

It's the end of March and another big school event has passed us by: graduation. I found graduation to be a little surprising at times yet very moving. Junior high school graduation is nearly as important in the US. Every student gets a spot in the local public high school. There is no entrance exam and every child is expected to attend. I think my junior high school graduation ceremony was after school and optional. I went because I was receiving an award; most people didn't go. There were no songs, no student speeches. The principal said few words and we got our certificates.

I liked the graduation here a lot more. Sure, it was not a short event. But it was wonderful to see the bonds the students have with each other. I find their sense of comradery. I was amazed that teachers wrote letters to the graduates and attended the ceremony from other schools.

Of course it wasn't just the students who were affected by the emotions of graduation. I may have only known the students for 2 terms, yet that provided me with ample moments to remember fondly. From being challenged to a dance battle shortly after arriving in Shigaraki, to working on Eiken and interview strategies, to their wonderful work during the speaking tests less than a month before, the 3rd years have given me plenty to cherish and miss. The school has felt empty without them and every time I come across some of their work I smile.

Shortly on the heels of the departing students, I am now experiencing another part of the Japanese education system which is foreign to me: the annual rotation of teachers. It was with much trepidation that I awaited the announcement

last Friday. My only knowledge of the events was the stories shared by other ALTs, often with an undertone of large-scale changes as a necessary outcome. While I will certainly miss the teachers who are leaving, I feel that the event was a bit overblown in my imagination.

The fact that teachers are rotated has left me with some questions about the way we structure education in the US. I'm unsure if I like the practice of regularly exchanging teachers. I can see the clear benefits to exposing students, and young teachers, to multiple teachers. Less apparent are the effects of changing the dynamic of the office and disrupting the bonds these teachers may have formed with students. I don't think I'll be able to really understand at least until the new teachers have arrived and settled in, perhaps not even until this all happens again in another year.

As for the future, I'm already excited. I have a lot of hope that this coming year, the students will continue to be just as amazing.

