

○ HOW I SURVIVED AS AN OVERSEAS TEACHER OF JAPANESE IN AUSTRALIA

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Languages education, or what has been called the study of languages other than English (LOTE), seems to involve a paradox in Australia. It is supposed to promote cultural enrichment and intercultural understanding, and yet the process of becoming a qualified language teacher tends to be intolerant of the cultural differences of overseas born and educated speakers of these languages. This is clear from an increasing body of literature on the difficulties experienced by overseas educated language teachers, which we review in the first half of this paper. Since this raises questions on how such teachers survive in Australia, we then present an introspective study of the experiences of the first author, including the circumstances that brought her to Australia, the difficulties she faced in teacher training and as a newly employed teacher, and the factors that enabled her to cope and eventually succeed. Her experiences highlight the particular importance of supportive supervisors and colleagues, thus suggesting a valuable role for mentoring.

INTRODUCTION

One reason for teaching languages in Australian schools has been to promote cultural enrichment and intercultural understanding, however well it has actually succeeded in doing this (see, for example, McMeniman and Evans 1997). For that purpose we might hope that those who grew up speaking these languages in the associated cultures overseas might be able to provide students with especially rich experiences of this sort. However,

such people often seem to experience special difficulties with becoming qualified teachers in Australia, precisely because of their differences from mainstream Australians. As an anecdotal example from some fifteen years ago, a lecturer in teacher education at one Australian university told the second author of this paper that it was almost impossible for teacher education students of non-English speaking or indigenous background to successfully complete the practicum.

The first of the following sections summarises recent literature on the problems faced by overseas educated Asians when they undertake teacher education in Australia, with occasional reference also to related research in Canada (Bascia 1996) and the UK (Basit and McNamara 2004). In view of the problems one may wonder what it takes for overseas educated teachers to succeed. To provide a basis for discussion, the first author of this paper then presents an introspective account of what she went through to become a teacher of Japanese in Australia. The paper then goes on to relate these experiences to the nature of interculturalism and to suggestions in the literature for improving teacher education for overseas educated teachers.

It may seem unusual for us to draw on our own personal histories, although this is not without precedent (e.g. Tsolidis 2001: 2–8; Ogulnick 2005; Paulston 2005). The intent is to harness memory as a ‘means by which we gain self-consciousness about the genesis of our own common-sense beliefs, derived as they are from our own social and cultural milieu’ (Kincheloe and Steinberg 1997: 241). For this researchers such as Bascia (1996) have more commonly reported the life histories of others, perhaps hoping to do it in a way that lets them ‘tell their own stories’ (Ryan 2003: 133). However, reliance on one’s own account can also be found in the use of diary studies (e.g. Bailey and Ochsner 1983), critical incidents (e.g. Tripp 1993) and other approaches for reflecting on one’s development as a learner or teacher (e.g. Mitchell and Weber 1999; Johnson and Golombek 2002). In addition, the first author’s account has been scrutinised and interrogated by the second author, who has thus played a role similar to researchers who base their findings on accounts taken from others.

THE PROBLEMS OF OVERSEAS EDUCATED TEACHERS

A growing literature suggests that the problems faced by overseas educated Asian teacher education students and teachers range from matters of cultural adjustment to various forms of prejudice. While anyone coming to live in another country and culture can face various problems in crosscultural adaptation (see e.g. Kim 2001), teachers need to overcome such problems in order to function effectively in Australian schools and

classrooms. As an example that did not involve Australian teacher education, Kato (1998) noted that Queensland brought fifteen Japanese teachers from Japan in 1995 to teach Japanese for two years in mostly nonmetropolitan schools. The program was discontinued as unsuccessful because these teachers were said to be ‘not assertive enough in their classroom management’ and ‘their teaching approach [did] not suit Australian classrooms’ (Kato 1998, no page number). Kato suggested that the expectations placed on these teachers may have been somewhat unreasonable, and that they were given only limited support.

The main point of Kato’s (1998) paper was that even Japanese-educated teachers who undertake teacher education in Australia do not seem to be getting sufficient support in such areas. From interviewing teachers, teacher trainees and teacher educators, she found that the main concern of Japanese native speaker teachers was the language used for classroom management. At the same time she noted that a survey had found that preservice education courses generally offer non-English speaking background teachers little or nothing on intercultural communication despite its importance for all teachers, and especially for language teachers.

Cruckshank (2004: 134) also identified language as a barrier to teacher education for overseas educated teachers. Hartley (2003: 54) more pointedly discussed ‘a chronic low-grade tension’ that often revolved around perceptions of the English ability of Japanese who were undertaking teacher education in Australia. Although these students had the standard of English required for tertiary study in Australia, she noted that:

[...] study in a second language requires the negotiation of sometimes almost insurmountable cultural barriers requiring an incalculable degree of personal investment. Under these testing conditions failure to achieve the expected return can generate a serious identity crisis, resulting in a profound impact on a student’s sense of worth. (Hartley 2003: 56)

With regard to culture, Peeler (2002) cited various literature on how the lack of more than brief and sketchy introductions to cultural issues in Australian teacher education programs left migrant teachers ill prepared for teaching in Australian contexts. She pointed out that such teachers ‘must develop suitable sociocultural knowledge, adopt a new persona, adapt to academic discourse and understand the local perspective’ to become able to ‘straddle two cultural traditions in their attempts to become socialized into the culture of schools and classrooms’ (Peeler 2002, no page number). Not only do teacher

education programs tend to neglect such issues, but as Cruickshank (2004: 132–133) found, the ideal teaching practices that they promote may be quite different from what prospective teachers will observe in actual classrooms.

The practicum thus poses special difficulties, since overseas teacher education students can experience cultural dissonance when entering ‘the unfamiliar physical and discursive environment of the school’ (Hartley 2003: 53). Not having been students in such a school, Hartley’s subjects were ‘totally uninformed with respect to local pedagogy and curriculum practice’ (p. 58). In addition, while the Japanese teacher education students thought that they might be valued for their ability to teach Japanese, they found instead that many Australians remain uncomfortable and uncertain, or even suspicious and threatened, by speakers of other languages (p. 56).

Along similar lines, Kato (2001b: 34) reported hostility towards language programs by both teachers and students at some schools. She also described how arrangements for Japanese teachers to travel among several schools to present lessons in the ‘noncontact hours’ of other teachers tended to leave them treated as visitors rather than real teachers by both staff and students (pp. 34–35; see also Purvis and Rinaldo 2003: 13). This problem may of course be exacerbated by ethnicity: in Canada Bascia (1996: 159) found that even in stable school situations migrant teachers could feel ‘intensely isolated’. Kato (2001b: 34) also described negative Australian attitudes to Japan and the Japanese, with even parents who had not been involved in World War II being unhappy about the language being taught because of the ‘Japanese military occupation’ (!).

In another paper Kostogriz and Peeler (2004: 2) maintained that the Australian conception of workplaces as ‘monocultural, pre-given and bounded entities’ helps marginalise overseas educated teachers within schools. They also related this to a problem of racism:

Spaces within communities where the migrant teachers work may also be sites of oppression, hostility, bullying and racism... Construed as Other, migrant teachers potentially become targets of racial slurs or deviant behaviour from students. Their sense of professional identity transforms into non-identity; they, as it were, become people without a place even though inside the workplace (Kostogriz and Peeler 2004: 12).

As Kato (2001a: 30) put it, such teachers often find themselves ‘the stranger’ in their own classrooms. As for the racism, a study by Dunn et al. (2003) in New South Wales

and Queensland found that nearly 36% of those who speak a ‘language other than English’ had some experience of racism in the workplace and nearly 30% had experienced it in education. Of course, the very expression ‘languages other than English’ (LOTE) constructs such languages as Other with respect to an expected English norm. In this particular context the expression is difficult to avoid, but in educational contexts one can instead just speak of ‘languages’ in the plural and thus of ‘languages education’.

Ninetta Santoro (1997; 1999: 31) conducted a study of how two Chinese teacher education students were positioned and regarded by supervising teachers. One, a man who had adopted an English name, seems to have had a fairly positive experience. The other, a woman referred to as Ling, seemed to be doomed as soon as her practicum supervisor saw that she was Asian and female. In the interview the supervisor said, ‘When I saw her, I thought oh no, back to square one, she’s going to have problems’ (p. 36). What did she do to help Ling overcome these problems? In another part of the interview she says, ‘I thought no, she just has to sink or swim here. You’ve got to be cruel to be kind sometimes. Had we molly coddled her, she probably would not have been aware of her problems’ (p. 37). More generally Santoro (1999: 35) noted that:

The discourses peculiar to Ling’s relationship with her supervising teacher, Ms T, construct her as powerless, Ms T. as powerful, Ling as incompetent, Ms T. as competent, Ling as submissive, Ms T. as assertive, Ling as weak, Ms T. as strong, Ling as oppressed and Ms T. as liberated.

A parallel from Bascia’s (1996) Canadian research is a student teacher who believed that she failed her practicum because she was perceived as a Chinese ‘trying to get into the Caucasian field’ (p. 158). In Basit and McNamara’s (2004: 109–110) study in the UK, migrant teachers suffered similar prejudice in their school situations.

In another Australian study, Kamler et al. (1998: 14–17) gave a ‘transcript poem’ they derived from an interview with a Japanese teacher they call Yoshi. Near the end Yoshi has occasion to use the phrase ‘I can’t do anything’ three times, reflecting the powerlessness of his position. Here are some extracts from where he is referring to his students:

Some are nasty especially the clever ones
They say ‘we’re studying Japanese, what about your English?’ ...
They say ‘you’ve got a very funny accent and do Japanese people talk like that all the time?’ ...

They are so rude to me all the times [sic]
I kind of get used to it.

One of the Chinese subjects in a study by Kamler et al. (1999: 67) suggested that the overseas educated teachers who suffer the greatest difficulties are those who are ‘not Australian enough’. We presume this really means ‘perceived as not Australian enough’ due to looks, language and behaviour, rather than as referring to any particular type of Australian values (for which see e.g. Phillips 1996). Regrettably, as Tsolidis (2001: 14) notes, even ethnicity alone may be enough to exclude ethnic minorities from ‘legitimate Australianness’. In any case, this prospective language teacher’s comment is an interesting one, considering that languages education is supposed to help Australian students become better prepared to deal with other cultures.

In view of the literature it would not be surprising if many overseas educated simply fail to establish themselves as teachers in Australia. While we have not yet found figures on the failure rate, we know of several Japanese who have simply given up and gone back to Japan. This can make one wonder how those who do become teachers in Australia have managed to succeed, and to pursue this question the first author reflects on her own experiences in the following section.

HOW I SURVIVED TO BECOME A TEACHER IN AUSTRALIA

When I (the first author) undertook teacher education in Queensland a few years ago I experienced some of the same difficulties reported in the literature. Unlike some other Japanese in the same situation, however, I managed to stay on and succeed, so one can wonder what helped make the difference in my case.

To some extent my ability to endure was surely supported by personal circumstances that may not apply to others. Most importantly, my sister was already living in Australia and was married to an Australian. I had visited Australia several times and travelled around with them before I decided to come here to study.

When I asked my sister for advice about studying in Australia, she told me that if I just wanted to have fun, I should just come for a year as an exchange student before going back to complete university study in Japan. On the other hand, if I wanted to study in Australia to get a job, it would be long and hard because I would have to master English first, and being a university student in Australia isn’t as much fun as in Japan. For a foreigner, completing a degree and finding a job in Australia would not be easy, and there would no point in trying if I couldn’t express myself in English. She recommen-

ded that I try to become a Japanese teacher before considering any other occupation, since I would have a better chance of being successful in this. Then, when I thought the job was no longer challenging enough, I could move up to something more.

Thinking about this, I finally decided that if I could finish my Japanese degree in nutrition with good grades and pass the Japanese national exam to be a dietician, then I would give myself a chance to go to Australia and study and start a new life. And this is what I did: upon finishing my study in Japan I entered a university in Queensland and embarked on a Graduate Diploma in Secondary Education, with Japanese as my first teaching subject and home economics as my second.

During the second week of the course I was asked to meet the professor in charge of home economics classes and practice teaching. I couldn't think of a reason why I was in trouble. The professor was very nice and welcomed me to the university and explained the course structure and future prospects for students. At the same time she told me nicely that none of the previous overseas students from Asian countries had completed the course because they failed the practicum. She stressed that they managed to pass the theory part of the course, since they had worked hard and were able to ask for help if they needed it. However, the practicum is the real world and no one could help you out. Basically, she suggested I change my second teaching area to Japanese primary teaching, which was what other Japanese students were studying.

I was in shock, since it was only the second week of my course and I was already being warned by the professor to change my course. After considering the matter carefully I still decided to go ahead because I did not want to give up without even trying. In making this decision I benefited from the support of one of my lecturers, who truly understood the problems and pains of overseas students. She pointed out that if I failed in home economics I would need to study an extra semester, but the same would be true if I changed to Japanese primary teaching, since it had become too late to make the change for that semester. So she suggested I give it a go and see what happened, since if I gave up, I might regret not having tried. No overseas Asian students had ever passed the practicum before, but she told me that this didn't mean I would fail too.

When I actually undertook my practice teaching my biggest shock was the difference in student perceptions of me as a Japanese teacher and as a home economics teacher. In my Japanese class I did not experience the lack of respect noted by Hartley's (2003: 56) subjects; instead students seemed to appreciate my knowledge of the language and culture, and I felt warmly welcomed. Instead it was with respect to my home economics class that I experienced the sorts of prejudice described in the literature. Some of the students

seemed confused, and could not get over the fact I was their teacher. I still remember the very first question from one of my male year twelve students:

Miss! How long have you been in Australia? How much do you know about Australian culture coming from Asia? Isn't it strange that people who don't know about Australian culture are going to teach home economics, which is closely related to the culture?

At first I didn't know what to say, because it was true if you think of Australian culture as a white western culture. I looked at my class again closely. The majority of students were Caucasians. There were no Asians, but one Indigenous student and one of Indian background. I answered the student by saying, 'Who are the Australians? Is Australia a multicultural country? I thought that Australians could be people from different ethnic groups with different cultures and languages.' The student did not look too happy but he stopped arguing with me. For him I was a female Asian teacher from the non-English speaking country of Japan and new to Australia.

At the end of my practice teaching I had an observation day. For home economics I was supposed to have three visitors: the home economics teacher of the class, the acting principal (who was also my supervisor for Japanese classes) and a university lecturer in home economics. I knew that it was an important day: if I did badly, I could fail the practicum. I prepared well for the class and tried not to stress myself too much, but I had an unexpected visitor. Instead of the home economics lecturer, the co-author of the home economics textbook we were using had volunteered to be my examiner. Coming to introduce herself to me just five minutes before my class she said:

I will be observing your class today. I have spoken to your lecturer and I thought... you need to know that teaching home economics in Australia isn't easy for you. Why did you come to Australia to teach home economics? I have heard that you are a nutritionist in Japan. Why did you give up such a wonderful career in Japan and come all the way here?

She was very intimidating and sent me a strong message of 'go back to where you belong; I'll teach you a lesson.' She put me under huge pressure and it affected my self-confidence for sure, but I tried my best anyway. I didn't think I did very well at the time, just OK, but the assistant principal, my Japanese practicum supervisor, didn't give up on me. She told the visitor that I might not be a good teacher yet, but that no one is perfect from

the start. The important part of the practicum is to experience being a teacher and to learn from it. She said, 'Why don't we give her some time to improve herself? Please think about when you were a student teacher. As educators our role is to help students' learning and not to destroy their dreams.'

This woman was not only a good teacher and supervisor, but a great person. She had to learn Japanese in three months before she commenced her Japanese classes for lack of a Japanese teacher at the school. She knew that teaching home economics for me was a challenge: while the students who chose to study Japanese in senior high school were keen and focused, many took home economics just because they thought they wouldn't need to do too much assessment, such as writing essays. She used to encourage me by saying no one is a good teacher from day one: they have learned to be a better teacher from their experiences and their hard work, so as long as I kept trying to achieve the goal, it might take me some time but I would get there one day.

As my Japanese practicum supervisor, this woman had two especially important characteristics

1. She could understand cultural differences. She could put herself into an overseas educated teacher's shoes and see where and how they're coming from and respect the differences. Such empathy is a key requirement for intercultural understanding (Alred 2003: 20–21).
2. She was always supportive and gave advice if needed. Instead of thinking, 'She is not good enough', she thought, 'How can I help this person to be a better teacher? What's lacking and how can it be fixed? Is there anything I can do to help?'

There was one area in which I did not take her advice, however. She suggested I learn to use the 'teacher's voice', which I understood to be a strong and loud voice, and to act it out when I needed it. While I greatly appreciated her advice more generally, in this case I preferred to draw on Japanese practices, using a more normal tone of voice with students. I don't like the way some Australian teachers sound as if they are treating students like animals and scaring them with a loud voice.

After I finished my course, I and other overseas educated teachers were excited to look for jobs in Australia. However, we found out we were only a 'third priority' labour force, with the first priority going to citizens and the second to permanent residents. We assumed that those with high grades would get jobs first, but even Australian students who had failed a unit received job offers before high performing overseas students. As

Kato (1998, no page number) explained about those who had come to Australia on student visas:

[...] obtaining a resident visa is not easy. In the [Queensland] state system, registered [Japanese native speaker] teachers may be sponsored for the initial two years by the state education department. Although this may be extended or teachers may be able to apply for a permanent residency, living with a degree of uncertainty is difficult. This was also expressed by the trainees whose future employment was uncertain during their study, which made the situation extremely stressful.

This seemed very unfair to us, although we found out that it was because of a government policy that foreigners shouldn't take job opportunities from Australians. Overseas students were very welcome when we enrolled the course and paid full fees. Our dean said we would have a great future at the end of the course, but this was the same person who told me that I was third priority when I actually finished. Basically, what he had meant when he said 'we' were Australians, not foreigners.

What may have helped me more than anything was something not discussed in the preceding review of the literature, although we will pick up on it in the final section. When I did get a job, I was able to benefit from sympathetic mentoring and support from a number of people. One person crucial to my survival was the young and supportive school principal at my first base school in a small Queensland town. The principal gave me a lot of help to adapt to the school and my job and its culture, and the community as a whole. When I first spoke to him over the telephone from Brisbane, I told him that I was secondary trained and had never been to an Australian primary school, so I was a little worried. He suggested I spend a couple of days in Cairns before I moved to the town so that I could visit primary schools there to observe classes of other Japanese teachers and seek their advice. This was an eye opening experience for me: I found that Australian primary schools represented a different world from my practice teaching at a high school. Experienced Japanese teachers warned me that if I couldn't manage the class, especially in terms of behaviour, there would be no point in trying to teach Japanese, so I would have to set strict rules.

This principal and his family lived right next to my teacher's accommodation and he was always there for me if I needed him. He showed me around the school and the small town and introduced me to everyone. The key of living in a small town happily is getting to know people and becoming part of them, and without him helping me to

mingle with others both professionally and socially it would have been really hard for me.

As a principal he wasn't intimidating but approachable, unlike typical principals in Japan. He didn't mind me asking silly questions – of course I didn't mean them to be silly – and he allowed me to observe more experienced teachers to study their behaviour management strategies. He said that everyone has a different approach but that you have to find the one that works the best for you. When I had trouble managing a class, especially at the beginning, he used to come into my class and show me his approaches and also offer his suggestions on what I could do better. He also gave me chances to attend professional development sessions.

Another person who helped me survive was a fellow teacher I was sharing a house with. She was an Australian who had graduated from the same university as I had and was also in her first teaching position, so we had a lot in common. She looked after me very well, helping me make handouts, cut papers for resources and so on. Whenever I taught her year seven classes, she stayed in class and helped me with behaviour management. She had very strong teacher's voice and students respected her. We also used to cook together, drive down to Cairns together for weekends and we even travelled together during school holidays, so I didn't get too lonely.

Some things still made me feel I was a foreigner in this country, whether or not the sorts of things that Peeler (2002) suggested should be addressed within teacher education programs. One was calling colleagues by their first name, especially the principal or anyone older than me, since I come from a culture in which this is considered rude. Another was to sing the Australian national anthem in morning assembly, since I grew up singing the Japanese anthem. Also, dancing the 'chicken dance' with students and parents at school was quite a learning experience for me, since everyone seemed to know it and could dance it well. I was lucky to have supportive and dedicated colleagues to help me to learn those things and become part of them. Their reaction was, 'Didn't you know this? Oh! Sorry, you are from Japan, but you'd better learn it because we all know this.' It turned out to be fun and a nice experience, but I never knew about these things until I actually taught in primary school in Australia.

I also found some support from a fellow Japanese colleague who had completed a Bachelor of Education in Queensland and was teaching Japanese at primary schools in Cairns. I used to stay at her place for a weekend to release my stress and refresh myself. Her survival was even harder than mine. Her practice teaching supervisor was a racist, telling her that she was not capable of teaching in Australia because she was not an Australian. My friend had a really hard time but didn't give up because she was married

to an Australian; she used to tell me that if she hadn't married him she would have gone back to Japan for sure. She also said that if she were in my position, she would have gone back to Japan: she didn't think a young, single, female, overseas educated teacher from Tokyo could survive in a small rural Australian town without strong support from friends and family. At the same time she helped me a lot by sharing her lesson plans and teaching material and by giving me suggestions from her own experience about what works well and what doesn't work in Australian classrooms.

Without such support as a new teacher I may indeed have gone back to Japan. I had a boyfriend waiting for me in Japan at one stage, and it was tempting to consider going back when I was struggling with life in Australia. But I was determined to put up with Australian conditions and obtain permanent residency and see Australia differently. I knew that after I obtained permanent residency I could make my own choices about jobs, so I was willing to sacrifice myself till then. If it had been an endless torture, I wouldn't have tried to stay on.

The hard part of being a new overseas educated teacher in Australia is being in a powerless position. Without permanent residency I could only have a two-year working visa and a contract with the Queensland Department of Education, and they had absolute authority. The department could cancel my contract any time they wanted for any reason, so I had to put up with the worst conditions. When I finally got permanent residency I felt like I was coming out from a prison. At the same time I did realise that I was getting paid to teach and that those experiences made me stronger as a teacher as well as a person. They certainly made me more understanding and compassionate toward others in similar situations.

It was also to my advantage that I had never taught in Japan. Of my friends who were teaching Japanese in Australia, the more teaching experience they had in Japan, the more problems they seemed to have with cultural adjustment, especially with school and student culture, and the harder it was for them to stay in Australia. To me, on the other hand, it was my first proper teaching position and I was ready for the challenge. I didn't even try to compare Japan and Australia; I was just thinking about what works and doesn't work in Australia and why. I knew that in Australia, I wouldn't be respected just because I'm a teacher, as I would in Japan. I might be respected if I were a nice person and a good teacher in my students' eyes.

After I had gone through so much in Australia I was no longer the same person. I must have established a dual personality or identity. I used to call it a self defence mechanism, and I was always thinking that if I could keep only the good bits out of Japan and Australia, that would be the best.

A NOTE ON INTERCULTURALISM

The final paragraph in the above section deserves a brief discussion. While serious engagement with a second culture can cause us to question our identities – and the second author’s experience was similar after he came to Australia from the US in 1974 – it seems difficult for adults to become truly bicultural (Byram 2003: 52–60). While behaving biculturally may not be difficult to maintain, Paulston (2005: 282) suggests that the problem is the need for a fully bicultural person to maintain potentially contradictory sets of values.

Certainly the authors of this paper do not consider themselves bicultural. The first author still sees herself as Japanese. The second author can characterise himself as ‘American Australian’, but he no longer feels a need to identify as a clear member of either group. With significant intercultural experience also in Ethiopia, Japan, the Philippines and Indigenous Australia, he has a range of cultural positions that he can manipulate as he sees fit, a variation on the notion of keeping ‘only the good bits’ of each culture.

Our situations represent what Tsolidis (2001: 114–116) refers to as new diasporic identities produced from our multiple cultural links. In connection with language teaching, however, it is better discussed in terms of what Byram (e.g. 2003: 61) calls being an ‘intercultural speaker’, that is, someone who is able to mediate between cultures, including ones other than his or her own. Unlike biculturalism this does not require identification with a second culture; instead it depends on such traits as curiosity and openness as well as on knowledge of one’s own and other social groups and the ability to acquire such knowledge, evaluate it critically and interrelate it across cultures (Byram 2003: 62). Sometimes this is described in terms of an ability to occupy an intermediate position or ‘third place’ (Kramsch 1993: 235–256), that is, even while not becoming part of a second culture, to ‘step out of’ the first culture enough to be able to reflect on it and see the difficulties it may pose for members of the second culture. This ability to reflect helps distinguish such interculturalism from biculturalism. Byram (2003: 64) notes that being bicultural does not depend on such a level of awareness, and he suggests that it is entirely possible for bicultural people to be ethnocentric in both of their cultures.

To whatever extent our own experiences have helped us assume positions as ‘intercultural speakers’, certainly helping students move in this direction is now a major concern of languages education in Australia (e.g. Lo Bianco et al. 1999). Effective intercultural teaching surely depends on teachers who themselves have intercultural abilities, and even for overseas educated teachers these should include the ability to cope with the cultures

of Australian schools and classrooms. Hopefully, however, we can find ways to overcome the need to also be perceived as ‘Australian enough’ in what purports to be a multicultural country.

LOOKING FOR SOLUTIONS

The main question addressed in this paper is how the first author managed to succeed as an overseas educated teacher in Australia in view of the various difficulties identified in the literature. To be sure, having a sister in Australia may have provided a initial advantage, and yet it seems to have little bearing on her experiences in teacher education and initial employment. She was also fortunate to encounter less racism than some overseas educated teachers, such as her Japanese teaching colleague in Cairns, although her ability to teach home economics was questioned by both students and authorities merely on the basis of her ethnicity.

While some of the literature (e.g. Kato 1998; Peeler 2002; Santoro et al. 2001: 74) has suggested that more should be done in teacher education programs to prepare overseas students for coping with Australian schools and classrooms, the first author does not see how further academic study could have helped her with this. More promising are a series of recommendations that Cruickshank (2004: 133) developed on the basis of teacher and lecturer interviews, including that:

- Teachers with less experience of the Australian school system be given work placements in primary schools prior to commencing the program;
- All teachers have structured school observations from the beginning of the program.

We also agree with Cruickshank (2004: 135) that the quality of school experience is far more important than the quantity. It does not really help to simply increase the length of the practicum, as was being done in Queensland as the first author was completing her teacher education there, since this only increases the time of being treated as student teachers rather than real ones, and thus not being taken very seriously by either supervisors or students.

The most obvious basis for the first author’s success was the strong and sympathetic support of one practicum supervisor, her first principal, and her teaching colleagues. Because of this we would stress the importance of mentoring, as difficult as it may be to make systematic provisions for it that work effectively (see Peeler and Jane 2003; Basit and McNamara 2004: 104–105). In this regard the practicum represents a particularly crucial time, and the first author was fortunate in having a far more positive and capable

practicum supervisor than the one Santoro (1999: 35) reported for Ling, who saw no better way to support a student teacher than to let her 'sink or swim'. Surely the selection and preparation of practicum supervisors as mentors is an area especially worthy of investigation.

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