

Adapting Authentic Picture Books to Gaikokugo Katsudo

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Background

Ever since the introduction of *Hi, friends!*, a popular but optional educational material published by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), stakeholders who prefer to treat *Hi, friends!* as a “coursebook” have been arguing that while the introduction of authentic picture books may raise the motivation of young learners, they tend to possess relative weaknesses in that they are expensive, and can take away time from busy teachers trying to set aside time for special preparations, and can also be prone to becoming sporadic, and structurally difficult materials to position in the school curriculum - especially when compared to coursebooks that “help” lay out cookie-cutter lessons for all teachers. In fact, a few public elementary school administrators have indirectly expressed one or more of these sentiments to the author when the Kanagawa Prefectural Institute of Language and Culture Studies (ILCS) initially proposed the introduction of authentic picture books in their schools’ respective Gaikokugo Katsudo also known as Foreign Language Activities (FLAs). Such arguments are however, by no means representative of the tide of the times. Resistance to the use of picture books in the ELT classroom seems to have its own history. Ellis and Brewster have reported in the past:

“... when the first edition of this book was published, there was still some resistance amongst teachers to using stories in the ELT classroom. This was for a variety of reasons:

- A lack of confidence in their ability to tell stories or read storybooks aloud
- A feeling that the language in the storybooks was too difficult
- A feeling that the content of the story was too childish
- A lack of understanding about the true value of using storybooks
- A lack of understanding how to use storybooks and of time to prepare a plan of work” (Ellis and Brewster, 2002).

While the cost of books is not something that can be resolved in public institutions, it can be counter-argued that many of these disadvantages only exist when the introduction of

authentic picture books is unplanned or un contemplated, and when FLAs are not taught in “thematic units”. Furthermore, there are several benefits that can be brought about in the learning experiences of young learners by introducing authentic picture books in FLAs. In order to demonstrate this point through practice, in April 2013, (in addition to the existing standard one-shot training delivery workshops), ILCS launched an initiative to offer an alternative form of training delivery service formally dubbed the “model lesson” which was designed to provide training to in-service public elementary school homeroom teachers (HRTs) through actual team-teaching in a real classroom together with the author playing the role of a model story reader while the pupils attending the model lesson learned through an authentic picture book called *Handa’s Surprise*. While training HRTs was an objective of importance to ILCS, there was also an equally important and necessary prerequisite for the author which was to assess the suitability of the picture book selected for the model lesson, and the effectiveness of the model lesson precisely because it was assertively and presumptuously named the “model lesson”. For this reason, this report does not analyze the effect of this new training initiative on the participating HRTs; rather, it only focuses on describing the rationale for using *Handa’s Surprise* in FLAs, and on assessing the suitability of the picture book and the effectiveness of the model lesson as felt by the pupils who attended it.

Ways and Benefits of Using *Handa’s Surprise*

An authentic picture book titled *Handa’s Surprise* was selected for the model lesson. *Handa’s Surprise* is usually categorized as an authentic picture book because it is a “real book” - a picture book written for native English speakers to take to the joy of reading. In other words, it is neither an “ELT picture book” - a picture book either designed or simplified for English language teaching to non-English-speaking readers nor a “reading schemes book” - a picture book specifically written as a coursebook for native English speakers’ literacy education also known as a “graded reader”. The possible ways of using *Handa’s Surprise*, an authentic picture book, and the benefits that can be brought about in the learning experiences of young learners through its suggested use are explained below.

Thematic Units

Authentic picture books can be easily integrated to the curriculum because it is real and can therefore be tied to various topics in coursebooks. For instance, *Handa’s Surprise*, which features lifestyles of children in rural Kenya, exotic fruits grown in Kenya, and the African savannah swarming with wild animals, nicely offers a connection to: the video clips of

greetings from around the world (including Kenya) covered in the companion DVD of *Hi, friends! 1, Lesson 1*, the English names of various fruits introduced in *Hi, friends! 1, Lesson 4*, and the topic, “*Where do you want to go?*” introduced in *Hi, friends! 2, Lesson 5*, respectively. The possible combinations of story themes and topics covered in individual activities of FLAs are endless. The teachers’ practice of strategically and thoughtfully linking authentic picture book themes to activity topics during lesson preparations also presents an added bonus in the sense that they simultaneously acquire the habit of bringing in from the outside world a “base theme” on which to build their syllabuses and teaching plans, as opposed to being boxed in inside the world of *Hi, friends!*, and feeling chronically besieged by it. Shin (2006) also advocates the idea of connecting activities to others that are related in content and language which not only helps recycle the language, and bolster young learners’ understanding and use of it, but also presents a larger context within which young learners can focus more on content and communication than on language structure.

Designing individual activities in thematic units yields another multiplier effect in that it helps elementary school teachers connect other subjects that they already teach, in turn helping young learners understand how learning crosses disciplines. Ultimately, the linking of multiple subjects will spark the malleable minds of young learners to employ the use of critical thinking with which to connect content, language and culture to a broader idea.

Language Awareness

Handa’s Surprise is full of repetition, familiarizing listeners with the sounds and rhythms of English, and nicely coinciding with one of the objectives in the New Course of Study or the *Shin gakusho shido yoryo* (MEXT, 2010). Moreover, listening to authentic story reading language in their L2 requires a different level of language ability from listening to basic and familiar classroom English expressions directed at them. Authentic picture books provide an extensive variety of authentic language input and a challenge that is manageable to young learners (Ellis and Brewster, 2002), when selected carefully. In particular, *Handa’s Surprise* introduces the use of English soliloquy, a rather manga-like and play-like attribute of the book, and a rare opportunity for young EFL learners when taking into account that even other modern-day authentic picture books are mostly comprised of narrations, dialogues, or comments directed to the listeners (or readers), and that the skits introduced in *Hi, friends!* are, understandably, dialogues.

The reading of authentic picture books should be done more often during FLAs also because once young learners are removed from the “safe” controlled language learning environment filled with familiar classroom English phrases and teacher-talk, they will be exposed to the real world where real language is spoken (Berardo, 2006), and they need to be

prepared for the real world anyway. As most ALT's now seem to be following the standard syllabus suggested by MEXT to use *Hi, friends!*, opportunities for young learners in Japan to listen to authentic non-classroom English prose may be diminishing.

Cultural Awareness

Unlike fairy tales, *Handa's Surprise* offers real cultural context in the sense that it features children from the Luo tribe of south-west Kenya, helping to illustrate real rural settings in a colorful and eventful manner. The lifestyle of the Luo people may appear too quaint to young learners, and incompatible with their own lives if introduced through photos and footages of rural Kenya alone. In other words, for young learners living in a comparatively monocultural urban setting in a country like Japan, such authentic picture books with real cultural context may prove helpful in scaffolding the discovery of another culture, taking their level of "readiness" into careful consideration. Takahashi (2006) describes, "Relying solely on language-based explanation is too abstract and fails to make young learners understand the cultures of developing countries, while the indiscreet presentation of visuals is likely to provoke a sense of acute culture shock and a feeling of strong rejection among young learners." In other words, an unconsidered or random use of realia may ironically and inadvertently become an interference to learning.

Handa's Surprise also features, for example, a fruit basket in use. Despite the existence of a well-acquainted game universally known as "fruit basket" to young learners, it can be fairly conjectured that they will have never imagined what a real fruit basket looks like, or seen a fruit basket in use unless they have been purposefully introduced to such authentic materials.

Communicative competence

Here again, the real-context provided by *Handa's Surprise* helps teachers generate critical thinking questions for young learners. The "why" and "how" questions can easily be integrated to an FLA lesson, making it a pivotal role for HRTs to take charge of. For example, when reviewing the book, or leading a quiz activity on *Handa's Surprise*, posing a question such as, "How did Handa hoist the fruit basket on to her head?" is almost impossible to do in L2 simply because the use of visuals, realia, gestures, or even "teacher talk" in L2 simply will not work as effectively for addressing such types of questions without translating each word in the question. With a limited amount of time in the FLA class, that time is too precious to waste especially if the primary objective of the activity is to make pupils think as opposed to making students improve their English listening skills. During such activities, HRTs should spend their class time focusing on the primary objective of the activity by relying on their L1 rather than

spending time trying to make a difficult word or expression comprehensible in English (Shin, 2006). Likewise, during such activities, it is also recommended that the learners be allowed to discuss in groups using L1 in order to generate collective opinions, and express them using gestures, L1, or a combination of gestures and L1; HRTs must realize that communication in FLAs does not only have to revolve around L2, and appreciate the value of the use of L1 especially when trying to drive home complex ideas that need to be communicated effectively. When communicating the answer to this example quiz, the authenticity of the illustrations in *Handa's Surprise* will help young learners realize without the use of L1 that people leading lives in rural areas have different sets of knowledge, wisdom, and skill sets from those living in urban areas, and the things in common that Japan has with Kenya.

The Model Lesson

After several months of preparation, on October 23rd, 2013, the first model lesson was team-taught by the author (ALT) together with a fifth grade HRT in one FLA lesson, and also with a sixth grade HRT in the following FLA lesson on the same day at Minamishitaura Elementary School (MES) in Kanagawa Prefecture.

The lesson plan, developed by the author, allowed both the HRT and ALT to use classroom English expressions, and recycle content and language covered in previous lessons through co-developed activities. The HRT and ALT also focused on different target areas: each HRT to focus on facilitating questions and giving instructions primarily in L1 in an effort to directly encourage the pupils to practice their communication skills through discussion, critical thinking, and self-expression using both L1 and L2, and the ALT to focus on raising language and culture awareness through the exclusive use of L2, and through the story reading activity of *Handa's Surprise*.

The model lesson also made use of a video clip of Kenya stored in the companion DVD of *Hi, friends! 1* in order to reveal the urban side of Kenyan life including skyscrapers, automobiles, and business people talking on mobile phones, as well as the African savannah along with its wild animals. The purposes of introducing the video clip were: to present something in common with Japan, to mitigate, remove or reverse general pre-existing stereotypes about Kenya being “backward”, and to provide “balance” by presenting highly contrastive lifestyles and standards of living within the contemporary Kenyan culture, and against the backdrop of the unevenly distributed opportunities and rewards brought about by their economic and geopolitical circumstances.

The Pupil Survey

The model lesson was offered to 22 sixth grade pupils and 31 fifth grade pupils at MES. All 51 pupils were surveyed anonymously during the last five minutes of either of the two FLA lessons they had attended using a “lesson reflection card” or *furikaeri card* as the instrument, a format that the pupils were familiar with.

The pupil survey consisted of two questions in Japanese, one specific and one general. The originals are provided in the Appendix (*Figure 1*). The English translations of the two questions are as follows:

Q1. Compare the picture book on Kenya and the video clip on Kenya, and write down anything you noticed.

Q2. Compare today’s lesson and your usual FLA lesson, and write down anything you felt.

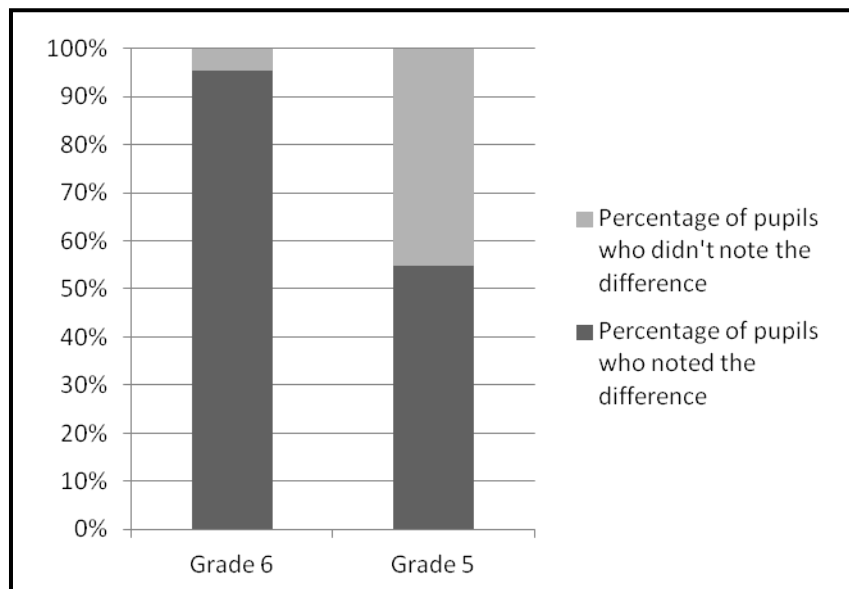
Results and Analyses of the Pupil Survey

Pupils’ Responses to Q1

All but one (21 out of 22 pupils in grade six), or 95% of sixth graders stated that they saw a clear difference in lifestyles and/or standards of living between that presented in the picture book and that of the video. Seven or 32% of them further stated that they found it “amazing” to see the co-existence and/or the difference between the developed urban lifestyle and the comparatively underdeveloped rural lifestyle in Kenya. Only one student misinterpreted the difference as “different periods in history”.

As for the pupils in grade five, 17 out of 31 students or 55% of the fifth graders were able to make note of the difference. This percentage figure was comparatively lower than that of pupils in grade six, and much lower than what was expected, hence making the current name of the program “model lesson” questionable (*Figure 2*).

Figure 2. Pupil responses to Q1 by grade



Of those who did not note the difference between the two lifestyles in grade five, 1 pupil left the answer blank, and 6 pupils wrote their impressions about the video, picture book or the lesson instead, completely failing to answer the question. Another 6 successfully noted a difference though the difference was between Kenya and Japan, a likely consequence of focusing too much on writing out their thoughts and not enough on answering the question. Interestingly though, 2 of them specifically wrote, “I understand now that people in Kenya carry things on their heads.” This last response is worrisome since they reflect classic examples of generalizations and cultural stereotypes to which extra consideration was given. So (2008) also warns that when designing activities that cover surface culture typically represented by “food, fashion and festival” in the elementary school classroom, one must pay close attention to the activity in question for the sake of avoiding the consequence of conveying “cross-cultural misunderstandings” in lieu of teaching “cross-cultural understandings” to pupils. Future model lessons thus need to be revamped with the aim that all fifth grade pupils are able to accurately interpret surface culture whereby their own stereotypes are addressed and mitigated during the lesson. It may be also worth pointing out here that many visually perceivable forms of culture do not necessarily represent surface culture - including images of people carrying items on their heads. While this is not strictly deep culture in the traditional sense, it should not be categorized as surface culture either because the aforementioned response by the two pupils is an indication that some young learners do not yet understand that people carry things on their heads not just out of tradition but primarily due to economic hardships and a lack of logistical means. As in this instance, it sometimes takes time and/or explanation to recognize the meaning of what the

learner is able to touch or see on the surface. This is a real example that clearly illustrates how the classic “iceberg theory” should always include three levels including a middle layer, sometimes referred to as “just below the surface culture”.

Additionally, in an attempt to look for more specific indications in the pupils’ choice of words in the responses, the survey results of pupils in both grades were combined for each of the two questions, and put through a test known as text-mining using a statistical software package, *R* with RMeCab. Then the frequency of use of the 20 most frequently occurring words (nouns and adjectives) in the responses were extracted. The frequency of verbs used in the responses were manually counted and also added to the results. Finally, the top 5 words were selected and presented as a table for each question (*Table 1*). The results of Q1 show that the word “amazing” appeared in the responses of 17 pupils suggesting that many were struck by the presentations of the two contrasting lifestyles that coexisted in Kenya. Even if the model lesson did not completely reverse the pupils’ cultural stereotypes of Kenya, many were at least able to take away a real-life perspective of the mosaic of coexisting cultures within Kenya, hopefully.

Table 1. Translated equivalents of words that appeared frequently in the pupil survey

Rank	Word (Frequency) in Q1	Word (Frequency) in Q2
1	Buildings (22)	Fun (28)
2	Video (19)	English (16)
3	Picture book (18)	Lesson (14)
4	Amazing (17)	Today (11)
5	Kenya (14)	Teacher (8)
6	Cars (12)	Foreign countries (8)

Pupils’ Responses to Q2

As shown in the rightmost column of the same table above, the word “fun” was used by 28 pupils. It is conceivable that the pupils were able to enjoy the model lesson despite being fast paced, with lots of new words in English, and unfamiliar story-reading and group discussion activities. It is however in the nature of such surveys to include biases because pupils fill out the surveys in the presence of the HRT. It should be also noted though that every effort was made in an attempt to remove potential biases from the results of this particular survey. For example, by making the survey anonymous, the pupils were able to answer the questions more freely. The pupils also filled out their standard reflection cards “as usual” prompting them to write normally. The author also said goodbye to them before they started filling out the cards, and the cards were collected by the HRT as usual, with the aim of abating their ability to infer that the survey was a part of a study.

Having gone through the pupils' responses manually, the author also found that 12 pupils in grade six had implied that they were able to "cope with" the exclusive use of authentic story reading language in L2, and the constant use of classroom English expressions both by the HRT and ALT. The reason for being able to draw this interpretation is due to their concurrent use of the words "difficult" and "fun" in the same sentence in that order connected by the conjunction "but" in most responses. This suggests that they were relatively tolerant of ambiguity. One pupil even explicitly stated that s/he learned a lot more in the model lesson than in his/her usual FLA lessons because the ALT only used English, a possible indication that his/her language awareness was comfortably raised as a result of the constant English input.

In contrast however, only 5 pupils in grade five implied the same, reflecting a high level of tolerance to ambiguity, while 6 pupils expressed sentiments solely concerning difficulty in understanding. Of the 6 pupils, 5 also stated clearly in their responses that the difficulty they felt was directly caused by the exclusive use of English by the ALT. Since one reason for conducting the survey was to determine the pupils' ability to cognitively and intellectually deal with their newly introduced learning experience in the model lesson consisting of connected activities in which they must listen in English, think critically and communicate their opinions using both L1 and L2, it is important to take this finding seriously, and further retool the model lesson with the goal of providing all pupils in grade five with a more manageable level of challenge. The collective sentiment of the latter could be a result of either the relatively high level of ambiguity of the activities (assignment ambiguity level) caused by the exclusive use of L2, or their comparatively lower tolerance to ambiguity (ambiguity tolerance level), or a combination of the two. Age difference between grade six pupils and grade five pupils could have played a role in this result. An extra year of learning either at the school, cram school, or both might have had a significant impact. Either way, the most interesting and unique aspect of the pupils at this school was the fact that they had never been taught by a native speaker of English in school until the day of the model lesson. If the model lesson is revamped to comfortably meet the English listening comprehension levels of all pupils at MES, it may become relatively less challenging to execute future model lessons at elementary schools with English-speaking ALTs.

Q2 was intentionally worded in a way to draw out only general responses. Variegated responses were to be expected from Q2 responses. The reason for this is because it is standard practice to ask only two questions per survey using reflection card templates, in consideration to the amount of time set aside for this task (usually the last five minutes of the lesson). There was therefore a need to compromise by asking a general question that was likely to draw out desirable responses from the participating pupils. Calculating percentages of this dataset was therefore meaningless. In other words the question being asked was not specific enough; it

asked the pupils to write down “anything they felt” about the model lesson in comparison to their usual FLA lessons. It therefore singularly depended on the students’ choice whether to write about “difficulty”, or about something else they felt. What mattered most, therefore, was the number of pupils who readily expressed “difficulty”.

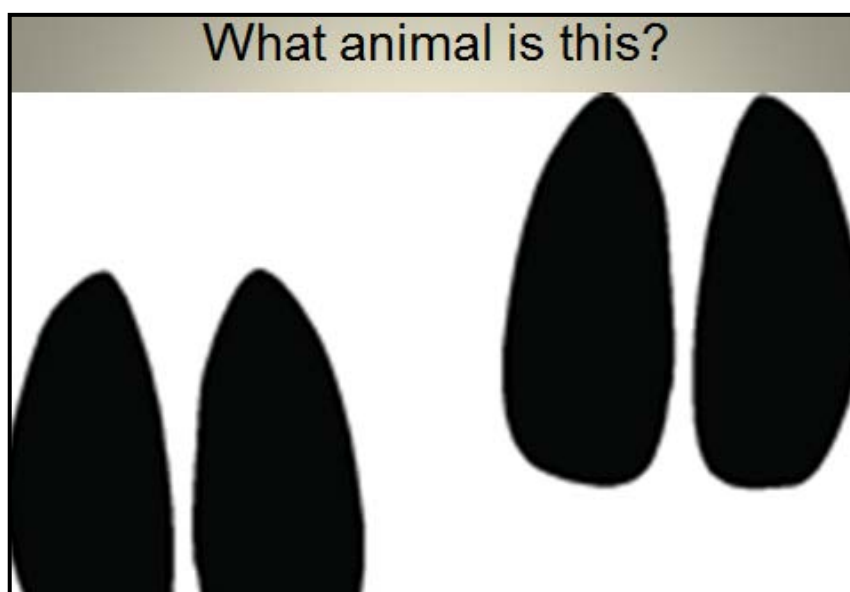
One positive thing that emerged from this survey was that one pupil in grade five who stated that s/he was nervous to be taught by a guest teacher who spoke only English, also wrote that s/he felt happy because Handa’s friend, Akeyo, in the end managed to receive her favorite fruit - tangerines. Seeing this comment was positive and at the same time surprising because this was the only page in the book where the listener had to understand the language associated with the picture. For all other pages, the pictures were self-explanatory, and did not require the listener to comprehend individual vocabulary words used in the book in order to understand and appreciate the story. It could very well be that this particular pupil somehow knew the word “favorite” used in Akeyo’s exclamation of joy, “Tangerines! My favorite fruit.” Another possibility however, is that the pupil was able to decipher the meaning of the story by paying attention to the facial expressions, gestures, and voice inflections employed by the story reader. The latter might be more likely because the pupil also wrote of being nervous, possibly suggesting that s/he was not used to receiving a constant input of English outside of school. If the latter was in fact the case, HRTs should be notified of this finding, hopefully making it more meaningful for teachers to practice story reading as part of continued training.

Discussion

Despite the rave reviews given to the model lesson by 28 out of 53 participating pupils, there was hardly any direct mention of the suitability of the picture book (although one pupil did state that it was easy to understand because the illustrations in the book were well-drawn). This phenomenon can be attributed to the theme-based “pre-model-lesson activities” created and executed by the two participating HRTs. In the first week of October the pupils were introduced to the exotic fruits grown in Kenya including avocados categorized as fruit, passion fruit, and guavas. In the second or third week of October the pupils were then introduced to the animals living in the African savannah including goats bred by humans, antelopes, and parrots which might all have been new to pupils. These preparatory activities conceivably helped pupils successfully recycle language and content during the model lesson on October 23rd, allowing us to speculate the probable outcome of absence of comments in regard to the picture book. That is to say the story became natural for them and easy to follow. It also saved time while reading the story during the model lesson because no one was lost or overly focused on trying to find out the meaning of words or objects shown in the picture book. One of the HRTs also said later that

the theme-based pre-model-lesson activities helped save time during the model lesson, hence allowing them to cover more ground than expected. This approach of learning in thematic units is crucial for the pupils' language learning especially because *Hi, friends!* contrastively takes a "one theme per chapter" approach hardly recycling the expressions they learn in each chapter. A sample pre-model-lesson activity is shown in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1. Sample pre-model-lesson activity



While the introduction of an authentic picture book was well received by the pupils, a secondary but equally important agenda of introducing Kenya, a relatively underdeveloped, non-Western country located far away from Japan, proved to be a challenging task. The difficulty and challenges of connecting such countries to FLA lessons however should not hamper or stop HRTs and other educators to introduce them to pupils. There is great significance and meaningful benefits in introducing a country like Kenya to young learners in Japan. Citizens of the globe no longer live in a world dominated by a handful of industrialized countries. Fates of nations are inextricably bonded more than ever. Now, with the African economy growing faster than its population, the African market is considered to be the last of its kind on this planet hosting roughly one billion residents. Economic ties between countries in Africa and Japan are stronger than ever. English is an official language of Kenya and a second language to many Kenyans, a fact understandably unknown even to the majority of HRTs. Yet another meaningful purpose for promoting a country like Kenya is to counterbalance the ENL-centric cultural resources and points of view (typically the United States, United Kingdom, and Australia) presented and taught in the FLA classroom, not by just the ALT, but also by the

HRT. Despite the forward-thinking attempt at introducing ESL countries such as Kenya and India, and EFL countries such as China and Brazil in *Hi, friends!*, cultural resources and points of view of ESL and EFL countries are nonetheless severely underrepresented according to various studies and observations. This may be partly due to the HRTs' often conditioned worshipping of Western values and customs as typified by the ubiquitous pop-culture representations of Halloween and Christmas in the FLA classroom, combined with the general preference of local authorities to hire ALTs from ENL countries although this is slowly changing. For pupils in Japan to become truly global citizens, they need to be exposed to a variety of cultures as well as a variety of "ESL/EFL Englishes". For this to happen, HRTs must try to imagine what the world will be like in 2023, a decade from now when many of the pupils will have started competing in the global marketplace. At the same time, HRTs must also engage in the process of "debrainwashing". That is to say, so long as HRTs continue to be fixated to the idea that English must sound a certain way, they will continue to have difficulty gaining confidence in their own English (Butler, 2007) as well as acting flexibly to bring in cultural resources and points of view from ESL and EFL countries such as Kenya. HRTs must start telling themselves and their pupils that the English spoken by them in Japan is one variety of "EFL English", and that there is nothing wrong with it. It is the role of the HRT to free their pupils of stereotypes pertaining to accents and pronunciation along with associated cultural stereotypes when encountering speakers of English from other non-ENL countries.

Another important purpose for trying to adapt *Handa's Surprise* to the FLA was to allow the pupils to recognize their own susceptibility to cultural stereotypes, and then mitigate, remove or reverse the pre-existing cultural stereotypes of a relatively unfamiliar country like Kenya. The justification or rationale for this purpose was derived from one of the "teaching tips" stated in the Teachers' Guide of *Hi, friends! 1, Lesson 1*. It interestingly stated that the desired outcome is to allow pupils to understand that they are also citizens of the globe, and have them acknowledge the diverse ways of life preserved and maintained by different peoples around the globe by making them think about the differences and similarities between Japan and other countries while paying full heed to the possible unwanted consequences of instilling stereotypes (MEXT, 2012). One cannot help but wonder how it is expected of HRTs to accomplish such a daunting mission when most HRTs are not at all trained to teach culture and cultural stereotypes, not to mention foreign languages, and when the availability of valuable video clips of various countries covered in *Hi, friends! 1, Lesson 1* is not even mentioned in the same Teachers' Guide. Even the video icons that are present in the DVD of *Hi, friends! 1* are invisible in the Teachers' Guide for some reason. It also came as an equal surprise to discover that the understanding of both surface culture and deep culture by pupils is also an explicit goal laid out by MEXT in the New Course of Study.

“Instruction should be given on the following items in order to deepen the experiential understanding of the languages and cultures of Japan and foreign countries:

- (1) To become familiar with the sounds and rhythms of the foreign language, to learn its differences from the Japanese language, and to be aware of the interesting aspects of language and its richness.
- (2) To learn the differences in ways of living, customs and events between Japan and foreign countries and to be aware of various points of view and ways of thinking.”
- (3) To experience communication with people of different cultures and to deepen the understanding of culture.” (MEXT, 2010).

Once again, one cannot help but wonder how it is expected of HRTs to teach and pupils to learn about Christianity and the way that Christians living in different countries belonging to different denominations think and understand their various points of view and ways of thinking only through the introduction of - “Santa Claus” and “Christmas parties” in FLAs. Allowing pupils to become aware of various points of view and ways of thinking requires the additional teaching of deep culture consisting of values, traditions, norms, beliefs, and meanings that cannot be conveyed by merely presenting food, fashion and festival.

The lesson plan of the model lesson was designed to focus on language input, cross-cultural understanding, and finally the development of communication skills. Communicative competence is considered to be an important “life skill” for pupils in Japan, and the *New Course of Study* also highlights general communicative goals such as fostering the ability to think, make decisions, and express oneself. It is however neither specifically nor intensively taught in any school subject. An emphasis on communicative competence therefore was also deemed important in the model lesson. This focus on communication was also integrated to provide an opportunity for HRTs to realize and leverage their fortes during FLAs. HRTs are by definition teachers of multiple disciplines, and for that reason, HRTs are more adept than ALTs at synthesizing cross-disciplinary materials, and teaching essential “life skills” including problem solving skills and communication skills that are vital to producing a truly global labor force. The author also reasoned that it was imperative for the participating teachers to gain a hands-on experience of incorporating such life skills or “key competencies” in FLAs because, according to the PISA 2009 results, one of the four common attributes that high-scoring countries possessed in common was their inclination to prioritize “high order thinking skills” (OECD, 2010).

Future Research

In the coming fiscal year, the author plans to continue providing on-the-job training opportunities to in-service elementary school teachers through the team-teaching of the model lesson. The research will focus more on teacher development where the transfer of training material and instructional techniques obtained through the model lesson will be qualitatively and quantitatively measured via interviewing and surveying of participating teachers. It will also attempt to monitor the effects of post-model-lesson activities in ensuing lessons on pupils for the purpose of conducting a more longitudinal study on the effects of implementing an array of activities in “thematic units”.

The overarching educational goal of the model lesson research project however, is to progressively help eradicate fun-to-do goalless game-like activities that have become ubiquitously problematic in FLAs executed in public elementary schools according to recent presentations made by progressive HRTs in the field, general conversations with incumbent HRTs, FLA lesson observations by ILCS staff, and results of teacher surveys conducted by ILCS in the past. The problem is also reflected in the frequent utterances of young learners such as, “Are we not playing games today?”, and must be addressed now.

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Appendix

Figure 1. Survey provided to pupils in grade five and grade six

ケニアの絵本とケニアのビデオをくらべて気付いたことを書いてください。

ふだんの外国語活動と今日の授業をくらべて感じたことを書いてください。