

A Cross-cultural Experience: A Korean Teacher in Japan

By Suh Oo-sheek

Editor's preface: Each year KOTESOL selects a Korean teacher to receive an LIOJ scholarship. The following is a report by this year's scholarship recipient, Suh Oo-sheek from the Daejeon chapter.

I'd like to thank all KOTESOL national executives, especially Ms Kirsten Reitan, International Affairs committee chair, and Kevin Parent, president of Daejeon chapter, for granting me a scholarship for LIOJ (Language Institute Of Japan) international summer workshop for teachers of English, August 4-9, 2002. Flying to the nearest part of the world outside Korea took me less than two heart-beating hours. My first landing on Japanese soil didn't make me feel like I was in an entirely different world. On my way to Tokyo Station from Narita international airport, I could see well-kept crop fields and peaceful looking rural cottages very similar to Korean agrarian surroundings. Getting to the capital city, I succeeded in finding a distinctive difference. Tokyo has few skyscrapers. The bullet train took me from Tokyo Station to Odawara city where the Asia Center, the workshop site, is located. The bullet train didn't allow me to have enough time to enjoy passing scenery. Odawara is an historic city and very clean. After a 10-minute taxi ride, I faced the Asia center that faced a hill which embraced the Asia center and LIOJ. I was given a warm-hearted welcoming party by the LIOJ staff, the director of LIOJ, and the executive of the Asia Center. I was accompanied by other international scholars from Malaysia, Russia, and Japan.

The official schedule kicked off on August 4th. I was required to present two topics about Korean EFL situations. The workshop participants comprised of three distinct groups: Japanese high school teachers, international scholars, and highly-regarded guest presenters. More than seventy Japanese English teachers from different prefectures paid for the workshop. Five international scholars and 18 guest presenters visited the workshop

to give presentations. Every participant was required to get involved in morning classes as teachers or students. I took a morning class entitled with 'Communication in the Junior and Senior High school Classroom: An Ideas Pool'. We discussed the difficulties of communicative language teaching as non-native speakers of English. We shared many ideas about 'how' rather than 'why'. I could get a picture of the Japanese English teaching contexts. I was keen to hear what's been going on in the real everyday English classrooms in Japanese secondary schools. We practiced a bunch of games we could utilize in our classrooms. The most interesting thing in the morning class was to be exposed to cultural differences.

I had felt anxiety about my two presentations. The day before my first presentation, I felt so nervous I couldn't sleep well. I could not come up with the English vocabulary to convey my ideas and was so embarrassed with that. Right before the presentation, 'Honesty is the best policy' hit my brain and then I managed to get myself relaxed. As many might know, Korea and Japan have an ugly history. I began the first presentation up by mentioning the dedication of a brave Korean young man who devoted his life to save a Japanese man who had misstepped into subway railroad in Japan. I suggested that the sacrifice be a bridge to narrow down misunderstanding as well as the hatred Koreans and Japanese have had respectively. All 20 Japanese English teachers who came to my presentation sympathized with the story. And also, I introduced them to 'Arirang', a legendary Korean folk song; we sang the song together. The main body of my presentation focused on how I teach English to boost my students' communicative competence. It was a 90 minute presentation. I saved one third of my talk to answer questions from Japanese teachers. They were quite interested in the Korean EFL situation.

Another feature of the workshop was global culture awareness. For that purpose, they organized 'International

Night' on Wednesday. Participants from different countries performed their traditional dances, played musical instruments, and sang songs. I played Gwaenggari, a hand-held percussion instrument, and sang another kind of 'Arirang'.



My second presentation focused on Korean EFL curriculum innovation in 1997. I was more relaxed because of the first presentation experience. I explained ongoing Korean English curriculum that guides Korean English teachers to focus on developing receptive and productive skills, and to equally evaluate and target the four skills.

The most interesting and educational thing of the workshop for me was the fabulous communications with many Japanese teachers. After the daily schedule, we freely gathered on the roof of the Asia Center building to chat. We exchanged casual conversations about life in Japan and Korea, history between the two countries, and the teaching situations. I think hatred between the two countries' people could be diminished through dialogue. The best way to build new history over an unpleasant one is to meet together and converse with each other frankly. If we do, we could find lots of the misunderstanding we hold because of no communication. I asked Japanese teachers to say good things about Korea to their students and I promised I would do the same to my students. I'd like to show my appreciation to Sachiko Ueda, Yoshinaru Sato, other Japanese teachers who showed me their hospitality during the workshop.

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