The Social Organization of High School Sojourner Experiences: At the Intersection between Corporate Transnationalism and Educational Processes

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate School of The Ohio State University

By

Mariko Mizuno Alexander, M.A.

Graduate Program in Education and Human Ecology

The Ohio State University

2014

Dissertation Committee:

Jan Nespor, Advisor
Keiko Samimy, Advisor
Antoinette Errante
Mari Haneda
Copyrighted by

Mariko Mizuno Alexander

2014
Abstract

Despite the urgent need to improve US education for the ever-increasing population of recently-arrived secondary English language learners (ELLs) (Gándara & Baca, 2008; Lazarín, 2006), relatively little attention has been paid to the unique challenges and struggles these ELLs encounter. This three-paper dissertation aims to contribute to the development of scholarly knowledge of transnationalism and secondary ESL education by investigating how the everyday experience of Japanese high school sojourner students—a group of late-entrant transnational ELLs—is socially and institutionally organized. This research uses a sociological method of inquiry known as institutional ethnography (Smith, 1987, 2005).

The first paper examines strategies that Japanese sojourners use to negotiate the institutional demands of US high school life while also calculating how their choices and performance will promote access to higher education in Japan. Despite the temporo-spatial constraints imposed by corporate transnationalism, Japanese sojourners actively carve out their future educational paths across borders through the effective but high-stakes strategy of graduating a year early from US high schools. I call this early graduation scheme a gambit because the sojourners sacrifice beneficial opportunities and even risk their graduation itself in the hope of securing a positional advantage upon their return to Japan. This paper addresses the sojourners’ distinctive educational experiences
and needs characterized by the involuntary, transient, and precarious nature of their stay in the US.

The second paper examines the realities of high-stakes testing experienced by Japanese sojourners, particularly late-entrant ELLs, focusing on one big risk factor in early graduation gambit—state-mandated high school exit exams—and the sojourners’ strategies for maneuvering the academic and linguistic challenges posed by the exams. These Japanese ELLs deliberately flunk the state English language proficiency tests and maintain the ESL status in order to avoid losing ESL accommodations, without which they would have little hope of passing the high school exit exams. This paper highlights the underlying issue of test validity and fairness and the importance of ensuring equitable treatment for transnational ELLs.

The third paper examines how the organizational structure of US public high school education regulates late-entrant Japanese sojourners’ second language (L2) interactional opportunities, opportunities which the second language acquisition (SLA) and L2 learning literature has found necessary for successful L2 development (e.g., Long, 1996; Lantolf, 2000). Findings show that late-entrant Japanese sojourners’ peer interactions and social lives differ markedly from those of long-term sojourners who came to the US as elementary students, and that American high schools’ structural constraints draw social boundaries, and limit interaction, between ELLs and American students. Intertwined with the school organizational structure are ideological discourse on limited English proficiency, marginalizing ELLs and imposing different academic expectations on sojourners who stay in versus those who test out of the ESL program.
The three papers together show how the actualities of Japanese high school sojourners’ lives in a local setting are translocally coordinated at the intersection of corporate transnationalism and educational policies and practices.
Dedicated to

My beloved daughter Emily Hazel Alexander

&

My caring and hard-working mom Haruko Mizuno
Acknowledgments

First of all, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my advisor, Dr. Jan Nespor, who has provided excellent guidance and extremely helpful advice throughout my time as his student. Dr. Nespor’s profound wisdom, knowledge, and commitment to the highest standards have inspired and motivated me. I am very lucky to have an advisor who cared so much about my work and gave me insightful, critical, and constructive comments on my writing, which always resulted in so much improvement of the drafts. Without his guidance and help, this research would not have been possible.

I would also like to thank my program advisor, Dr. Keiko Samimy, for being so caring and supportive during this long and difficult, but rewarding journey. I am particularly thankful to her for the valuable opportunity to present my research and discuss it with her students in her class. Her comments and her students’ feedback were very helpful.

I am very grateful to Dr. Mari Haneda (Penn State) for guiding me through the first half of my doctoral study and candidacy exam as my advisor, staying in my committee and giving invaluable suggestions about research and informative career advice. She has been a great mentor and role model. I greatly appreciate every opportunity to work with her, from assisting in her research project to co-authoring papers. I have developed so
much from the professional development opportunities she gave me to serve as a journal and conference reviewer. I would not be the emerging researcher I am without Dr. Haneda.

I thank Dr. Antoinette Errante for giving me book suggestions and for her thoughtful comments in my proposal defense. Her course introduced me to qualitative research methods, and her lectures and assignments helped me develop a foundation for educational research.

I would like to express special thanks to my loving husband Sam for his patience, support, encouragement, and constant faith in me. I gratefully acknowledge those countless late nights he spent proofreading my drafts and his perceptive comments on a number of points in this dissertation.

Gratitude goes to my family in Japan—my parents Haruko Mizuno and Takuo Mizuno, my sister Emi Mizuno, my aunt Dr. Yoriko Nishitani, and my “brother” Dr. Yoshifumi Nakamura—who have always supported me in so many ways, encouraged me, and believed in me.

Finally, I wish to thank the Kōnosuke Matsushita Memorial Foundation for their generous financial assistance (grant number: 11-004), which allowed me to conduct this research.
Vita

March 1991 ........................................................Kōka Gakuen High School, Tokyo, Japan

March 1995 ........................................................B.A. English Language and Literature,

Tsuda College, Tokyo, Japan

April 1995 to March 2008...............................Full-time English (EFL) Teacher

Fujimi Junior and Senior High School
Tokyo, Japan

August 2000 ....................................................Awarded M.A. Scholarship by Fujimi Junior

and Senior High School, Tokyo, Japan

August 2001 ....................................................M.A. Gender and Cultural Studies,

Simmons College, Boston, Massachusetts

August 2009 to December 2009 ..................Full-time Japanese Teacher

Columbus Japanese Language School
Columbus, Ohio

January 2010 to June 2013..............................Graduate Administrative Associate

Cataloging Department, University Libraries
The Ohio State University
July 2011 .................................................. Awarded Dissertation Grant

The Kōnosuke Matsushita Memorial Foundation, Japan

May 2013 .................................................. M.A. Foreign, Second, and Multilingual Language Education,

The Ohio State University

Publications


http://edrev.asu.edu/reviews/rev908.pdf

Fields of Study

Major Field: Education and Human Ecology

Specialization: Foreign, Second, and Multilingual Language Education
Table of Contents

Abstract ........................................................................................................................................ ii

Acknowledgments ...................................................................................................................... vi

Vita ................................................................................................................................................ viii

List of Tables ................................................................................................................................ xv

List of Figures ............................................................................................................................ xvi

Chapter 1: Introduction .............................................................................................................. 1

Statement of the Problem ........................................................................................................... 5

Objectives of the Study ............................................................................................................. 10

Research Questions .................................................................................................................. 10

Overview of the Study ............................................................................................................. 11

Significance of the Study ........................................................................................................... 15

Methodology ............................................................................................................................ 17

Overview of Institutional Ethnography .................................................................................... 18

Research Site and Participant Selection .................................................................................. 20

Data Collection Procedure ..................................................................................................... 30
Concluding Discussion........................................................................................................ 60

Acknowledgments............................................................................................................. 63

Notes................................................................................................................................ 64

Chapter 3: College-Oriented Transnational English Language Learners Fighting on an
Unlevel Playing Field: High School Exit Exams, Accommodations, and ESL Status..... 65

Abstract .............................................................................................................................. 65

Introduction ........................................................................................................................ 66

The Impact of NCLB on Secondary ELLs’ Educational Experience ............................. 67

Methodology and Data Sources ....................................................................................... 70

NCLB Mandates for High School ELLs in the Midwestern Context ............................. 72

Findings ............................................................................................................................... 73

The MELAT Test: “It’s Best Used as a Form of Toilet Paper” ....................................... 76

It’s All Political: Insufficient Funding for ELLs and the Change of ESL Exit Criteria
........................................................................................................................................ 79

MGT Is Not a Level Playing Field..................................................................................... 83

Language Barrier.............................................................................................................. 85

Curriculum Discontinuities ............................................................................................ 86

Concluding Thoughts ....................................................................................................... 89

Notes.................................................................................................................................. 92
Chapter 4: “I Don’t Have Any American Friends”: English Language Learners’ Access to L2 Peer Interactions and Structured Boundaries in US High School ................................. 94

Abstract ..................................................................................................................... 94

Introduction ................................................................................................................ 95

Adolescent Peer Groups and Interaction in the School Context .............................. 96

The Role of Interaction in L2 Learning and Access to Interactional Opportunities .... 99

Methodology and Data Sources .................................................................................. 102

Findings ....................................................................................................................... 104

Different Friendship Circles and Social Lives ....................................................... 104

Boundaries between Late-Entrant and Long-Term Sojourners.................................. 107

Language Barrier or Choice? ..................................................................................... 109

The Organization of US High School Life................................................................. 112

Temporally and Spatially Compartmentalized Individualized Schedules .......... 113

Pre-Established Cliques from Earlier Grades......................................................... 114

Curricular Tracking .................................................................................................. 115

English Proficiency Requirements and Competitive Tryouts for Extracurricular Activities ...................................................................................................................... 118

Concluding Discussion ............................................................................................. 121

Notes ......................................................................................................................... 126
Chapter 5: Conclusion...................................................................................................................... 127

The Social Organization of Japanese High School Sojourners’ Everyday World...... 128

Limitations of the Study............................................................................................................. 136

Directions for Future Study........................................................................................................ 137

References........................................................................................................................................ 139

Appendix A: Interview Questions for Japanese High School Sojourner Students........ 154

Appendix B: Interview Questions for Japanese Sojourners’ Parents ............................... 158

Appendix C: Interview Questions for Teachers.......................................................................... 161
List of Tables

Table 1. Demographics of the city of Riverwalk and the Midwestern state (2010) .......... 21
Table 2. Demographic information of Japanese sojourner students .......................... 23
Table 3. Demographic information of Japanese returnee students ............................ 24
Table 4. Demographic information of the parents of the Japanese high school sojourners ................................................................. 29
List of Figures

Figure 1. Social Organization of Japanese High School Sojourners’ Everyday Lives... 131
Chapter 1: Introduction

My research interest in transnational English language learners (ELLs) can be traced back to my 13 years of teaching experience in a large private high school in Tokyo, Japan. Approximately 90 of the 1500 student population were returnees, who had had the experience of sojourning overseas for several years due to their parents’ long-term work appointments. The majority of the returnees came back from English-speaking countries; some of them recently and others during their elementary school years. As an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teacher who appreciated multilingualism and multiculturalism, I tried to create an educational environment which could bring out the best in the internationally cultured Japanese returnee students so that they might exert a positive influence on non-returnee students in terms of the development of English skills and intercultural understanding. Based on the institutional discourse prevalent in Japan, I initially assumed that every returnee student had a high level of English proficiency, “Westernized” communicating style and behavior, and familiarity with “Western” culture. However, teaching returnees and non-returnees together in the same classroom, I gradually realized that these assumptions were seriously erroneous. To be more precise, I found considerable individual differences among returnees, but only a handful of returnees—without exception the ones who lived overseas in their early childhood—had acquired native-like fluency in spoken English. (In fact, there were many cases of non-
returnee students who outperformed most returnee students in English.) Moreover, the majority of the returnees were not “Westernized”; they were not particularly direct in communication or willing to engage in discussion or argument—values which characterize Western cultures—and they were not that familiar with the “mainstream” culture of their host countries.

I found it highly intriguing that shorter-term Study Abroad students, who spent just one school year studying in US high schools as international students, improved their English dramatically and became more or less “Americanized” even in such a short time. By comparison, returnee students, who spent much longer abroad, often failed to even gain enough confidence to openly embrace their returnee status. What happened to those returnee students on the other side of their transnational schooling—when they were sojourners overseas?

While the Japanese government has been pushing forward with internationalization, returnee students are described as “valuable assets for Japan” with intercultural and bilingual competence making them eligible for leadership roles in the future Japan (Fry, 2007, 2009, p.369). For example, in a written notification to the governors, boards of education, and national high schools and universities in all prefectures, the Japanese Ministry of Education issued an official call for accepting more returnees, facilitating their easier readjustment to the Japanese educational system, helping them improve their Japanese, and “making good use of returnees’ intercultural experiences and distinctive abilities to promote other students’ international understanding” (MEXT, 1993). Such a simplistic view of Japanese returnees as internationally-minded cosmopolitans who may suffer from first language (L1) attrition but have a fluent command of a second language
(L2) totally obscures what returnees really are and reduces their actual experiences abroad to an institutionally idealized image.

This dissertation originated partly from the above disagreement between the returnees as real persons that I knew as a teacher, and the returnees in the institutional discourse in Japan—a disagreement that Dorothy Smith (1987, 2005) would call a “disjuncture”. Smith states that the disjuncture occurs “between the world as it is known directly in experience and as it is shared with others, and the ideas and images fabricated externally to that everyday world and provided as a means to think and image it” (Smith, 1987, p. 55). In institutional ethnography, a feminist-oriented sociological inquiry Smith introduced, the term “everyday world” is used in a particular sense. It is the world that people locally and actually experience, and it is “the locus of a sociological problematic” (ibid, p.89). As Grahame (1998) explains in simpler terms, sociological problematic is “the complex of concerns, issues, and questions which generate a horizon of possible investigation” (p.348). Smith (1987) explicitly differentiates the everyday world as problematic from the everyday world as phenomenon:

Defining the everyday world as the locus of a sociological problematic is not the same as making it an object of study. A distinction must be made between the everyday world as problematic and as phenomenon. To aim at the everyday world as an object of study is to constitute it as a self-contained universe of inquiry. The effect of locating the knower in this way is to divorce the everyday world of experience from the larger social and economic relations that organize its distinctive character. …It [The concept of problematic] is used here to constitute the everyday world as that in which questions originate. (pp.90-91)

In brief, the everyday world as problematic is an entry point for an inquiry, but the inquiry is not about the everyday world itself. It is about the larger social relations that
organize the everyday world, because “the everyday world is not fully understandable within its own scope” (ibid, p.92). Smith goes on to say:

> The everyday world, the world where people are located as they live, located bodily and in that organization of their known world as one that begins from their own location in it, is generated in its varieties by an organization of social relations that originate ‘elsewhere.’ (pp.91-92)

Here, Smith points out that the social organization which constitutes the actual people’s everyday realities is generated “elsewhere”—somewhere outside of the local setting. She sees the everyday world as part of a nexus of social relations, which connects one local setting to another. When the translocal, institutional complex of social relations exercises power and dominates and regulates the actual people’s realities, Smith calls it “extralocal relations of ruling.” In case of the present study, the extralocal ruling relations are transnational as well.

The present study examines the everyday world of high school students who are on the other side of Japanese returnees’ transnational schooling: Japanese sojourner students in the U.S. They are a distinctive group of middle-class transnational students, who entered U.S. public schools as ELLs when their parents received long-term appointments overseas from transnational corporations, and who will eventually return to Japan upon graduation or upon the relocation of their families. Like other ELL groups, Japanese sojourners have to negotiate the institutional demands of high-school life in a different educational system from that with which they are familiar; however, their educational needs for successful learning are fundamentally distinct from those of immigrant, refugee, or international students. Using the methodology of institutional ethnography, the study aims to describe and elucidate how extralocal relations of ruling shape the

4
Japanese high school sojourner students’ everyday world the way they experience it. The subsequent section motivates the study, which is followed by further elaboration of the study and some theoretical concepts of institutional ethnography, and a detailed description of the data collection and analysis method of the research.

**Statement of the Problem**

Contemporary global capitalism has created the context for transnational migration, generating economic demand for cheap labor and specialist personnel and accelerating the flow of people, goods, knowledge, language, and culture in multiple directions (Glick Schiller, Basch, & Blanc, 1995; Guarnizo & Smith, 1998; Jones, 1992; Kim, 2009; Portes, 1996). As people have become increasingly mobile across national borders, heterogeneity in the characteristics of student populations at every level of our educational system has received growing recognition. In the course of the past two decades, U.S. public schools have undergone an unprecedented population growth in students with culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, the majority of whom do not speak English as their L1 (Goldenberg, 2008; National Center for Education Statistics, 2004; Reeves, 2006; Valdes, 2001). ELLs account for 19 percent of the US school population (Preciado, Horner, & Baker, 2009) and it is estimated that, by 2025, one out of four students in US public schools will be an ELL (NEA Education Policy and Practice Department, 2008). Among this rapidly increasing population of ELLs, recently-arrived secondary ELLs are the fastest-growing group (Gándara & Baca, 2008) and are particularly at risk of dropping out due to lack of adequate English learning support and limited time for acquiring English (Lazarín, 2006). Despite the urgent need
to improve recently-arrived ELL high school education, relatively little attention has been paid to this group of ELLs, often referred to as late-entrant ELLs, compared to the amount of research devoted to younger ELLs or US-born high school ELLs.

More research on late-entrant high school ELLs—especially regarding their unique challenges and struggles, and their strategies for coping with adversity—is necessary because they are particularly vulnerable to unintended adverse consequences of high-stakes testing policies, such as extended schooling, dropping out, or the inability to go to college (Menken, 2008). In the current accountability system under the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), which requires the full inclusion of ELLs in state assessments, late-entrant high school ELLs in many states are required to pass comprehensive high school exit exams designed for native English-speaking students (McIntosh, 2012). Many late-entrant high school ELLs arrive in the US in the 9th grade or above, and therefore, they need to acquire both the academic content for the exit exams and the English language in an extremely limited amount of time (Lazarín, 2008). While an emergent body of research addresses the negative impact of high school exit exams on ELLs’ learning experiences (Holme, Richards, Jimerson, & Cohen, 2010; Menken, 2008, 2009, 2010; Reardon, Arshan, Atteberry, & Kurlaender, 2010) and the tremendous gaps in passage rates between ELLs and non-ELLs (Center on Education Policy, 2007; Solórzano, 2008), we know little about how the everyday experience of high school ELLs, especially the ones who come to the US older, is shaped by high-stakes testing policies, or how these ELLs manage to pass rigorous exit exams aimed at native English-speaking students.
Many late-entrant ELLs are transnational students who temporarily stay in the US, also known as sojourner students. They come to the US, sometimes involuntarily, generally with their parents; they may go back to home country during or after high school, or move back and forth between the US and home country for years, depending on such factors as familial and financial circumstances and parents’ jobs. Sojourner students are characterized by “their vulnerability to dislocation and their transnational backgrounds” (Hamann, 2001, p.32) and “plural sense of belonging or partial belonging” (Zúñiga & Hamann, 2009, p.330). Besides the academic and linguistic challenges imposed by educational and language policies, sojourner students often encounter extra difficulties due to their geographic impermanence, their transnational mobilities, and their future uncertainty (Hamann, 2001; Zúñiga & Hamann, 2009). It is important to understand late-entrant ELLs’ experiences and needs in terms of the transnational nature of their lives: what they are going through in US schools cannot be fully understood without considering it in connection with their past and aspired future overseas.

The present study focuses on Japanese sojourner students (a particular subset of transnational late-entrant high school ELLs) and examines the educational and social aspects of their everyday experience in the US through the lens of transnationalism. Transnationalism refers to a pattern of migration in which transmigrants maintain economic, political, social, cultural, and/or religious relations to their countries of origin while residing in host countries—host countries to which they do not necessarily adapt—in marked contrast to the traditional assimilationist model (Glick Schiller, Basch & Blanc-Szanton, 1992, 1995; Jones, 1992). Transnationalism also connotes regular, or intermittent back-and-forth movements between home and host countries, exchanges of
goods and information across borders, and a variety of everyday practices spanning more than one country, such as political participation, remittances, cultural practices, and entrepreneurial activities. I understand transnationalism using Hornberger’s (2007) demarcation between transnationalism and immigration: transnationalism involves temporary stay in the host country and affinity ties and social networks both in the home and host countries through bodily moves across borders, while immigration presupposes a more permanent connection with the host country and disconnection from the home country. Although there is considerable variation across groups of transmigrants in terms of their socio-economic and cultural background, visa status, and the scale and form of transnational practices, previous research on transnationalism has primarily focused on adult immigrants, especially poor uneducated laborers. While an emergent body of research on “transnational childhoods” discusses the lives of immigrant children and transnational mobilities of individual families (Orellana, et al., 2001), little has been known about the experiences of school-age sojourner children and adolescents whose transnational mobilities are chiefly determined by corporate power. The present study can push forward the scholarly knowledge of transnationalism experienced by middle-class adolescents, a neglected population in research on transnationalism. It can also add to the development of another emergent line of research on middling transnationalism (Conradson & Latham, 2005), which focuses on the middle-class everyday practices built into transnational mobilities. Conradson and Latham (2005) call for more studies on previously less examined forms of transnationalism, particularly that of the people who have middling social positions in their home countries.
Japanese students sojourning overseas with their parents are not a new phenomenon; they have existed since the 1960s, when Japanese multinational corporations started doing business worldwide and sending workers on long-term appointments overseas. Previous studies on Japanese sojourners living in the U.S. have documented a variety of conflicts and concerns, such as adjustment problems and peer relationships (Farkas & Kōno, 1987; Ford, 2009; Fry, 2007; Minoura, 2003; Okada, 1993; Satō, 1999; Yashima, 1999), and examined questions related to their bilingual development (Kataoka, 2008; Kataoka, Koshiyama & Shibata, 2008; Minoura, 2003; Samimy, 1989, 1990), bilingual practices (Haneda & Monobe, 2009), and identity construction and negotiation (Fujiu, 2004, Kanno, 2000a, 2000b, 2003; Kobayashi, 2008). Overall, Japanese sojourners have been studied with a primary focus on the psychological, sociocultural factors affecting their sojourning lives. However, very little attention has been paid to how the sojourners are locally and translocally positioned in a larger social context. In other words, existing studies’ findings have rarely been analyzed from both macro-scale and micro-scale points of view, or from a perspective of transnationalism, and there is little research on how the sojourner student’s everyday practices and future educational paths are shaped by institutional power. Focusing on the social and institutional complexities operating on the Japanese high school sojourner’s experience and the transnational aspect of their everyday world, this study will contribute to the researcher’s and educator’s understanding of this unique group of transnational late-entrant ELLs.
Objectives of the Study

The main purpose of the study is to examine the everyday world of Japanese sojourner students attending U.S. high schools and explicate how their educational experiences are organized by institutional relations of ruling on the transnational scale. To meet this purpose, I looked at the Japanese sojourners’ local experiences as transnational ELLs from their standpoint; b) identified social relations that coordinate and rule the students’ experiences and actions and that they themselves unknowingly participate in; and c) investigated how the ruling relations translocally organize the Japanese sojourners’ everyday lives and future educational trajectories.

Research Questions

The overarching question of the study is: How is the everyday world of Japanese high school sojourner students shaped and coordinated by extralocal, institutional relations of ruling? The more specific questions that guide the study are formulated as follows:

1) How do Japanese sojourners experience their everyday lives in the U.S.?

2) How are their educational experiences and opportunities in the U.S. structured by the systems of schooling, different discourses, or institutional forces outside the students’ everyday world?

3) How are the sojourner students’ actual experiences represented in texts and categories that conform with the official frame in the U.S. and Japan?
4) If they have control over the way they are categorized, what strategies and practices do they use to successfully negotiate the institutional demands of their sojourning lives?

Overview of the Study

I follow a three-paper dissertation format, which includes three stand-alone articles related to the overall theme of the dissertation research. Each article forms a cohesive exploration of how Japanese high school sojourners’ everyday world is socially, translocally organized.

The first article (Chapter 2) examines strategies that Japanese sojourners use to simultaneously negotiate the demands of US high school life while also calculating how their choices and performance will promote access to higher education in Japan. Despite the temporal and spatial constraints imposed by corporate transnationalism, Japanese sojourners actively carve out their future educational paths across borders through the effective but high-stakes strategy of graduating a year early from US high schools. Unlike permanently residing immigrant students, these sojourner students do not decide on their own to come to the US, nor when to return to Japan; their mobilities and educational experiences are determined by the decisions of their fathers’ multinational corporations. Japanese sojourners are characterized by the precarious, transient nature of their stay in the US. Their fathers’ job appointments are often abruptly terminated, and they are uncertain whether they will be able to stay in the US until high school graduation. Returning home without a high school diploma would end their candidacy for official returnee status in college entrance exams in Japan (which require returnees to
have overseas high school diplomas). Therefore, the sojourners put top priority on graduating from US high schools. Early graduation—meaning skipping the senior year—minimizes the risk of having schooling interrupted again (they have already had their schooling in Japan interrupted once) as well as the risk of transferring to school in Japan as a senior (which is difficult because most college-oriented high schools in Japan do not accept returnees in their senior year). However, completing high school at an accelerated rate is attended with risk and challenges: it entails the constant risk of failing to handle increased course load and to pass the state-mandated high school exit exams in a timely manner. I call the sojourners’ early graduation strategy a gambit (a term used in chess, meaning a strategic move in which a piece is risked for advantage later) because the sojourners sacrifice beneficial educational opportunities and even risk graduation itself in order to secure a positional advantage of returnee status over non-returnees upon their reentry into Japan.

The second article (Chapter 3) examines the realities of high-stakes testing experienced by Japanese sojourners, particularly late-entrant ELLs, focusing on one big risk factor in early graduation gambit—high school exit exams—and the sojourners’ strategies for maneuvering the academic and linguistic challenges posed by the exams. Analysis shows that Japanese ELLs strategically flunk the Midwestern English Language Acquisition Test (MELAT, pseudonym). They do this in order to maintain ESL status and secure ESL accommodations for the Midwestern Graduation Test (MGT, pseudonym), including bilingual dictionaries and extra test-taking time: accommodations without which they would have little hope of passing the MGT. The chapter highlights the underlying issue of test validity: ELLs need to flunk the MELAT because the
MELAT cutoffs fail to correlate with English proficiency. In other words, MELAT cutoffs are so low that ELLs who still need the ESL service are forced to exit from the ESL program if they do not intentionally fail the MELAT. Exiting from the ESL program means taking the MGT without ESL accommodations. Consequences for failing the MGT are serious and lingering: dropping out, giving up college, suffering emotional distress, severing connections with fellow Japanese sojourners out of embarrassment, and so on. As we discussed in Chapter 2, US high school graduation is the sine qua non for these Japanese sojourners to gain access to tertiary education in Japan. Aimed at native English speakers and covering the materials of five core subjects taught up to 10th grade in US public education, the MGT is the most formidable obstacle in the way of Japanese ELLs getting a high school diploma. Japanese sojourners and their ESL teachers, who are aware of the sojourners’ desired future educational paths and the devastating consequences of exiting ESL, negotiate and resist high-stakes testing policies under NCLB by co-constructing and promoting the defensive strategy of deliberately flunking the MELAT. This paper also illustrates how late-entrant ELLs have unique difficulties related to linguistic and curricular discontinuities between their former education in Japan and US public education, indicating that the MGT fails to be a level playing field even with ESL accommodations.

The third article (Chapter 4) is closely related to the question that I posed in the beginning of this introduction: What happened to those Japanese returnees who did not acquire reasonable levels of English proficiency or socialize into the local culture overseas, despite years spent in English-speaking countries? The paper examines how the organizational structure of US public high school education regulates late-entrant
Japanese sojourners’ L2 peer interactional opportunities, opportunities which the second language acquisition (SLA) and L2 learning literature has found necessary for successful L2 development (e.g., Gass & Varonis, 1994; Lantolf, 2000; Lantolf & Thorne, 2007; Long, 1996; Mackey, 1999). While long-term Japanese sojourners, who came to the US as elementary students, primarily interact with American students in and outside of school, late-entrant Japanese sojourners tend to stay in their own ethno-linguistic group and do not mingle with American peers. It is common for a late-entrant to lack even one lone American friend; their American friendships (or rather acquaintances, in most cases) tend to be limited to the classroom context. Late-entrant sojourners’ lack of American friends tends to be viewed as a “choice” by their ESL teachers, but the reality is more complicated. Despite going out of their way to befriend American peers, late-entrant sojourners’ L2 interactional opportunities are circumscribed by: 1) temporally and spatially compartmentalized individualized schedules; 2) pre-established cliques from earlier grades; 3) curricular tracking; and 4) English proficiency requirements and competitive tryouts for extracurricular activities. Interwoven with the organizational structure of US high schools is an ideological discourse on limited English proficiency, in which ELLs are viewed as low-achieving, less academically-oriented, and incapable of communication. The way American high school education is organized draws social boundaries and significantly limits interaction between late-entrant sojourners and long-term sojourners, and by extension, American students.

The three papers together show how the actualities of Japanese high school sojourners’ lives in a local setting are connected to multiple complexes of institutional relations beyond their everyday world. Sojourners’ everyday experiences, practices, and
actions are translocally and institutionally dominated and shaped by corporate transnationalism, federal and state educational and language policies and practices in the US, the organizational structure of US high schools, and ideological discourses on limited English proficiency. On one hand, Japanese sojourner/returnee students are depicted as interculturally competent individuals with foreign language proficiency, a valuable human resource for the future international competitiveness and advancement of Japan (Fry, 2007, 2009); on the other hand, they are categorized as students with limited English proficiency, who lack the language (and academic) competence and need to be remedied, rapidly transitioned into the mainstream classes and assimilated into US society. In either case, these students’ actual experiences or “consciousness” (Smith, 2002) are reduced to a social object and a category in ideological discourse in text, such as government brochures, policy documents, and testing rulebooks, to name a few. Further discussion will be made in Chapter 5.

**Significance of the Study**

Focusing on the transnational and social aspect of Japanese high school sojourners and its relation to translocal institutional processes that shape their sojourning lives and future educational trajectories, the present study promises four main benefits for the development of research in the fields of transnationalism and L2 education.

First, the study sheds light on sociocultural and economic heterogeneity within transnational ELLs, as well as that within sojourner students in the US. Theories on transnationalism have been constructed based on research largely on adult immigrants as if transnationalism were solely an immigrant phenomenon. The present study joins
Hamann’s (2001) call for adding a new category of sojourner students to the classification of transmigrants, but it also addresses the distinctive educational needs of Japanese sojourners, needs which are different than those of sojourners with other sociocultural and economic backgrounds. The study also adds to emergent lines of research on “transnational childhoods” (Orellana, et al., 2001) and “middling transnationalism” (Conradson & Latham, 2005). It unveils the way the middle-class adolescents’ present and future educational trajectories are coordinated by corporate transnationalism and institutional demands on their high school life in the host country.

Second, the present study penetrates into the realities of high-stakes testing and English monolingual language policies that ELLs face under NCLB. Specifically, the study demonstrates the way ELLs are put at a disadvantage by losing ESL accommodations before acquiring the English proficiency necessary to meaningfully take high school exit exams unaided. The study also provides insight into unique linguistic and academic difficulties that late-entrant ELLs face due to their transnational backgrounds and the strategy they use to negotiate their ways through these difficulties. The present study is also significant from the methodological point of view: it addresses the importance of qualitative inquiry into the actual experience and voices of test-takers, which are absent in much of the testing and assessment research.

Third, the current study contributes to the knowledge of high school ELLs’ L2 peer interactions. While the facilitative role of L2 social interactions in successful L2 development has been acknowledged in the SLA and L2 learning literature (e.g., Gass & Varonis, 1994; Lantolf, 2000; Lantolf & Thorne, 2007; Long, 1996; Mackey, 1999), relatively little attention has been paid to the issue of access to such interactional
opportunities. The study highlights how late-entrant ELLs’ development in L2 oral skills may be hindered by the social structural constraints that limit ELLs’ access to the opportunity to interact with more competent L2 speakers.

Fourth, the present study promotes the educator’s understanding of Japanese sojourner students as a unique group of transnational ELLs. Existing empirical studies of Japanese sojourners have either relied heavily on statistical analyses of survey data to discuss the student’s adaptation and identity on the psychological level, or focused on the bilingual practices or identity negotiation of a small number of individual students. In short, the Japanese sojourner’s experience has rarely been analyzed from both macro-scale and micro-scale perspectives. Furthermore, the ways in which power relations exert influence on the Japanese sojourner’s everyday experience remain under-studied. Compared to the rather limited scope of previous studies on Japanese sojourners, the present study provides a more complete picture of the social and institutional complexities the Japanese sojourner’s everyday life is embedded in.

Methodology

This section comprises the description of the methodology of the study and the rationale for the selection of methods and procedures for data collection. The study examines the everyday world of Japanese high school sojourner students through a sociological method of inquiry known as *institutional ethnography* (Smith, 1987, 2005). The participants, their schools, and the research site are all identified by pseudonyms in this proposal.
Overview of institutional ethnography. Institutional ethnography is a qualitative method of inquiry based on Smith’s (1987, 2005) feminist-oriented theory of “social organization of knowledge”. On the assumption that women are marginalized from the “ruling apparatus” in the society constructed by those in dominant power and that the ruling apparatus generates views and values which structure the everyday world women live in, Smith argues that “knowledge” is nothing but ideology reflecting interests of those in ruling positions. The way people view themselves/others and the way they act in their lives are socially organized and put together by what Smith calls “relations of ruling” or “ruling relations”: “objectified forms of consciousness and organization, constituted externally to particular people and places, creating and relying on textually based realities” (Smith, 2005, p.227). In brief, “ruling relations” are the relations of “socially-organized exercise of power that shapes people’s actions and their lives” (Campbell & Gregor, 2004, p.32) and that people themselves participate in shaping, often without knowing it.

Smith originally developed institutional ethnography in a feminist context, and then has broadened the applications of this new research methodology, which she dubs as “sociology for people” (Smith, 2005). Institutional ethnography treats people not as “objects” of research but as “knowers” situated in their own local actualities. They are regarded as “informants” who have expertise on what they are experiencing and doing in their everyday world. The term actuality/actualities represents the realities that people are experiencing and that are “always more than described, named, or categorized” (Smith, 2005, p.223). Institutional ethnography takes the standpoint of actual people and draws on their local experiences to identify and examine extralocal relations of ruling that
influence, coordinate, and rule their activities in a particular everyday local setting. Therefore, the method is ethnographic and starts with inquiry into the participant’s everyday local experience, but its main analytic focus is on larger social, political, economic, or institutional contexts or connections in which the participant’s life is embedded.

Another important theoretical point about institutional ethnography is how Smith conceptualizes the function of “texts” in institutional ethnography. By texts, Smith means replicable material forms that we see, read, watch, and hear: for example, any printed materials, images, audio, computer files, and so on. In the following extract, Smith (2005) explains that the text plays an essential role in organizing people’s actions in a particular way—mediating extralocal relations of ruling.

The capacity to coordinate people’s doings translocally depends on the ability of the text, as a material thing, to turn up in identical form wherever the reader, hearer, or watcher may be in her or his bodily being. And when we are addressing institutions, as we are for the most part in institutional ethnography, we must be particularly aware of the role of texts in the generalization of social organization that we take for granted when we use the term. …It is the constancy of the text that provides for standardization. The multiple replication of exactly the same text that technologies of print made possible enabled historically an organization of social relations independent of local time, place, and person. (p.166)

In this way, the replicability, proliferation, and constancy of the text enable social relations to translocally organize people’s actions and lives. Also, to mediate social relations, the text must be “activated” by people who handle it.

Smith (2005) refers to the social organization and knowledge generalized by the text (generalized discourse) as ideological discourse. Ideological discourse reflects the interests and standpoints of those in ruling power and circulates through the text, but people in the everyday world also participate in and help reproduce ideological discourse
when they use the text and act in conformity with it. Therefore, for Smith, discourse includes not only the text and ideological accounts in it, but also people’s actions; discourse is “translocal relations coordinating the practices of definite individuals talking, writing, reading, watching, and so forth, in particular local places at particular times” (Smith, 2005, p.224).

In institutional ethnography, data can be collected through different methods, but the most common one is interviewing. The purpose of interviewing is to look at the world through the lens of the participant’s local actualities and develop an understanding of how their everyday realities are shaped by outside forces beyond their knowledge and control. The exploratory interviewing generates entry-level data and helps the researcher have an idea of who else to interview to get level-two data: the data to get missing pieces in the entry-level data to understand social relations operating on the participant’s lives. As Smith (2005) describes, texts, in various forms, mediate and activate ruling relations; necessarily, it is essential to closely examine texts relevant to the participant’s everyday world and trace the linkages between the sites, people, ideological discourse (objectified knowledge), and institutional complex. Institutional ethnography is specifically designed to “map” and explicate ruling relations that dominate and shape people’s everyday lives. Thus, the method has the potential for critically challenging the ruling relations and seeking for transformation of the way ruling interests subordinate people’s interests.

**Research site and participant selection.** The research site is a community of middle-class Japanese business sojourners’ families in Riverwalk, a growing suburban city adjacent to Fountain City, the capital of an upper Midwestern state. The 2010 U.S. Census shows that the overall population of the city of Riverwalk is 41,800, which has
increased by 33% for the last decade and which is predominantly (80.5%) white (United States Census Bureau, 2011; numbers rounded off for the sake of anonymity). The census data also indicates that 15.3% of the residents in Riverwalk are Asians, which number is considerably large, given the fact that Asians account for only 1.7% of the state’s entire population. As presented in Table 1, the population in Riverwalk is highly educated and relatively affluent.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Riverwalk</th>
<th>Midwestern state</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population, 2010</td>
<td>41,800</td>
<td>11,537,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population, percent change, 2000 to 2010</td>
<td>33.0%</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population, 2000</td>
<td>31,400</td>
<td>11,353,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White persons, percent</td>
<td>80.5%</td>
<td>82.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian persons, percent</td>
<td>15.3%</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black persons, percent</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
<td>12.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino persons, percent</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian persons, percent</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others, percent</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school graduates, percent of persons age 25+</td>
<td>98.7%</td>
<td>86.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s or higher, pct of persons age 25+</td>
<td>70.5%</td>
<td>23.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median value of owner-occupied housing units</td>
<td>$327,200</td>
<td>$135,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Per capita money income</td>
<td>$50,900</td>
<td>$25,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median household income</td>
<td>$114,600</td>
<td>$47,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1  Demographics of the city of Riverwalk and the Midwestern state (2010)
(United States Census Bureau, 2011)
Riverwalk has a significant Japanese population, due in part to a plant of a large Japanese car manufacturer, Morita, and its suppliers in Parksville, a neighboring city 20 miles away from Riverwalk. The Fountain City area (including Riverwalk and Parksville) is home to 83 companies of Japanese origin. Many of the Japanese families, even those who work 60 miles away from Riverwalk, choose to live in Riverwalk for many reasons: low crime rate, a reputation for quality residential environment, good public service, and highly rated school systems. There are also a small number of Japanese sojourner families living in Milton, another city neighboring Riverwalk. Like Riverwalk, Milton is also predominately white; it is not as affluent, but the two cities are otherwise geographically close and share a similar residential landscape.

There are 53 participants in the study: 30 Japanese high school sojourner students (17 females and 13 males), 13 of their parents, 2 male Japanese students who graduated from Riverwalk Central High School and are attending US colleges, 4 local high school teachers, and 4 Japanese returnee students (3 females and 1 male) who had been staying in the Riverwalk area as high school sojourners for several years and gone back to Japan for college education. The Riverwalk school district has three public high schools: Riverwalk Central High, Jefferson High and Southridge High. Most of the participating students go to Riverwalk Central, which has by far the largest number of Japanese students as compared to the other two schools. Two students go to Jefferson, another two go to Southridge, and three go to Douglas high school in the Milton school district. Two of the participants live far from Riverwalk – one in East City, 70 miles away, and the other in West City, 10 miles away from Riverwalk – and go to schools in their respective
cities. The participating students’ ages, grades, genders, schools attended, ages of entry into the U.S., and lengths of stay are presented in Tables 2 and 3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>School attended</th>
<th>Age of entry</th>
<th>Length of stay</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>12th</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Riverwalk Central</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7 years 1 month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>12th</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Douglas</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>2 years 6 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>12th</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Riverwalk Central</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7 years 10 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>11th</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Riverwalk Central</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6 years 1 month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>12th</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Jefferson</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3 years 11 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>12th</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Southridge</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3 years 2 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>12th</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Riverwalk Central</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>2 years 6 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>10th</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Riverwalk Central</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3 years 10 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>12th</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Riverwalk Central</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5 years 2 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>11th</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Riverwalk Central</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7 years 10 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>11th</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Riverwalk Central</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2 years 11 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>9th</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Riverwalk Central</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>8 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>11th</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Riverwalk Central</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>1 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>11th</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Riverwalk Central</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>1 year 3 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>9th</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Riverwalk Central</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>9th</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Riverwalk Central</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6 years 1 month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>11th</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>East High School</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11 years 4 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>11th</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>West High School</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2 years 5 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>9th</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Riverwalk Central</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1 year 1 month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>9th</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Riverwalk Central</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1 year 3 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10th</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Douglas</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6 years 1 month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10th</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Riverwalk Central</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1 year 3 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>11th</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Riverwalk Central</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5 years 5 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>11th</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Riverwalk Central</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4 years 3 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>11th</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Riverwalk Central</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1 year 6 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>11th</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Riverwalk Central</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>10th</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Douglas</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3 years 1 month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>12th</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Riverwalk Central</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1 year 11 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>12th</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Riverwalk Central</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>2 years 2 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>11th</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Riverwalk Central</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2  Demographic information of Japanese sojourner students
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>School attended</th>
<th>Age of entry</th>
<th>Age of return</th>
<th>Length of stay</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Riverwalk Central</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>6 years 10 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Riverwalk Central</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>3 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Jefferson</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>3 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Southridge</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4 years 4 months</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3  Demographic information of Japanese returnee students

The participating high school students are the children of Japanese business sojourners working for transnational corporations. Almost all of the students knew limited or no English when they arrived in the U.S. and had to learn it as ELLs in school environments and systems very different than they were used to. The students attend local public high schools during the week and *hoshūkō* (Japanese supplementary schools) on Saturdays. In *hoshūkō*, they learn Japanese as a first language and other core subjects in Japanese to maintain their L1 proficiency and develop their cognitive ability in L1 appropriately for their age so that they might be ready to return to an L1-dominant school system whenever their parents transfer back to Japan. In addition, the students have some private English tutoring sessions multiple times a week for the first three to four years of their sojourn to keep up with the contents covered in class at local high schools and to help them finish their homework. As previous studies show, Japanese sojourners’ everyday lives are extremely busy; overloaded with homework for both local American schools and *hoshūkō*, many of the sojourner students study every waking moment (Farkas & Kōno, 1987; Okada, 1993).

I have selected the setting and participants for the study through *purposeful selection* (Maxwell, 2005) that aims to deliberately select settings and people to inform the
understanding of the problem under investigation and get information which would not be provided by other sampling strategies. Important goals of purposeful selection include “achieving representativeness or typicality of the settings, individuals, or activities selected” and, at the same time, documenting “the entire range of variation” in the population (Maxwell, 2005, p.89). To reach these goals, the present study has a relatively large number of participants for qualitative research (53 individuals in total) and encompasses Japanese sojourner and returnee students with diverse characteristics and experiences; more specifically, the study includes both male and female students, aged 15 to 21, with varied lengths of stay in the U.S. (8 months to 11 years), varied ages of entry into the U.S. (age 6 to 17), varied English and Japanese proficiencies, and varied degrees of access to interaction with their American peers and culture.

In the process of recruiting participants, I first contacted 16 high school students who I taught Japanese as a first language and social studies to in hoshūkō (Japanese Saturday school) in Fountain City in Fall 2009. I sent them individual messages on Facebook, the most popular social networking tool among Japanese sojourner adolescents. A Facebook user, after registering and creating a personal profile, can exchange personal messages with other users just like exchanging emails, without sending out or accepting “friend request,” which requires sharing each other’s profile, pictures and status update, hence more commitment. I used Facebook to contact them because I did not know their email addresses. In the messages, I gave the students a brief overview of the study and asked for permission to interview them individually for 90 minutes. Twelve of the 16 students that I contacted replied to me on Facebook. Of the 12 who replied, 9 agreed to participate in the study and 3 declined my request because
they were just about to return to Japan for good or busy with their extracurricular activities.

Again using Facebook messages, I contacted 6 more Japanese high school students whose names were on the 2009 version of the hoshūkō student’s list. All of the 6 students replied to my message and agreed to be interviewed. I also contacted 18 other Japanese high school sojourners living in the Riverwalk area through the introduction of my former hoshūkō students, and 16 of them agreed to be given an interview. Altogether, I have contacted 40 students and obtained consent to participate in the study from 32 of them: 30 Japanese high school sojourner students, one Japanese sojourner who graduated from Riverwalk Central in 2010 and chose to stay in the US for college, and one Japanese-born male student with permanent residence who came to the U.S. at the age of two (also a graduate of Riverwalk Central, attending a US college). The student with permanent residence was included with the hope of drawing out some unique accounts, stories, and perspectives on Japanese sojourners from him: although he did not have to prepare himself for entering the Japanese educational system, he attended hoshūkō for 12 years until graduation and had a close relationship with the Japanese sojourner students. At the same time, he mingled with his American peers without any language barriers, giving him a unique perspective on Japanese sojourners; his knowledge of the everyday realities of the Japanese high school sojourners facilitated the understanding of the problem.

Considering interviews with the Japanese high school sojourner students as the entry point into institutional social relations, the present study aims to go beyond the standpoint of the sojourners themselves. By interviewing parents, teachers, and returnee students
back in Japan, the study delves deeper into the social relations that coordinate the
Japanese student’s sojourning experience. Parental interviews were helpful because the
parents were deeply involved in their children’s decision-making processes on a variety
of occasions: school choice, extracurricular activities, transnational mobilities, and so on.
Teacher interviews were also helpful because the school was one of the sites where
institutional processes considerably affected the Japanese student’s sojourning life. The
teachers’ accounts shed insight into how state and local educational policies and practices
shaped the Japanese sojourner’s approaches to schooling. Furthermore, to examine
translocal/transnational processes that shaped the Japanese sojourner’s present and future,
I collected the reflective accounts of Japanese returnee students who had already finished
their sojourning years in U.S. high schools and returned to Japan for further education.
The way the returnee students made sense of their U.S. sojourning experiences and
cultural/linguistic boundary-crossing experiences added insight into how the Japanese
high school sojourner’s everyday realities geared into the institutional complex.

Besides the 32 student participants in the US, I also contacted (via individual e-
mails) four returnee students who I had taught at hoshūkō in Fall 2009. Three of them
gave me permission to interview them. I selected them because they were college
students in Tokyo, Japan (an area which I am very familiar with personally) and because
I established good rapport with them over the past two years. I also emailed and
recruited a returnee to whom I taught English reading and homeroom at a large private
girls’ high school in Tokyo in 2007 and 2008. By an amazing coincidence, she had
stayed in Riverwalk as a sojourner and studied for one year in Southridge high school
before I taught her in Japan. She and her family returned to Japan in 2005 when she was
a 10th grader, and she transferred into the high school where I was working as a full-time EFL teacher. She agreed to participate in the present study.

I recruited 13 parents of the Japanese high school sojourner students as follows. First I met the mother of a female returnee student with whom I have developed a particularly close rapport since teaching her at hoshūkō in 2009. This student graduated from Riverwalk Central High School in June, 2010, and returned to Japan for college education. She and I have exchanged emails occasionally since I left hoshūkō at the end of 2009. We went out to dinner together a few times – twice in Riverwalk and once in Tokyo. Her parents and younger brother was still in Riverwalk because her father, a Morita employee, was on his long-term appointment in the U.S. The mother willingly consented to participate in the study and also to introduce me to other parents of Japanese high school sojourners. To gather representative as well as heterogeneous stories and perspectives which could inform an understanding of the high school student’s everyday experience, I asked my student’s mother to include Japanese parents with a relatively long sojourning experience. She gave me the names, phone numbers, and email addresses of 12 mothers, the majority of whom have been sojourning in the U.S. for more than 4 years. One mother was living in North City, approximately 50 miles away from Riverwalk. The other mothers were all living in Riverwalk. I contacted the 12 mothers and they all consented to participate in the study.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Children’s age (gender)</th>
<th>School attended</th>
<th>Length of stay</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>F (mother)</td>
<td>19 (F), 16 (M)</td>
<td>Riverwalk Central</td>
<td>4 years 3 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>18 (M), 16 (F)</td>
<td>Riverwalk Central</td>
<td>3 years 8 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>19 (M), 17 (F)</td>
<td>Riverwalk Central</td>
<td>8 years 3 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>21 (M), 18 (M), 16 (M)</td>
<td>Riverwalk Central</td>
<td>5 years 4 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>17 (F), 13 (F), 12 (F)</td>
<td>North h.s. in North City</td>
<td>6 years 4 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>18 (M), 15 (M)</td>
<td>Riverwalk Central</td>
<td>1 year 3 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>18 (F)</td>
<td>Riverwalk Central</td>
<td>6 years 9 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>20 (F), 17 (M)</td>
<td>Riverwalk Central</td>
<td>4 years 6 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>18 (M), 14 (F)</td>
<td>Riverwalk Central</td>
<td>3 years 5 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>19 (F), 16 (F)</td>
<td>Riverwalk Central</td>
<td>5 years 9 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>22 (M), 20 (M), 18 (F), 16 (F)</td>
<td>Jefferson</td>
<td>4 years 6 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>20 (M), 16 (F)</td>
<td>Douglas</td>
<td>3 years 4 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>15 (M)</td>
<td>Riverwalk Central</td>
<td>1 year 3 months</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4  Demographic information of the parents of the Japanese high school sojourners

Finally, the four teacher participants include three ESL teachers and one Japanese/English bilingual aid at Riverwalk Central High School. I selected Riverwalk Central High because it has by far the largest population of Japanese sojourner students of the three high schools in the Riverwalk school district. In fact, Japanese students are the biggest ethnic group of ELLs in Riverwalk Central. I knew one language arts teacher at Riverwalk Central because I took a class with her in the university; she helpfully gave me contact information for the four teachers. She herself also consented to participate in the study, but we did not have the opportunity to meet for an interview due to schedule conflicts. I contacted the four teacher participants via email and all of them consented to participate in the study.
**Data collection procedure.** The data sources for examining the research questions include: 1) in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 30 Japanese high school sojourner students, 4 Japanese returnee students, 2 Japanese US college students who graduated from Riverwalk Central, 13 parents of Japanese high school sojourners, and 4 teachers at Riverwalk Central High School; and 2) documents, including information, reports, testing rule books, handbooks, articles, and other materials available on the websites of the Midwestern Department of Education, Riverwalk City Schools, and Japanese Ministry of Education.

The present study has three sequential phases of data collection: 1) the exploratory interview phase, 2) the identification phase, and 3) the investigation phase. Following a common data collection method used in institutional ethnography, the initial stage of the present study explored the Japanese high school sojourner student’s everyday experience through in-depth semi-structured interviews. A total of 30 Japanese high school sojourners participated in the initial phase of data collection. Most participants were individually interviewed once for approximately 1.5 to 2 hours about their everyday lives in and outside school; one-on-two interviews were occasionally conducted in cases when the interviewee felt more comfortable with a friend. The interviews were conducted mostly in the participants’ homes, or, in several cases, at a coffee shop or a library in Riverwalk. All the interviews were audio-recorded with the permission of the participants and field notes were taken after each interview. Initial exploratory interviews served to generate a full-length picture of the Japanese high school sojourners’ everyday lives and descriptions of their sociocultural, educational, and transnational experiences.
In the second stage of the study, I attempted to trace linkages among people in different local settings and identify the institutional and organizational processes that shape the Japanese sojourner student’s everyday life. To accomplish this goal, I conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews with 2 Japanese US college students who graduated from Riverwalk Central, 13 parents of the Japanese sojourners, 4 teachers in Riverwalk Central High, and 4 Japanese returnee students who had reentered the Japanese educational system. The participants except for returnee students were individually interviewed for 1.5 to 5 hours each, in their individual homes, or in several cases, at Riverwalk Central High School or at a coffee shop in Riverwalk, whichever was comfortable for each participant. Individual interviewing with the returnee students was conducted in a coffee shop or a restaurant in different areas within Tokyo, Japan. All the interviews were audio-recorded. This identification stage enabled me to go beyond the standpoint of the Japanese sojourner students and to see their everyday world from different points of view. Interviewing individuals working in different local settings helped me “identify some of the trans-local relations, discourses, and institutional work processes that are shaping the informants’ everyday work” (DeVault & MaCoy, 2006, pp.20-21), which processes and ruling relations the sojourner students themselves participate in but are not consciously aware of.

In the third phase of the study, I delved into the institutional and organizational processes identified in the preceding stages. DeVault and McCoy (2006) point out that ruling relations rely on text-based knowledge and practices in contemporary society. Institutional ethnographers examine texts on the assumption that the everyday world is mediated by texts in their variety of forms; more specifically, texts mediate connections
between the sites, people’s everyday practices, public discourses, and translocal relations. Institutional ethnographers also see interview transcripts as a form of text that standardizes ruling relations. Therefore, in the investigation phase of the study, I focused on text-based forms of knowledge: interview transcripts, and documents and materials available on websites and relevant to the participating students’ experiences. Examining these texts and text-mediated discourses that might inform and represent social relations, I intended to explicate the way the everyday world of the Japanese high school sojourners was socially and institutionally organized.

DeVault and McCoy (2006) state that interviewing in institutional ethnography should be understood as “talking with people” (p.22) and that it should not be confined to one-to-one, formal interviews. Therefore, I sometimes took advantage of opportunities to talk with people in more naturalistic settings. For example, when a participant wanted to talk more about her experiences even after a semi-structured interview was over, we kept chatting over coffee. When another participant suggested that we should have a talk over a meal and tea, the interview ended up lasting for three to four hours. A participating mother, a housewife bored with her life in Riverwalk, seemed to be very happy to have someone to talk about her children, and kept on for five hours. Accordingly, the interview lengths varied considerably from participant to participant. Interviewing with the 30 sojourners lasted 96 minutes on average, ranging from 72 minutes to 124 minutes, while the interview lengths with the 4 returnee students ranged from 97 minutes to 348 minutes, the average being 171 minutes. The interviews with the 13 parents lasted 138 minutes on average, ranging from 90 minutes to 340 minutes.
I went over the IRB-approved consent form for the students aged 18 and up, or the assent form for the students under 18, together with each participant before interviewing, and had them sign the form if they agreed to participate in the study. I also had the parent sign the parental permission form if the participant was a minor. With the parents and teachers, I obtained their consent in the same way, but used different IRB-approved consent forms from the form for the students. I informed each participant that she or he could leave the study at any time; all participants stayed in the study until the interview was finished. As for incentives, I gave 15 US dollars to each sojourner student and 20 US dollars to each returnee, parent, and teacher, upon the completion of the interview.

**Study timeline.** The study began in June, 2011, immediately after the IRB approval of the research project on June 8. Through in-depth, semi-structured interviews, I gathered accounts and stories of Japanese high school sojourner students in the summer and fall of 2011. Since the initial IRB review only covered the first phase of data collection, in which the IRB-approved maximum number of participants was 25 Japanese high school sojourner students, I submitted an IRB amendment request in October, 2011, to start the second phase of data collection. I requested permission to add more participants (sojourners, returnees, parents, and teachers) and to conduct research internationally (interviewing returnee students in Tokyo, Japan). The IRB amendment was approved on October 20, 2011. I conducted interviews with 4 returnee students in Tokyo, Japan, in December, 2011. Also, I interviewed several more Japanese sojourner students, 13 parents of the Japanese sojourners, 4 teachers in Riverwalk Central High School, and 2 Japanese college students in the US between November, 2011 and May, 2013.
**Data analysis.** In qualitative research, data analysis is “a systematic search for meaning” (Hatch, 2002, p.148) and “a continuing process” (Glesne, 2006, p. 94). It is essential to process massive amounts of qualitative data in an organized and timely manner. In the present study, data collection and preliminary data analysis were conducted simultaneously to find recurrent themes and relationships and make sense of the data. For the purpose of data analysis, the interview recordings were all transcribed and indexed.

In institutional ethnography, researchers must keep up their main interest in the explication of the actualities in the local setting under investigation: what is really happening in the setting and how things happen the way they do (Campbell & Gregor, 2004). Translocal ruling relations, which coordinate the everyday world of the participants, are what institutional ethnographic accounts are all about. Unlike other types of ethnographies, seeking to develop patterns and categories, compare things in the same category, or producing concepts is *not* the analytic purpose of institutional ethnography. Therefore, the present study does not code the interview data in any way. As Campbell and Gregor (2004) warn, coding and (re)arranging the data into categories is not helpful because it may obscure and misrepresent the connections between social relations and people’s everyday experiences.

In the present study, data analysis was conducted as follows. Along with transcribing and indexing interview data, I listed some “problems” that the sojourner students talked about or that repeatedly appeared in interviews. The salient problems included: 1) high school exit exams as the biggest obstacle to graduation; 2) exiting the ESL program and the accompanying disadvantages (e.g., losing ESL accommodations);
3) the state-mandated English proficiency tests which fail to accurately measure ELLs’ readiness for mainstreaming; 4) uncertainty about when one will have to return to home country; 5) difficulty in transferring into a Japanese high school; 6) whether or not to graduate a year early; 7) college entrance exams; 8) struggles to improve oral English skills; 9) lack of American friends; and 10) a language and social barrier between late-entrant and long-term sojourners/American students. I used the interviews with parents, teachers, returnees, and Japanese college students to deepen my understanding of how these problems happened and what may have shaped the sojourners’ experience of the problems. I went back to the indexed interview transcripts, copied all the parts relevant to the problems, and collected the parts concerning each problem into individual files. This facilitated delving into each in more detail. I also closely, and repeatedly, read the interview data and various forms of texts, making notes on what I noticed and writing analysis memos on the “disjuncture” between different versions of reality – the way the sojourner students experienced their everyday lives and the way their experiences were represented in texts.

I explored documents and materials available on the websites of the Midwestern Department of Education, Riverwalk City Schools, and the Japanese Ministry of Education. Which texts to analyze was determined by the problems revealed by the interview data. Because I found a disjuncture between the sojourner students’ actual experiences as ELLs at school and the way the state-level department of education recognizes and categorizes ELLs, I examined such texts as the state assessment rule books, score report samples, newsletters, and a family guide, to determine how the student’s language-learning and test-taking experiences were coordinated by institutional
relations of ruling. I also examined the Riverwalk Central High School student handbook, which includes the school curriculum and the description of extracurricular activities and educational programs, and the brochures about Japanese returnees published by the Japanese Ministry of Education. The data analysis process helped me develop the focus of each paper, write up the data, and choose which pieces of data to use as evidence for my analytic points.

Definition of Terms

The key terms used in the present study are defined to clarify their operational meanings as follows.

**Japanese sojourners.** School-age Japanese adolescents and children who enter the US upon their parents’ (generally fathers’) overseas job transfer within multinational corporations, temporarily enroll in US schools, and eventually will return to Japan upon the completion of their parents’ job appointments, or upon graduation from high school, whichever comes first. Japanese sojourners may move from the US to another foreign country before their permanent return to Japan, as decided by the corporations.

**Long-term Japanese sojourners.** Japanese high school sojourner students who have been staying in the US since elementary school or before.

**Late-entrant Japanese sojourners.** Japanese high school sojourner students who entered the US as secondary (middle-school or high-school) students.

**Late-entrant ELLs.** English language learners who entered the US as secondary school students. In this study, late-entrant Japanese sojourners and late-entrant ELLs mostly overlap.
Transnationalism. A pattern of migration in which transmigrants maintain economic, political, social, cultural, and/or religious relations to their countries of origin while residing in host countries—host countries to which they do not necessarily adapt—in marked contrast to the traditional assimilationist model (Glick Schiller, Basch & Blanc-Szanton, 1992, 1995; Jones, 1992). Transnationalism also connotes regular, or intermittent back-and-forth movements between home and host countries, exchanges of goods and information across borders, and a variety of everyday practices spanning more than one country, such as political participation, remittances, cultural practices, and entrepreneurial activities.

Social relations. Social processes into which people enter through everyday practices (Travers, 1996). In institutional ethnography, social relations do not refer to relationships between individuals, such as those between a teacher and a student; rather, the term is used as the analytic lens to investigate the social organization of people’s lives. The concept of social relations makes it possible to see “the complex practices that coordinate people’s actions across separations of time and space, often without their conscious knowledge” (Campbell & Gregor, 2004, p.31).

Ruling relations (relations of ruling). Social relations that exercise power and dominate people’s lives.

Institution. In institutional ethnography, institution does not mean such an organization as a university, but it refers to “clusters of text-mediated relations organized around specific ruling functions, such as education or health care” (DeVault & McCoy, 2006, p.17). Institutional ethnography’s institution is a clustering of social relations centered around or embedded in particular ruling relations.
**Discourse.** A system of thoughts and representation which constitutes translocal social relations coordinating people’s actions and practices in a particular local setting. Smith (1987, 2005) uses the concept of discourse, inspired by Michel Foucault. What distinguishes the notion of discourse used in institutional ethnography from that used in Foucault’s work is that the former includes people’s participation in using and circulating the text (DeVault & McCoy, 2006, p.44). Ideological discourse reflects the interests and standpoints of those in power. It is generalized by the text. People in the everyday world also participate in and help reproduce ideological discourse when they use the text and act in conformity with it.

**Text.** Replicable material forms that we see, read, watch, and hear: for example, any printed materials, images, audio, computer files, and so on. Text extralocally mediates ruling relations and organizes people’s actions and lives by its identical, constant, replicable form.

**Basic Assumptions of the Study**

The following basic assumptions were made based on the methodology employed in the present study.

1) The way the world works is social and people living in the world are social beings; their lives are socially organized.

2) The way people act cannot be explained solely within a particular local setting: their actions and experiences are organized by “social relations” that originate somewhere outside their world.
3) The participants were capable of fully understanding all the interview questions in their native tongue (Japanese or English).

4) The participants were capable of conveying knowledge of their everyday lives in their native tongue.

5) The participants described their experiences, actions, choices, decisions, thoughts and feelings as truthfully as possible and to the best of their knowledge.

Limitations of the Study

One limitation of the present study is that I did not have a chance to interview some people who might have provided important information about how Japanese high school sojourner students’ everyday experiences are organized: for example, their fathers and regular classroom teachers at high schools in Riverwalk. Although the fathers generally know much less about their children’s US high school life than the mothers, they have expertise on how their work is organized. Their accounts of transnational job transfers might have shed more light on Japanese sojourners’ transnational mobilities. Regular classroom teachers might have offered insight into how sojourners behave in the classroom and how they interact or do not interact with American students, and might have revealed additional problems and struggles. Another limitation of the study is that I did not collect observational data. Although interviewing is the most common and effective data collection method in institutional ethnography, observation might have been useful, especially in the second and third phases of data collection, to get insight into some routine features of the social relations shaping sojourners’ lives. I decided not to conduct observation based on feasibility: as Campbell and Gregor (2004) point out,
significant amounts of observational data would be necessary to make it useful in institutional ethnography. The third limitation of the study is that its findings do not immediately generalize to the entire group of Japanese high school sojourners in the whole United States, although the ruling relations that coordinate the lives of the study’s participants may exist across many local settings.
Chapter 2: The Early Graduation Gambit of Japanese High-School Sojourners in the US: Organizing Educational Paths across Borders

Abstract

While there is a growing presence of trans-Pacific migrant students in the US, relatively little attention has been given to the diversity among them in terms of their everyday experiences and future educational trajectories shaped by different patterns of transnational mobilities and practices. This paper addresses the distinctive educational experiences and needs of transnational Japanese students, temporarily enrolled in US schools in company with their parents on business appointments from transnational corporations. This institutional ethnographic study examines the strategies that these sojourner students use to negotiate the institutional demands of US high-school life and the way to promote access to tertiary education in Japan. The findings show that, although corporate transnationalism restricts Japanese sojourners’ geographical mobility, they still actively construct their futures through the high-stakes strategy of graduating a year early from US high schools. I call this early graduation scheme a gambit because the sojourners sacrifice beneficial opportunities and even risk their graduation itself in the hope of securing a positional advantage upon their return to their home country. The early graduation gambit is analysed through a lens of transnationalism.
Introduction

Asians comprise an increasing proportion of transnational migrants, and trans-Pacific migrant students are a growing presence in US secondary schools. This paper addresses the distinctive educational experiences and needs of transnational Japanese students, temporarily enrolled in US schools while their parents are assigned to the US as workers for transnational corporations. Unlike permanently residing immigrant students, these sojourner students are abruptly moved from the Japanese to the US educational system, then sent back into the Japanese system after several years in the US; what this means is that they must simultaneously meet the academic and linguistic demands of US high school education while also calculating how their choices and performance will promote access to tertiary education in Japan. The paper examines the *early graduation gambit*—the high-stakes strategy which Japanese sojourners use to negotiate the different requirements and expectations of the two educational systems by sacrificing aspects of their high school education in the US to orchestrate their access to tertiary education in Japan.

This study adds to an emergent line of research that discusses educational issues and processes through a lens of transnationalism (Doherty, Mu, & Shield, 2009; Hamann, 2001; Huang & Yeoh, 2005; Rodríguez, 2009; Sánchez, 2007; Zúñiga & Hamann, 2009). As Sánchez and Kasun (2012) argue, transnational students’ lifestyles and practices stretching more than one country have often been poorly recognized by schools. These scholars point out that researchers have tended to take an educational phenomenon involving transnational students as contained within the boundary of one single country,
or interpret this phenomenon under a framework of assimilation. The perspective of transnationalism allows us to look at the larger social context in which the border-crossing and everyday practices are embedded and at “the dynamicity of students who recognize and conceptualize their lives in simultaneous places” (Sánchez & Kasun, 2012, p.80). In the rest of the paper, I first situate the present study in the literatures on transnationalism and sojourner students, and then present the methodology, findings and concluding discussion of the study.

“Middling” Transnationalism

Transnationalism refers to a pattern of migration in which transmigrants sustain political, social, and economic ties to their countries of origin while residing in host countries, to which they do not necessarily adapt—in stark contrast to longstanding views of immigrants uprooted and assimilated into host countries (Glick Schiller, Basch, & Blanc-Szanton, 1995). Transnationalism also connotes back-and-forth movements between home and host countries and various kinds of everyday practices transmigrants engage in. The lens of transnationalism has reconceptualized border-crossing in contemporary society as a dynamic process creating “transnational social spaces” (Faist, 2000) and as a multi-directional process generating both counter-hegemonic grassroots powers “from below” and elite hegemonic powers “from above” (Guarnizo & Smith, 1998). As compared to globalization research, scholars in transnational studies have spotlighted transmigrants as key social agents in the global economy.

Mobility is “a centerpiece of transnationalism” (Mahler, 1998, p.76). Much has been written about how transmigrants shuttle between North America and their home
Latin American countries, maintaining networks and practices across borders (e.g., Basch, Glick Schiller, & Blanc-Szanton, 1994; Levitt, 2001), but relatively little has been studied about transnational mobility elsewhere. There is considerable variation across groups of transnationals in terms of the scale and style of mobility and locality (Dahinden, 2010). Transnationalism is more than just border-crossings of either poor uneducated labourers or professional elites, which have been the focus of the majority of transnational research. Conradson and Latham (2005) called for research on “middling” forms of transnationalism—the transnational mobility of people with middling social positions in their home countries—in order to fully understand the phenomenon of transnationalism that is reconfiguring the world. Research on middling transnationalism also focuses on ordinary, everyday aspects of transnational life, including education. The present study addresses these gaps in the literature by examining how a group of middle-class sojourner students negotiate their everyday life-world and strategically construct their own futures across borders.

**Sojourner Students**

Sojourner students were long absent in the transnational literature until Hamann (2001) proposed they should be included among transmigrants. Differentiating the experiences and educational needs of Latino sojourners from those of permanently settled immigrants, Hamann (2001) characterised sojourner students by “their vulnerability to dislocation and their transnational backgrounds” (p.32). He noted that sojourner students need to develop multiple cultural literacies because they negotiate not only the new place but also the old; they are not well served by US schools, which uphold assimilationist presuppositions and
disagree with the sojourners’ transnational strategies and cultural beliefs. Calling
attention to sojourner students’ academic disadvantage due to curriculum discontinuities
and their twofold needs for spatial negotiation, Hamann (2001) and Zúñiga and Hamann
(2009) have contributed to making the sojourner student’s school presence more
recognized in research.

An important point to note is diversity in sojourner experience. The Latino
sojourners discussed in Hamann (2001) are children of workers in what a dual system
theorist Michael Piore calls “the secondary sector” (as cited in Hamann, 2001, p. 40), a
labour market characterised by low skill levels, high job turnover and little job security.
Some of them may face specific challenges, such as lack of access to health care and
higher education, due to undocumented status. On the other hand, Japanese sojourners’
parents, fully documented, work in “the primary sector” marked by better-paid jobs,
promotion opportunities, and job stability. Such different work situations create different
transnational mobilities. Latino sojourners experience circular migration involving
constant back-and-forth movement over many years; Japanese sojourners experience
temporary migration but “settle” in one place longer during their sojourn. Another
difference lies in the degree to which constraining structures allow sojourners to exert
agency in physical movement. While the transnational mobility of those who cross
borders as a livelihood strategy depends on individual family decisions, Japanese
sojourners’ border-crossing is determined by corporate power. Japanese workers are sent
overseas not based on professional skills or English proficiency, but on the company’s
job rotation system, which is used as development opportunity for employees on the “fast
track” (Kopp, 1999). Under such corporate transnationalism, company benefit is
prioritized over families’. Each overseas appointment must be unconditionally accomplished. Japanese sojourners cannot decide on their own when or whether to cross borders; neither can they choose to stay permanently in a host country, due to visa status.\(^1\) Their involuntary mobility (and immobility) adds to academic vulnerability and makes it necessary to negotiate future educational paths across borders.

**Third Culture Kids**

Although the transnational literature has rarely spotlighted children’s participation in transnational migration (except for Orellana, Thorne, Chee, & Lam, 2001), children sojourning overseas with parents are not a new phenomenon. The experience of expatriate workers’ children in the primary sector has been well documented in literature on *third culture kids* (TCKs)—a term coined by Useem (1976) in the 1950s. TCKs live in the *third culture*, a highly mobile expatriate community, where host and home cultures meet (Pollock & Van Reken, 1999). TCKs’ most noticeable features are their expected return home, financial and logistic privileges, and sense of belonging to nowhere or multiple cultures. The TCK literature often treats Japanese sojourners/returnees as TCKs (Fail, Thompson & Walker, 2004; Pollock & Van Reken, 1999; Szukdlarek, 2010), but the groups do not completely overlap. Both literatures of Japanese sojourners and TCKs address youths with common characteristics, such as “involuntary international mobility, immersion in various cultures, distance from ‘home culture’, and resulting feelings of ‘marginalization/emancipation’” (Kano Podolsky, 2004, p.77). However, we should note that overseas experience can vary according to the age of first stay overseas and the length of time away from home. Long-term Japanese sojourners living abroad since
childhood may share TCKs’ readjustment problems (Fry, 2007), but the typical profiles of TCKs—the rootless, homeless and alienated bi/multi-lingual who “builds relationships to all of the cultures, while not having full ownership in any” (Pollock & Van Reken, 1999, p.19)—do not usually apply to Japanese high-school sojourners, who mostly enter the US in their teens as English language learners (ELLs). On the contrary, they look toward futures deeply rooted in Japan and do not perceive themselves as “homeless”.

Identifying Japanese sojourners as TCKs or overgeneralizing expatriate children may obscure the contextual nature of sojourning experiences, which are shaped by different local particularities of the place, such as educational policy and school culture. However, currently isolated, different streams of research, if integrated, would create a meaningful presentation of the sojourner experience. While the transnational lens better captures the complexities of sojourners’ academic vulnerability and negotiation of multiple places, the TCK literature supplements the understanding of sojourner experience by exploring psychological aspects of sojourners’ cross-cultural adaptation and reentry into home culture.

**Methodology and Data Sources**

The present study uses institutional ethnography (IE) (Smith, 1987, 2005), a qualitative method of sociological inquiry aimed at examining everyday experiences in a local setting from their own standpoint and explicating how their activities are coordinated by *ruling relations*—relations of “socially-organized exercise of power that shapes people’s actions and their lives” (Campbell & Gregor 2004, p.32). IE treats people as “knowers” or “informants” with expertise on their everyday doing, and draws on local experience to
identify translocal webs that shape the “everyday world” (Smith, 1987).

I conducted a year-long fieldwork in a community of Japanese business sojourners’ families in Riverwalk, a suburban city in a US upper Midwestern state, between 2011 and 2012. Their multinational employers transfer them from branch to branch every few years. Depending on corporate interest and economic outlook, the Japanese sojourner’s stay in Riverwalk is four years on average, ranging from two to eleven years. Japanese sojourners, arriving with little or no English proficiency, are the biggest ethnic group of ELLs in Riverwalk Central High, one of three public high schools in the district.

This paper is based on analyses of the following data: 1) semi-structured interviews with 53 participants, conducted individually for 1.5 to 5 hours each (30 Japanese high school sojourners, 13 parents, 4 high school teachers, 4 Japanese returnee students who completed their sojourn and returned to Japan for college, and 2 Japanese Riverwalk Central graduates who entered US college); 2) documents available on the websites of the Midwestern Department of Education, Riverwalk City Schools, and Japanese Ministry of Education. While interviews with American high school teachers were conducted in English, other participants were allowed to choose between Japanese and English. All chose Japanese, although one female long-term sojourner exhibited extensive code-switching between the two languages. The Japanese interview excerpts used in the paper were translated into English. The participants saw me as a Japanese transnational migrant born and raised in Japan. For case-oriented analysis, all the interview recordings were fully transcribed, indexed, and annotated. The participants, schools, and research site are identified by pseudonyms to protect privacy.
The analysis demonstrates that, despite the structural constraints of corporate transnationalism, Japanese sojourners agentively carve out their future educational trajectories by pursuing an effective but high-stakes strategy of graduating one year early from US high schools. I call this early graduation scheme a *gambit* (a term used in chess, meaning a strategic opening move in which a piece is risked for advantage later) because sojourners sacrifice certain beneficial opportunities and even risk graduation itself in hopes of securing a positional advantage upon returning home.

In what follows, I will describe the early graduation gambit and the context behind it, with three guiding questions:

- Why do Japanese sojourners graduate a year early?
- What additional work does early graduation create and how do sojourners manage that work?
- What educational opportunities are forfeited for early graduation?

**Why Graduate Early?**

Early high school graduation is an option originally intended for high-achieving American students who want to save money and get a jump-start on college (Ward & Vargas, 2011). The present study reveals that reality runs contrary to that image—early graduation in Riverwalk is a phenomenon peculiar to Japanese sojourners:

Mariko: Are there any American students who graduate early?
Erina (junior): I’m pretty certain there aren’t any. I have never heard of anyone.
Mariko: Why do you think Americans don’t choose to graduate early?
Erina: I guess they might want to graduate with their classmates.
Mariko: I see. So you’re saying only Japanese students graduate early.
Erina: Yeah. I believe so.

Even American students perceived early graduation as a practice only for Japanese students: “My American friend asked me, ‘Are you gonna graduate early too?’ And I was like, ‘Yeah, probably’” (Shiho, junior). Every year, some Japanese sojourners exercise the option, in which they can graduate in three years, instead of four years, if they have all the requirements met.

**Tactics for avoiding double disruption and achieving a positional advantage.**

Early graduation is not popular for money-saving or faster college graduation; rather, it is a precautionary measure, to avoid getting trapped between two educational systems (and thus to help secure access to higher education, as described below). To understand their choice, we must first consider the link between their transnational mobility and its influence on their educational experience. On short notice, sojourners are uprooted from their Japanese social lives without being emotionally prepared. Tremendous sacrifices are required when they transfer to school overseas. Besides the linguistic and cultural challenges encountered as ELLs, they are driven to rework their academic and career plans. Some sojourners have to extend their schooling: “I was a senior in Japan, but I entered Riverwalk Central as a sophomore—going down two grades—because otherwise I wouldn’t have been able to have all the graduation requirements met” (Daisuke, returnee). They even abandon long-cherished aspirations:

I know Daisuke always wanted to become a doctor. He was attending an after-school cram school [in Riverwalk] to prepare for the competitive entrance exam for undergraduate med schools in Japan. He couldn’t pass it, and ended up switching to economics, because he realized he wouldn’t keep up with [non-returnee] med students. It’s that hard. (Miyuki, returnee)
As academic content areas and performance standards vary across countries, Japanese sojourners experience curriculum discontinuities upon transfer to schools overseas as well as upon return home. In Daisuke’s case, the American high-school math curriculum repeated material he had already studied in Japan. He missed the substantial math content of the Japanese curriculum necessary to pass rigorous Japanese undergraduate medical school entrance exams—the gap was too big to fill.

Abrupt disruption from schooling in Japan may put sojourners at an academic disadvantage later, but what they are most afraid of is involuntary disruption from schooling for a second time: sudden return home in the middle of the school year. That would prevent getting a US high-school diploma, the *sine qua non* to achieve a positional advantage over non-returnee Japanese students, and possibly further extend schooling in Japan, because college-oriented Japanese high schools conventionally reject returnees beyond the Fall of their 11th grade (and therefore they would have to go down a grade in transferring into one). Sojourners may have difficulty finding a decent Japanese high school to transfer into, as not all Japanese high schools accept returnees. Early graduation reduces the risk of having schooling interrupted again.

The primary reason for early graduation is uncertainty about their stay in the US: “They choose this option, because the family needs to go back to Japan. This is the only reason” (Ms. Nichols, ESL teacher). During the sojourn, it is fairly common for the father’s business appointment to be extended, shortened, or abruptly terminated: “At first, we were told to stay in the US for three years. When the three years passed, it extended to five years” (Honoka, junior). Sojourners shape their educational strategy within this uncertainty:
The compelling reason for me graduating early was, we weren’t sure when my father’s job appointment would be ended. (Honoka, junior)

My father’s appointment has only less than a year left at this point… If I didn’t graduate early, I wouldn’t be able to apply for any colleges because I’d have to leave here by next November anyway, without a high school diploma in hand. So we all agreed that I should graduate early. (Takanori, junior)

Shortly after graduating from high school, the overwhelming majority of Japanese sojourners return to Japan and prepare for college entrance examinations, even if their families remain in the US. This seemingly linear transnational mobility makes sense in the larger socio-political context in Japan. With high interest in internationalization and political pressure on schools to accept internationally experienced students, 54 percent of Japanese universities have introduced quotas for returnees with alternative examinations, because returnees refine the school’s image as an “internationalized” institution (Fry, 2007). Japanese sojourners attempt to exploit their returnee status to enter prestigious Japanese universities which they would likely be unable to enter otherwise: “Even before leaving Japan, I was already happy I could enjoy the advantage of returnee quotas in college entrance exams” (Yuka, senior). Mai, in her junior year, explained that returnee quotas and relaxed admission criteria offset curriculum discontinuities:

Obviously, we can’t do well in the competitive general college entrance exams…especially social studies and science, because the content we learned [in American high school] is totally different from what is taught in Japanese high schools. I’d definitely want to use the returnee quota system.

Sojourners put the highest priority on graduating from US high schools because the qualification for returnee quotas calls for at least two years of enrolment in high school overseas, including the graduating year.3 By graduating early, sojourners can
achieve the advantageous position of returnee status right after their junior year and minimize the risk of the worst-case scenario: returning to Japan in the middle of their senior year. Some sojourners decide to return home by themselves in their freshman/sophomore year as a pre-emptive measure, if they might not have enough time for early graduation:

If it turns out that I will have to return to Japan in my senior year, I can neither graduate nor transfer. It’s not easy to graduate a year early, either, so I will go back to Japan this month. (Runa, sophomore)

Japanese high school sojourners are rational, prudential decision-makers, who assess the risk of being disrupted and dislocated from their schooling for a second time and actively construct educational paths according to their imagined futures back home.

**Additional Work for Prospective Early Graduates**

Completing high school at an accelerated rate is fraught with risk and challenges. The option raises the difficulty of graduating in two ways. First, prospective early graduates must handle increased course loads, taking required courses for both juniors and seniors simultaneously. This entails constant risk of failing to accumulate credits toward timely graduation. Second, they must pass all five sections of the state-mandated high school exit exam, the Midwestern Graduation Test (MGT), within a short time—one year instead of two. Tailored for native speakers, the MGT is a formidable challenge for Japanese sojourners (including regularly graduating ones), even with ELL accommodations (extra test-taking time and the use of dictionary). Failure in passing any of the five sections (reading, writing, math, science, and social studies) before commencement means leaving school without a diploma. Students can retake the MGT
until they pass it to obtain their diploma; however, in the case of Japanese sojourners, the situation is more complicated because of the transient and uncertain nature of their stay.

**Bigger workload.** Cramming two years of courses into one, prospective early graduates must take two language arts courses (English III and IV), two social studies courses (US Government and Economics), and two math courses, in addition to other elective and required courses for juniors. A daunting task for Japanese sojourners is to handle two English courses for American students. How do these ELL sojourners manage these challenging requirements? Ms. White, an experienced ESL teacher, explained a few alternatives to the language arts requirement for ELLs aiming at early graduation:

They have three options. One is that they take a regular English class. They generally don’t want that option. Their second option is to do online, NovaNet. Now, some of more advanced kids…they can handle that. NovaNet is about the seventh-grade reading level. But, the one, the option that almost all of them choose is called the “American School.” It’s a correspondence course. So they get this book and mail in their test and everything. And the specific course they take is, English Foundations, I think. It’s what it’s called, but it’s very easy. So even our students who have low fluency can actually do pretty well with it. And …they can work with their tutors. Or they can work on it sometimes in their resource room, with us.

Whereas prospective early graduates who exited ESL must simultaneously handle two regular English courses, those in ESL fulfil the English requirement by taking one ESL class and one easier correspondence course, following the advice of a well-informed teacher like Ms. White. This alternative pathway creates a big discrepancy between the language arts expectations for English-proficient students and those for ELLs; it is fairly certain that ELLs would have much more trouble graduating early if they had to
simultaneously handle two regular English courses. It cannot be fully discussed here for lack of space, but Ms. White seemed a strong advocate for her students in terms of promoting equity for ELLs in state-mandated testing. Her advocate stance may have shaped her understanding of Japanese sojourners’ circumstances and needs, and expertise on alternative ways to earn credits for required courses.

Another challenge for Japanese sojourners is US Government—a subject absent in Japan. Lacking the foundation necessary to understand the operation of US federal and state governments, sojourners find the course difficult:

Seniors must take Government and Economics. These two courses require a lot of time working on various projects. Like, if we didn’t complete a project, 100 points would be deducted. It was absolute hell making a list of all the amendments to the Constitution, writing down what each amendment meant, and memorizing all of them. (Kyoko, senior)

Strategies for managing these courses circulate within the community. Newcoming sojourners are forewarned:

They said Government and Economics would be a lot of trouble for us, so I took both in summer school…My ESL teacher and Japanese students a year ahead of me advised me to do so (Asami, senior).

Because taking US Government in the regular school year was said to be particularly challenging, I wanted to get it over with in summer. Japanese students generally take it in summer, so I heard what it’d be like…also, the same teacher was teaching the course for 14 years. (Miyuki, returnee)

Sojourners can finish US Government and Economics with easier assignments and tests within only three weeks in summer: “Since the course had to finish in only three weeks, I guess the content was reduced and a bit more basic than that taught in regular school year. It was quite easy. I got an A.” (Asami, senior).
Besides the two social studies courses, some Japanese sojourners take algebra and health/physical education in summer school to accelerate their course work toward early graduation. As the following comments show, early graduation would be an almost impossible challenge without using such strategies as correspondence courses and summer school:

[Would it be difficult to graduate early without using summer school?] Yes, we’d be seriously hard-pressed. Well, also, we wouldn’t be able to take other required courses during the regular school year. (Takanori, junior)

We would be impossibly busy in the last year [of high school], not attending summer school. (Kouhei, junior)

**High school exit exam.** As of 2012, 25 states require students to pass comprehensive high school exit examinations to graduate, and 83% of ELLs in US public high schools are subject to such requirements (McIntosh, 2012). Previous studies demonstrate tremendous passage rate gaps between ELLs and non-ELLs (e.g., Solórzano, 2008); such gaps naturally exist because graduation exams are intended for native English-speaking students and such linguistically complicated questions are hardly suitable for assessing the academic proficiency of ELLs (Menken, 2008). The Japanese sojourners’ accounts of the MGT add to concerns about its fairness, educational effectiveness, and consequences:

Intermediate ELLs seldom pass all five subjects of the MGT on their first try. I finally passed all on my fourth try, you know. (Haruki, senior)

Some students couldn’t graduate because of the MGT. It’s unreasonable that the school doesn’t even allow you to attend a commencement, to say nothing of getting a diploma, simply because of one single subject test you haven’t passed. Even though you have enough of the credits and attendance rate
required for graduation... It doesn’t make any sense, you know. The MGT is very difficult. There’re many things you don’t know in the MGT unless you stay here long... I know a senior, who’s been here for only a year and a half, has reading and writing left. These two are the hardest subjects for us to pass. A very harsh situation for her. She’s in the intermediate ESL, so her English isn’t that good. If she wants to go to a Japanese university, she’s got no time to lose in passing the MGT. Otherwise, she’d be in a mess. (Satoko, junior)

It is no exaggeration that passing the MGT is the single most pressing matter for college-oriented sojourners, because failing a single test can make the rest of their high school life very different or—worse—devastate their future education and career options. Due to the transient nature of their stay, sojourners may not be able to keep retaking the MGT until they pass. But then, they may not be able to transfer into a Japanese high school as a senior, either; they could be stuck between the two educational systems. Some sojourners failing the MGT have dropped out, given up college, or “completely disappeared” (Ms. Tanaka, a sojourner’s mother)—meaning severed all contact—from Riverwalk’s Japanese community, due to embarrassment. Ms. White recalled her Japanese sojourner student who failed the MGT’s writing section and could not graduate:

He took it again in summer [after commencement], didn’t pass. Took it again in October, didn’t pass. It was very scary seeing him go through all of this, because you know, I don’t want him to hurt himself or anything. He’s basically been hiding the entire last year, because he doesn’t want people to know...I’ve talked to him a couple times when he was coming for the test, but he’s soooo ashamed.

Students start taking the MGT in the spring of their 10th grade. Those who failed to pass it on their first try can retake it three times a year including summer school, which means six times in total before commencement. However, prospective early graduates have only two test-retaking opportunities: “To graduate early, I must take some core
courses in summer school instead of the MGT prep, so I’ll have only two chances to pass the exam…boy, it’s stressful” (Akira, sophomore). They constantly feel the pressure placed on passing the MGT: “Most Japanese who came here after me have already passed all five subjects but I haven’t. A bit too much of a shock” (Takanori, junior). All in all, the early graduation option endangers graduation itself. But still, they are willing to play the gambit: “Mom, Dad, and I had a family conference at dinner, and I thought it might be risky, but…hell, it’s worth it” (Chiharu, junior).

**What Do They Miss Out on?**

Working as a Japanese/English bilingual aid in Riverwalk City Schools for 25 years, Ms. Sasaki assists Japanese sojourners in ESL pullout settings to fulfil assignments and interprets for them as needed. Knowing the sojourners’ situation well, she takes a stand against early graduation:

> Early graduation takes a lot of work. I personally don’t see it beneficial to students in any way. That said, they may have to return home with their parents in their senior year and might not be able to transfer to a Japanese school, so it can’t be helped, I know. What I mean by demerits of early graduation is students would miss so much by skipping the fourth year. They wouldn’t tackle extra courses, participate in any extracurriculars, or go to senior prom. It’s such a disadvantage not to have the full experience of their American high school life. I want them to directly experience American culture, learn more about it, before going back to Japan.

As Ms. Sasaki explained it, early graduation means missing out on a whole year of valuable educational opportunities and important social elements of high school. Challenging AP courses, elective courses, and extracurriculars would otherwise contribute to the Japanese sojourners’ English and academic skills, as well as to a
stronger school record that would work in their favour in college application in Japan. However, to play it safe—to ensure sufficient credits for graduation within three years—prospective early graduates generally take less demanding “regular” courses: “I thought AP and Honors would be troublesome, so I didn’t take any. They’d assign a huge amount of homework” (Tomoya, sophomore).

Other educational experiences sacrificed for early graduation include the opportunity to obtain the International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma, an academically rigorous program which takes both junior and senior years to complete. The IB Diploma is an internationally accredited credential portable between schools worldwide. It is currently offered in 2,462 schools across the world and gaining more recognition and popularity, because of its unique curriculum designed to nurture students with “critical-thinking skills and a sense of international-mindedness” essential in the globalized world (IBO, 2013). “Applicants with the IB Diploma are preferred and given priority by admissions in good US universities” (Naoki, senior, IB student); therefore, while most Japanese sojourners feel uncompetitive with their American peers (and that is exactly why they wish to return to Japan), the IB Diploma would enhance the sojourner’s access to such universities. Choosing to graduate early, they practically give up all hope of US college.

The impact of forfeiting social interactions with their English-speaking peers cannot be overemphasized, particularly in terms of linguistic and intercultural development. Interviews with sojourners revealed that it is extremely important for ELLs to join in extracurricular activities, the only occasions where they can make friends with American peers:
I spoke to Americans sitting close to me or working in the same group, but we only talked in class. I made friends with Americans in the colour guard, though. We hung out sometimes, shopping and dining out, and slept over.

(Asami, senior, regularly graduating student)

The way American high-school education is organized does not give sojourners much opportunity to use English outside the classroom. Timetables are rigidly compartmentalized in time and space, with movement from one classroom to another; four-minute passing periods are insufficient to interact with friends. Also, secluded in two to three ESL classes a day, sojourners have limited chances to communicate with English-proficient students. Extracurricular activities, such as sports and clubs, provide them with the valuable opportunity to meet non-Japanese students and use English. However, besides missing out the fourth year, many prospective early graduates have no time for extracurriculars. They have daily sessions with tutors at home, getting homework help—their English proficiency has not developed sufficiently to handle homework by themselves, in their first few years. What sojourners sacrifice for early graduation may be substantial, but again, a high school diploma takes precedence over all else, and if they successfully return home with coveted returnee status for college entrance exams, the gambit will have paid off.

**Concluding Discussion**

This paper has looked at how Japanese sojourners negotiate their educational needs and the demands of US high-school life, as well as how they strategically graduate early to seek a positional advantage upon their return home. Despite the risk, sacrifice, and additional challenge, early graduation is still the most reliable method for these students.
to participate in both home and host educational systems. It allows them to make their
time spent overseas significant, in the sense that they establish “ownership” (Nespor,
2007, p. 762) of educational credentials in a transnationally portable, usable form—in
other words, the high school diploma with at least two years of enrolment overseas.
What academic content they learned or what activities they engaged in during their
sojourn are not important in this sense. They could pursue extracurriculars, AP, or IB
courses, but in practice these are not worth jeopardizing the diploma itself.

The early graduation gambit is a transnational middle-class family strategy for
risk management, opportunity calculation, and positional competition. The important
point to note here, however, is that, unlike Asian educational transmigrants aiming for
English proficiency to boost their competitive edge in the globalized education market
(Huang & Yeoh, 2005; Park & Bae, 2009; Zhou, 1998), Japanese sojourners do not use
border-crossing itself as a strategy for upward mobility. Rather, they are temporally and
spatially bound by corporate transnationalism. With all the structural constraints on
geographical mobility, however, Japanese sojourners actively construct their future
educational paths across borders through making the prudential and proactive decision to
modify the institutional time frame of schooling and maximize opportunity for future
success. The early graduation option used by Japanese sojourners at Riverwalk is
representative of strategies used at many similar Japanese business sojourner
communities in the US, wherever local educational policies allow it. Some school
districts openly encourage early graduation, but others make it impossible for ELLs—for
example, through lack of summer courses, correspondence courses, or support from
schools/teachers.
The early graduation gambit can be also seen as a time-control scheme for
Japanese sojourners—who lost control when they were uprooted from their home
country. They tend to feel “derailed”—knocked off the temporal track followed by their
Japanese peers. Sojourning in the US generally requires the students to drop a grade (in
the US and/or in Japan when they transfer into high school) or delay college entrance
(because, upon their return to Japan, they start preparing for the entrance examinations
for the next academic year). Early graduation “re-rails” them on the same temporal track,
writing off the disruption and securing their college entrance in the same year with same-
age friends they left behind in Japan. In short, the gambit allows sojourners to
manipulate and convert the temporal organization of their secondary education, so that
they can maximize their chances of access to high-quality tertiary education.

This paper expands our understanding of children’s participation in transnational
migration, in which their transnational mobility does not depend on individual family
decisions as in “transnational childhoods” (Orellana, Thorne, Chee, & Lam, 2001), but on
corporate decisions (hence involuntary transnational mobility). In corporate
transnationalism—one form of middling transnationalism—children face unique risks
and challenges because of their sudden dislocation from home, the temporariness and
uncertainty of their stay, and the educational attainment aspirations and expectations
characteristic of the middle class. The transient, precarious nature of sojourners’ time in
a host country requires preparation for unforeseeable disasters such as discontinuation of
schooling. They constantly weigh the risks and benefits of each choice they make. As
Ball (2003) points out, risks are embedded in the everyday process of the middle-class
family’s work on social reproduction pertaining to education. Envisioning college
education as a given future route, or “something ‘automatic’, obvious” (Ball, 2003, p. 165), middle-class sojourners identify and manage the “spatialized” risks inherent in border-crossing to “ensure access to privileged trajectories or to avert calamity” (p. 169).

This study highlights the importance of understanding transnational students’ choices, practices and performance in terms of the larger social context into which patterns of transnational mobility are intertwined. One implication for educators is that transnational students would benefit substantially from the teacher’s recognition of their specific educational needs and her thorough familiarity with district/state rules and policies. This study also contributes to our knowledge of sojourner students by showing that they experience extra academic and acculturative challenges and twofold spatial negotiation regardless of socio-economic background (primary or secondary sectors) or patterns of transnational mobility. We should bear in mind that there is heterogeneity within sojourners as well. Transnational students’ needs and practices should be understood in terms of multiple variables of mobility—duration, frequency, regularity, voluntariness, and purposes—as well as different future aspirations and expectations across transmigrant groups.

Acknowledgments

This paper has been accepted for publication in Asia Pacific Journal of Education. I am deeply grateful to Dr. Jan Nespor and two anonymous reviewers for their insightful comments and valuable suggestions.
Notes

1. The L2 dependent visa for Japanese sojourners allows them to stay in the US on the condition that their parents hold a valid L1 (Intra-company transferees’) visa. The sojourner can change her visa status to F1 (student visa) to remain in the US, but she is limited to a maximum of 12 months of attendance at a public high school. This is not a popular option for Japanese sojourners, because not all high schools accept F1 visas, and tuition rates for F1 students (four times as expensive as in-state tuition) are not affordable.

2. Japanese high schools are not legally compelled to accept returnees, as public school in Japan is only compulsory up to the 9th grade.

3. The student with recent, multi-year transnational schooling experience but no high school diploma overseas might still be categorized as a returnee, but her choice of university would be considerably narrower.
Chapter 3: College-Oriented Transnational English Language Learners Fighting on an Unlevel Playing Field: High School Exit Exams, Accommodations, and ESL Status

Abstract

Though previous research addresses the negative impact of state-mandated high school exit exams on English language learners’ (ELLs) educational experiences, less attention has been given to how college-oriented ELLs, especially older ELLs who attended school in their home countries before coming to the US, handle rigorous exams or gain access to tertiary education. This paper examines the strategies that late-entrant, college-oriented transnational ELLs use to negotiate the linguistic and academic challenges imposed by high school exit exams. Qualitative analyses show that the students deliberately flunk a state-wide English proficiency test mandated by No Child Left Behind and maintain their ELL status in order to avoid losing ELL accommodations, without which they would have little hope of passing the exit exams. The paper further delves into the serious test validity and fairness issues entailed in high-stakes testing and language education policies in the US and sheds light on the importance of ensuring equitable treatment for ELLs and incorporating the voices of test-taking ELLs and their teachers into policymaking decisions.
Introduction

Using high school exit exams as a vehicle for imposing educational policy is a common practice in many countries, particularly those with centralized educational systems (Shohamy, 2001). Since the implementation of the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (NCLB), we have seen increased federal involvement in US public schools, with profound consequences for students and teachers. In this paper, I analyze the realities of high-stakes testing experienced by transnational high school ELLs. Looking at the tests as *de facto* language policy promoting English monolingualism (Menken, 2008; Shohamy, 2001), I explicate the students’ strategies for maneuvering around the academic and linguistic challenges posed by the tests. While previous research addresses the negative impact of high school exit exams on ELLs’ learning experiences (Holme, et al., 2010; Menken, 2008), little attention has been paid to how college-oriented ELLs, especially those who received former schooling in their home country, manage to pass the rigorous exams and gain access to tertiary education. Focusing on late-entrant Japanese high school sojourner students, who came to the US as middle or high school and will return to Japan for college, the paper examines how curricular and linguistic discontinuities generate difficulties for students, and how students negotiate, resist, and work their ways through these difficulties. In particular, I show how a strategy of deliberately failing an NCLB-mandated English proficiency test allows Japanese sojourner students to retain their ESL status, and how the accommodations this lets them claim make it possible for them to pass the state-wide high school exit exam—an exam they would have little hope of passing without these accommodations. Sojourners and
their ESL teachers co-construct and promote this defensive strategy against high-stakes testing and language education policies, which entail serious validity and fairness issues and are driven by political expediency, not the student’s educational benefits per se.

In the rest of the paper, I first present a brief overview of the research on the impact of NCLB on the educational experience of secondary ELLs. Then I describe the methodology, research participants, and research site of the present study, followed by the local context of NCLB mandates for high school ELLs. After presenting findings, I conclude the paper by discussing implications of the findings and suggestions for future research.

The Impact of NCLB on Secondary ELLs’ Educational Experience

With the passage of NCLB, the Bilingual Education Act (Title VII) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act was replaced with the English Language Acquisition, Language Enhancement, and Academic Achievement Act (Title III). While Title VII acknowledged the facilitative role of the ELL’s native language in developing English language and academic proficiencies, Title III ended the use of the term bilingual in federal law and emphasized the necessity of speedy English language acquisition for academic achievement (see Evans & Hornberger, 2005; Wiley & Wright, 2004 for detailed descriptions of the course of policy change). Language education policy in NCLB is based on the assumption that it takes ELLs only three or fewer years to develop English proficiency sufficient to meet the academic standards of native English-speaking students; this contradicts Cummins’ (1981, 2000) well-cited research that indicates ELLs need five to seven years to acquire academic English language proficiency. NCLB
requires that every state annually assess the development of ELLs’ English language proficiency for academic and social purposes and fully include ELLs in academic content assessment. All students, including ELLs, are expected to make “adequate yearly progress (AYP)”, measured by standardized tests, and to achieve the unrealistic goal of reaching the level of proficient in English language arts and mathematics by 2014. One important ELL assessment issue is that states and school districts implement federal policy differently and use different ELL identification/re-classification criteria. As a result of such inconsistency across and within states, AYP reporting may lack accuracy (Abedi, 2004). A growing body of research has criticized the way the NCLB mandates such rapid transition of ELLs into mainstream classrooms, the high-stakes testing conducted in a language ELLs have not acquired, and the harmful consequences on ELLs especially when combined with restrictive state language policies (Abedi, 2004; Abedi & Dietel, 2004; Crawford, 2009; Evans & Hornberger, 2005; Gándara & Baca, 2008; Gándara & Hopkins, 2010; Menken, 2008, 2009, 2010; Wright, 2006; Wright & Li, 2008).

Under NCLB, high schools face tremendous challenges in serving recently-arrived ELLs and in helping them to develop English skills, to meaningfully participate in regular classroom instructions with appropriate accommodations, to meet state academic standards, and to graduate, all in a short time period. As compared to elementary schools, secondary schools have a larger share of recently-arrived foreign-born immigrant students; however, secondary ELLs are less likely to receive ESL service than elementary ELLs (Ruiz de Velasco & Fix, 2002). Lazarin (2006) points out that ELLs who enrolled in US schools in the 9th grade or later are most at risk of dropping out
because of inadequate language learning support and limited time for acquiring English and passing state required exams; and that the current accountability system based on students’ test performance can unintentionally encourage schools to push out low-performing ELLs.

English-only high-stakes testing can have immediate detrimental consequences on high school ELLs. Academic content assessments conducted in English act (whether intentionally or not) as English proficiency tests, and the result of a test affects high school graduation, entrance to tertiary education, future career opportunities, and emotional health. Roughly half of the US states require students to pass comprehensive high school exit exams, and 83% of all ELLs in US public high schools are subject to such high-stakes tests (McIntosh, 2012). Previous studies show significant cross-state gaps in passage rates between ELLs and non-ELLs (Solórzano, 2008); such gaps exist because high school exit exams are designed for native English-speaking students who have received 10 years of formal school education in the US. Such linguistically complex exams are hardly suitable for assessing ELLs’ academic content knowledge (Menken, 2008). To “level the playing field” for ELLs, states provide accommodations to address these needs and enable ELLs to be assessed like their English-proficient peers. However, the most frequently allowed ELL accommodations—timing and setting accommodations (e.g., extended time and small-group administration)—do not minimize linguistic or cultural disadvantages of ELLs specifically, but would instead benefit any kind of student (Stansfield & Rivera, 2002). Research shows that linguistic accommodations (e.g., native-language tests) are rarely available and come with practical and financial problems. For example, identifying and appropriately training interpreters
with competent linguistic and interpretation skills requires money, human resources and time, and direct translation of an English test into another language does not necessarily preserve its validity (Stansfield & Rivera, 2002; Wright, 2006). Overall, although the NCLB requires states test ELLs “in a valid and reliable manner” with “reasonable accommodations” (Title I of NCLB cited in Gándara & Baca, 2008, p. 208), there is no common agreement on which accommodations would best help ELLs and make exit exams fair to everyone (Young & King, 2008).

**Methodology and Data Sources**

The present study uses *institutional ethnography* (IE) (Smith, 1987, 2005), a qualitative method of sociological inquiry, and begins with the everyday experience of Japanese high school sojourners. IE treats participants not as objects of study but as knowledgeable experts on their own locally experienced everyday world. Our inquiry uses the Japanese sojourner’s experiences and practices as an entry point for examining translocal “ruling” power relations that institutionally organize and shape the sojourner’s everyday reality and actions, because the way one acts, behaves, and experiences one’s everyday life cannot be explained solely in terms of what happens in a particular local setting (Smith, 1987). I collected data through the most commonly used method in IE: interviewing. The purpose of interviewing is to look at the world from the Japanese sojourner’s standpoint and develop an understanding of how their local actualities are regulated by outside forces, such as the dominating power of authorities and policymakers.
I conducted yearlong fieldwork between 2011 and 2012 in a Japanese business sojourners’ community in Riverwalk, a relatively affluent US upper Midwestern city. These middle-class business migrants are assigned to work overseas by multinational corporations. The average length of an overseas stay is 4 to 5 years, ranging from 2 to 10 years depending on the economy and on individual position within the company. On short notice, one’s children are uprooted from school and social life in Japan, emotionally unprepared for the linguistic and cultural challenges of the host country’s education system. They enroll in US schools as ELLs, and will eventually go back to Japan when their fathers’ business appointments are terminated.

This paper is based on analyses of in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 53 participants: 30 Japanese high school sojourners, 13 parents, 4 high school teachers, 4 returnee students who graduated from high school in Riverwalk and returned to Japan for college, and 2 Japanese US high school graduates who entered US colleges. The paper also draws from documents available on the websites of the Midwestern Department of Education, Riverwalk City Schools, and Japanese Ministry of Education. Interviews were conducted individually for 1.5 to 5 hours each, mostly in the participant’s homes or, in several cases, at Riverwalk Central High School or a coffee shop in Riverwalk. While the interviews with American high school teachers were conducted in English, other participants were allowed to choose between Japanese and English. All chose Japanese. The interview excerpts used in this paper were translated into English by the researcher and checked for accuracy by a highly proficient Japanese/English bilingual. For case-oriented analysis, the interviews were audio-recorded, fully transcribed, indexed, and annotated. Participants, schools, and research site have been given pseudonyms.
NCLB Mandates for High School ELLs in the Midwestern Context

In the Midwestern state where the present study was conducted, K-12 ELLs take a state-wide standardized English proficiency test, the Midwestern English Language Acquisition Test (MELAT), each spring. ELLs are classified into five levels of English language proficiency according to their MELAT results: pre-functional, beginning, intermediate, advanced, and full English proficiency. The MELAT is the only measurement used to evaluate whether or not an ELL is ready to exit the ESL program. The Midwestern Department of Education (MDE) prescribes that, to exit the ESL program, ELLs must obtain an overall MELAT score of the highest level—5 (full English proficiency)—or two subsequent overall scores of 4 (advanced). After exiting ESL, ELLs are treated as English-proficient students in every way: they are provided no ESL service at school, no course assignment/test modification in regular classrooms, and no testing accommodations for ELLs during state-mandated academic content assessments.

The full inclusion of ELLs under NCLB in state assessments requires high school students in this Midwestern state to pass all five sections (reading, writing, mathematics, science, and social studies) of the high school exit exam—the Midwestern Graduation Test (MGT)—to get a diploma. Students start taking the MGT in the spring of their 10th grade, and receive two test-retaking opportunities per year after that. Failure to pass any of the five subject tests by the scheduled commencement implies leaving school without a diploma, even if all other requirements for graduation are met. They are allowed to retake the MGT after the commencement until they pass it to obtain their diploma, but that might be logistically difficult for some of them, particularly for those transnationally
mobile students who need to leave the Midwestern state for family reasons or due to other unavoidable circumstances. For example, it is fairly common for the Japanese sojourner’s parent’s business appointment from a multinational corporation to be abruptly shortened or terminated. When that happens, the sojourner student on an L2 dependent visa loses the eligibility to stay in the US upon the invalidation of her parent’s L1 (Intra-company transferee’s) visa; the sojourner family must leave the US immediately and the student is unable to retake the MGT.

ELLs who have not met the exit criteria for the ESL program based on the MELAT scores may take the MGT with ELL accommodations (extended test-taking time and the use of a dictionary). If they have been in US schools for less than 3 years and have got a score of 3 or less in both the reading and writing sections of the MELAT, they may also have access to a bilingual translator to orally translate the questions on the MGT test sheet.

Findings

The findings of the present study show that Japanese sojourners deliberately flunk the MELAT and keep their ESL status in order to avoid losing testing accommodations for ELLs without which they would have no hope of passing the MGT. Ms. White, a veteran ESL teacher at Riverwalk Central High School, described the practice of deliberately failing the MELAT as a defensive strategy commonly used by her students:

If they get exited out the [ESL] program, based on the MELAT, they no longer get any kind of accommodations on the graduation test, so no extra time, no use of a dictionary. So, at the high school level at least, students typically try to fail the MELAT…to protect themselves. And they know what the consequences are, of
passing it, or doing well on it. And they don’t want to put graduating at risk, so they fail.

The MGT is aimed at native English-speaking students in their 10th grade; therefore, passing it in a timely manner is an arduous linguistic challenge for Japanese high school sojourners, most of whom came to the US in their 7th grade or later and have not developed sufficient English proficiency to do well in the MGT, even with ELL accommodations. It is very rare for Japanese sojourners to pass the MGT on the first or second try. Haruki, a senior Japanese sojourner who has been in the US for 4 years, passed all five subjects of the MGT only on his fourth try. To secure his eligibility for testing accommodations until completing the MGT requirement, he was careful not to lose his ESL status by “messing up on the MELAT”:

Mariko: So the MGT directly affects your choice whether or not to stay in the ESL program.
Haruki: Yes, precisely. It’s a big graduation test, you know.
Mariko: But if your English is good enough, won’t you be pushed out of ESL anyway?
Haruki: Ah, well, so we just marked randomly and messed up on the MELAT on purpose.

The strategy of securing MGT accommodations by flunking the MELAT was not originally devised by Japanese sojourners themselves. Several students explained that their ESL teachers advised them not to meet the MELAT’s ESL exit criteria:

When I complained about not being eligible for the bilingual translation accommodation for the MGT, my ESL teacher said to me, “See, I told you! You should have scored low marks in the MELAT.” (Takanori, junior)

My ESL teacher sometimes advises us to deliberately stay in the ESL program—not openly saying that though. Well, if you do badly enough on the MELAT to be re-categorized as ESL, you will be allowed to use extended time and bilingual
dictionaries on the MGT. So the teacher intentionally but implicitly recommends we do badly, saying like, “You know there won’t be any problem if you flunk the MELAT, right?” (Akira, sophomore)

Satoko (junior): If I were forced out of ESL right now, I wouldn’t be able to use a dictionary or extra time in the MGT. I’d be in big trouble. So my teacher’s telling me to do badly on the MELAT just this one time.

Mariko: Your teacher says that?!
Satoko: Yes. An American ESL teacher says to every one of us, “You’d better not to do well on the MELAT.”

Mariko: Does everyone deliberately do badly on the MELAT?
Satoko: Absolutely. So, for the first few questions in the reading section, I did my best, but for the rest I just made a wild guess.

Mariko: But the result doesn’t show your actual English proficiency.
Satoko: No. But my mom also knows that, so it’s OK. She’s like, “Well, it can’t be helped.” The ESL teachers have come to understand that the MELAT bears a lot of problems, so now they never fail to warn the students at the beginning of the academic year as well as right before the MELAT. …At a parent-teacher conference once a year, a Japanese bilingual aid translates the warning about the MELAT into Japanese and lets the Japanese parents know about it.

As Satoko commented in the end of the above interview excerpt, parents are also kept informed about the ramifications of exiting the ESL program by the ESL teachers. For these college-oriented transnational students and their parents, the first and foremost priority is to get a high school diploma in the US so that they can have access to higher education in Japan. The MGT is the most formidable obstacle they must clear to achieve this goal. In the Riverwalk school district, with its continuous flow of Japanese sojourner families, ESL teachers are well aware of Japanese sojourners’ needs and their desired future educational paths and of the devastating consequences of the ELLs taking the MGT without special accommodations.

The analyses of the interview data also illuminate the following issues related to test validity, political expediency, and social justice lying behind the sojourner’s practice of
deliberately flunking the MELAT on the advice of their ESL teachers. First, the MELAT does not accurately measure the ELL’s readiness to exit the ESL service. Second, the ESL exit criteria were relaxed due to insufficient funding for ELLs, not based on sound research. And third, the MGT still fails to achieve a level playing field even with ELL accommodations, because the policy behind the test mistakenly assumes that ELLs are a homogeneous group of students, all having received previous formal education in the US. I will present these findings in greater depth below.

The MELAT test: “It’s best used as a form of toilet paper”. The MELAT’s questionable validity is one of the primary reasons why Japanese sojourners go out of their way to deliberately flunk it. The MDE states that the purpose of the MELAT is “to test students’ English language proficiency to determine whether they are ready to achieve success in classrooms where English is the language of instruction” (Midwestern Department of Education, 2012a, p. 9). Its statewide assessment rulebook also provides that, in order to exit ESL programs, students need to have English proficiency, in all four language domains, “at a level in which they are able to…meaningfully take academic assessments in English with no accommodations” (Midwestern Department of Education, 2012b, p. 33). For these official statements of language education policy to be validly implemented, the MDE must make sure that ELLs who meet the ESL exit criteria have actually reached the expected level of English proficiency. In other words, the MDE must ensure accurate and consistent classification of ELLs based on the MELAT results—the only determiner of the ELLs’ readiness for their meaningful participation in mainstream instructions and academic achievement tests.
In reality, many Japanese sojourners express distrust in the validity of the MELAT:

If you’re told you’re no longer ESL, you can’t stay ESL. But I’ve heard that not a few students were forced out of ESL due to some sort of mistake. It’s a grading job done by machines, after all. So, like, a newcomer student knowing no English somehow got a 5 and had to leave ESL, which landed him in serious trouble. He wasn’t provided ELL accommodations in the MGT, like translator services, so he failed. (Runa, sophomore)

A student was forced out of ESL—he didn’t understand the questions at all so he just made a wild guess at all answers but he guessed right and got a good result. I was like, wow, so, it’s not a good idea to score high on the MELAT. So I didn’t make any serious effort. I just took the test, answering randomly, whatever. (Momoka, junior)

Even if you get a 5 or two consecutive 4s on the MELAT just by chance, you will be forced out of ESL no matter how low your actual level of English proficiency is. I myself was pushed out of ESL that way, so I’m having a hard time catching up with a Language Arts class for Americans. I’ve also heard about the hardships senior students are experiencing just like I am. (Kouhei, junior)

These students’ accounts show that there is a wide disparity between MELAT results and the actual English language proficiency an ELL has: that the MDE set the ESL exit criteria too low. According to ESL teachers in Riverwalk Central High, a composite score of 4 on the MELAT is nowhere near the level of English proficiency necessary to comprehend course materials: “Compared to the MAC1 and also the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test, we know students who are scoring 4s are really only reading at the sixth grade level” (Ms. White). Once exited from the ESL program, ELLs no longer receive any ESL service under state regulations. What this means is that high school ELLs with only sixth-grade reading comprehension and vocabulary skills can be treated as “English-proficient” students, thrown into mainstream classes without any support, and forced to
take the rigorous MGT without ELL accommodations. Ms. White’s following remark well represents the ESL teacher’s frustration at the invalidity of the MELAT:

The MELAT test… it is best used as a form of toilet paper [sarcastic laughter]. I’m not a fan. It’s just heartless to, just to say to your student, “Based on this one test that you took one day, this is what the rest of your academic life is gonna be like.”…I had a girl this year. She was a senior. She left the essays blank. Once again, how is this a valid test? If you don’t write any of the essays on the writing test, and they still score you as a 5. She was really upset. She said, “I left them all blank, on purpose, I didn’t want to run any risk of being exited out of ESL.” She had 5s. All the way across. So she was forced out of the program. Now, her actual reading level is a sixth grade reading level. She also really struggles with oral comprehension.

Not only is this “sink-or-swim” testing policy an unethical, unfair treatment for these ELLs, it also disregards ESL teachers’ professional opinions about the students.

Because of the loose ESL exit criteria, while Riverwalk Central High School offers five levels of ESL classes (beginner’s, intermediate I, intermediate II, advanced, and transitional), it is rare for ELLs to reach the highest level before they are mainstreamed. Ideally speaking, they should complete the ESL program all the way through transitional and exit ESL with at least ninth-grade reading skills. In reality, ELLs even at the intermediate levels (with third- through fifth-grade reading levels) would have little trouble exiting the ESL program provided they do their best on the MELAT. Kentaro, a long-term Japanese sojourner who recently graduated from Riverwalk Central and currently goes to a US university, commented on the MELAT:

Kentaro: It’s written in easy English, the reading is easy too. The students who have been here for only two or three years can easily get a 4 or 5. The content is so easy I think it’s ridiculous to decide whether or not to exit ESL only because of the MELAT results. As a result, there have been more and more students having
English skills that only allow for basic communication but not enrolled in the ESL program.

Mariko: Were there any students like that around you?
Kentaro: Yes, yes. They were pushed out of ESL although they hadn’t even reached the advanced level of ESL class.

In short, ELLs are exited from the ESL program not because they are truly ready to take mainstream courses or to take the statewide MGT assessments as “English-proficient” students. They are pushed out of the ESL program because of arbitrary exit criteria set by the MDE.

If the MELAT accurately assessed whether the ELL could achieve academic success in mainstream classrooms and pass the MGT without ELL accommodations, Japanese sojourners would not need to deliberately fail the MELAT. The faulty ELL classification system negatively affects the validity of the MELAT and leads to unfair treatment and inappropriate, ineffective instruction for ELLs, putting them at an academic disadvantage.

**It’s all political: Insufficient funding for ELLs and the change of ESL exit criteria.** A fundamental question naturally comes to mind: How did such a substantial discrepancy between ESL exit criteria and actual language proficiency come about? The ESL teachers in Riverwalk and many of the Japanese sojourners told me that, due to the recent increase in the number of ELLs in the Midwestern state and the accompanying problem of insufficient money for ELL education, the MDE loosened the standard for exiting the ESL program in 2010 so that the number of students eligible for ESL service would decrease:
Because of the rapid growth of the ELL population here, they changed the system to push those ESL students who could at least use a little bit of English out of the ESL program. (Kentaro, graduate of Riverwalk Central)

[Why did they change the ESL exit criteria?] Funding? It’s like, they can’t fund ESL students that much anymore. (Erina, junior)

Their official reason was that, ELLs tend to do fine in the MGT. But the real reason is money. So, you know, when they made the switch, 50 percent of Riverwalk’s ESL students were forced out of the program. And that’s a program that has about 1200 students district-wide. Statewide, I think it was somewhere…also about 50 percent of all ESL students were forced out of the program. (Ms. White)

As the above interview excerpts show, it was common knowledge that insufficient funding for ELLs was the real reason for relaxing the exit criteria. However, the MDE does not state this in any published documents. The official reason for the criteria change is that “an analysis of longitudinal data on student performance showed that…students who attain a composite score of four on the [MELAT] in two annual administrations will likely score at the ‘proficient’ or above level on the language arts portion of the [MGT]” (Midwestern Department of Education, 2010, p. 3). However, the MDE does not specify exactly which research they conducted nor how they used its results to rationalize the revised exit criteria. The MDE relaxed the ESL exit criteria without taking into consideration that those ELLs who obtained two subsequent 4s in the MELAT actually did fine in the MGT because of the ELL accommodations they were provided. With the current exit criteria (the MELAT composite score of a 5 or two consecutive 4s), such students are no longer eligible for MGT accommodations. Regarding this issue, Ms. White spoke of a “heated discussion” that she had with the director of the Resource Center for ESL at the MDE in 2010:
They [The MDE] based their decision on the fact that students who got a 4 on the MELAT generally did well on the MGT. I said, “Did you ever consider that one of the reasons that they do well is because they do have the accommodations?” And his [the director’s] response was, “No, really, you think that’s gonna have an impact?” Like, “Really. Out of the entire state of Midwestern, are you saying that I am the first person who thought of this?” And he was like, “Well, we’ll have to keep track of that, but, no, I think they’ll be fine.” And, what I’ve always noticed is, my advanced students take the longest… on the MGT. Because they know, if they put extra effort in it, if they look up words, they will pass. So, you know, by taking their accommodations away, it’s just, it’s very unfair.

Ms. White’s account demonstrates that there exists a disparity, between language education policymakers and ESL teachers, in terms of understanding the importance of providing ELLs appropriate accommodations that address their educational needs and allow them to demonstrate their content-area knowledge.

Before the exit criteria were relaxed in 2010, ELLs were required to get a composite score of 5, and 5 in all four language domains (reading, writing, speaking, and listening) in order to exit ESL. The problem of the present ESL classification system is made clear if we consider how the MELAT’s composite score is calculated. First, the ELL’s performance is scored in each domain on a scale of 1 to 5. The composite score, also on a scale of 1 to 5, is computed from: 1) an English comprehension score based on the reading and listening domain scores, and 2) an English production score based on the writing and speaking scores. Therefore, a composite score of 4—the level currently considered “English proficient”—does not mean that the ELL received 4s in all language domains; he may have gotten 3 or less in one or more of the four domains. ELLs are thus transitioned out of the ESL program without well-balanced language development.

Erina, a long-term sojourner in the 11th grade, recalls a mass exodus of ELLs during the first year of the new exit criteria: “So everybody suddenly started exiting ESL with only
4s and 3s in domain scores. Many of them are at a loss in regular English class”. Being able to remain ESL until the highest level of class under the former ESL classification system with its stricter exit criteria, previous years’ ELLs had developed English skills in all four domains sufficient to keep up with regular English courses by the time they exited the ESL program. Miyuki, currently a college junior in Japan who graduated from Riverwalk Central in 2010, stayed in the ESL program until graduation (she was in the transitional class in her senior year), though she was a top student among late-arrival Japanese sojourners and awarded honor roll status at commencement. She said it was not easy to exit ESL:

Mariko: Was there anyone who tried to stay in the ESL program as long as possible?
Miyuki: Tried to stay in the ESL long? Um, rather, there were students who couldn’t exit ESL even though they wanted to. Yeah, most of them were like that.

Contrast her remark with the discourse currently circulating among Japanese sojourners that the MELAT is “easy” and “useless”. Japanese returnees like Miyuki, who spent high school years in Riverwalk before the ESL exit criteria was relaxed, did not have to deliberately flunk the MELAT to maintain ESL status for MGT accommodations, while Japanese sojourners under the current system view ESL status as something to protect because it is so easy to lose.

Policy decisions impacting ELLs’ educational experiences and future paths should not be based on political expediency or administrative misconceptions, but on solid research. The way the MDE changed ESL exit criteria contradicts research findings on the length of time needed to acquire academic language proficiency in a second language; the MDE is not even consistent with the research findings they cite on their own website
in a one-page file titled “What research tells us about the education of Limited English Proficient (LEP) students?”:

According to a longitudinal study conducted by Wayne Thomas and Virginia Collier (School Effectiveness for Language Minority Students, 1997)…it takes typical “advantaged” immigrants with 2 to 5 years of on-grade-level home country schooling in their native language from 5 to 7 years to reach the 50th NCE [Normal Curve Equivalent] in English when schooled in all English programs in the U.S. (Midwestern Department of Education, 2012c, p. 1)

NCE reports the performance of a student relative to others in test results, and the 50th NCE is equivalent to the 50th percentile rank. Therefore, according to the study, it can take Japanese sojourners from 5 to 7 years to perform average in English (this is further substantiated by Cummins (1981, 2000)). In spite of this, the MDE made a political decision to accelerate the process of mainstreaming ELLs before they reach the level of English proficiency required to successfully cope with the academic and linguistic demands placed upon them by regular classes and high-stakes tests.

**MGT is not a level playing field.** The MGT is not particularly difficult for the majority of native English-speaking students and long-term Japanese sojourners:

“American students are given two and a half hours [for one subject test of the MGT] but they get it done faster. They all say ‘It’s so easy.’” (Runa, sophomore); “I didn’t study for the MGT at all but I passed it. It was nothing compared to the SAT” (Takuya, senior, sojourning in the US since the 1st grade). However, the MGT poses a tremendous challenge for late-entrant Japanese sojourners. Every year some Japanese sojourners in Riverwalk fail to pass one or more of the five subjects of the MGT before commencement and end up returning to Japan without a high school diploma:
I know many mothers whose children flunked the MGT and couldn’t graduate…
There have been some every year for the past eight years during my stay here, I think. (Ms. Tanaka, mother of two long-term sojourners)

The MGT is extremely huge, such a formidable barrier. If you can’t pass it, you can’t graduate. I’ve had some students who failed it…It’s unfair, because they will return to Japan and they don’t go to college in the US. (Ms. Sasaki, bilingual aid at Riverwalk Central)

Nanako, a senior Japanese sojourner, met all high school graduation requirements except the science portion of the MGT. She and her mother were devastated to get the last MGT result a week before commencement, realizing that Nanako would not be able to graduate with her classmates or return to Japan for college, and that, in the tightly-knit Japanese sojourner’s community in Riverwalk, everybody would know Nanako’s failure if she did not show up to commencement. Nanako’s mother submitted a plea for permission to let Nanako attend the commencement without a diploma and reported in person at the vice principal’s office to discuss the matter, but her request was denied:

The result of the MGT was reported to us in May, shortly before commencement. Just one week before or so. And you know what, the senior students, all of them, had already got caps and gowns by then. But with all the preparations for commencement, Nanako was told that she wouldn’t be able to graduate with her classmates. That’s horribly brutal. How dare they do that, that cruel thing, to my daughter! Well, if she was the kind of child who’d cause trouble for the school, then it would of course be an issue. But I thought, come on, they might at least let her sit in the commencement. (Nanako’s mother)

For Japanese sojourners, the commencement is not only the culmination of high school life, but also the culmination of their sojourn in the US. In fact, it is up to local school districts to decide whether students who have not passed the MGT may attend commencement (Midwestern Department of Education, 2011). Considering the fact that the Riverwalk school district has a significant Japanese population, considerations should
be given for students like Nanako. Fortunately, Nanako retook and passed the MGT in
the following August, but the fact that she was not allowed to attend commencement and
lost face in the Japanese community and had to finish her sojourn in a “disgraceful” way
will not be easily forgotten, and she missed application deadlines for some Japanese
universities.

**Language barrier.** For Japanese sojourners, the major difficulty in passing the MGT
in a timely manner lies in its linguistic complexity. To minimize the linguistic
disadvantage, the MDE allows ELLs to use a dictionary and extra test-taking time, and
provides bilingual translation for certain students as above. Yet even these
accommodations do not fully level the playing field, or make the scores of ELLs and non-
ELLs comparable.

Having studied English in Japanese junior high school, late-entrant Japanese high
school sojourners tend to get a 4 in the “easy” reading section of the MELAT and lose
eligibility for the translation accommodation long before their third year in the US. Few
Japanese sojourners are able to use the translator accommodation on the MGT. This
makes a big difference to their performance, as native-language support greatly enhances
the accessibility of MGT content:

> The best thing about a translator is that students don’t misunderstand the questions. My daughters told me it took lots of time to read and comprehend the questions. A question is made up of some sentences, each five lines long or something. So first of all, it takes them so much time to read the question. If they misinterpret the meaning of the first question, then they will misread subsequent questions too. It’s like a vicious circle, you know. But a translator will read the questions accurately and translate them into Japanese. (Ms. Nakata, mother of two sojourners)
It is thus an advantage to be eligible for the translation accommodation; it ensures no questions are misunderstood. Without the help of a translator, Japanese sojourners do not always fully comprehend what is written on the test even with a dictionary:

There was a huge difference between taking the MGT with and without the translator. I got a 4 in the MELAT reading section, so I was like, “Darn!”…I was too optimistic; because it was only my first year here, I thought I would be eligible for translation anyway. But I was told that I wouldn’t be, which made me anxious. [I took the MGT for the second time and] this time I was confused about some questions, not sure what they meant. And I encountered lots of words which didn’t appear in my dictionary. So I may have screwed up. (Takanori, junior)

Considering the fact that a 4 is only a sixth-grade reading level, one could easily see that having to pass five academic content tests designed for 10th graders is an enormous challenge for these Japanese sojourners. It is unethical to make ELLs take the high-stakes exit exam written in far more advanced, complex English than their own levels of English proficiency, without allowing them full access to the test content through a bilingual translator. Eligibility criteria for the translation accommodation should be reexamined; mere extra time and the dictionary use is not enough to make the test fair to all students.

**Curriculum discontinuities.** Another factor that considerably affects the Japanese sojourner’s MGT performance is discontinuity between US and Japanese curricula. Aside from the reading and writing portions of the MGT, which are universally difficult for sojourners, the next most challenging subject will depend on the time of entry into the US school system. Age of entry determines: whether the sojourner has learned the core foundations of a particular subject in her native language; whether she can comprehend
classroom contents in English; and whether she even has a chance to take all the MGT-relevant courses before taking the test.

The case of Nanako, the senior sojourner we met earlier in this section, represents how curriculum discontinuity in transnational schooling, coupled with the linguistic barrier, puts transnational ELLs at a disadvantage. Nanako, who kept failing the MGT’s science section and could not graduate with her classmates, came to the US in her 8th grade. Since formal English language education starts in the 7th grade in Japan, her English was only beginner level when she enrolled in US middle school. Nanako’s mother recalls the first few years of Nanako’s sojourn in the US:

My daughter was in middle school for only a year and then entered high school. So in the beginning of high school, her English wasn’t that good yet. Generally, it takes two to three years for Japanese students to be able to follow what the teacher says to some degree and attend class without being overly tense. My daughter said, “For the first two to three years, I was always tense in class, wondering what I should do if I was called on by the teacher to answer a question, what I should do with today’s lesson, I don’t understand what the teacher says.” It was only in her third year that she finally felt she was following the teacher in class. So, because she entered high school in her second year here, she still didn’t understand class contents at all.

What is immediately apparent from this excerpt is that sojourners who came to the US with little English tend to miss a large part of the first two years of content. The MGT covers the academic content taught up to 10th grade in US public education. Some subjects, particularly science and math, build heavily upon material from earlier levels: a solid grounding in middle-school level material is prerequisite for understanding high-school level material. Nanako’s mother pointed out that Nanako did not have the chance to learn the foundations of science in her native language either:
My daughter was especially poor at science. It’s like the accumulation of scientific knowledge or something that she missed. She didn’t follow what the teacher said, so she didn’t understand basic scientific principles taught in class. Without the foundation, there’s no way she could understand more advanced levels of science in high school. Japanese students who came to the U.S. as high school students tend to pass the science MGT pretty easily, so I thought it wouldn’t be that difficult. I was wrong. The thing is, those who were taught science in Japanese in junior high had a more or less solid foundation on which they could understand science taught in English here. So they were able to solve questions on the MGT. But Nanako didn’t have the chance to learn those basic scientific principles in Japan.

On the other hand, sojourners who came to the US in 10th grade or later are likely to experience another kind of curriculum discontinuity. In US high school, the required social studies courses include 9th grade Modern World History and 10th grade US History. Because neither subject is taught in Japanese junior high school, sojourners who come to the US in their 10th grade or later must first take Modern World History (prerequisite to US History) and completely miss out on US History when they first take the MGT: “In my 10th grade, I took Modern World History with 9th graders, but I didn’t know anything about U.S. History. So I didn’t know the answers to the questions about it and I struggled really hard” (Miyuki, returnee). Depending on individual English proficiency levels, these sojourners also tend to experience difficulty in keeping up with classes and may miss the content of Modern World History as well: “That was my first year in the US… the content covered in the class totally slipped through my head” (Miyuki, returnee).

All Japanese sojourners are required to take the MGT in the 10th grade and later, regardless of whether they have recently arrived in the US or whether they have learned the academic content covered in the test. The ELL accommodations prescribed by the
MDE do not adequately address these transnational ELLs’ educational needs, because the “sink-or-swim” approach of high-stakes testing treats all ELLs as students who have received previous formal education only in the US. Transnational ELLs with different former schooling experiences are invisible; they are unfairly held accountable for their performance, exerting lingering consequences on their future educational and career trajectories.

**Concluding Thoughts**

This paper has examined the academic and linguistic difficulties that high-stakes testing policies impose on transnational Japanese high school students and how these students negotiate and work their ways through these difficulties. The students strategically flunk state-mandated English proficiency tests in order to maintain ESL status and secure ESL accommodations for high school exit exams: accommodations without which those already challenging exit exams would be even more so. Students and their ESL teachers co-construct and promote this defensive strategy. But even given ESL accommodations, the MGT may still not be fair for these transnational ELLs, who may have missed important MGT content due to their relatively recent entrance into the US educational system.

This study highlights the importance of understanding that late-arrival transnational ELLs have different curricular histories, which may create additional academic disadvantages that could affect the educational experiences and futures of these students already facing linguistic disadvantages. Recently-arrived secondary ELLs—the fastest-growing segment of the ELL population in the US (Gándara & Baca, 2008)—are
particularly at risk of poor academic performance and dropping out. However, the NCLB and state educational policies lump all types of ELLs into one subgroup, treating them all as students who have lived in the US all their lives. As Wright and Li (2008) point out, language and education policies should consider ELLs’ diverse learning experiences, home-country education and opportunities to learn the same content their American peers learn before taking high-stakes tests. I would further call for more careful consideration of ELLs’ different entry-times into the US (with resulting curricular discontinuities) and of their diverse educational, linguistic, and cultural needs. High-stakes state tests like the MGT, as well as their ESL accommodations, need to be assessed and critiqued not only in their language proficiency presuppositions, but also in their assumptions about the period of time students have spent in the state system.

As this study demonstrates, state English proficiency tests, as well as high school exit exams, involve high-stakes decisions which have a big impact on ELLs’ futures. They determine linguistic support in regular classrooms and in the exit exams and thus affect whether students can graduate or go to college. From students’ perspectives, these state tests are not simply evaluations of the past but also access points to the future, sometimes pointing in mutually exclusive directions—a test that declares one proficient in English is less useful than a test that gives one a diploma. We might assume that ELLs who have tested out of the ESL program have a lower language barrier and a better chance of passing the exit exams. However, as Riverwalk shows, when ESL classification depends solely on cutoff scores from a single test, and when cutoffs fail to correlate with English proficiency, “English-proficient” status does not help students pass the exit exams. On the contrary, losing special accommodations can put the students at a
disadvantage and create a detrimental learning environment. A fundamental issue in Riverwalk’s case is a discrepancy between the way “English-proficient” students are defined in policy statements and the way such proficiency is actually measured in practice. The MDE defines English-proficient students in its assessment rule book as those with English ability in all four language domains at a level in which they can “achieve successfully in classrooms where the language of instruction is in English” and “meaningfully take academic assessments in English with no accommodations” (Midwestern Department of Education, 2012b, p. 33). If the definition holds, it would be certainly rational to treat such students exactly like native English-speaking students. On the other hand, based on ESL teachers’ reports, in practice, “English-proficient” status only requires sixth-grade English reading skills. It is not reasonable to take a tenth grader with only sixth-grade reading skills, label him “English-proficient”, and withhold all accommodations on that basis. (Remember that even with those accommodations, the exit exams are not a level playing field.)

Another important point to note is the ESL teacher’s mediator role in ELLs’ negotiation of high-stakes testing policy. The defensive strategy of deliberately flunking the MELAT and maintaining ESL status to avoid losing ESL accommodations was initiated by ESL teachers, who were aware of the MELAT’s validity problem and the adverse consequences of ELLs taking the MGT without accommodations. Through classroom interactions and parent-teacher conferences, Japanese sojourners and their parents were socialized to implement and approve of the strategy. While the discourse of monolingual language policy promoted by high-stakes testing strongly shapes the sojourners’ work around desired future educational paths, ESL teachers mediate between
this ideological discourse and the everyday reality these sojourners experience—they are forced to take the exit exams in the language they do not fully comprehend and before reaching grade-level reading proficiency.

As for future research on ELL assessment and language education policy, I call for more inquiry, through qualitative research methods, into the experiences and insights of actual test-takers and their teachers. Traditionally, testing and assessment research has relied on statistical analyses of test scores and on extrapolation, but the voices of test-takers are often absent (Shohamy, 2001). As the present study demonstrates, students’ own accounts of test-taking, and their perception/evaluation of the tests, shed light on problems in the high-stakes testing and accountability system. ESL teachers often feel powerless in front of administrators—“I don’t think they [the MDE] will listen to us” (Ms. Nichols, ESL teacher in Riverwalk). These ESL teachers, who know their students so well, should have a voice in ELL assessment policy. In particular, their professional opinions should be one of many factors in the ESL classification system. ELLs and their teachers are often treated as powerless recipients of top-down policies. But in fact, they actively resist policy decisions—for example, implementing the local policy of intentionally “messing up” on the English assessment test. As researchers, it is our responsibility to make their voices heard and to provide empirical evidence to improve language education policy, so that ELLs are given fair, equitable treatment.

Notes

1. The MAC II Test of English Language Proficiency (MAC) is a commercially-developed English proficiency test that ESL teachers in Riverwalk Central
annually give ELLs, using it to place students into appropriate classes. ESL teachers explained why the MELAT scores were not used for placement purpose: “it actually gives us zero information about the student. We get a score back, one to five. That actually tells us nothing…zero information, no reading level, no nothing” (Ms. White); “I think it’s very invalid. Poorly written test. Speaking part is, it’s like, either you can pass it, or you can’t pass it. It doesn’t tell me any range in between. It doesn’t give me very much information” (Ms. Bailey). On the other hand, MAC scores provide a comparative reading level of native English speakers and a detailed breakdown of the strengths and weaknesses of each student’s English ability in the four domains.

2. SAT (Scholastic Assessment Test) is a college admission exam widely used in the US.
Chapter 4: “I Don’t Have Any American Friends: English Language Learners’ Access to L2 Peer Interactions and Structured Boundaries in US High School

Abstract

While second language (L2) research has addressed the importance of sufficient, meaningful target language interaction in successful L2 development, little has been said of the impact school organizational structure has on L2 learners’ access to such interactional opportunities. This paper examines transnational English language learners’ (ELLs’) everyday friendship patterns and the way the structure of US public high school education shapes their L2 peer interaction, focusing on late-entrant Japanese high school sojourner students. Findings show that their peer interactions and social lives differ markedly from those of long-term Japanese sojourners who came to the US as elementary students, and that American high schools’ structural constraints draw social boundaries, and limit interaction, between ELLs and American students. Intertwined with the school organizational structure are ideological discourse on limited English proficiency, marginalizing ELLs and imposing different academic expectations on sojourners who stay in versus those who test out of the ESL program.
Introduction

While the second language acquisition (SLA) and second language (L2) learning literature has addressed the importance of sufficient, meaningful target language interaction in successful L2 development (e.g., Gass & Varonis, 1994; Lantolf, 2000; Lantolf & Thorne, 2007; Long, 1996), little has been said of the impact that school organizational structure has on L2 learners’ access to such interactional opportunities. In this paper, I examine transnational English language learners’ (ELLs) everyday friendship patterns and the way the structure of US public high school education shapes their L2 peer interaction outside the classroom. I focus on late-entrant Japanese high school sojourner students, who came to the US as middle- or high-school students upon their fathers’ overseas job transfer within multinational corporations. Recently-arrived secondary ELLs are the fastest-growing segment of the ELL population in the US (Gándara & Baca, 2008), and ELLs who entered US schools as 9th graders or later are particularly at risk of poor academic performance and dropping out, partly because of limited time for acquiring English and passing state-required exams (Lazarín, 2006). Therefore, optimizing educational outcomes for late-entrant high school ELLs is a matter of urgency. Despite their academic achievement being predicated on the attainment of high English proficiency, the late-entrant’s access to L2 interactional opportunities outside the classroom are relatively underexplored. The present study found that late-entrant Japanese sojourners’ peer interaction patterns and social lives exhibit a striking contrast to those of long-term Japanese sojourners who came to the US as elementary students, and that the way American high school education is organized draws social
boundaries, and limits interaction, between ELLs and American students. Intertwined with the school organizational structure are ideological discourse on limited English proficiency, marginalizing ELLs and imposing different academic expectations and pressures on sojourners who stay in versus those who test out of the ESL program.

In the remaining paper, I discuss the relevant areas of research that inform the present study, followed by methodology and data sources. After presenting findings, I conclude by discussing the implications of the findings.

**Adolescent Peer Groups and Interaction in the School Context**

Since the 1960s, a significant number of studies have been conducted on adolescent peer groups and relationships. Adolescents select friends who are similar to themselves in various respects, such as gender, race, school performance, future aspirations, socioeconomic status, and popularity (Cohen, 1983; Hallinan & Williams, 1989).

Adolescents’ social worlds are multi-layered and complicated. There are three levels of adolescent peer relations: dyads, cliques, and crowds (Brown, 2004). The dyadic level includes individual friendships and romantic relationships. Cliques entail small exclusive groups of peers who regularly interact with each other. Adolescent crowds—stereotypical labels for larger peer groups socially connected and defined by a shared image, reputation, behavior, and personality—are particularly salient features of US high school experience (Brown, Mory, & Kinney, 1994). Crowds are within-school status categories that adolescents impose each other and use to understand their social world (ibid). Members of a crowd may or may not directly know each other. Commonly observed high-status crowds include jocks, cheerleaders, and preppies, while low-status
Adolescent peer relations are generally unstable (Brown, 2004), although friendship stability varies across crowds. For example, Eckert (1988) found that middle-class, high-status students ("Jocks") switched friends as their activities and interests changed, whereas working-class, low-status students ("Burnouts") valued solidarity among peers and had their activities determined by their long-lasting friendships.

These status categories and school-sponsored extracurricular activities are generally considered congruent: both students and teachers know which sports teams rank high in terms of popularity and prestige; the members of these highly ranked sports teams tend to occupy the dominant crowds (Merten, 1996). Merten (1996) shows that, when a low-status crowd member joins a high-status extracurricular activity (cheerleading), culturally established assumptions are violated and cheerleaders’ status is threatened, because the extracurricular activity “provides…the justification for the prestige and privilege that accrue to participants” (p.53). Knowledge of crowd reputation serves to structure adolescent friendships: adolescents tend to make friends more with, and are friendlier to, members of their own crowds than those of others (Urberg, Değirmencioğlu, Tolson, & Halliday-Scher, 2000).

Adolescent peer relations are partly shaped by school organizational structure. According to Brown (2004), the emergence of crowds in adolescence is encouraged by the shift from the same group of peers in self-contained elementary classrooms to the continuously changing peers from classroom to classroom in larger secondary schools. Hallinan (1994) points out that tracking—the school practice of grouping students by academic achievement and ability, for the purpose of increasing the effectiveness of
teaching and learning—generates an unintended social hierarchy based on track level. Lower-track students tend to be assigned lower status, be less respected by their peers, and have lower self-esteem and motivation (Hallinan, 1994; Oakes, 1985). A close relationship between tracking and friendship construction exists: tracking limits students’ interaction across different tracks, facilitates it within the same track, and over time increases the probability that students form friendships within the same track (Ball, 1981; Hallinan & Williams, 1989). In a similar vein, Frank and his colleagues (2008) argue that a high school student’s “local position”—defined as the “group of adolescents who, by virtue of their course-taking, share a social and academic space in school” (p.1648)—partly determine their social relationships. The student’s local position depends on a set of “focal courses”, by which are meant “experiences that most differentiate members of one local position from others in the school” (Frank et al., 2008, p.1656). Students with equal local positions share the same focal courses (e.g., AP courses) as their commonality affording a foundation on which to potentially build friendships. Thus, students’ course-taking patterns construct their network of peers with similar academic/career interests, and the norms and values within local positions influence their track choice.

School organizational factors, such as tracking and extracurricular activities, also affect interracial contact opportunities (Epstein, 1985; Hallinan & Williams, 1989; Moody, 2001). Even in schools with heterogeneous student populations, adolescent friendships are often segregated along racial lines (Epstein, 1985; Moody, 2001). Research shows that tracking not only increases racial resegregation in desegregated schools but also generates a hierarchy between higher-track students (often white) and lower, non-college tracks, to which minority students are likely to be assigned (e.g.,
Epstein, 1985; Oakes, 1985; Schofield, 1991). Extracurricular activities, on the other hand, enhance interracial contact in informal contexts. Moody (2001) found that lower levels of racial segregation were observed in friendships in schools that had successfully integrated students of different races in extracurricular activities. Extracurricular activities provide an important social space where, in pursuit of common goals, students can make friends with peers who are academically, culturally, socio-economically, and racially different, who were formerly outside each other’s peer networks (Dworkin, Larson & Hansen, 2003; National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, 2000).

That said, students’ preference for same-race friends was also observed in various situations, such as lunchtime (Schofield, 1979) and extracurriculars (Collins, 1979).

While much has been written about adolescent peer relationships, cross-race interactions and friendships, surprisingly little attention has been paid to the everyday friendship patterns of minority students. Significantly, the rapidly increasing national ELL population seems to have slipped through from the adolescent literature. To fill the gap in the literature, the present study examines a group of high school ELLs’ everyday peer interactions and the influence of school organizational structure on the social aspects of their high school lives.

**The Role of Interaction in L2 Learning and Access to Interactional Opportunities**

The facilitative role conversational interaction plays in L2 development has long been acknowledged from different perspectives within SLA scholarship. One is the cognitive-interactionist perspective, where interaction is a means for language learners to meet some conditions necessary for SLA (e.g., input, feedback, and output) and incorporate L2
grammar into their mental system (e.g., Gass & Varonis, 1994). Along this line of research, the Interaction Hypothesis (Long, 1996) postulates that negotiation of meaning in interaction between a language learner and a more competent speaker of the target language advances SLA “because it connects input, internal learner capacities, particularly selective attention, and output in productive ways” (Long, 1996, pp. 452).

Another perspective that highlights the role of interaction in L2 learning is a sociocultural perspective, which sees language as a social practice and the medium of learning, and sees language learning as co-constructed by learners and their interactants. The central tenet of this perspective is sociocultural theory (Lantolf, 2000; Lantolf & Pavlenko, 1995; Vygotsky, 1986), which posits that “while human neurobiology is a necessary condition for higher order thinking, the most important forms of human cognitive activity develop through interaction within these social and material environments” (Lantolf & Thorne, 2007, p.197). Mental activity, including L2 learning, is mediated by cultural artifacts, such as language; higher-order thinking required for language learning is enhanced through participation in culturally-organized practices, hence L2 development through social interaction.

While both approaches explain how oral interaction facilitates L2 development, they do not seem to fully address the issue of access: language learning through meaningful L2 interaction does not occur unless the learner has access to the opportunity for such interaction. Although the issue of L2 learners’ access to interactional opportunities has received relatively little empirical attention, some of the poststructuralist research focusing on L2 learners’ identities discusses subtle forms of power relations exerted on ELLs’ access to opportunities to interact with native English speakers (Miller, 2000,
In her study on immigrant women in Canada, Norton (2000; Norton Peirce, 1995) argues that L2 learners’ social identities “must be understood with reference to larger, and frequently inequitable social structures which are reproduced in day-to-day social interaction” (Norton Peirce, 1995, p.13). Her notion of investment, unlike the notion of motivation in cognitive SLA research, captures the language learner’s complex desires and identities in relation to the target language as well as to the changing social world: learners invest in L2, anticipating the symbolic and material resources provided by language acquisition. A highly motivated learner may not be able to invest much in L2 practices because of unequal power in the historical relationships between L2 learners and native speakers (Norton, 2000; Norton Peirce, 1995). Norton Peirce (1995) conceptualizes language as an essential factor in access to community and to interactional opportunities: “it is through language that a person gains access to—or is denied access to—powerful social networks that give learners the opportunity to speak” (p.13). Introducing the notion of the right to speak as an important element of communicative competence, she demonstrates that L2 learners are often positioned without power to exercise this right but can challenge marginalizing social practices around them through developing an awareness of the right.

Miller’s (2003) notion of audibility is also informative in understanding the relationship between language, identity, and social interactions. Attending to the fact that claiming the right to speak entails the listener’s collaboration, Miller argues that the way ELLs are heard by native English-speaking peers and teachers is just as critical, in terms of their achievement of self-representation in English and access to the mainstream communities, as the way they speak. She argues that discrimination does not occur
based solely on visible difference: *audible* difference (e.g., her Asian immigrant ELLs’ accents and faint voices made them *inaudible* in English) can also hinder participation in the mainstream academic and social contexts. Audible difference, and the practice of excluding “others”, are perpetuated by the vicious cycle of inaudibility, of no access to native English speakers, and of unsuccessful English learning.

While high school ELLs’ lack of interaction with native English-speaking peers has been observed (Daoud, 2003; Harklau, 1994; Kanno, 2003; Miller, 2000, 2003), little attention has been paid to the effect of school organizational structures on ELLs’ access to L2 interactional opportunities outside the classroom. The present study expands our understanding of the reason why high school ELLs have so much difficulty making friends with their native English-speaking peers.

**Methodology and Data Sources**

This study uses *institutional ethnography* (IE) (Smith, 1987, 2005), a qualitative method of sociological inquiry, to investigate the everyday reality of Japanese high school sojourners from their own standpoint and explicate how their experiences are coordinated by *ruling relations*—the relations of “socially-organized exercise of power that shape people’s actions and their lives” (Campbell & Gregor, 2004, p.32). IE treats people as “knowers” or “informants” who have expertise on their everyday practices; their accounts are used as an entry point for examining the larger translocal web of socially-organized connections, in which people’s locally experienced everyday world is embedded.

I collected data through the most commonly used method in IE: interviewing. I conducted fieldwork between June 2011 and May 2013 in a Japanese business
sojourners’ community in Riverwalk, a US upper Midwestern city. These middle-class business sojourners are assigned to work overseas based on multinational corporations’ job rotation systems. They stay in Riverwalk with their families for four to five years on average, ranging from two to ten years. The focus of the present study is adolescent sojourner children, who entered US public schools as ELLs and will eventually return to Japan upon the termination of their fathers’ job appointments or their graduation from high school, whichever comes first. Most participants attend Riverwalk Central High School, where Japanese students are the biggest ethnic group of ELLs. A small number attend Jefferson High or Southridge High, also in Riverwalk, or Douglas High School, located in a neighboring school district.

This paper is based on analyses of the following data sources: 1) in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 53 participants, individually conducted for 1.5 to 5 hours each (30 Japanese high school sojourners, 13 parents, 4 teachers at Riverwalk Central, 4 Japanese returnee students who completed their sojourn and returned to Japan for college, and 2 Japanese Riverwalk Central graduates who entered US college); and 2) documents available on the website of Riverwalk City Schools. While the interviews with American high school teachers were conducted in English, other participants were allowed to choose between Japanese and English. All chose Japanese but one long-term sojourner who code-switched between the two languages. The interview excerpts used in this paper were translated into English by the researcher. For case-oriented analysis, the interviews were audio-recorded, fully transcribed, indexed, and annotated. Participants, schools, and research site have been given pseudonyms.
Findings

The analysis demonstrates that Japanese high school sojourners’ patterns of peer interaction and social lives vary according to age of entry into the US and whether or not they have tested out of the ESL program. Late-entrant Japanese sojourners, who entered the US as middle- or high-school students, tend to stay in their own ethno-linguistic group and do not mingle with American peers; consequently, they return to Japan with less oral English skills than they once hoped for. Long-term Japanese sojourners, in the US since elementary school, avoid the company of late-entrant sojourners and interact primarily with American students within school, though they socialize with both groups outside of school. Together with ideological discourse on limited English proficiency, the organization of American high school education—with its individualized schedules, curricular tracking, and structured extracurriculars—draws social boundaries between ELLs and English-proficient students and significantly limits ELLs’ chances to interact with native English-speaking peers. My intention here is not to essentialize the difference between late-entrant and long-term sojourners, but to use the observed difference as a window into the institutional relations of power within which Japanese sojourners are living.

Different friendship circles and social lives. In the morning, Riverwalk Central’s cafeteria is a lively place where friends gather and wait for first period, talking, eating, or finishing homework. Late-entrant Japanese sojourners of varying ages, boys and girls separately, sit at their usual spots and enjoy 25 minutes of Japanese chitchat. In Japan, where same-age grouping and seniority-based status relationships are the norm in
secondary schools, it is rare for students of different ages to spend time together as friends. However, a common ethno-linguistic background, rather than age, seems to bring late-entrant sojourners together here: “All us Japanese boys get together” (Kouhei, junior). Another thing they share is their ESL status: most late-entrant sojourners stay in the ESL program until graduation. While language unites these students, it divides them as well. Long-term Japanese sojourners, who exited the ESL program before enrolling in high school (or in the first year of high school), spend morning time in the cafeteria with American friends. The same circles persist at lunchtime:

Mariko: How do you spend lunchtime?
Nanako (senior): Again, I only sit with Japanese students. It’s like all Japanese students getting together. What’s it all about? Those who don’t even know or haven’t talked to each other, only because they are Japanese, gather and form a lunchtime group, you know. The only ones allowed to sit and eat with Americans are the long-term students having lots of American friends.

Lunchtime seating arrangements reflect student friendship patterns and the hierarchical social system of cliques (Eder, 1985). Here, lunch with Americans is spoken of like a status symbol. It is actually a sign of social integration and English proficiency, a privilege that Japanese sojourners’ mothers desire their children to attain. Ms. Takahashi, a sojourner’s mother, describes it as “such a hurdle” for late-entrant sojourners: her son has been in the US educational system as long as four and a half years (starting in 6th grade) and has made friends with some Americans, but “he can’t have the sort of relationship where he can sit with them at lunch every day”.

Late-entrant sojourners’ friendships with Americans, if any, tend to be limited to the classroom. Satoko, a female junior who has been in the US for five years, does not have a chance to hang out with her American peers outside of school:
Mariko: Do you have American friends?
Satoko: Yes. What was her name...I knew it...ah, Carolyn. Me and Carolyn take orchestra and chemistry together. Quiet Americans like her are friendlier to us. She likes manga (Japanese comics) and stuff, so we hit it off well. She tries hard to listen to what I’m trying to say. …Some mean Americans are like “Huh?” when I say something, but Carolyn tries to understand me. She’s such a nice girl.

Mariko: Do you hang out with her outside the school?
Satoko: No, only at school.

The Americans interested in late-entrant Japanese sojourners are “almost always otaku (nerds) who are so much into anime (Japanese animation), manga…kind of like losers and snubbed by cool Americans” (Haruki, senior). Unlike those in popular crowds who receive high publicity and recognition, nerds are mostly invisible, regarded as socially incompetent, subjects of derision and rejection (Kinney, 1993). This description of nerds corresponds to a stigmatized view of otaku in Japanese school culture. Late-entrant Japanese sojourners come to understand the hierarchical relationships between popular and unpopular crowds in a few years of sojourn and avoid nerds: “We stay away from those American otaku” (Haruki, senior). Therefore, it is only natural that, although Satoko is on speaking terms with Carolyn, they neither have lunch together nor hang out outside the school (indeed, Satoko barely managed to remember Carolyn’s name). Most late-entrant sojourners do not even have a single American friend. Fumika, a female sophomore who has been in the US for four years, lamented having no opportunities to interact with Americans at school:

I don’t have any American friends. Sometimes I don’t have a chance to speak English all day. What am I supposed to do? I joined the cross-country team, hoping I could make friends with Americans, but I ended up running with my Japanese friends.
On the other hand, long-term sojourners’ friendships with Americans go beyond the school context. Erina, a female junior who came to the US at nine years old, belongs to the marching band at Riverwalk Central and spends plenty of time with her American band members:

On Friday night, like football days, like we have football until 11 o’clock. We hang after 11. We go to Stake ‘n Shake (a restaurant chain), and we stay there until 1, and like, Stake ‘n Shake people all think we are bandies.¹

Long-term sojourners “go to the movies, run in the gym, watch movies at a friend’s house, go shopping at the mall, have sleepovers with their American friends” (Shiho, junior). Sleepovers are commonly held within the Japanese sojourner community, but late-entrant sojourners almost never sleep over with Americans.

**Boundaries between late-entrant and long-term sojourners.** Although long-term sojourners do not keep company with late-entrant sojourners at school, the two groups get along well with each other outside the school. Regardless of the length of stay in the US, most Japanese sojourner students attend Hoshūkō, a Japanese Saturday school offering part of the curriculum set by the Japanese Ministry of Education, to keep up with their language and academic proficiencies in Japanese. Both groups of sojourners frequently hang out after Hoshūkō or on Sunday. However, within the local American high school context, long-term sojourners avoid contact with late-entrant sojourners and resist being identified with them by their American peers. Long-term sojourners expressed a strong dislike for late-entrant sojourners gathering in crowds and speaking Japanese loudly in the hallway:

At school, you see Japanese students walking together in crowds…They look unapproachable, allowing nobody to come talk to them. (Naoki, senior)
They are quiet as individuals. But when they stick together, they make too much noise, clattering and chattering (in Japanese). So annoying. ...I see them coming and I’m like, Uh-oh…Americans are also like, “Ah, that group again.” (Shiho, junior)

While late-entrant sojourners always talk to each other in Japanese, long-term sojourners—particularly girls—purposefully use only English at school and occasionally in out-of-school contexts as well, even when they are talking to each other or other Japanese students are around them. The practice of exclusive English use, which is one form of long-term sojourners’ identities as fluent English speakers with native-like American accents, readily distinguishes them from Japanese ELLs and positions them on the side of American students. Aya, a female long-term sojourner in her sophomore year at Douglas High, exclusively uses English at school because she “couldn’t stand it” when her American friend jokingly said, “Oooh Aya, you’re so Asian!” referring to her helping some ELLs in Japanese. Aya chose to sever her relationship with Japanese sojourners in Douglas, preferring her American friends at school; but outside of school, she hangs out almost exclusively with two late-entrant sojourners attending Riverwalk Central, whom she met in Hoshūkō. Her strategic investment (Norton Peirce, 1995) in Japanese friendship shows a complicated desire to stay connected with the Japanese community while simultaneously being socially integrated in the US: “I just want to be on good terms with Americans at school. It’s more fun to be with Japanese friends…I want to go to college in Japan, because I like Japan” (Aya). The reason for female long-term sojourners’ self-consciousness, or even fear, of being lumped together with late-entrant sojourners by Americans was further explained by Naoki, a male long-term sojourner at Riverwalk Central: “Americans don’t seem to like it when they see others speak a
language they don’t understand.” Naoki added, “They look like this,” and made a frowning face.

Late-entrant sojourners feel excluded and frustrated when long-term sojourners use English in front of them:

We were chatting with the girls who were here a long time. They somehow switched to English in the middle and kept going like that. We were like, what the hell? All we could do was nod our heads. (Momoka, junior)

Unable to understand their English-proficient friends, late-entrant sojourners are silenced and deprived of “the right to speak” (Norton Peirce, 1995). They feel that there are unbridgeable boundaries between themselves and long-term sojourners, and, by extension, American students:

I feel as if there was a wall between me and them, although they’re also Japanese. Like, when I hear them speak English fluently. If I could speak English like them, the distance between me and Americans would get closer. (Haruki, senior)

Linguistic and social boundaries make it nearly impossible for late-entrant sojourners to become acquainted with American students through long-term sojourners.

**Language barrier or choice?** What marks the boundaries between long-term and late-entrant sojourners the most is “audible difference” (Miller, 2003): those who can speak like Americans and those who have difficulty making themselves understood in English because of their strong Japanese accents and faint voice. Lacking confidence in spoken English, late-entrant sojourners stay quiet to the extent that they think of themselves as “air”—invisible, unnoticed, and “blending in to the furniture so that they cannot be called on” (Ms. White, ESL teacher). They speak so quietly that Rosetta Stone, a language-learning computer program used in the ESL classroom, fails to detect
their voice. But together in their safe environment—where they can speak Japanese—
“all those who wanna be air are boisterous and stinking loud…you can definitely see the
teenager come out” (Ms. White).

Unlike long-term sojourners, who naturally acquired English on the playground at a
younger age, late-arrival sojourners struggle with English oral communication. Their
chief concern is “audibility” (Miller, 2003):

First of all, seriously, with my poor pronunciation, I can’t even make myself
understood in one-on-one conversation. How could I make myself understood in a
presentation to the whole class? I really didn’t want to do that. I knew I was
unintelligible. Even if I work hard to speak in class, it’s just waste of time.
(Takanori, junior)

Ms. Nichols, their beginning-level ESL teacher, reported that Japanese ELLs’ oral
English proficiency is “the last thing to come. It’s very hard for them to say sentences
and even present something in front of the class.” Ms. Bailey, who teaches intermediate-
level ESL, observed that Japanese sojourners often “come with great grammar skills” but
“their oral is something that [she] always sees that they struggle with”. Because having
as many English-speaking opportunities as possible is one of the best ways to improve
oral English skills, ESL teachers encourage Japanese sojourners to make friends with
American students: “We are always telling them, ‘Make friends with American friends.
Make friends with American friends. They’ll help your English. Don’t be shy’” (Ms.
Bailey).

ESL teachers keep advising Japanese ELLs to interact with American students,
because they view Japanese ELLs’ behavior pattern as a “choice”: “The majority of them
avoid American kids. They prefer to eat lunch with each other, hang out together, do
everything just with other Japanese kids” (Ms. White). As a non-native ESL teacher originally from Russia, Ms. Nichols says she can relate to the way Japanese ELLs stick together: “I’ve been here for 18 years, and still my close, real friends are Russians. I do socialize with my colleagues…but it’s still not the same close relationships.” Indeed, speaking the same language and sharing cultural assumptions and expectations, Japanese ELLs feel comfortable and safe together. However, the situation is more complicated than Japanese ELLs merely “choos[ing] to be in their own group because it’s more comfortable” (Ms. Nichols).

Although late-entrant Japanese sojourners go out of their way to make friends with Americans, language barriers often stand in their way. Izumi, a female freshman who came to the US a year ago with little English, reflected on how she was only spending time with other Japanese in her first year in the US, and expressed her desire to expand her circle of friends: “Now I am becoming more and more inclined to make friends with Americans. I want to take full advantage of my stay here.” Hoping to mingle with American students, Izumi joined the color guard in the marching band at Riverwalk Central. However, things did not go smoothly as she wished. Ms. Tanaka, a mother of a Japanese sojourner in the marching band, occasionally observes the color guard and marching band practicing together in the field. She saw Izumi and two other newcomer Japanese sojourners isolated, always standing apart all alone:

You need to have a good command of English, or you’ll get left out. In the color guard, there are three recently-arrived Japanese girls and they speak zero English. They can’t join any groups, you know. Whenever I see them, they are isolated. Once they form an exclusive Japanese group, American kids stay away from them. I wonder how much those six months of practice really helped their English.
Japanese sojourners’ parents and ESL teachers all agree that extracurricular activities will help ELLs interact in English. In reality, even if they do join sports or clubs, ELLs tend to feel isolated, forming groups with other Japanese students and never talking to American peers. The ELL’s extracurricular investment (Norton Peirce, 1995) often fails to bear the anticipated fruit (or symbolic resources, ibid): informal social interactions with American students. As Ms. Tanaka points out, English proficiency is a key to making American friends. Among 36 student interviewees (9 long-term and 27 late-entrant sojourners), Yoshikazu, a junior, is the only late-entrant who has achieved social integration. He sits with Americans at lunchtime and hangs out with Americans in and outside of school. What makes him a non-typical late-entrant is his English proficiency level: he was already placed in the second highest ESL class upon his arrival (in his freshman year) and exited ESL within a year. As a junior, he has passed the highest grade of the STEP Eiken test (the most widely used English proficiency test in Japan), which even Erina, a long-term sojourner in her senior year, with native-like English proficiency, could not pass. This suggests that late-entrant sojourners need a high level of English proficiency in order to really be socially integrated.

Reducing late-entrant sojourners’ experience to a mere “choice” does not fully explain why so few of them interact with or make friends with American students. In what follows, the paper discusses how sojourners’ L2 interactional opportunities are regulated by the organizational structure of high school life.

The organization of US high school life. The analysis shows that late-entrant Japanese sojourners’ opportunities to interact with their American peers are circumscribed by 1) temporally and spatially compartmentalized individualized
schedules; 2) pre-established cliques from earlier grades; 3) curricular tracking; and 4) English proficiency requirements and competitive tryouts for extracurricular activities. Each point is detailed below.

**Temporally and spatially compartmentalized individualized schedules.** High school life in the US is rigidly compartmentalized in time and space: students move from one classroom to another according to their individualized schedules. This partly explains the difficulty late-entrant Japanese sojourners have making friends with Americans during classes. Potential classroom friends part ways when the bell rings. In Riverwalk, the passing period is four minutes, barely enough time to proceed to the next classroom. Students have no time for social interaction with friends. School-directed schedules and curricula are not designed to enrich social aspects of high school life. Lunchtime is only 25 minutes long; students need to catch the bus within 10 minutes of the last class and cannot stay around after school; no cultural or social events or sports days are included in the curriculum. Miyuki, a graduate from Riverwalk Central and currently a college junior in Japan, explained how the US high school system failed to help her make American friends in contrast with the Japanese high school system:

> I wasn’t that close to Americans…In Japan we have homeroom, so I was always surrounded by the same people in the same classroom. But in the US, classmates were different in each class. Even if I got on familiar terms with someone in one class, I didn’t get to see her once the class was over.

In Japanese secondary schools, students stay in homeroom for most of the school day, taking classes and having lunchtime. It is teachers, not students, who move from room to room. The Japanese system helps cultivate close friendship and solidarity between students assigned the same homeroom through spending the entire school year together.
and sharing various school events. In the US high school system, even if late-entrant Japanese sojourners make an acquaintance through group work in a class, it rarely develops beyond the classroom.

**Pre-established cliques from earlier grades.** Observing how late-entrant Japanese high school sojourners struggle to make friends with Americans, long-term Japanese sojourners and their mothers assert that, besides the language barrier, the social barrier also hinders a newcomer ELL from being accepted into American high school students’ circles of friends. Entering high school, Americans already know many classmates from elementary and middle school. Cliques emerge in early middle school and become stable by 8th grade (Eder, 1985). Close friends tend to choose the same high schools, and their cliques continue into and throughout high school. Kentaro, who graduated from Riverwalk Central and currently attends a US college, points out that high school friendship groups may not welcome new students:

> Those who came here as elementary students can easily fit in with Americans. ..But [American] high school kids tend to form cliques and see no point making new friends. They’ve already formed solid groups through sports and so on, so it’s hard, particularly for ELLs, to get in such groups. It’s no easy matter for them even to speak any English at all, much less put themselves out there where Americans are firing off in-jokes.

Ms. Tanaka has been living in Riverwalk for 8 years and seen newcomer Japanese mothers “expecting their children to master English during the sojourn” and “always complaining about their children sticking with other Japanese”. From the experience of raising two sojourners through elementary and secondary school in Riverwalk, Ms. Tanaka argues that “newcomer Japanese mothers should know the reality”: 

114
It’s wrong to come here with a rosy picture that their children will eventually hang out only with Americans… It’s like asking the impossible. Middle- and high-school kids here don’t easily let a newcomer into their cliques. These American kids don’t give a damn about “Others”. Only elementary students would say kind things like, “Is everything OK? Are you lost? Are you Japanese?”

Ms. Takahashi, a mother of a junior who entered the US as middle schooler, shares Ms. Tanaka’s view: “It seems very difficult to fit in with Americans and enjoy the intercultural experience unless you came here as an elementary student” (Ms. Takahashi). This reality may sound harsh to late-entrant sojourners, for whom age of entry is not something they have any control over, depending entirely on the decisions of their parents’ companies. Ms. Tanaka’s husband happened to be transferred overseas when her children were elementary students, and that is exactly why, unlike late-entrants, they were able to culturally and linguistically blend into the local American community and American cliques. Pre-established student cliques make it hard for late-entrant sojourners to interact with Americans.

**Curricular tracking.** In most US high schools, students are tracked within subjects: each subject has different course levels and students are placed in one based on their performance within the subject (Hallinan, 1994). Riverwalk’s high schools offer International Baccalaureate (IB), advanced placement (AP), Honors, and regular courses, for the five core subjects. Students can theoretically self-select courses, but are often counseled into the “right” track based on perceived ability, achievement levels, and previous courses. Curricular tracking is meant to meet students’ academic needs: high-performing students are supposed to take higher-track courses. However, the interview data suggest that most Japanese sojourners’ course selection (track placement) is forced,
not only by teachers/counselors but also by the logistics of their stay in the US and their English proficiency. Those in the ESL program are assigned to regular courses, while those who have exited it are assigned to higher-track courses, regardless of academic proficiency. The belief that “ESL students can’t take AP classes because they require a high level of English skills” (Aya, sophomore) is so prevailing among Japanese sojourners, parents, and teachers in Riverwalk that Japanese ELLs, even if they are high-achieving and in transition to mainstream English, rarely take higher-track courses.

Miyuki, a returnee and former late-entrant sojourner, was in the top percentile of her graduating class in her Japanese junior high school. She might have done well in higher-track courses, but she was assigned to regular courses throughout high school (except for one AP mathematics course, which was considered less linguistically dependent).

Compare Shunsuke, a long-term sojourner and a Riverwalk Central graduate who had a native-like command of English. Although he was an “average student”, he took “a whole lot of AP classes” in his senior year, which “massacred” his GPA because it requires so much more work to get good grades in AP courses. Long-term sojourners are pressured to take higher-track courses:

Long-term students are under pressure from all sides. We understand English, so they [late-entrant Japanese sojourners, parents, and teachers] think naturally we should take AP classes, get high SAT scores…They all have this idea that we will get good grades just because we have been here for a long time. Parents are always talking about such things. (Kentaro, a Riverwalk Central graduate)

Thus, Japanese sojourners’ English proficiency, high or low, is equated with academic achievement level. Late-entrant sojourners are viewed as less capable than long-term
sojourners, and are discouraged from content that would otherwise benefit their linguistic and academic development (Lucas, Henze & Donato, 1990; Roessingh, 2004).

This deficit view of limited English proficiency, pervasive in curricular tracking, circumscribes late-entrant sojourners’ opportunities to interact with American peers in higher tracks. Late-entrant Japanese sojourners usually aspire to enter highly-regarded Japanese universities, but confined to regular courses, they have little chance of meeting Americans with similar ambitions. And because of higher enrollment rates, the regular track is divided into more classrooms, further reducing the chances of seeing a friend in multiple classes. On the other hand, college-oriented American and long-term sojourner students tend to take as many AP courses as possible in order to impress future colleges, and therefore, they are often together in multiple classes. Sharing the same “local position” (Frank et al., 2008), they build peer groups around academics and construct the shared identity of academically-oriented students. Ms. Iida talks about how the track choice of her daughter, a long-term sojourner in her junior year, relates to her identity:

AP courses require a lot of homework. I asked my daughter, “You’re going to a Japanese university anyway, don’t you think it’s better to get straight A’s in regular classes than take AP classes and end up with some B’s?” She said, “No! Regular courses are absolutely unbearable.” She chose AP classes in all subjects again (like in previous years) and she’s working very hard. What’s important to her is which group she belongs to—those who can keep up with AP classes or not.

While long-term sojourners assert their identities by choosing tracks geared toward intellectual development, late-entrant sojourners are positioned on the “other side” of it and cannot enjoy the benefits of advanced coursework or academically-oriented peer groups.
Another advanced college-preparatory track into which late-entrant Japanese sojourners are rarely assigned is the IB Diploma Programme, a rigorous, internationally recognized two-year program currently offered in 2,462 schools across the world (IBO, 2013). This program provides students with a well-rounded curriculum consisting of six academic areas. The IB Diploma, portable worldwide, is a well-received qualification for higher education. In theory, anybody with a GPA of 3.5 or above can enroll in the IB Diploma Programme. In practice, Riverwalk’s ELLs are categorically excluded, because they are not thought to have enough English proficiency. Ironically, while the IB program was designed to prepare internationally mobile students for college education overseas, IB students at Riverwalk, including two long-term Japanese sojourners, all intend to enter US colleges with it, while truly internationally mobile students (such as our late-entrant Japanese sojourners) do not have access to it. The IB program also provides a great social space where the same small group of students spend almost the entire day together—similar to Japanese high school—taking the same classes for two years and building solidarity and friendships. The IB program would otherwise encourage the development of late-entrant sojourners’ linguistic and academic proficiencies, facilitate their L2 interaction with peers, and fulfil their social lives.

**English proficiency requirements and competitive tryouts for extracurricular activities.** Research shows that extracurricular activities give educational, psychological, and interpersonal benefits to students: improved academic achievements, lower dropout rates, higher self-esteem, more friends, better social skills, and more social support (Eccles & Barber, 1999; Feldman & Matjasko, 2005). Extracurriculars are often the only occasion for late-entrant sojourners to interact with their American peers in informal, out-
of-classroom contexts. That said, English proficiency requirements and competitive sports tryouts make a narrow choice of extracurricular activities, such as non-team sports where they have little opportunity to mingle with their American peers.

On one hand, most long-term sojourners are actively engaged in multiple extracurricular activities; for example, Kentaro participated in boys’ tennis, marching band, service and social clubs, Japanese club, and the National Honors Society. On the other hand, late-entrant sojourners only tend to partake in less demanding sports or clubs (with fewer opportunities for socializing), if any at all. ESL teachers bemoan Japanese ELLs’ lack of participation in extracurricular activities: “I don’t know why, they just don’t do it as much as they feel comfortable, but I would like to see that improved upon” (Ms. Bailey). The reason for late-entrant sojourners’ nonparticipation in extracurriculars is that “those who arrived as high schoolers can’t get in anything they’re interested in” (Ms. Tanaka, a mother of two sojourners). Many sojourners come to the US with years of experience in some sport and an ardent desire to join a team here; but the deficit view of limited English proficiency prevalent in sports teams often limits the ELLs’ opportunity to participate in it.

Kyoko, a female senior, entered Riverwalk Central in her 10th grade, with four years of experience playing a particular team sport in a strong Japanese junior high school team. She attended a tryout meeting for the Riverwalk sport team, but she wasn’t even allowed to try out because of her limited English proficiency:

The coach said to me, “Eh, you can’t speak English?” I said “A little”, and he was like “A little isn’t enough. Playing [this sport] requires communication.” I understood what he said even with my poor English skills. Then, he said something like, “How dare a student like you came here for a tryout?” and “All
right. Step aside.” I made an appeal to the coach, emphasizing that I played [the sport] well in the middle school, but he said, “What you did in Japan doesn’t matter here.”

Kyoko found out the next day that her name was not included in the list of tryout applicants. Refusing to give up, she confronted the coach again:

He said, “Oh, your name was omitted? Sorry, but were you at tryout meetings?” I said, “I attended one yesterday.” Then he was like, “But your name is missing, so you didn’t come here, did you?”

We cannot know whether Kyoko’s coach really forgot, or merely pretended not to remember Kyoko’s presence at tryouts. One thing is certain—the coach did not even let her try out, problematizing her communicative skills in English. Kyoko said, “I realized I wouldn’t be able to join sports or clubs unless I could speak English fluently. I almost hated America.” A year later, Kyoko attended tryouts again. The coach remembered her this time: “So, can you speak English now?” Feeling discouraged and insulted by this remark, Kyoko left the meeting without trying out: “That was it. Not gonna have anything more to do with him.”

Due to limited English proficiency, late-entrant Japanese sojourners, even those skilled at their sport, may be denied access to team sports. Non-team sports, such as skiing or cross-country running, do not usually require tryouts or English proficiency, making them accessible; but of course, these do not provide nearly as much opportunity to socialize.

Another structural constraint limiting Japanese sojourners’ sports involvement is the tryout itself. Riverwalk Central has strong teams who compete at state level, and “trying to get into several of the sports at Riverwalk is incredibly competitive” (Ms. White).
Some late-entrant sojourners, even given the chance to try out, fail to make the cut, and they become “depressed and downhearted” (Ms. Takahashi). These sojourners—especially boys—often gather to play basketball or soccer outside of school. This helps alleviate the frustration of not getting on the team, but it also reinforces the behavior pattern of hanging out exclusively with other Japanese.

The extent to which late-entrant Japanese sojourners exercise choice in the construction of social circles is limited by US high school social structure. Many have no other choice but stick together with Japanese peers, and have difficulty finding opportunities to interact in English in informal, out-of-classroom contexts. The ideological discourse of limited English proficiency separates ELLs from the mainstream community of American students, limits their participation in high school life, and places them in a subordinate position.

**Concluding Discussion**

This paper has examined how the social organization and structural constraints of American high school life shapes late-entrant ELLs’ circles of friends and access to L2 social interactional opportunities. This is illustrated by contrasting late-entrants against long-term sojourners: the latter are spared many of these constraints. Late-entrants’ access to L2 social interaction is particularly limited by an ideological discourse of limited English proficiency in which ELLs are viewed as low-achieving, less academically-oriented, and incapable of communication. This deficit view of ELLs sets low expectations for them and marginalizes them in the academic and social aspects of high school life.
The present study delineates everyday high-school ELL friendship patterns previously not considered in the literature on adolescent peer groups. Except in work on ESL intragroup relations (e.g., Talmy, 2004), ELLs are mostly invisible in studies on US adolescent peer dynamics. The interview data indicates that, despite their lack of social interaction with American students, late-entrant ELLs certainly do internalize and co-construct the stratification system of adolescent crowds. Over time, they become aware of subtle differences among Americans, between popular and unpopular crowds and between “cool” and “uncool” people, and are socialized into the practice of avoiding those labeled as nerds, so as not to be identified with them. By doing so, late-entrant sojourners reinforce the social hierarchy. This reveals complicated, ambivalent motives. The late-entrant sojourner wishes to be integrated into native English-speaking peer networks, and struggles in vain for opportunities to interact. But at the same time, he or she avoids stigmatized groups, forfeiting what might otherwise be some of the most viable English-speaking networks available. This mirrors the way long-term sojourners avoid the stigma of the late-entrant sojourners, refusing to socialize with them in school despite being on good terms with them outside of school.

This study also highlights how language demarcates groups and mediates the ruling relations between those with a good command of the dominant language and those without. Proficient English speakers (including Americans as well as long-term sojourners) have power over late-entrant sojourners just based on audible cues. Oral English skills and usage are closely involved in the on-going process of Japanese sojourners’ *identification* (Hall, 1996, 1997), the process by which identities are discursively constructed and represented through difference and “within the play of
specific modalities of power” (Hall, 1996b, p.4). The identification process is exemplified by long-term sojourners’ deliberate, exclusive use of English, which functions as a powerful tool for positioning themselves inside the mainstream community at school. The incompressibility (to the ears of late-entrant sojourners) of long-term sojourners’ English is a symbolic resource that, intentionally or not, is used to strip late-entrants of “the right to speak” (Norton Peirce, 1995) and to mark social boundaries between them more saliently.

The findings of the present study are consistent with poststructuralist L2 researchers’ argument that: 1) although learners have the capacity to actively invest in L2, they can only do so within the constraints of unequally distributed power; and 2) language is a symbolic resource and a site of identity negotiation (Miller, 2000, 2003; Norton, 2000; Norton Peirce, 1995; Pavlenko, 2002). What the present study adds to previous research is that the issue of access to L2 interactional opportunities should be understood not only in terms of unequal power in the historical relationships between L2 learners and native speakers but also in terms of organizational and institutional structure of the everyday world where the learners’ lives are embedded. The social organization of US high school education creates a particularly difficult place for late-entrant ELLs to integrate themselves into. It is no accident that high school ELLs’ lack of interactions with native English-speaking peers has been repeatedly reported (e.g., Daoud, 2003; Harklau, 1994; Kanno, 2003; Miller, 2000, 2003).

This paper has several educational implications. First, ELLs’ behavioral pattern of staying in their own ethno-linguistic group should not be assumed to be a “choice” or “preference”: often, ELLs justifiably feel that they lack any realistic means of making
American friends. Realistically, ELLs are denied access to L2 interactional opportunities, and may even be forced to assume the identity of “air” (see Section “Language Barrier or Choice?”). Second, in order to help high school ELLs have more L2 social interactions in out-of-classroom contexts, it is not sufficient to merely suggest they “make friends with American students” or “join extracurricular activities.” They are fully aware that interacting with native English-speaking peers is beneficial to their L2 development; they simply do not know how or where to make such friends. Educators might proactively create an informal social space to give ELLs the opportunity to regularly interact with more competent L2 speakers: for example, by organizing an English conversation club and recruiting American students interested in volunteer work, foreign languages, or other cultures; by fostering language exchange partnerships; or even by opening up home-stay programs (ordinarily used for foreign exchange students) to high-school ELLs. Another potential way to enhance social inclusion of ELLs at US high schools would be a structured peer buddy program. Such programs have already been applied in the case of students with disabilities, where they were found to cultivate positive attitudes and friendships (Hughes, Copeland, & Guth, 2001). Educators could apply such a program to ELLs, setting up a new service learning course that counts for academic credit and assigning an American student to play a dual role of English tutor and friend of an ELL. Such a program would also benefit American students, considering how college admissions value applicants’ community service and volunteer work.

This study reiterates the importance of recognizing the diverse needs of secondary ELLs, who are usually lumped together into the same ESL classroom (Calderón, Slavin,
& Sánchez, 2011). Since Cummins (1980) distinguished between basic interpersonal communicative skills (BICS) and cognitive/academic language proficiency (CALP), teachers have been warned not to assume that an ELL with L2 oral fluency in everyday social contexts is L2 proficient in academic contexts. The present study demonstrates that the opposite situation applies to late-entrant secondary ELLs. A late-entrant secondary ELL with poor L2 oracy do not necessarily have low L2 literacy skills and academic language proficiency. As the findings of the present study and previous studies (e.g., Wang & Goldschmidt, 1999) show, ELLs are predominantly assigned to lower-track courses, with diminished content. Schools seldom provide ELLs access to academically rigorous courses before attainment of English proficiency, but research shows track placement is a stronger predictor to ELLs’ academic achievement than English proficiency level (Callahan, 2005) and they benefit from taking advanced courses in terms of their linguistic and academic development (Lucas, Henze & Donato, 1990; Roessingh, 2004). Educators should shift away from the deficit view of ELLs’ language proficiency as limited intelligence, and take into account the different academic achievement levels and curricular histories late-entrant ELLs enter US high schools with, and provide especially those in higher-level ESL classes the opportunity to receive high-quality content instruction. Benefits are not limited to academic or linguistic development. Placing ELLs into higher-track courses might enable them to make friends with academically successful college-oriented American students, whom they can relate to and model themselves after. It could also develop ELLs’ self-esteem and academically-oriented identities. Higher-track classes tend to use more interactive
classroom activities, such as group work, as opposed to teacher-centered lower-track classes that offer little peer interactional opportunities (Harklau, 1994).

Social interactions play an essential role in the acquisition of target language and culture, but we should bear in mind that opportunities for such interaction are embedded in particular social and ideological contexts and are not always guaranteed. The ever-increasing late-entrant ELL population cannot fully take advantage of an English-speaking environment which could otherwise increase their linguistic and cultural resources and develop their English proficiency. Although the current high school organizational structure is unlikely to change, acknowledging the complexities surrounding ELLs’ L2 interactional opportunities, and implementing changes like those listed above, will be a step toward the integration of these students.

Notes

1 The original language of the excerpt is English. Erina code-switched between Japanese and English during her interview.
Chapter 5: Conclusion

Throughout this trilogy, I have looked at the everyday experience and practice of Japanese high school sojourner students, paying special attention to the larger social, organizational processes that shape their lives in the US. The first paper (Chapter 2) analyzes high school Japanese sojourners’ early graduation strategy through the lens of transnationalism. Early graduation entails risk, sacrifice, and additional challenge. But sojourners play this gambit in order to overcome temporo-spatial constraints imposed by corporate transnationalism, and to gain access to tertiary education in Japan, by securing a positional advantage, upon their return to Japan, over regular, non-returnee Japanese students. The second paper (Chapter 3) examines how Japanese sojourners, the majority of them in the ESL program, negotiate and work their ways through the academic and linguistic challenges posed by high-stakes testing policies and English monolingual language policies under No Child Left Behind (NCLB). Resisting these policies, sojourners and their ESL teachers co-construct and promote the defensive strategy of deliberately flunking the state English proficiency test in order to maintain ESL status and avoid losing accommodations—accommodations without which they would have little hope of passing rigorous high school exit exams. The third paper (Chapter 4) focuses on late-entrant Japanese sojourners, discussing the social aspects of their US high
school lives. Whereas long-term sojourners fit in with the mainstream communities, late-entrant Japanese ELLs are isolated and marginalized, and lack access to linguistic or cultural resources. Late-entrants’ L2 interactional opportunities are circumscribed by high school organizational structure and ideological discourse on limited English proficiency. The social boundaries between late-entrant and long-term sojourners, and by extension, American students, are marked by differences in language proficiency and language use.

This conclusion ties these three papers together and addresses the overarching question of my dissertation research: *How is the everyday world of Japanese high school sojourner students shaped and coordinated by extralocal, institutional relations of ruling?* Finally, I will conclude with the present study’s limitations and future research recommendations. I leave out a discussion of educational implications here, since each paper has already discussed its own.

**The Social Organization of Japanese High School Sojourners’ Everyday World**

This dissertation research aims to explicate the social organization of Japanese high school sojourners’ everyday world, to make visible “how things happen the way they do” (Campbell & Gregor, 2004, p.16) in the sojourners’ everyday lives. Japanese sojourners’ everyday doings are well articulated in their accounts—how they catch the school bus, how they enjoy chatting with their friends, how they spend lunchtime, how they take exams, how they interact with teachers, how they handle (or do not handle) coursework and graduation requirements, and how they prepare for their future return to Japan; they are the experts on their own everyday lives in this particular local setting. What they
may not see or know, however, is how their everyday doings are connected to and coordinated by extralocal social relations, which “originated elsewhere” (Smith, 2005), and how sojourners themselves participate in those relations. This is not to imply extralocal social relations are always invisible to sojourners. On the contrary, the data in the present study gives compelling evidence that Japanese high school sojourners are aware of some of the reasons that they experience adversities; for example, they know that educational policies affect them and that they can respond back to the policies through various strategies. While Smith’s (1987, 2005) theory behind institutional ethnography posits that extralocal relations of ruling purposefully coordinate people’s lives and are mostly unseen in the everyday world in a particular local setting, it is important to note that these sojourner students do exercise agency and are capable of actively working their way through the extra challenges imposed by ruling relations.

Figure 1 illustrates extralocal social relations that coordinate Japanese high school sojourners’ everyday experiences, practices, and activities. It is, of course, not exhaustive: other institutions, social relations, actors, and texts are also involved in the social organization of the sojourners’ lives. What is shown in Figure 1 is based on my investigation of the most conspicuous issues and concerns, the concerns most real to the sojourners themselves. These are the issues they repeatedly talked about in interviews, which therefore guided the direction of this research project. The three rectangles drawn with bold lines—“US Education”, “Transnationalism”, and “Education in Japan”—indicate institutions (clusterings of social relations embedded in particular ruling relations). The rectangles drawn with fine lines indicate bureaucratic, industrial, or educational organizations that generate and are generated by social relations. Ovals
represent texts that mediate social relations, shaping and ruling Japanese high school sojourners’ lives. Lines connecting the organizations and the everyday world of Japanese sojourners indicate social relations; lines with arrowheads denote those that exercise power on sojourners.
Figure 1  Social Organization of Japanese High School Sojourners’ Everyday Lives
Extralocal social relations centered around “US Education” include layers of hierarchical relations between different levels of political, bureaucratic organizations. Since the implementation of the NCLB, we have seen expanded federal involvement in US public education. The US Department of Education “establishes policy for, administers and coordinates most federal assistance to education” and “assists the president in executing his education policies for the nation and in implementing laws enacted by Congress” (U.S. Department of Education, 2010, p.1). Through the NCLB’s requirement that each state administer annual testing and meet “adequate yearly progress”—and by controlling funding based on states’ performance—the US Department of Education exerts power over state-level government agencies, such as the Midwestern Department of Education (MDE). Riverwalk City Schools, a school district under the control of the MDE, implements the state’s educational policies involving achievement tests, English proficiency tests, curricula, and academic standards, covering twenty primary and secondary schools (including the three high schools that our participants attend). These twenty schools are systematically coordinated by Riverwalk City Schools through various forms of text, which mediate extralocal ruling relations. Such text is standardized, constant, and replicable. For example, regardless of which schools they attend, students in Riverwalk City Schools are all required to fill out the same standardized forms (Riverwalk City Schools, 2013). At the school level, teachers are required to conform to curricula, regulations, and policies, and they are evaluated by the school district. These teachers play the most direct role in fulfilling the purpose of U.S. Department of Education: “to promote student achievement and preparation for
global competitiveness by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access” (U.S. Department of Education, 2010, p.1). Thus, extralocal ruling relations around “US Education” have the structural form of one level of organization nested within another, and so on. Through top-down educational policies, these extralocal ruling relations systematically and purposefully regulate students’ and teachers’ experiences.

Let us now turn to Japanese high school sojourners’ ordinary doings in their everyday world. Their biggest concern is how to handle that most formidable graduation requirement, the Midwestern Graduation Test (MGT). As Chapters 2 and 3 show, graduating from US high school in a timely manner is the highest-priority for these sojourners, who aspire to get in to “good” Japanese universities through returnee quotas. The MGT is linguistically and academically challenging for the late-entrant sojourner because it is targeted at native English speakers, covering materials taught up through the US education system’s 10th grade. Sojourners’ ordinary doings around the MGT, such as test preparation and test taking, are all regulated by ruling relations operating within and beyond their everyday world. Their ordinary doings are also shaped by “ideological discourse” (Smith, 2005), which is embedded in ruling relations and represents the standpoint of those in ruling power.

For example, the practice of deliberately flunking the Midwestern English Language Acquisition Test (MELAT) to avoid losing ESL accommodations for the MGT was devised as a way to resist two ideological discourses entailed in state and federal ELL testing policies: 1) an ideological discourse of English monolingualism (Menken, 2008; Shohamy, 2001); and 2) an ideological discourse that ELL are a homogenous subset of
student population. The ideological discourse of English monolingualism is exemplified in the facts that 1) ELLs are forced to take academic achievement exams in the language they do not fully comprehend; and 2) that ELLs are forced (by too low ESL exit criteria) into a rapid transition into mainstream; and accordingly, 3) that ELLs lose eligibility for linguistic accommodations for the MGT (bilingual dictionaries and bilingual translation service) before they can meaningfully take the exam unaccommodated. Rapid mainstreaming of ELLs is a political expediency, an artifact of budgetary constraints at the MDE. This can be seen in the way ESL exit criteria were changed without discussion grounded on sound research. The ideological discourse of ELLs as a homogeneous group is evident in the categorization and objectification of ELLs as one indivisible subset of the student population, as well as in the lack of consideration (in policy documents and assessment rulebooks) for late-entrant ELLs’ transnational experiences. Despite their different curricular histories and their linguistic disadvantage, late-entrant Japanese sojourners are lumped together with permanently-residing immigrant ELLs who have lived in the US all their lives.

A web of ruling relations around “US Education” coordinates not only Japanese sojourners’ academic experiences but also the social aspect of their high school lives. US high school organizational structure makes it difficult for late-entrant ELLs to interact with native English-speaking peers. An ideological discourse of limited English proficiency as deficit (in which discourse, ELLs are viewed as low-achieving, less academically-oriented, and incapable of communication) is evident in educational practices and programs. As shown in Chapter 4, this discourse fails to represent Japanese
sojourners’ actualities, past experience and evaluations, or capabilities. Not only does this ideological—or generalized—discourse keep ELLs in lower tracks and ill-served by schools (Callahan, 2005; Hallinan, 2004), it also further limits their English interactional opportunities, hence their sluggish development of English oral skills.

Japanese high school sojourners’ actual experiences, or “consciousness” (Smith, 2002), are not accurately represented in Japanese texts, either. The Japanese Ministry of Education called, in 1993 and again in 2013, for Japanese high schools and universities to facilitate returning sojourners’ transfer or entrance into Japanese high schools and colleges, to distinguish returning sojourners as “global human resources” (gurōbaru jinzai), and to use their experiences to cultivate non-returnee students’ international understanding (MEXT, 2013a). This is linked to Japan’s goal of increasing the number of internationally experienced students and developing “human resources with a global perspective, a global network and the ability to operate globally” (Shiraki, 2012) and “with a good command of English, communicative competence, and intercultural experience” (MEXT, 2014). This categorization and objectification is out of touch with the actual experiences we have seen in this dissertation. These are “different versions of reality—knowing something from a ruling versus an experiential perspective” (Campbell & Gregor, 2004, p. 48). The ideological discourse of Japanese returnees as English-proficient global human resources, coupled with that of Japanese returnees as valuable assets (evident in the 1993 policy decision), have circulated through the text and extralocally coordinated Japanese sojourners’ experiences, actions, and future aspirations. These discourses have propelled high schools and universities to set up more returnee
quotas in entrance exams and have facilitated Japanese sojourners’ transition back into the Japanese educational system. As a result, most Japanese sojourners wish to take advantage of their overseas experience to get in good universities and many of them choose to take the early graduation option to make sure they meet the eligibility for the returnee status. In addition, the discourses have exerted unnecessary pressure on returning sojourners to demonstrate the linguistic proficiency and intercultural experience that they did not have a chance to acquire during the sojourn.

All in all, the central thesis of this dissertation is that the everyday world of Japanese high school sojourner students in the U.S. is institutionally and extralocally coordinated at the intersection of corporate transnationalism and educational policies, practices, and structure in home and host countries. The risks and challenges they encounter, and the educational choices and actions they make, are in large part characterized by their involuntary transnational mobilities and the transiency and uncertainty of their stay in the US. Japanese sojourners’ everyday experiences are ruled by transnational corporations, and at the same time, are also coordinated by the texts (e.g., visas) and organizations (e.g., immigration) mediating the ruling relations between the sojourner and the transnational corporation, and in a larger framework, between the sojourner and the global capitalism that has driven transnationalism forward.

**Limitations of the Study**

Besides the methodological limitations described in Chapter 1, there are limitations in the three-paper dissertation format. Since chapters 2, 3, and 4 are stand-alone journal papers, they follow different journal house styles. Because of constraints on length, the literature
review is not as exhaustive as in the usual monograph dissertation. For example, Chapter 4 leaves out relevant literature about adolescent ELLs in US school contexts. Another limitation is that I did not have access to the actual state-mandated English proficiency test or high school exit exams; if I had been able to conduct textual analysis of the MELAT and MGT, that might have provided evidence to support the findings or have given fresh insight into them.

**Directions for Future Study**

Whereas existing studies on Japanese sojourners tend to treat their “everyday world as phenomenon” or as “an object of study”, this research has treated it as “problematic” that provides a question and a focus for the study, and a point of entry into the institutional process (Smith, 1987, pp. 90-91). As Figure 1 shows, Japanese high school sojourners’ everyday experiences cannot be explicated or understood solely within a self-contained local setting; their everyday lives are inevitably embedded in larger social contexts and ruled by the institutional actors who work for organizations generating and generated by a web of ruling relations like “US Education”, “Transnationalism”, and “Education in Japan”. By analyzing the data from both macro-scale and micro-scale points of view, this research has expanded our understanding of Japanese high school sojourners’ actualities in a local setting and the way their actualities are dominated by relations of power.

One future direction of this research is to conduct a multiple-site study and pursue further investigation of the institutional and organizational processes that shape the everyday experience of Japanese high school sojourners in the US. Considering that North America has 87 hoshūkō (Japanese Saturday schools) (MEXT, 2013b), there may
be many other Japanese sojourners’ communities similar to Riverwalk. By using the actualities of sojourners in more than one local setting as multiple windows into institutional processes, wider understanding of translocal relations of ruling might be achieved. A multiple-site study has the potential to illuminate what this dissertation research has not clarified: how exactly Japanese sojourners in Riverwalk are connected to those in another local setting, or how their everyday experiences are translocally coordinated by ideological discourses in a similar way (or not). Such investigation might provide new insight into problems in educational policies, language policies, school organizational structure, social integration of ELLs, and so on. Also, a multiple-site study will increase the generalizability of this dissertation research by showing how relations of ruling exist across multiple local settings (Campbell & Gregor, 2004, p.89).

This dissertation research has shed light on the experience of late-entrant high school ELLs, who have been given little attention in previous research, as well as on the heterogeneity among transnational students. Under various temporo-spatial and social constraints, these transnational ELLs negotiate their ways through the institutional demands of US high school life. As a final remark, I would highlight the importance of understanding, using the lens of transnationalism, the educational phenomena involving these transnational ELLs. Future research, with an awareness that these students’ present educational experience is inseparable from their transnational past and/or futures, will be crucial in order to address transnational late-entrant ELLs’ unique linguistic, academic, and social challenges and struggles.
References


140


MEXT (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology). (2013a). *Kōtō gakkō ni okeru hogosha no tenkin igai no jijō ni yori kaigai kara kikoku shita seito ni taisuru hennyūgaku no kikai no kakudai tō ni tsuite* [Expanding opportunities for high school returnee students who stayed overseas due to voluntary study abroad to transfer into or enter Japanese high schools or colleges]. Retrieved from http://www.mext.go.jp.


Appendix A: Interview Questions for Japanese High School Sojourner Students

A. Questions about the Japanese sojourner’s background

1. Where are you originally from?
2. How long have you been living in this Midwestern state? How old were you (which grade were you in) when you came here?
3. Why did your family move here?
4. Where have you received formal education? List all the places in which you attended school.
5. Did you know any English before coming to the US? If so, how?

B. Questions about the Japanese sojourner’s school life (1): Local American School

1. Which school do you attend and which grade are you in?
2. How did you and your family know about the school? How did you and your family choose the school?
3. Describe a typical school day for you.
4. How do you go to school?
5. Do you take an ESL class? If so, how is it organized? What do you think about the ESL classroom? How is the ESL curriculum organized in your school?
6. Which level of ESL are you in? If you have already exited from the ESL program, how long were you in ESL? How did you exit from the ESL program?
7. How do you think other students (Japanese/Americans) see ESL (ESL students)? Have you ever had any problems because you were ESL or international students? How do you see ESL?
8. What kinds of standardized tests do you have to take? What do you think of the tests?
10. How many Japanese students are there in your school? In your grade? In your class?
11. In each class you take, how well do you follow the teacher? What problems do you have? When you have difficulty in understanding what the teacher says, how do you cope with that?
12. How do you participate in classroom activities?
13. How do you feel about orally expressing yourself in regular classrooms? (e.g. presentation, discussion, and reading aloud)
14. How much homework do you generally have? What kinds of support do you get to complete homework?
15. How do you spend the time between classes and lunch time? With whom do you generally spend time together at school?
16. How do you interact with other Japanese students at school? What do you think about interacting with them at school?
17. How do you interact with American students? What activities do you do together with your American friends?
18. What kinds of extracurricular activities do you participate in?
19. What is the most important thing for you within your school life?
20. What do you like about your school life? What do you not like about it? Why?

C. Questions about the Japanese sojourner’s school life (2): Japanese Saturday School
1. Do you currently attend Hoshūkō (Japanese Saturday school)?
2. How long have you been attending Hoshūkō?
3. Why do you attend Hoshūkō?
4. What kinds of subjects do you study in Hoshūkō? What do you think of the curriculum and learning in Hoshūkō generally?
5. How much homework do you get? How long does it take you to finish it?
6. What do you think about the classroom environment?
7. What kinds of activities do you have other than learning in the classroom?
8. How do you interact with your classmates / teachers / younger students / older students?
9. Do you see any differences in your friends’ attitude and behaviors between when they are in Hoshuko and in local school? Why?
10. Tell me about the most memorable experience of yours in Hoshuko.
11. Do you and your friends hang out after Hoshuko? If so, where?
12. What is Hoshuko to you? How does it affect your “Japanese-ness”? Why is Hoshuko important/unimportant to you?
13. What do your friends at local school think about you going to Hoshuko every Saturday?
14. What do your parents say to you about *Hoshūkō*?

D. Questions about the Japanese sojourner’s bilingual practices

1. Which language(s) do you use at home? Why?
2. Which language do you use during a break, lunch time, and other non-classroom contexts at school? Why?
3. Which language do you use with your Japanese friends? What about with non-Japanese friends? If you code-switch with your friends, why, with whom, and in what contexts?
4. What books do you read for pleasure? In which language and why?
5. Do you keep a journal? If so, which language do you use? Why?
6. How do you interact with people in online spaces? Which language do you use?
7. Have you ever taken any English proficiency tests (such as Eiken and TOEFL) in the U.S. voluntarily? Why?
8. What does it mean to you to use two languages?

E. Questions about the Japanese sojourner’s activities outside school

1. How do you and your friends spend time after school?
2. How do you spend Sundays?
3. How do you spend American/Japanese holidays? How do you spend summer?
4. Where do you go out with your family? What activities do you do?
5. What kinds of TV programs do you watch?
6. What music do you listen to?
7. How do you share useful information with other Japanese students?
8. What kinds of gatherings do you have among Japanese sojourners and their families?
9. Do you attend any events in your community/neighborhood? How do you interact with your neighbors?

F. Questions about the Japanese sojourner’s transnational mobility

1. How often do you go back to Japan? What about your family?
2. How many times have you returned to Japan during your sojourn so far?
3. How long do you stay in Japan each time?
4. What activities do you do in Japan?
5. How often and how do you contact your friends and relatives living in Japan?
6. Do you know when you will go back to Japan for good? Is it due to your parent’s job reassignment or your wish to get into college in Japan? Do you want to come back to the U.S. someday in the future? Why?
Appendix B: Interview Questions for Japanese Sojourners’ Parents

Background

- When and why did you come to this Midwestern state? How old was your child?
- How did you know that the family would come here? How did you feel about it? How did you tell your child about moving here? How did your child react?
- How did you prepare for moving to the US? How did your (or your spouse’s) company help your family prepare for that? Did you attend any workshop/meeting? Did you get any handbook of life in the U.S.? If so, what information did it contain? Did anyone give you guidance or advice on life in the U.S.?
- How did your child prepare for moving to the US? Did he/she attend an English language school to improve his/her oral English?

Arrival in the U.S.

- Did your family come to the U.S. all together?
- How did you decide where to live?
- How did you choose your child’s school?
- Who did you contact when you arrived in the US? Who helped your family settle in a new environment?
- What difficulties and concerns did you have on your arrival to the U.S.? How did you cope with the difficulties of living abroad?

Family / Home

- What oral and literacy skills do you and your spouse have in English?
• What languages does each person in your home use to communicate with your child?
• Please describe a typical day at home.
• How does your child spend time after coming back from school?
• How does your family spend a vacation?

Education

• How often do you visit your child’s school to meet his/her teachers?
• Describe your experience of a parent-teacher meeting.
• Do you have an interpreter when you meet your child’s teachers?
• How is your relationship with teachers? Do you feel you are well informed about your child’s academic performance and linguistic development?
• How do you evaluate the ESL program at the school that your child has been attending?
• What does your child seem to enjoy most about school?
• What does your child struggle with the most?
• How did you know about the Japanese Saturday school? Why/why not did your child enroll in it? How did you get involved in your child’s decision-making process?
• What do you expect from the Japanese Saturday school?

Acculturation / Social Network

• What difficulties has your family experienced in adapting to the U.S. society and culture?
• Is your child’s level of acculturation different from that of yours and your spouse’s? If it is, does this result in additional responsibilities for your child?
• Do you have any concerns about your child’s acculturation compared to that of his/her siblings or friends?
• What social support systems, if any, do you (the family) have now? What social support systems did you (the family) have prior to your arrival in the U.S.?
• Is there anyone in the neighborhood who you closely interact with? If so, is he/she American or Japanese?
Transnational Mobilities / Corporate Transnationalism

- What is your child’s visa status? How long is it valid?
- Has your scheduled length of stay in the U.S. changed since? If so, how and why?
- How does your (or your spouse’s) company decide who to send overseas for long-term sojourn? Who (what kind of employee) is likely to receive long-term appointment overseas? Are you allowed to decline/postpone your job transfer? What is the average length of sojourn overseas? How does the system work?
- How often do you go back to Japan during your sojourn in the U.S.?
- Do you have a clear idea of when your family will return to Japan (for good)?
- Does your child think about getting transferred to a high school in Japan? Why/why not?
- Does your child plan to go to college in Japan? Why/why not?
- Have you and your child ever talked about entering college in the U.S.? How have you got involved in your child’s decision-making processes about college education?
Appendix C: Interview Questions for Teachers

**Background**

- How long have you been working for this school?
- Which grade/course do you teach?
- (To ESL teachers) How many ESL students do you have? How many Japanese students do you have?
- (To ESL teachers) What kinds of English skills do your Japanese students come to school with (oral, reading, writing skills etc)?
- (To ESL teachers) What kinds of assessments do you have for ELLs when you first meet them?

**School Organization**

- What duties / responsibilities do you have other than classroom teaching?
- Please describe your typical day at school.
- How often do you have a faculty meeting?
- How is your work evaluated? Who evaluates your work in what way?
- What activities do you do after school? Are you in charge of any extracurricular activities?
- What kinds of challenges do you think your school is facing?
- Would you explain what the early graduation option is? Who uses early graduation scheme?
- How is the ESL program set up in your school?
• How is the ESL program in your school affected by district policy? What are the key documents?
• How is the ESL program in your school different from others around the area?
• What are the responsibilities that the school district expects you to perform?
• How are ESL issues addressed in the school? What kinds of ESL issues do you think are needed to be discussed?
• What kinds of grading systems does your school use? What is S/U grade? What are the advantages and disadvantages of the S/U grading system? How do ELLs decide whether or not to use the S/U grading system? How do regular classroom teachers understand the S/U grading system?

Instructional Routines / Classroom Practices

• How many students do you have in one class?
• What resources do you use to organize your instruction?
• Is there any curriculum guide you use? If so, how do you use it?
• Please describe your teaching style and classroom practices. How do you conduct a class?
• How do you facilitate ELL students’ participation in classroom activities?
• How do you organize the classroom seating?
• (To regular teachers) How do you modify the academic content for ELL students?
• (To regular teachers) What kinds of accommodations do you give ELL students? In what situation?
• How do your Japanese students perform and behave in your class?
• (To regular teachers) Do Japanese students interact with their American peers in class? How?
• (To ESL teachers) Do Japanese students interact with students from other countries in class? How? What about outside the class?
• (To ESL teachers) How long do Japanese students stay in ESL? How do they get out of ESL?

Standardized Testing

• (To ESL teachers) How is the MELAT administered? How do you prepare your students for the MELAT? What advice do you give your students before they take it?
• (To ESL teachers) How do you evaluate the MELAT? Do you have any concerns or problems about the test?
• (To ESL teachers) How is the MELAT score used?
• (To ESL teachers) How is Mac Test held? What is the purpose of the test? How is the test score used?
• How is the MGT held? How do you prepare your students for the MGT? What advice do you give your students before they take it? Do you see any problems in high school exit exams?
• What challenges and struggles do you think the Japanese sojourners face in standardized testing?

Relationship with Students

• How do you interact with Japanese students? (in class / outside the class / after school)
• (To ESL teachers) What are your students’ nationalities? Where do they come from?
• What language do Japanese students use in the hallways?
• What kinds of challenges have you ever encountered teaching Japanese students? What kinds of strategies have you ever used to address these challenges?
• Have you noticed any change about Japanese students over time?
**Relationship with Other Teachers**

- (To ESL teachers) Who do you work with in the school? Do you work with regular classroom teachers?
- What do you think of your relationship with other teachers?
- How do regular teachers understand the educational needs of ELLs?

**Relationship with Parents**

- How do you interact with parents of ELLs?
- How often do you meet with ELL parents? Who attends the meeting? What issues do you discuss with parents?
- If you see a problem in the English language learner’s academic performance, linguistic development, behaviors, or attitudes in the classroom, how do you attempt to solve it? Who do you talk to? How do you contact the student’s parents?
- When and how do you (or other teachers) explain to parents the way the ESL program is organized, the way ESL students are graded, and what kinds of standardized tests they have to take?
- Is there anything that you always try to let the ELL parents know about in the parent-teacher conferences?

**GENERAL**

- How do Japanese students interact with their American peers at school?
- What would you advise Japanese students to do if they wanted to improve their English?
- What do you know about the Japanese students’ lives after graduating from high school here?