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ABSTRACT

A study examined a set of assumptions and expectations held by six male Japanese students (who came to the United States to learn to speak, read, and write English) upon their arrival and 6 months later. These students were considered at-risk because their marginal university status and their inability to function in an English language environment cut them off from traditional support services. Students' responses to both sets of open-ended interview questions were terse, succinct, and unelaborated. Responses were gathered into a first-person narrative. Results indicated that the students' shifted their assumption that the best thing in the United States would be "freedom" to expressions that the best thing in the United States is that "it's cheap." Students also shifted from the belief that they would get to know and be liked by United States students to the reality that their new friends were all foreigners like themselves. Findings suggest four techniques for teachers to use with at-risk students from the moment they arrive: (1) visit at-risk students in their home environment to gain a better understanding of who the students are; (2) examine assumptions about the university and at-risk students' place in it; (3) follow-up on a regular basis to determine shifts in assumptions and expectations; and (4) use this information as a starting point for meaningful dialogue between teacher and student. (Appendixes present survey instruments and answers.) (RS)

Imagining America:

A Study of Assumptions and Expectations Among English as a Second Language Students From Japan

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Introduction

This paper deals with a special sub-group of students at risk in an American University. They are students from overseas who have come to the USA to learn to speak, read, and write English. Usually students in this sub group are preparing for an advanced education in the United States. Some, however, are combining their English language studies in the USA with the pursuit of a higher education at home or are aiming to meet the requirements of a career in Japan which requires English-language fluency.

Often students enrolled for intensive English-language programs in United States universities are part of a separate social, linguistic, and administrative unit in which they, and often their teachers, comprise a distinctive enclave standing somewhat apart from the "real" university. Thus, the factors which put these language learners at risk for failure probably weigh in somewhat differently than those which impact the American student or even the fully matriculated international student. Not only are these English-language learners removed from the support systems of family and culture; they are also largely removed from access to the social and cultural opportunities at the university which are taken for granted by degree-seeking, university students. That is, by virtue of their marginal university status, besides their inability to function in an English language environment fully, these students are essentially cut-off from the support resources such as counseling, student activities, some student health services, and deans of students or other traditional resources for conflict resolution.

For many years after they retired, my parents traveled all over the world on group tours. When they would return after a jaunt, we would ask how they felt about their travels. The answers were always on the order of:

"The people on the tour were nicer than we expected."

"The people were nastier than we expected."

"The scenery was more beautiful than we expected."

"The food was worse than we expected."

And so on.

These were not emotion-free evaluations. If something was less satisfactory then "expected," what was communicated was a real sense of loss and disappointment. The experience had let them down. India had not lived up to their expectations. If India had only known they were coming she could have put herself right in time to greet them properly. On the other hand, an experience that bested a set of low expectations was a real winner.

When students come to our universities to learn English, they are very much the voyagers my parents were. Their heads are filled with expectations and assumptions of one sort or another and with concerns about their own abilities to cope with whatever challenges they assume will await them. And, my point is, how those expectations and assumptions play out in America may play as significant a role in determining success and satisfaction as do the more usual indices associated with positive academic performance.

When students from abroad arrive at our United States institutions of higher education, they will unpack more than their suitcases. They will also unpack the social, intellectual and cultural baggage that has been packed for or by them since they were born. How and by what agencies this baggage gets packed is a topic for another day. For now, I want to take a look at some of this intellectual and cultural baggage and see if such an examination might prove useful for developing educational strategies which help "at risk" students succeed in our colleges and universities.

In this paper, I examine a set of assumptions and expectations held by one small group of students from Japan and then I compare these assumptions

and expectations to interpretations of "reality," six months after this same group's arrival in the USA. I suggest that one element that may help to reduce the risk for intensive English language students is for faculty and administrators to build an awareness (in general) and an understanding (in the specific) of students' expectations and assumptions into the philosophy and curriculum of the intensive English language program. I do not suggest that the language program must recreate itself to fit students' expectations. Rather, I wish to promote the view that our individual and collective expectations play a powerful force in each of our lives. Our internal evaluations of personal progress, satisfaction, and ultimately, success, hinge to some extent on how we believe we are doing in terms of the assumptions and expectations we have brought with us to the table.

This paper is the story of six Japanese sojourners and their first six months in America. It focuses on what they expected their lives would be like here and what they assumed to be true about us. Then, it takes an updated look at the same students and their "real" lives after they have been in the English language program for six months.

The Japanese students at home

Our six young students are charging the sun. Time stands still. Flying east. They will arrive at Los Angeles International Airport the same day they left Japan, despite having traveled for eighteen hours, eaten five or six meals and watched endless video presentations. As they pass over the mist-shrouded Sakhalin Islands, every adult on the Korean Airliner makes the same nervous joke about the Russians, but these nineteen-year old boys are too young to feel vulnerable to musings on mortality. They are coming to America. Beginning a great adventure. Flying out of the warm womb of Japan into the fractious, ribald chaos of Los Angeles. A young Japanese student in the southern United

States was shot and killed the year before, daring to knock on the wrong door on Halloween eve dressed-up as John Travolta and startling the nervous homeowner into fatal action. More recently, two Japanese students at Mount Saint Mary's College in Los Angeles were gunned down in the parking lot of a local Safeway, victims of a car-jacking. But our boys are playing the odds. They will head east toward where the sun really rises and their futures begin.

These are International Communication students at a college that for purposes of this paper I will refer to as *Tech College*, in a small city in Kyushu Prefecture, at the southern end of the island nation of Japan. Tech College is a young, private college, conceived as the "next step" in a growing, educational complex which now includes, in addition to the technological college, a large private preschool; a first-class swimming facility which trains competitive swimmers and provides recreation to the community; a secondary school which specializes in teaching the technology of the "information age;" and a college of Nursing. Tech College offers a three-year technical program with a focus on preparing young men and women to program and operate the computers, machines and robots which form the backbone of Japanese industrial production.

A new major at Tech College is International Communication, a three-year degree program that combines a mastery of English with a basic understanding of computer systems.

Our six young students are enrolled in the International Communication Program. In fact, they represent the first cohort to pursue this major. In 1991, Tech College first offered the senior class a trip to California. Besides paying homage at the shrines of Disney and Universal, the senior class also spent two days in a "homestay program" at California State University, Los Angeles. This program provided the Japanese college seniors (actually in

their third and final year) with a chance to meet some American university students, talk to the U.S. students who spoke Japanese. and to see something of life on an American university campus.

An outcome of these visits was the establishment of the program for which our six sojourners were heading east. The administration of Tech College determined that the three-year, International Communications major should consist of one year at Tech College, one year in the intensive English Language Program at Cal State LA, and the final (third) year back at Tech College.

In December of 1993, the author and an administrative colleague accepted Tech College's invitation to interview the International Communication program students who would be coming to Cal State LA and meet their parents at Tech. The Cal State leg of the program was to be launched in March (the beginning of Spring Quarter) of 1994.

None of the students could speak English at more than a rudimentary level. The best of them could understand enough to answer simple questions. The others might or might not respond appropriately when queried. For example, one student answered the question, "what subject do you most enjoy studying at college" by saying, "Visit Disneyland and Universal." However, should the circumstances have been reversed. the intimidating context in which the interviews were held would certainly have contributed to this author's nervousness. My own assumptions about interviewing students were based on any number of interviews I had conducted over the years. But whether interviewing teachers or students for Fulbright Exchange Programs or interviewing students for Cal State LA study abroad programs. nothing in my experience could have prepared me for the environment in which these interviews were conducted.

The students, their parents, a bevy of Tech College administrators and faculty members, cameramen (both still and video) and local newspaper reporters marched into a cavernous, undecorated, multi-purpose auditorium at Tech. At the front of the room was a table with two chairs on each side: two for the two of us Cal State LA interviewers, one for the Tech College student and one for one parent of the interviewee. Cameras started rolling and flashing, candidates and their parents filled the front rows of folding chairs, staring stoically ahead.

My colleague and I looked blankly at each other, trying to imagine how, in such a public setting, we could conduct the friendly, supportive and revealing interviews we had imagined. We had assumed that the interviews would be held privately in a small, interviewing room with a table and four chairs. Period. Despite our discomfort with the TV camera men leaning over the table, the multiple bursts of anti-red-eye-strobe flashes and the stiff, formal parents, students and college officials, we went ahead with the interviews. We hoped that this format for an interview was more familiar and acceptable to the participants than it was to us.

But, the students' performance was terrible. After at least five years of English language study (English study is compulsory from the 7th grade in middle school through the end of secondary school) there was only one student who could engage in even the semblance of a conversation. Sadly, due to a recent crisis in her parents' business, this excellent student (the only woman to be interviewed) could not afford the cost of the program.

Attributing the unsatisfactory results of the interviews to discomfort on everyone's part, immediately following the formal interviews, we requested that we hold a question and answer session with the parents and students as a group. We had hoped that during this less formidable meeting things would

relax and parents would be able to address any concerns and fears they might have.

However, we soon saw that if we followed the Tech College plan, the atmosphere for the Q and A would be very similar to that in the interviews. This time my colleague and I were to sit at the front of this vast hall, facing stoic rows of students, parents, administrators, and photographers. Unable to manage our discomfort with the hyperformality of the setting, we begged to be rid of the photographers, the reporters, most of the administrators and faculty and the rows of chairs. And when, too polite (or stunned) to protest, the parents, students, and remaining college staff members let us, two foreigners, indulge our need for the familiar traditions of the California T-group-meeting, we took off our coats, rolled up our sleeves, rearranged the chairs in a big circle, and invited students and parents to join us in the symbolic democracy of the circle.

Once seated, however, nothing happened. Despite the coaxing of our interpreter, the only questions (very slow in coming) had to do with the already known cost of tuition and housing. The dialogue we assumed would be paramount in the minds of the parents had to do with the safety of their children, should they be accepted into this Los Angeles based program. But, to our surprise and puzzlement (and relief) we were spared the tough questions that would only put us in the position of apologizing for a social order we could not control or making empty promises we could not keep. Parents were neither prepared to embarrass their foreign guests nor to indulge our administrative puffery.

The session ended and we all (parents, teachers, administrators and students) trooped off to a traditional *o-bento* box lunch in another part of the

building. We Californian administrators were much more relieved than the students that this ordeal was over.

My brief exposure to Tech College allowed me to see our prospective students in their home environment and to take note of the blazing and pervasive differences in everything from language to institutional culture between their current lives and the lives I knew they would live in Los Angeles. I began to wonder how these students could possibly have formed an accurate set of assumptions about how things would be for them in California. I thought it be important to uncover the assumptions they actually held and view them in the clear light of experience.

Ian Mitroff (1983) makes a powerful case for the importance of uncovering and subsequently checking the accuracy of assumptions held by organizational stakeholders. He argues that doing this permits each player to gain a fuller understanding of what informs the behavior of the others and thus to lead the way for the development of policies which are understood and acceptable to a greater number of stakeholders.

Assuming that students are stakeholders in the enactment of their own educations, I wondered if by uncovering some of the assumptions held by international students, we might not be able to form a more complete understanding of our students and, ultimately, provide an important tool for developing successful administrative and pedagogic strategies; in short, to help them succeed in their missions.

As an administrator in a university with about 1,000 international students and an extremely diverse local population, this issue is important to me. In our housing complex. negative incidents between international students in the intensive English language program and matriculated African-American students have already indicated that our increasing diversity, one of the

presumed benefits of international education (Fels, 1993), has not been harvested as fruitfully as one might wish.

We visited Japan in December, 1993. The students were coming Los Angeles at the start of our Spring Quarter, 1994 escorted by a Cal State LA student employee, John, a young man born in the United States to a Japanese mother and German-American father. John was raised in Japan and is fluent in both English and Japanese. He is only one year older than the Tech students in our group. In light of the stakeholder research I hoped to conduct, prior to his departure for Japan, I had prepared a set of questions for him to ask the students while they were still at Tech College. I hoped that by conducting the interviews before they left Japan, we would increase the possibility that authentic, "uncontaminated" answers would be elicited.

For logistical reasons, the interviews did not take place in Japan but on Korean Air at 37,000 feet. One by one, in Japanese, John interviewed each student and tape recorded their responses. When I heard the quality of the tape and read its English transcription, I assumed that the ambient noise in the aircraft, the general fatigue of the subjects, and the lack of privacy disqualified this as an appropriate venue for interviews. However, especially in the revealing light of my own participation in the interview sessions in Japan, I reevaluated the accuracy of this assumption. Perhaps the airborne interviews were more acceptable than I presumed.

The answers were succinct and unelaborated; hardly the responses to open-ended interview questions that I had wished for. Nevertheless, from the interviews that John had collected, we put together a rough snapshot of the assumptions held by this group of six students as they headed to California.

Rather than a series of questions and answers, I have collected the findings into a first-person narrative. The speaker may be considered to represent the group.

The exact transcription of the interviews may be found in an appendix at the end of the paper:

Interview Summary: March, 1994

You asked us several questions about what young people in Japan think abut the United States and how we six think our lives will be when we get there. Here is our response:

> We are sorry to say that young people in Japan think that guns, drugs and a high crime rate are the greatest problems, and in fact, the worst qualities, of life in the USA. On the other hand, we think that the best things about the United Sates are how free everyone is to do what they want and how different everybody is, the one from the other. We think that Americans must be very proud of their country and their families.
>
> You asked us what we think would most embarrass young Americans. We think that they would get embarrassed when they have their weak points exposed, or when they drop their food, just as they are about to put it into their mouths.
>
> Only one of us has ever known an American. A Black American woman taught one of us in an English cram class. She was very kind and thoughtful. We don't see American TV, either, since it isn't broadcast in our city. We do see American movies. The only ones any of us could think of that show life the way we assume it is lived in the United States are Drugstore Cowboy and Lethal Weapon. Most of us, however, couldn't think of any American movie that showed the real life there.
>
> In terms of family life, we think that American families are relaxed, warm, stress-free and comfortable. More like a group of friends than a family. We assume that each family member has his/her own role and own direction.
>
> You asked us what our expectations for our lives in the United States are. First, we think that the most fun will be seeing new places, making new friends, learning about another culture, and shopping. We think that the most difficult things for us will be staying healthy, learning

and communicating in English, and staying in touch with our friends in Japan.

We think that young people in Japan assume that the best things about Los Angeles (our destination) are its huge size (so much bigger than our city) and its convenient location. From there, you can go to so many other places. We assume that other good things about Los Angeles are its freedom and the many different kinds of people who live there. On the other side of the coin, we think that Japanese young people assume that its high crime rate and bad neighborhoods are the worst things about Los Angeles.

When it comes to what we think most young Japanese think about Black Americans, we have different opinions. We think that many Japanese think Black Americans are scary. But not just scary...cool at the same time. Of course the one of us who has known a Black woman teacher didn't think she was scary. Just kind and nice. Some of us don't have any opinion one way or the other.

Now, about what we think Americans think about us Japanese we don't agree. We had different ideas. Maybe that we are shallow, loose with time, extremely educated, don't respect money and that we are small people. But they may like us.

Most of us think that the thing that will make us the saddest in the USA is being so far from family and friends. Maybe the language barrier will make us sad, too. As for making us happy, we think that that will mostly come from such things as making new friends, experiencing a different culture, seeing Japan from a different aspect, and seeing new places and things.

When we think about who our friends will be, we think of casual and fun friends (whom we can speak to). Friends for life. Friends who are serious and thoughtful. Friends with dreams.

American Students will probably be thoughtful (and a bit scary), serious and kind. We imagine that our greatest challenges will be to adopt better priorities, survive in a different culture and to eventually enroll in the University. Certainly the most difficult single task for us will be to learn and use English.

Regarding what we think our daily lives will be like, this is what we imagine. That on a typical school day we will go to class, try to concentrate, study, review and try to expand our English. At night, we will probably study. On weekend days, we think we will sleep, play soccer, study and get ready for Monday and maybe meet some people. At night on the week ends we will meet friends and have fun.

As for what will make us proudest of ourselves, most of us think it will be surviving a year in America. One of us thinks that if he can hold a decent conversation in English, that will be the thing that will make him the proudest.

We tried to imagine what our teachers would be like. We couldn't agree. Our opinions ranged from nice, thoughtful, kind and gentle with fun teaching methods, to strict and scary.

The Students in America

In Los Angeles, the superficial changes occurred first. When I first met them in Japan, the students were models of Japanese decorum and appearance. They dressed formally in sport coats, ties and white shirts. They were deferential to their elders. Their hair was neatly and uniformly cut.

None of this was to last, however. By the end of the second week, one student's black hair had turned a Woody Woodpecker shade of red. Another, the most, innocent-looking member of the group made a dramatic appearance at our regular Friday meeting as a lemon-blonde. I was nonplused. I began to worry about what was happening to these young men whose parents, only days before, had waved them goodbye, confident that they would "be in good hands" in California. What do you say about someone who appears to have morphed into a Loony Tunes character?

Before opening my mouth, however, I thought about the book, Between Parent and Teenager by Hiam Ginot (1969), in which Ginot discusses non-judgmental conversational ploys which can be used to lead teen agers into relatively productive discussions about touchy topics.

So I said in my most non-judgmental voice to the first dyer, "I see you are a blond." He looked down and smiled shyly. Then, to the second, who was the apparent leader of the group, I said, "and you have red hair."

"Yes" he said. "Red."

But this was only the beginning. Over the next few weeks, another student, too, became a canary-yellow blond and the students began to pierce their bodies in earnest. I know for certain that holes were drilled in ears, noses, and eye brows. I could see them. I did not inquire about what I could

not see. Possibly, I thought, this was some elaborate "connect-the-dots" game. If you tied a string from Saito-san's earring to his nose ring to his eyebrow ring you could just make out the Big Dipper.

Not only appearances had changed. In Japan these young men had been diligent at their studies in Japan. But now I was fielding complaints from their English instructors that one student was sleeping in class and two others were coming to class late. Hair dyes and piercing holes would eventually go away. But what if they were doing other things. Using drugs? Things were getting out of hand!

I asked John for advice. He had been a sunflower blond for most of summer of '93, so I figured he could help me understand what was going on. He tried to assure me that my worry that radical alterations of physical appearance were early steps on the road to degradation was unreasonable. This was a good group. They didn't use drugs (except nicotine and a little beer) and, responding to my obsessive worry, they had not gotten tattoos. I told John that I would draw the line there.

Tattoos! I imagined headlines in the students' home town daily paper, accompanied by lurid photos. John politely told me to stop worrying about how they looked and whether or not they were learning to cook things they could stand to eat (another of my concerns), and to start paying more attention to their academic performance. He advised me to be very firm with them or they were going to think that it didn't matter.

The winter-quarter ended with mixed results. One of the non-dyer-piercers moved ahead to the next level with rave reviews. Others were less successful. Comments on first quarter reports included, "you have strong potential, but you must try to stay awake in class." Or, "please try to look up

during the class so I know you are awake." Overall, there was progress, but not much.

I tried a new tactic. I dropped the Carl Rogers approach to advising my charges and started to treat them the way I had my own children: with threats and guilt. "Look. Sleeping through class isn't going to cut it. Your parents aren't going to be happy about your performance. You are the first group of students in this program. You are responsible for making a good reputation for Tech College," and so on.

The next quarter went much better. Everyone was promoted. The hair dye was washed out. The body piercing continued, but less gaudy studs gradually replaced the original hoops. I still noticed that when, in between our weekly meetings, I would see this little "pod" of students as they moved around campus, between class, on their way to the cafeteria, or to their campus apartment they were always together, unless one of them had overslept. They did not appear to be forming independent relationships.

Early in the third quarter (fall, 1994), John once again interviewed the six students, one by one. This time, he asked about the reality they had encountered to date. He conducted the interviews in the relative privacy and quiet of their student apartment on the Cal State LA campus. The answers were just as terse as before.

The content of the questions was the same, but shifted into the present tense. As before, I have summarized the answers as if they had been presented by one person.

Interview Summary: September, 1994

> Although we don't agree on which is the greatest social problem in the USA, the ones we have identified are racism, homelessness, aids and killings by guns. We consider the best thing about the USA to be that life here is cheap. That is, it is relatively inexpensive to live here. As for the worst thing about the USA, we agree. It is its danger. You asked

us what we think Americans are most embarrassed about. One of us wondered, "Do they get embarrassed?" The rest of us think that they are probably most embarrassed about the problems of violent crime in one form or another. Three of us think that Americans are proudest of their country and its power. The other three assume that it is their heritage, parents or themselves about which Americans are most proud.

Things which are the most fun for us in the United States include the friends we have made, the trips and vacations we have taken, the experiences we can not get in Japan, sort of living on our own, but still relying on our parents, and simply living in the USA. As for the most difficult things about being in the United States, we include transportation difficulties, house work, living on our own, getting used to a new environment and learning the language (two of us felt that was the most difficult).

The best thing about Los Angeles is its weather. The worst thing is that it is dangerous and dirty. We don't agree on our perceptions of Black Americans. Two of had nothing special to say about them. One of us thinks that they don't like Japanese people. One thinks that they are selfish and get mad easily. One thinks they are scary and the last one of us thinks finds them nicer than he thought they would be.

As to what Americans think of Japanese, we are also of several minds, but it is all negative. We think that they think of us as self-centered and serious, not good decision makers, don't speak our minds and are rich.

We are sad for different reasons, such as because we can not see our friends and family; because we can not get around easily, because we have to fend for ourselves, because it is boring, and because there are communication problems. We pretty much agree about what makes us happy here. It has to do with the experiences we can have, including meeting other foreigners and learning about their countries. We also agree about the biggest challenge in the USA. One way or another it is the language that challenges us the most.

A typical school day is spent going to class and studying. On a typical school night it is study, homework and TV. On the weekend, the days are usually spent with TV and outings with friends. Shopping. Weekend evenings, it's relaxing, watching TV or videos or listening to music, and talking with friends.

You ask what makes us proudest of ourselves. Three of us say "parents/family," two say, "our experiences," one says "nothing."

About our favorite language program teacher, most of us agree that the most important characteristic is that he/ she really takes care of us, treating us like his or her own children. Other characteristics include keeping the classes interesting, cheerful and fun and appearing to be a good person.

We have many different views about how we describe our friends in Los Angeles: they have "wider views on life;" They are "kind, and the age

> difference does not matter;" they "watch out for each other;" they all have, "distinct characters;" they are "mentally stronger than normal people."
>
> As for American students, we don't seem to have a very clear picture. We say that they study a lot; that they like their studies; that they are free and casual; that they are adults; and that they are lazy.
>
> Our biggest surprises in the United States are diverse. We were surprised that LA is very international and that everybody is nice; that it is easier to live than we had anticipated; that people are kind; that there are more Asians than one would have imagined; that it is safer than imagined as well as stricter.

Discussion

In her book The material child: Coming of age in Japan and America, Merry White (1993) points out that teens in the United States. are perceived to be "at risk" while teens in Japan are perceived to be "at promise." My own misguided assumptions about what the hair dying and body-piercing behavior of the Tech College students might mean if they had been a group of local American students is a case in point. I fully expected to see them slide, one by one, down a slippery slope into total rebellion. Delinquency, possibly. Although we have not attempted to uncover the specific assumptions that underlay their behavior, I am certain that a discussion about them would have been informative and productive, conversational reluctance or conservatism notwithstanding.

I was glad to be judged wrong in this case. And yet, there is something to be concerned about when we bring untraveled, unsophisticated, English-deficient young people to our universities. In the case of the Tech College students, the full story is yet to be revealed. They are now in the midst of their third quarter. They will return to Japan in March of 1995.

This paper is about a particular category of "at risk" student who has come to the United States to develop speaking, reading, writing and listening skills in English. The students from Tech College were coming from an

educational system which makes quite different demands on its students than does ours in the United States. All Japanese high school seniors have studied calculus, foreign languages, earth sciences, physics, chemistry, biology, two musical instruments, several artistic media, including calligraphy (White, p.6). It is no wonder that even though our Tech College students expected that things would be tough and challenging, they may have also assumed that they could do it successfully.

It is revealing to observe that in as few as six months the Tech students have shifted their assumption that the best thing in the United States would be "freedom" to expressions that the best thing in the United States is that "it's cheap." Or the distressing change, when asked about what they assume most embarrasses Americans, from, "dropping some food when they are about to eat it" to "killing foreign students." Or from an assumption that they would get to know (and probably be liked by) United States students, to the reality that their new friends are all foreigners like themselves and that Americans may, in fact, not think much of them if indeed they think about them at all.

Implications for the behavior of United States-based teachers and administrators are informed by an awareness of what our students assume and expect. Without such understandings we would not have a baseline from which to plot the state of our students' current existence. That is, the answers to the second set of interviews might on their own not serve as indices that the ground has shifted. We might simply see the students as "getting it" becoming more like us. But what has been lost? What hopes and fantasies dashed? We might never know.

Certainly most instructors recognize that their intensive-English charges are likely to experience some form of "culture shock" and that the

inability to express themselves fully and maturely in English feels frustrating and limiting to students. But we can glean more from this simple exercise.

Perhaps we can move toward a more complete understanding of who our students are and what their real stakes are if we build opportunities to discuss with them their assumptions and expectations into the curriculum. If, as I assume, these forceful, qualitative, internal measures of what our reality should be are the determinants of how we evaluate our experiences, taking steps to uncover those often unrecognized expectations seems essential.

For example, with groups such as ours from Tech College, we might want to kick off the first quarter by giving students an opportunity to answer a short instrument dealing directly with their assumptions and expectations. Of course we will have no assurance that one is getting at "the truth" rather than getting what the student assumes the teacher wants. However, this is not designed so much to be a scientific exercise as an opportunity to open a window for further discussion. Subsequently, the instructor (possibly one-to-one and with a translator if needed) can uncover what assumptions and expectations are currently held. Besides serving as an individual base-line for each student, the initial comparison of assumptions and expectations might help teachers avoid adopting erroneous generalizations about their students.

For example, in Japan the students from Tech are generally isolated from United States media and the American people. They have learned what they know about us from Japanese news reports, music, and the occasional marketing efforts of United States companies. They have lived tranquil lives, enjoying many of the pleasures of the countryside. This stands in stark contrast to their urban, high-speed, Tokyo cohorts.

Yet unless some effort is made from the outset to identify those realities and clarify the assumptions and expectations that come out of them, it may not be clear that this is the case.

This was brought home rather vividly on a camping trip with the Tech students and John and myself in early September. After a camp-fire dinner of Japanese curried stew and rice, John talked about how as a youngster in Tokyo he sometimes felt jealous of friends in Kyushu Prefecture, where his grandfather lived, because they could catch their own beetles for traditional beetle wars. He, on the other hand, had to buy his beetles in a shop.

He envied what he saw as a gentler, simpler life, more connected with nature. And, by extension, a much less cynical, less hedonistic life as well. We may imagine that teachers who are used to working with fast-paced, sophisticated, urban Japanese students, may, based on their own assumptions, make unfounded (and possibly negative) deductions about the intellects of the slower paced, less-exposed students from the south.

To continue with how we might help students use their identified assumptions and expectations:

Then, on a regular basis, perhaps each quarter or semester, the instructor could review those assumptions and expectations with the student; see if and how those assumptions and expectations have been realized or changed. The point of the follow-up is to give students the opportunity to discuss and thus unhook from outdated assumptions and expectations, revise them and establish new ones better grounded on the reality of the situation.

This also provides an opportunity for the teacher to discover areas that, if left unattended, might push an at-risk student right out the door. For example, in the six month "reality check" of assumptions and expectations held by Tech students, I found that unlike the other five students, one in

particular answered with "I don't know" to an inordinate number of questions, including "what makes you the happiest in the USA" and "How would you describe your favorite language teacher?" This review has given me the chance to open a dialogue with him about his feelings of being ignored and unappreciated by his teachers. It also gives me a way to discuss his expectations and feelings with his teachers.

This is also the chance to catch assumptions which have not become more insightful with time. For example, the assumptions which the Tech students made about American students after being at Cal State LA for six months demonstrated no additional insight than those given *en route* to California. This is specifically true for their insights regarding African Americans. Since an understanding of American people and their cultures is an important component of any intensive English language program, this is a flag to me that additional work must be done in this area.

Specifically, significant efforts must be made to augment the curriculum so that English-language learners are given meaningful exposure to the whole spectrum of American students.

The review also gives us opportunities to help students adjust to United States teaching and administrative styles. Being aware of and acknowledging that "parenting" is expected from a good teacher will reduce the possibility for hurt feelings and disappointment and will open the door for greater mutual understanding and accommodation between teacher and student.

Do implications in this study for at-risk students exist beyond those who inhabit the intensive English-language classroom? I think so. Most of our at-risk students come from social, economic or cultural backgrounds which lie at some distance from the mainstream culture of the university. At Cal State LA, the vast majority of our student body are first-generation college students,

living in financial or social circumstances that are either totally foreign to our faculty and administration or from which they have long removed themselves.

Why do so many of our at-risk students fail to persevere with their studies? Many of the reasons extend far beyond the limited questions raised in this study. However, a personal examination of what individual students assume and expect about their lives at the university may add one more tool to our kit.

Therefore, I propose that we apply the techniques harvested from this study to work with at-risk students from the moment they are admitted. That is:

1. visit at-risk students in their home environment to gain a better understanding of who our students are. This will provide important insights into just how jarring the move to the environment of the university might actually be. These visits are too important to be left solely to the purview of the university's outreach workers. Counselors, administrators and, most importantly, faculty, must participate;

2. examine assumptions about the university and the at-risk students' place in it;

3. follow up on a regular basis to determine shifts in assumptions and expectations;

4. use this information as a starting point for meaningful dialogue between teacher and student.

An on-going assessment of the expectations and assumptions about university life held by at-risk students will help all university personnel anticipate areas in which students might have difficulty.

We will continue to develop and refine techniques for uncovering assumptions and expectations of our Tech College students as we begin

working with a new group in March of 1995.

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Appendix 1
Survey instrument (and answers) enroute to California
March, 1994

What do you think Japanese people your age think is the greatest social problem in the United States?

Guns and Drugs (n=6)

What do you think Japanese people your age think is the best thing about the United States.

Freedom (in general) (4).
Freedom (in school) and everybody is so different (2)

What do you think Japanese people your age think is the worst thing about the United States?

High crime rate (3)
Drugs
Guns
Danger

What do you think people your age think Americans are the most embarrassed about?

Dropping some food when they are about to eat it.(1)
To have their weak points exposed (2)
No idea (3)

What do you think Japanese people your age think American people are the most proud of:

Pride in their country (2)
Family
Their country
No idea (2)

Do you know any American people?

Don't know any (5)
English cram-school teacher (1)

What can you tell us about her?

She is my teacher outside of Tech College.
She is Black.
She is very nice and thoughtful.

Have you ever seen a United States movie that you think shows an accurate picture of the United States?

Drug Store Cowboy
Lethal Weapon

None (4)

Have you ever seen a United States TV program that you think shows an accurate picture of the United States?

No United States TV programs are broadcast in our city.

What do you think Japanese people your age think of United States families?

At home. comfortable and relaxed.
The members seem to be more like friends than family.
The kids are cute
Each member has his own position and his own work.
Warm and friendly
Comfortable, without stress

What kind of things do you think will be the most fun for you in the United States?

To be in another culture and meet many people
I can go many places
Shopping
Learn another culture
Seeing many places
Making new friends

What kinds of things do you think will be the most difficult part of being in the United States?

Communication (2)
Mastering the language
Staying healthy
Keeping in touch with friends
Don't know

What do you think Japanese people your age think the best thing about LA?

It is much bigger than our city.
It is in a convenient place and from there I can go to many other cities
Freedom
It is a big city
Lots of different people
Don't know

What do you think Japanese people your age think is the worst thing about LA?

Bad area (5)
Lots of crime (1)

What do you think Japanese people your age think about Black Americans?

Scary yet cool
Scary (3)

Neither good nor bad
My English teacher was Black and she was nice.

What do you think American people think about Japanese people?

Shallow
They may like us
Loose on time and extremely educated
Don't respect money
Small
Don't know

What do you think will make you sad in the United States?

I can't see my friends (2)
The struggle until I can adapt
The language barrier
I will miss my family and friends
Being home sick

What do you think will make you happy in the United States?

I can see many different places and things (3)
I can see Japan from a different aspect
I can experience a different culture
I can make new friends.

What do you think will be the biggest challenge to you in the United States?

To enroll in the University
I can test myself and see if I survive
Survival in a different culture
To adopt better priorities
Language
Staying healthy

Tell us how you think a typical school day is in the United States?

Studying and reviewing English (3)
Study for the TOEFL [test of English as a foreign language]
Go to school and concentrate
Try to expand my English

Tell us how you think you will spend a typical weekend day?

Sleep (3)
Play soccer
Study and get ready for Monday
Meet people

Tell us how you think you will spend a typical school night?

Study (5)

Meet people

Tell us how you think you will spend a typical weekend night?

Meet friends (5)
Have fun (1)

What do you think is going to be the hardest thing for you during your year in the United States?

English conversation (3)
Survival in a different culture
TOEFL
Don't know

What do you think is going to make you the most proud of yourself?

If I can at least have a decent conversation, I will be proud
That I survived in America
That I survived one year in a foreign country
That I survived in the United States (3)

What do you think your first United States teacher will be like?

Strict (2)
Kind, gentle and thoughtful
Sincere and fun teaching methods
Strict and scary
Nice

Who do you think your friends will be in LA?

Casual and fun friends that I can speak to
Friends for life
Serious and thoughtful
Friends with dreams
Casual people
Don't know

Tell us what you think United States students are like?

They have their own policies in life
I don't know yet, but they seem thoughtful yet scary
Serious and thoughtful, with of course exceptions
Compared to Japanese university students, I think they are more serious
Kind and thoughtful
Nice

Appendix 2

Survey instrument (and answers) in California
September, 1994

Now that you have been in the United States for a few months, what do you think is the greatest social problem here?
- I think the homeless is a big problem
- Racism
- Killings by guns (2)
- I don't know
- AIDS

What do you think is the best thing about the United States?
- Life here is cheap (4)
- There are many things to experience
- I don't know

What do you think is the worst thing about the United States?
- It's dangerous (3)
- Lots of crime
- Murders
- Everybody has guns

What do you think most Americans are embarrassed about?
- Do they get embarrassed?
- That they have killed foreign students
- The crime rate
- That America is not safe
- I don't know (2)

What do you think that American people are most proud of?
- Their country
- That their country is a global power (2)
- Ancestors and their heritage
- Themselves
- Parents

What is the most fun for you in the United States?
- The friends I made (2)
- I can sort of live on my own and still rely on my parents.
- The things I experience that I cannot experience in Japan.
- The fact that I'm living in the United States.
- Trips and vacations

What is the most difficult thing about being in the United States?
- Local transportation
- House work
- I don't understand the language (2)
- Living on my own
- Getting used to a new environment

What is the best thing about LA.?
It's very international
The good weather (5)

What is the worst thing about LA.?
It's dangerous (2)
Crime rate (2)
It's dirty
I don't know

What do you think about Black Americans?
Nothing special (2)
They don't like Japanese people
Nicer than I thought
Selfish and get mad easily
Scary

What do you think Americans think about Japanese people?
Self-centered and serious
I don't know
That we are not good decision makers
Serious
That we don't speak our minds
Rich

What makes you sad here?
I can't see my friends and family
I can't get around
I have to fend for myself
I still can't communicate well
Nothing
It's boring

What makes you happiest here?
I can experience America
Everything that I experience
I can do a lot of things
I can meet many foreigners and hear about their countries and become more international.
Nothing
Adventures

What is the biggest challenge for you in the United States?
To start up an English conversation
I have to be organized
English communication
TOEFL

How do you spend a typical school day?
I go to class and study (2)
I go to school
Go to school and meet foreign people
Go to school
Watch TV and study

How do you spend a typical weekend day?
Sleep and I go shopping
I do my laundry and go shopping
I watch TV and go places with friends
I watch TV and go shopping
I go shopping and do homework
I watch TV, talk with friends. study and go shopping.

How do you spend a typical school night?
Homework and study
I watch TV and do my homework (2)
Homework and sleep
Study and sleep
I study, make dinner, watch TV and sleep

How do you spend a typical weekend night?
Meet friends or watch videos
Talk with friends
Relax (2)
I watch TV
Listen to music and watch TV and meet friends

What is the hardest thing for you in the United States?
Language communication (6)

What makes you most proud of yourself?
I have experienced a lot (2)
My parents (3)
Nothing
My experience

How would you describe your favorite ACLP teacher?
He really cares about us
Her classes are fun and she seems like a good person
She keeps the lessons interesting and cheerful
She deals with me like her own child
None
She takes care of me

How would you describe your friends in LA.?
They have wider views on life
They are kind and the age difference does not matter
They watch out for each other
They all have distinct characters
I don't know
They are mentally stronger than normal people.

How would you describe United States students
They study a lot
They like their studies
Free and casual
Adults
I don't know

Lazy

What was your biggest surprise in the United States? That is, what was very different from what you expected? How was it different?

It's very international and everybody is nice
It's easier to live that I thought
The people are kind
There are more Asians than I expected
It is safer than I expected
It is stricter than I expected

Now that you have been in the USA for a few months, what do you think is the greatest social problem here?

What do you think is the best thing about the USA?

What do you think is the worst thing about the USA?

What do you think Americans are most embarrassed about?

What do you think American people are most proud of?

Would you describe your favorite TV show in Kagoshima?

What is the most fun for you in the US?

What is the most difficult thing about being in the US (not just being away from your family)?

What is the best thing about LA?

What is the worst thing about LA?

What do you think about Black Americans?

What do Americans think about Japanese people?

What makes you sad here?

What makes you happiest in the US?

What is the biggest challenge to you in the US?

How do you spend a typical school day?

How do you spend a typical weekend day?

How do you spend a typical school night?

How do you spend a typical weekend night?

What is the hardest thing for you in the US?

What makes you most proud of yourself?

How would you describe your favorite ACLP teacher?

How would you describe your friends in LA?

How would you describe US students?

What was your biggest surprise in the US? That is, what was very different from what you expected? How was it different?