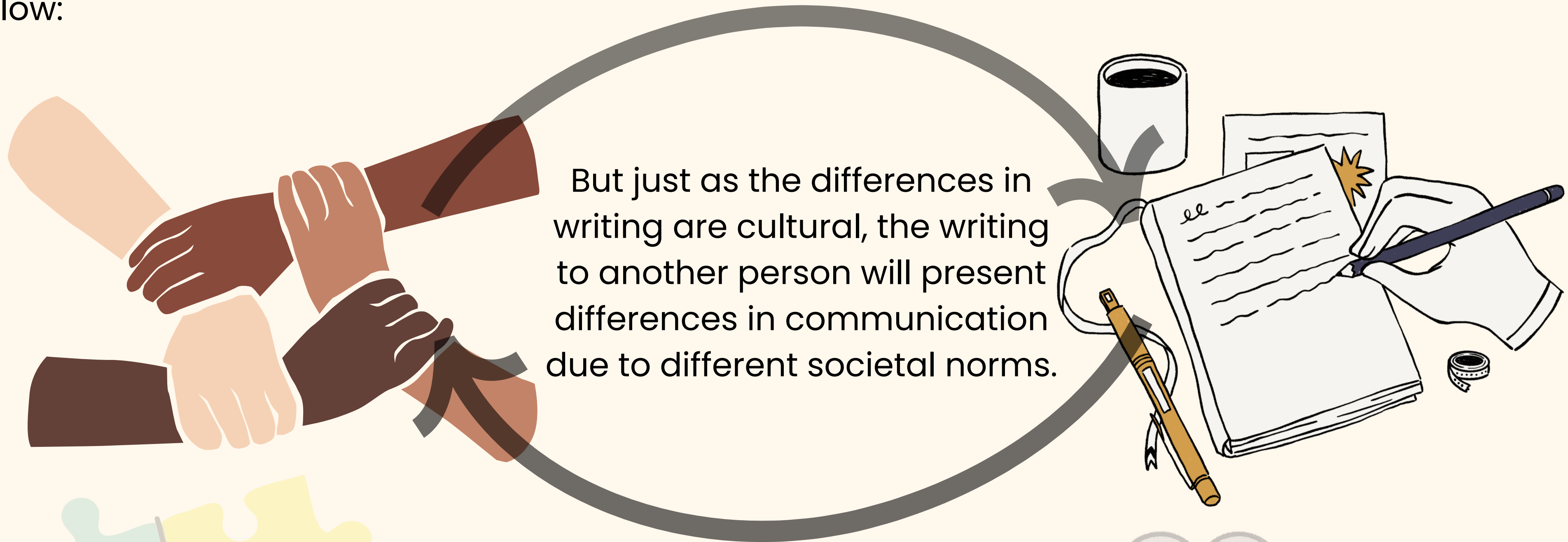


Pedagogical Implications: Approaching Writing in Different Cultural Contexts

Aisha Mir, Dr. Yusuke Yokoyama

When I first started my LiA, I decided to separate my goals in my sub-projects. One focus would be on cultural exchange (Pen Pal), and the other would be on pedagogy (science camp). However, that is definitely not how it worked out, and I had a consistent theme going for both sub-projects, as demonstrated below:



But just as the differences in writing are cultural, the writing to another person will present differences in communication due to different societal norms.

Thus, I need to work on looking at the bigger picture and connecting concepts together.

Some days at the beginning felt very slow. I wasn't starting on the projects as fast as I wanted, so I had major imposter syndrome at the beginning. Often questioning why I was in Japan if my impact was not immediate. However, I think those were periods of observation. It helped me learn the needs of the students in Yoron, something I couldn't entirely understand until I attended and helped out in English lessons. The term I like to use is Neha's "silent leadership", something I read in her LiA outline.

Japan is considered a collectivistic society. As a result, it is important to integrate socially. I struggled with a few things that I later asked upfront about to non-Japanese. However, no Japanese person truly minded because they were understanding of how difficult it could be to adjust. This difficulty applied to things I rarely observed or rather, things I did that seemed normal but other teachers did not do in the schools.

I would also describe myself as a very go-with-the-flow kind of person, so I appreciated that the teachers were flexible in accommodating and quickly pivoting to new dates to conduct the activities with the students. I also learned how to be really flexible without panicking, which I'll admit I was not the best at previously. I think teachers aren't given enough credit for this.

Overall, the biggest thing Yoron reinforced was the importance of community, being approachable, going above and beyond for strangers even, and how to foster an environment such that the kids and adults get along. I'm so grateful they extended this love towards me. Speaking of which, my name uses the kanji of love (Ai - 愛) and grateful (sha - 謝). I can only hope I lived up to my name during my time in Yoron, and will continue to exemplify that love everywhere.

Acknowledgements

Of course, this experience would not be possible if not for the support and funding of the Laidlaw Foundation, the superior mentorship of both my supervisor Dr. Yusuke Yokoyama and the individuals working at the University of Toronto Laidlaw Scholars Programme (thank you Shraddha and You Jia!). In Yoron, Ms. Kaori Tabata and Dr. Shoko Hirabayashi were super helpful and I am forever indebted to them. Thank you to all the schools in Yoron for having me: Chabana Elementary, Yoron Elementary, Nama Elementary, Yoron Junior High, and Yoron High School.