the immersion education, I was always asked about issues that the media did not cover, such as what would happen if the children could not keep up in the program or whether all children in the program were happy with it. To give a portrait of the program in this report, I will include the children's voices and discuss their thinking about the immersion program.

Background about immersion and its history

Richards and Schmidt (1985) explain that an immersion program is a form of bilingual education offered to majority language speaking students for content area learning in a second or foreign language (p. 248). Immersion programs are categorized into three types according to when students start the program: early immersion, middle immersion and late immersion.[1] They are also categorized according to how much the students are immersed in target language instruction: total immersion or partial immersion.[2]

Immersion programs started first in Canada in the 1970s as a new methodology for teaching second or foreign languages. In general, traditional bilingual education in Canada had little success in developing a bilingual citizenry, and this lack of success brought an awareness of the need to teach French to English-Canadians for use in their practical situation in Canadian life. Concerned educators, researchers and parents introduced French immersion programs as one manifestation of their attempt to improve instruction in French as a second language (Cummins and Swain, 1986), and these programs have been successful for over 30 years (Ito, 1997). Supported by the government, research institutes, and parents who send their children to the programs, these programs have maintained their recognition.

There are several immersion programs in Europe. In conjunction with its ongoing sociopolitical and economic reform, Hungary introduced an English immersion program in the 1980s (Duff, 1997). In Finland, a Swedish immersion program is provided for Finnish

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1 Bostwick (1999) explains these three types as follows: Early immersion starts in either kindergarten or first grade. Middle immersion starts in grade four or five. Late immersion starts in middle school.

2 Total immersion means the students are taught entirely in a second or a foreign language. Partial immersion means they are taught part of the day in second or foreign language instruction. But total immersion is only "total" at the beginning; gradually the second or foreign language instruction decreases so the students can develop their primary language (Bostwick, 1999).

speaking students to meet the socio-cultural needs of minority people in areas where Swedish is also used (Björklund, 1997). In Spain, Basque, Catalan and Spanish immersion programs reflect their historical backgrounds (Arzamendi and Genesee, 1997; Artigal, 1997). There are several immersion programs in Pan-Pacific countries as well, for example, in Hawaii, to help maintain the society's historical heritage (Slaughter, 1997), and in Singapore, which has a rich diversity of languages and where English proficiency is one of the key factors in children's future career success (Eng et al., 1997).

The history of immersion education in Japan is short compared with other countries. With immersion receiving more attention every year since it was inaugurated in 1992 at KES, some schools are conducting partial immersion programs. Many of them are in secondary education, for certain subjects such as art, music or English. At the elementary level, four private schools conduct partial immersion programs. These schools share the objective of providing a program that will assure the children's primary language development.

The immersion program at Katoh Gakuen Elementary School

This program started in 1992 with 29 grade one students and was gradually extended to the kindergarten, junior high, and senior high sections of the Katoh Gakuen school system. In March 2004, the school celebrated the graduation from twelfth grade of the first immersion students. It is a unique situation for Japanese elementary school children who are learning English and some other subjects to be taught in English in the Japanese school culture with Japanese classmates.

a. Program overview

The program is a partial immersion program. Because the students live in Japanese society and it is important for them to develop their primary language, Japanese language arts lessons are taught in the primary language. Mike Bostwick (1999), who organized the curriculum and started the program at KES, gives another

reason for the importance of Japanese language arts lessons for Japanese children: the languages used in most immersion programs in North America are alphabetic, while the writing system in Japanese is totally different. English, math, science, and life studies in the lower grades and social studies in the third grade are taught in the target language, while social studies from fourth through sixth grade, with content closely related to Japanese society and history, is taught in the primary language. Choice of language for other subjects is flexible, depending each year on the availability of teachers who can teach music, art, or P.E. in English. The chart below shows the language used in classroom instruction at KES in the 2004 school year.

	Kokugo	Math	Science	Social Studies	PE	Music	Art	Life studies	English
Grade 1	J	E	n/a	n/a	E	E	E	E	E
Grade 2	J	E	n/a	n/a	E	E	E	E	E
Grade 3	J	E	E	E	E	E	E	n/a	E
Grade 4	J	E	E	J	J	J	J	n/a	E
Grade 5	J	E	E	J	J	J	J	n/a	E
Grade 6	J	E	E	J	J	J	J	n/a	E

J=Japanese E=English

The following chart shows changes in the number of students in immersion grade one since the program started.

Year	'92	'93	'94	'95	'96	'97	'98	'99	'00	'01	'02	'03	'04
# of grade 1 students	29	39	43	43	37	36	42	48	50	58	40	42	43

The increase in the number of students from 1992 to 1993 is likely explained by the successful first year. Prospective parents may have observed the program's first year and made the decision to enroll their child the second year. The figures also show that enrolment increased markedly after 1997 and then decreased abruptly from 2001 to 2002. In 1998 the immersion program was expanded to the junior high school, and the numbers enrolled in grade one increased rapidly through 2001. The opening of the junior high immersion program

seems to have influenced prospective parents of the elementary section. The growth of the immersion program for six years and its inclusion of all grade levels attracted more people. As a result, applicants for the elementary school increased and the school accepted the maximum number of students for grade one. Enrolment was less than 45 from the year 2002 onwards because of regulations from the prefecture school board limiting the number of the students who can be accepted in one class. Though the number of applicants increased, the number that the school could accept in grade one was kept the same. As a result, there has been greater competition at the entrance examination. Also, keeping the class size at around 40 helps both teachers and children create a better teaching/learning environment. No specific reason was found for the drop in enrolment between 1995 and 1996.

b. Curriculum overview

Basically, the program follows the curriculum of public elementary schools. But in math in first and second grades, the children learn with manipulatives and worksheets, not with textbooks unlike public elementary schools. Although the Japanese math textbooks are distributed to everyone. They listen to the teacher speaking in English and use manipulative objects to learn basic math skills. From third grade, the children use math and science textbooks which have been translated into English. The foreign teachers teach music in grades one and two. The children learn songs and dances and do other activities of the music curriculum in English. Singing is highly valued as an effective way to learn English.

Before 2001, when there were no specific guidelines for the English immersion program in Japan, the English curriculum depended largely upon individual teachers. The administrator assigned one teacher as English coordinator, to build syllabi for teachers at each grade level to refer to every year. The materials (textbooks, workbooks and side readers), tests, and vocabulary lists for each grade were established, and a well-organized report card was created. Since then, the English curriculum has been redeveloped year after year according to each

year's reflection. The English committee, comprised of foreign teachers, organize English speaking events such as speech contests, English speaking month and celebrating international holidays.

The school year for the immersion program is divided into three terms just like other public schools. The usual school events, such as sports day, field trips, parents' observations, open house etc., are held throughout the school year. The highlight is the two-week school trip to the United States in grade five. Day to day in the immersion program, the children explore primarily in the cognitive academic language proficiency(CALP)[3] environment, even though they listen and respond to interpersonal conversation with foreign teachers. On the US trip, the children experience camping in a national park, a home stay and attending an elementary school. This gives them the opportunity to explore the basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS) environment on their own. Every year, more than 80% of the grade five children participate in this trip. When they return to Japan, most of the students say that they want to spend even more time studying English.

c. Assessment

In most subjects, upon completion of a unit of study, there is a unit test in the language used for classroom instruction. Parent-teacher conferences are held in June and December to discuss each child's progress. Parents express concerns and expectations about their child's progress to both the Japanese and the foreign teachers for each grade. As many parents are not confident of speaking in English to foreign teachers, the Japanese teacher serves as a translator. If the Japanese teacher's English is not good enough, the administrator asks more English-proficient Japanese teachers from the kindergarten or junior high section to help.

Math has two unit tests for each unit—one in English and one in

3 Baker and Jones (1998) explain that CALP is the level of language required to understand academically demanding subject matter in a classroom, and BICS is everyday straightforward communication skills (p. 698).

Japanese. The children take a test in English first, and then they take one in Japanese. The Japanese math unit tests ensure that the children understand the content. A review session in English is provided for those who score less than 80% in English or Japanese. Each child's mastery of the math content in English is the main concern for both teachers and parents. Most of the teachers voluntarily organize a weekly "Math Club" after school, inviting the children who are having difficulty with math for a small-group supplemental lesson in English.

At each grade level, the English curriculum sets out the vocabulary list, and spelling tests are given weekly. At the end of each term, different kinds of writing tests are provided according to the grade level. At the beginning and end of the school year, all children take the Katoh Gakuen English Reading and Vocabulary tests to assess their progress. These are the tests that Bostwick and other English teachers prepared specifically for Japanese elementary school children in the immersion program.

Many children take the STEP Test (Eiken) by Society for Testing English Proficiency (STEP) every year, even though the school does not provide preparation. The school expects them to pass Eiken level Pre 2 if they want to apply for entry into the junior high bilingual program. Eiken level Pre 2 is the level which senior high school students in Japan are supposed to achieve. Every year, by the end of grade four, 80% of the children pass level 3. Eiken is so far the only English proficiency test provided outside of school that enables children to assess their English progress. However, because Eiken is intended for students who are in junior high school or older, children below grade three have difficulty reading the test's instructions, which are in Japanese. Therefore, most of the students don't take it until they enter grade three.

d. Where the children live

In the 2004 school year, 261 students in grades one through six are enrolled in the KES English immersion program. 51% of them (133

students) live in Numazu City, where the school is located. 45% of the students (118 students) come from nearby cities or towns in the same prefecture. 4% (10 students) commute from Kanagawa prefecture. Even though 51% of the students live in Numazu City, not many of them live within walking distance of the school, and most commute using public transportation. For example, in grade four, 2003, less than 25% of the children walked to school. In each grade, around 10% of the families moved to Numazu because they wanted to send a child to this program, or the father lives elsewhere, apart from the rest of the family, for the sake of his job.

e. The teachers

14 foreign teachers and 11 Japanese teachers work in the program in the 2004 school year, including some subject teachers and part-time teachers. Most of the foreign teachers are assigned to a grade level as a classroom teacher, while some of them teach a specific subject in several grade levels. The foreign teachers are from Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the United States.

The school recruits foreign teachers from English-speaking countries who hold elementary teaching certificates. For a number of reasons, finding and hiring good foreign teachers is the most difficult part for the administrator. First, Japanese school culture is very different from that of North America or the countries of Oceania. Faculty duties at KES include not only teaching, but also eating lunch in the classroom with the children; supervising children while they clean the room, hallways, stairways, and playground; teaching swimming; and attending different kinds of meetings. Second, even though the teachers are experienced in their own countries, teaching children whose English is extremely limited makes the teachers' job very hard and frustrating. Third, it is also very hard to keep good communication with the students' parents without a translator. Despite these difficulties, the foreign teachers I interviewed told me that even though the job was hard, whenever they observed the children's growth, the toughness of the job turned into the joy of teaching in this school. KES is always

hoping to find native English speakers with a good command of Japanese, but it is extremely rare to find a native speaker of English with an elementary school certificate and fluency in Japanese.

Japanese teachers, who are paired with foreign teachers to manage a class, are expected to have some proficiency in English conversation. This isn't easy for the Japanese teachers either. When a child has a problem in the foreign teacher's classroom and the foreign teacher cannot understand the child's explanation, the Japanese teacher has to get involved and sometimes has to contact the parents. In each grade teachers work as a team on a daily basis trying to overcome the language and culture barriers.

f. No drop-outs

When a child is accepted into this program, the parents are strongly encouraged to keep the child in the program until the end of grade six to gain the maximum benefit from the immersion education. KES takes responsibility for each child and does not expel anyone. Some students, however, have resigned from the program for various reasons. During the years 1999 to 2003, five of my students transferred to other schools. Four of them left because of the family issues. One child, who was a returnee, transferred to an international school after two years at KES because his parents wanted more western education for him.

The reasons for resigning from KES vary, but in my experience with the immersion program, no family decided to send the child to another school halfway through because of low performance in learning or being overwhelmed by the immersion program. Even so, teachers observe some children who are not quite suitable to the program. These students often choose to go to another school when they finish grade six.

In most cases, the parents, not the child, make the decision to enroll the child in the immersion program. "What happens if a child is overwhelmed by the heavy work load and does not want to stay in the program?" This may be a common question which many people

want to ask. I observed, however, that many upper grade students believe that they were lucky to have started learning English at an early age and no one told me that he or she wanted to transfer to another school. A survey was conducted to confirm this observation.

The survey of the students

a. Procedure

The main focus of this paper is children in the immersion program. To gather information, I visited KES for a week as a researcher. I asked the children six questions adapted from Bostwick (1999). Before using the questions I had prepared, I had a short discussion with the grade five students and created three or four choices for each answer. To ensure that all children understood the questions, I asked them in Japanese. The fact that all except the grade one children knew me in person helped to establish a non-threatening atmosphere for the children to answer the questions. They were very cooperative and told me their thoughts frankly. Allowing them to talk in Japanese seemed to enable them to feel free to express their sincere opinions. 227 students from grades one through six participated in this survey. The number of children at each grade level is as follows:

Grade	1	2	3	4	5	6	Total
# of students	37	40	33	37	40	40	227

The following are the six questions.

1. What efforts are you making to improve your English?
2. To whom do you speak in English in order to improve?
3. Why do you speak mostly in Japanese among friends even though you are encouraged to speak in English?
4. How well do you understand lessons in English?
5. Which lessons do you think you can understand better, lessons in English or lessons in Japanese?
6. How happy are you in the immersion program?

This six-question survey was conducted orally. After reading each question and all the choices for that question, I read the question and answers again, pausing after each answer while the students raised their hands to indicate their choices. Then they had an opportunity to talk about their answers, and they freely gave their opinions related to each question. The sessions were all recorded so I could revisit them to be sure of what the children said.[4]

The results were analyzed by the number and percentage of children within each grade who raised their hands for each answer. The Kruskal Wallis test was used for the last three questions to calculate the significance of grade level differences. For those questions, each answer was given a point value according to the content of the question.

b. Questions, results and discussion

1. What efforts are you making to improve your English?

A. trying hard to finish homework every day

B. trying hard to talk to foreign teachers

C. trying hard to read books and watch English videos

D. trying hard to speak in English among friends

Grade	1 n=37	2 n=40	3 n=33	4 n=37	5 n=40	6 n=40	Total n=227
A	34(92%)	22(55%)	27(82%)	24(85%)	23(56%)	40(100%)	67%
B	21(57%)	17(43%)	18(55%)	11(30%)	5(13%)	13 (32%)	37%
C	28(77%)	16(40%)	26(88%)	17(46%)	35(86%)	18 (45%)	63%
D	14(38%)	2 (5%)	11(33%)	2 (5%)	1 (2%)	0 (0%)	12%

This question was intended to reflect children's efforts to study English other than sitting in a classroom listening to lessons in English. For this question, the children were allowed to choose more

4 This method of conducting the survey is quite informal and may not be sufficiently rigorous. Getting reliable answers from six- and seven-year-old children is not easy. Because I was concerned that children who were social leaders might influence other children's decisions, I explained to each class that I wanted to know everyone's honest opinions not influenced by their friends' responses. Research methods with young children should be investigated in further research.

than one answer.

The responses indicate that finishing homework was important for most of the children. The percentages for this choice were very high compared with the other three choices in grades one and six. Grade one students, who are new to the program, may need more time to finish homework, while for those in grade six, the reason for the high percentage seems to involve the complexity of the content, which even in Japanese is difficult for many students. As most children are not exposed to an English environment at home, their homework assignments, usually worksheets, play an important role in reinforcing their progress in English. Because the homework usually covers what they learned in the lesson, accomplishing the homework is valued highly in every grade.

Parents sometimes complain about the large amount of homework the teachers require. The children get at least three kinds of homework (Japanese language arts, English, and math in English) every day beginning in grade one. The amount of homework becomes a bigger burden for all students as the grade level goes up. Lower grade teachers often ask the parents to check if the child finished the homework. The results of this question indicate that the children value the time and effort they spend working on homework, even though some find the amount of homework overwhelming and they do not have much free time at home on weekdays.

Many students said they use both books and videos at home frequently. Most classes have a class library of books and videos, and teachers often take their students to the school library to choose books to read at home. Twice a year, a bookstore selling English picture books, chapter books and videos visits the school, and many children and parents purchase English books and videos for their home libraries. While books and videos are readily accessible for everyone at school, it is not certain whether the children read or watch videos for practice or just for fun. Many of them are required to keep reading logs as a weekly assignment. It is a time-consuming process

to reach the stage that they can enjoy reading in English, and children may read mainly because they have to write logs. Watching videos may be more for entertainment; many of them told me the titles of their favorite cartoons.

The results of this question also indicate that the children make more effort on receptive activities, rather than productive ones, in language learning. Reading books and watching videos require reading, listening and watching, all of which are skills of receptive learning. Even though the homework worksheets require writing, which is productive, the writing is usually done to meet the teachers expectations or to follow their instructions. As the chart shows, the percentages for speaking are much lower than for the other two options. It is understandable that the children practice more receptive skills than productive ones in the EFL environment. Both the school culture that expects all children to complete their homework and the high socio-cultural value placed on diligence and obedience may contribute to the children's choices for their efforts to progress in learning English.

2. To whom do you speak in English in order to improve?

A. foreign teachers

B. parents

C. friends

D. dolls or pets

Grade	1 n=37	2 n=40	3 n=33	4 n=37	5 n=40	6 n=40	Total n=227
A	16(45%)	8(20%)	30(91%)	35(95%)	40(100%)	40(100%)	66%
B	8(22%)	10(26%)	13(39%)	14(38%)	11 (26%)	5 (13%)	24%
C	9(24%)	6(15%)	17(52%)	4(11%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	14%
D	20(54%)	10(26%)	3 (9%)	10(27%)	8 (8%)	5 (13%)	22%

For this question, the children were again allowed to choose more than one answer, and again their answers varied by grade level. While upper grade children realize the importance of speaking to foreign teachers, they may not necessarily make every possible effort to do so.

It is interesting that in all except in grade three, the percentage who talked to dolls and pets was higher than those who talked to friends. Asked why, some children explained as follows:

- I like my doll. (grade one girl)
- My goldfish looks like it is able to understand English. (grade one boy)
- My doll is an American doll. (grade two girl)
- The doll came from USA. (grade two girl)
- My dog understands my orders in English, such as "down" or "stay." (grade two boy)
- I like speaking English to my dog because I don't have to be afraid of making mistakes when I speak to my dog. (grade five girl)
- I sometimes speak to my dog in English because I feel relaxed when I talk to her in English, and I know that she never checks my English. (grade six girl)

It may be natural for lower grade students to play with pets and dolls and talk to them in English. The reasons given by the upper grade girls show they are concerned about making mistakes when they speak English. From a Vygotskyan point of view, their monologue or egocentric talking to their pets may be explained as a kind of "private speech".[5] Nakajima (1998) values private speech in bilingual education and explains that it is the first step in each learner's efforts to internalize foreign language input. She also claims it is important to give the learners enough time to do it.

3. Why do you speak mostly in Japanese among friends even though you are encouraged to speak in English?

A. because I am shy

B. because it's troublesome

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5 Private speech is speech to oneself. Vygotsky valued it to overcome cognitive difficulties in the process of acquiring language. Richards and Schmidt (1985) also valued it for second language learners as a practice for better performance in conversations in the classroom.

B′. because I don't know how to say what I want to say in English[6]

Grade	1	2	3	4	5	6	Total grades 2-6
A	5(14%)	6(15%)	2 (6%)	14(38%)	22(55%)	20(50%)	33%
B	0 (0%)	34(85%)	31(94%)	23(62%)	18(45%)	20(50%)	67%
B′	32(84%)	—	—	—	—	—	—

Because one of the teachers' roles is to facilitate building social skills and establishing friendships, the foreign teachers in the immersion program do not force all students to speak in English with each other, but always encourage them to do so. However, I often observed that children, when they could have spoken most of a conversation in English, spoke only in Japanese. I wondered why they did not use English.

It was surprising to learn that not many of these students felt shy about speaking in English to peers, because I have observed that many Japanese people are shy about speaking with each other in a foreign language. Although these children said they didn't feel shy, they did say that it was more difficult to use English. The upper grade children explained that they declined to use English because they could express themselves effortlessly in Japanese. The responses to answer A show that more upper grade children feel shy about using English than lower grade children. This seems to be related to the fact that upper grade children reach the stage when they can control their primary language well enough.

4. How well do you understand lessons in English?

A. very well (value score 3)

B. moderately well (value score 2)

C. not well (value score 1)

6 In answering this question, none of the grade one children raised their hands for option B, "because it's troublesome," but one said, "I don't speak much because I don't know how to say it in English." When he said that, many of the classmates agreed with him. Therefore, even though I did not give this option to other grades, I included the result in the chart above.

Grade	1	2	3	4	5	6	Total
A	17(46%)	29(73%)	24(73%)	28(76%)	25(63%)	34(85%)	62%
B	9(24%)	4(10%)	3 (9%)	6(16%)	15(37%)	4(10%)	10%
C	11(30%)	7(17%)	6(18%)	3 (8%)	0 (0%)	2 (5%)	9%
Kruskal Wallis test	85.08	115.65	115.64	122.08	111.88	132.40	$p=.01$, $df=5$

The Kruskal Wallis test indicates that more grade one children are struggling with lessons in English than children in other grades. Considering their shorter duration in English immersion and their less developed vocabulary and listening comprehension skills, the result is reasonable. As they get older, they will gain a wider vocabulary and better comprehension. And in fact the grade six children, who have the longest duration in the program, did show significant self-satisfaction, rating themselves high in understanding lessons in English.

5. Which lessons do you think you can understand better, lessons in English or lessons in Japanese?

A. lessons in English (value score 3)

B. there is no difference (value score 2)

C. lessons in Japanese (value score 1)

Grade	1	2	3	4	5	6	Total
A	19(50%)	16(40%)	7(21%)	16(44%)	17(43%)	7(18%)	36%
B	13(36%)	7(18%)	21(63%)	14(36%)	14(35%)	17(42%)	38%
C	5(14%)	17(42%)	5(16%)	7(20%)	9(22%)	16(40%)	26%
Kruskal Wallis test	135.84	105.29	109.33	125.11	121.89	88.20	$p=.05$, $df=5$

It is interesting that grade six children, who had the highest percentage for understanding English lessons "very well" in the previous question, chose lessons in Japanese more than the lessons in English. There are two possible reasons. First, grade six children, who are preparing for the entrance examination, may spend much more time studying in Japanese than younger children. In the past five years, all grade six children took entrance examinations for junior

high school, and many of them started preparing for them one year before the exam. Thus they were spending much more time studying in Japanese after school. Second, because of the complexity of the content, more children may want to have support in the primary language. I observed during my visit to KES that the older the children were, the more they wanted to know the Japanese translation. As they have built a wider vocabulary in Japanese at this stage, they tend to think that learning in Japanese is easier.

The following are some examples of the lower grade children's explanations of why lessons in English were easier for them:

- English lessons are easier because the foreign teachers' gestures and hand movements are very helpful to understand the lessons. I see that the teachers' hands are talking. (grade two girl)
- I understand English lessons better because we can use many things such as blocks, cards and other things. We don't use those toys in Japanese lessons. (grade one boy)
- I think I understand English lessons better because I usually get higher scores in tests in English. (grade two boy)

In the first two years, math lessons are done without textbooks so that the children, in small groups, can concentrate on listening to the teacher's explanations.[7] The teachers use a variety of manipulative objects to assist the children's understanding of introductory math concepts through a foreign language. As the grade two girl explained, the students also use the teachers' gestures as a visual aid for understanding. In my experience, foreign teachers, especially in the lower grades, are aware of the importance of rich facial expressions and body language.

There is another interesting insight about grade one children preferring English lessons. A Japanese teacher explained that she observed that some lower grade students could not differentiate what they did and did not understand. She said they seemed to be in a

[7] For the math content in English, lessons are held with a small group of ten to twelve children, so the teacher can give the children individual attention.

foggy situation about understanding, with their understanding often partial and vague. And because they did not have enough English vocabulary to explain what was clear and what was not, they stayed in that situation. (I have heard from many parents that their children, when asked to explain what they understood, could not answer well. The parents were not sure how much of what was being taught their children could comprehend. So they were sometimes concerned about their children's lack of clarity about their own comprehension.) However, they enjoy lessons manipulating numbers using blocks or other objects and this experience may result in a positive attitude toward lessons in English. On the other hand, when the children reach grade six, they have enough literacy development to judge what they understand and what they don't. They are more aware than lower grade children of the difficulty of learning content in a foreign language.

6. How happy are you in the immersion program?

A. very happy (value score 3)
B. moderately happy (value score 2)
C. not very happy (value score 1)

Grade	1	2	3	4	5	6	Total
A	24(65%)	34(85%)	23(70%)	22(59%)	30(75%)	25(63%)	69%
B	11(29%)	4(10%)	10(30%)	10(27%)	7(17%)	12(30%)	23%
C	2 (6%)	2 (5%)	0 (0%)	5(14%)	3 (8%)	3 (7%)	8%
Kruskal Wallis test	109.39	130.88	116.38	100.86	119.41	106.16	$p=ns$ $df=5$

The results show that more than 90% of the students are either very happy or moderately happy in this program.[8] However, these results do not clearly show that the students are happy being in the immersion program specifically, as a way to learn. They may be happy with their school life in general. Their oral responses helped clarify this distinction. The following responses from lower grade

8 There was no statistical significance between grade level differences.

students indicate they meant that they are happy with the immersion program itself, learning content in English:

- I am happy because I can practice English. (grade one boy)
- I started learning English when I was in kindergarten and I want to continue, so I am very happy to be in this school. (grade one girl)
- I am happy because I can watch videos without reading the subtitles. (grade three boy)

The responses are quite simple and positive. At the beginning of the school year, some grade one children cry because they are having hard time adjusting to the English environment—they can't use English to describe their loneliness and unease. As time goes by, however, these children form friendships and settle down.

Upper grade children explained their responses similarly. While I was teaching at KES, I was often asked by people who were interested in this program whether the children wanted to go to a regular school. I often asked this question to the children. They always answered that they wanted to stay in this program. Even children who were struggling to learn in English answered that they were happy being in the immersion program. When the children became old enough to realize they were in a very different school from other children, they seemed to believe they were lucky to have started learning English much earlier. They were aware of the value of learning in two languages and wanted to keep it as an advantage for the future.

These positive attitudes above, however, could be interpreted in a quite different way. Some of the children's responses about feeling happy to be in the program are related not to learning English, but to their living situation away from school. Because many of them commute by bus or train, they do not have much time to play at home or they do not have many friends in their neighborhood. Many are also busy at home with homework or going private lessons such as piano, swimming or cram school classes. Consequently, KES is the place where they can meet, play and talk with friends. Some of my

former students' mothers told me they were surprised that their children preferred weekdays to Sundays.

Implications

The results of the survey indicate that most children have a positive perception of being in the immersion program. Even though they make the most effort to improve receptive skills—listening or reading, I will suggest to teachers that they continue discussing among themselves how best to motivate the children to practice productive learning and that they continue discussing with their students the importance of practicing productive learning. It is also very important for Japanese teachers to explain to children in Japanese the value of being bilingual.

At the same time, as I review the results of the survey, I cannot help thinking that there is something which did not reveal. The survey explored the strengths of the immersion program, but it did not elicit the students' specific needs, struggles, or problems. As a former teacher in the program, I remember that teachers had to deal with many different problems not reflected in the results of the survey. It seems to me that there are two possible reasons why the survey did not reveal these problems.

First, this may have been due to the children's and adults' different perceptions of what it means to the children to be in the immersion program. Because teachers and other adults can compare the life of the children in the immersion program with other children or their own childhoods, they may expect that children in the immersion program would express more hardships or troubles. But the children in the immersion program cannot experience different options in their lives. They may be sometimes envious of other children in different situations, but they are there in the immersion program every day and most of them said they were happy.

The second possible reason is that the survey questions did not go far enough to ask about individual problems. They showed the

positive aspects the children had in common, but not individual difficulties, such as how they deal with communication difficulties with foreign teachers when they want to express their opinions or emotional appeals with their limited vocabulary, what they usually do or say when they cannot understand the homework or finish it, or whether or not there are specific stresses or frustrations when learning in English.

The immersion program will be practiced and examined as an innovative methodology in bilingual education, but all people who are practicing it should also examine it from an educational point of view. Many parents and teachers say they want to educate children to be bilingual. They often talk about language teaching and curriculum, but seldom about the contribution of bilingual ability to each child's growing process. It is important to examine teaching and curriculum, but they are only part of a child's overall education, and we adults also need to consider the children from another point of view: how well they are creating relationships with others in the classroom and in society and how learning English may affect the process of their growth and their future in a broader sense—its positive and negative effects on their lives. I say this because of my regret that as an immersion teacher there, I was too busy just teaching to think and talk about this issue with my colleagues. Even if children may be able to speak, read, write and listen to English well, it does not mean much if they do not understand how and in what way they can use the two languages to help other people and to create a fruitful life of their own.

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