

Over There

A Preparation Course for Japanese High School Students
Embarking On a Student Exchange Year Abroad

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the course design process for a study-abroad preparation course for Japanese high school students. The design process yielded valuable teacher insights: the importance of understanding one's teaching beliefs, the vital need for student and teacher feedback, the benefits of strong classroom community, and the need for better understanding students' cultural and learning contexts. Interviews with ten former exchange students revealed students' lack of cultural knowledge of their own and target culture, especially the invisible culture, which had led to misunderstanding and conflict. Students' inability to express their personal identity adequately in L2 had also led to an avoidance of language use and cultural engagement and a lower self-esteem. Examination of these students' critical incidents forms the course basis and establishes an awareness of cultural differences and the affective issues facing the learner in the study-abroad context. A syllabus, unit explanations, course teaching materials, and assessment tools are presented.

Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) Descriptors

Study Abroad

Curriculum Development

Cultural Differences

Cultural Exchange

Conversational Language Courses

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INTRODUCTION

Without a Thou, there is no I evolving, without an It, there is no figure, no heat, but only an affair of mirrors confronting each other (Hawkins 1967: 52).

There they were sitting, six young faces, serious and eager to learn, focusing intently, waiting for me to provide them with much needed English communication skills. This was the first group of students in the newly established International Course program at my Japanese high school in Tokyo which includes a year of studying abroad. This group of tenth graders would be leaving in three months time for an English speaking country of their choosing. There I was sitting. It was the beginning of my second year at the school, and the ninth of a now fourteen-year EFL teaching career, all in Japan. I was going to be meeting with them for two after school lessons a week, and this I was our first fifty-minute class. It was my task to work on improving their speaking and listening skills to be better prepare them for the English speaking worlds they would soon be entering. I can still clearly recall what I was thinking and feeling at that time, “This is very different, extremely important, and I am not prepared for this.” It was very different, for in my teaching context, I had never taught students with immediate needs. It was extremely important, for they would have to depend on their English ability as their sole means of communicating and learning for a whole year. I was not prepared for the task in a couple of aspects. The first was the very strong instant sense of teaching responsibility washing over me for the first time. The second was of all the endless

possibilities, what should they be taught? What would be best for them? It was an uneasy feeling. There I was, feeling fortunate that my teaching was taking on new important relevance, but not at all confident that I could be of relevance to them. There they were sitting. And there I was sitting.

I know little to this day how they fared in their year overseas. I can though easily surmise that they would have possibly had a more fulfilling experience had I known what and how to teach to them in those afternoon lessons. Since then, six years have passed and six more groups of students have sat with me. The quote I began with from Hawkins perfectly encapsulates the reasons for doing this IPP. Since that day with the first group, the “I” (the teacher) has not evolved much because a fuller understanding of the “Thou” (the students) has been missing. With these elements both absent, the “It” (the content), could never be realized. Through the process of designing a course, it is my intention to correct the situation of having “no figure, no heat”, the students sitting there unknown, and this teacher not growing in his practice. This Independent Personal Project (IPP) is a course design for the next group of young, excited, albeit worried students in that study-abroad preparation course. The goal of this IPP is to produce a course design which will leave both students and teacher feeling confident that they can handle the specific challenges they will confront. Those specific challenges will finally be defined and students’ needs revealed.

I do confess to having never designed a course which addressed all the components of the design process: assessing needs, conceptualizing content, formulating goals and objectives, organizing the course, developing materials, designing an assessment plan, defining the context, articulating beliefs, and assessing the course

(Graves 2000). Not evolving as a teacher means that I had not clearly defined my teaching beliefs and put them into practice, nor completely understood my students' cultural context. It meant I had never put together a complete course, where student needs, student learning, and course were all assessed, where goals and objectives were clearly defined, and an entire syllabus was created with the latter three being conveyed to the students. This IPP is for a teacher who has wandered aimlessly, performing half measures in his classroom, and feeling guilty for not adequately providing for the needs of his students. It is not so much about the specific steps needed to create a course design, but about what was learned by going through the design process. It has enabled this teacher to define his students and himself more clearly, and to truly appreciate the value of tuning in to what his students have to reveal. Insights and new awareness derived from exploring these three areas have informed this teacher while producing his first complete course and instilled a new felt confidence that he can be of relevance to the students in this study-abroad preparation course.

In Chapter 2, I will first look at the teaching context. Following this is a reflection on how my past work, education, and past study-abroad course experiences informed the course design. Chapter 3 details what new insights were gained through articulating beliefs, and tuning in to student feedback, which along with language learning needs, revealed two other critical needs: cultural knowing of self and other, and affective needs. Chapter 4 is the end product, the course design, the result of the being informed by what is revealed in Chapters 2 and 3. It contains an outline of the course goals and objectives, a grid containing the syllabus, and explanations of the course design and how choices were made. Chapter 5 is a reflection on the implementation of the

course using information gathered from classroom observation, student feedback, learning assessments, and a course assessment. It concludes stating what has been gained from doing this IPP and reflects on the questions remaining and the questions going forward concerning this course, as well as my teaching practice.

CHAPTER 2
EXPERIENCES
The Context

The students enrolled in the International Course attend Teikyo High School, a private three-year co-ed high school in Tokyo. The International Course is a three-year program, and as tenth graders, students study abroad for one year in an English speaking country of their choice. The first term starts in April and ends in early-July, after which the students depart during the summer holiday for their host countries. The preparation course—which I have taught several times over the past seven years—lasts approximately ten weeks and typically meets for three fifty-minute classes per week. The class size has ranged from six to eighteen students. Approximately 5 percent of the student body is enrolled the International Course. The class dynamics on average are that 60 percent of the class has attended the school’s associated junior high and have known each other for three years, while the remaining 40 percent enter the high school from different junior high schools.

They have had at least three years of English language classes as junior high school students. A few typically have had some limited exposure to the language in elementary school for approximately two years. Most of their English language learning has been mainly approached using the grammar translation method with peripheral

attention given to communicative learning. For most Japanese language learners at this age, writing on the sentential level and reading are much stronger than their speaking and listening skills. For the students going abroad the latter two skills are of greater immediate value.

Their attitude on learning the language is very positive. Most of these students have done well in their English classes as junior high school students, and they are eager to improve their communicative skills. Because they are going abroad, and with some having very specific goals, their motivation to learn is quite high. Their reasons for joining the International Course typically range from wanting to do one or more of the following: improve their language skills to enter a specific university and for future careers, experience living in a foreign culture, look cool from being able to speak another language, be an independent person, learn more about themselves as individuals, learn the differences between Japanese and the host country's culture, follow in an older sibling's footsteps, and simply be good at English because they like it.

Past Working Experience

My past working experience did not prepare me well for that first study abroad class. Having never designed a course and not possessing the valuable knowledge and insights that the experience brings the teacher, I was in need of some guidance. I can recall years later the mixed emotions I was feeling over my lack of designing a course design experience while chatting with a few of my graduate school classmates. We were nearing the end of our coursework and discussing possible topics for our Independent Professional Projects. When I mentioned that I would like to do a course for my project,

one classmate enviously responded, “You are so lucky! You have the freedom to create whatever course you want.” She had an official curriculum that she had to follow. I feigned an enthusiastic reply of, “Yeah, I guess I am.” I was envying her situation, for that freedom she wanted was the very thing that has left me wondering and wandering. I wanted such a guide to help make the best decisions for my students. However, at the same time as I was feeling envious and lost, I felt a sense of hope from the excitement in her voice. I thought, “I must have a good situation.” I just did not yet know why.

My first teaching position was at a major language conversation school chain which hired me with no teaching experience. I was trained for three days and sent off to instruct my first students. The school was able to send out inexperienced teachers after only three days of training because the teachers were given lesson plans with step-by-step instructions to strictly follow. The teacher took the class through the lesson plan consisting mostly of drilling, some listening and reading comprehension, and very little personal application. The position provided me with my first techniques for teaching L2 but little else, as I would soon discover. After a year and a half of constant repetition and substitution drilling, I left for a teaching career in Japanese public and private secondary education.

I soon found myself at the other end of a course design continuum, a complete vacuum. The conversation school had a curriculum and lesson plans neatly packaged for us teachers to deliver with nothing much else required on our part. This is all I had known. So fully expecting there to be a set text, explicit goals laid out, and some sort of syllabus to follow for the various classes that I would be teaching, I strode into the school fairly confidently. I was informed that there was none of the above, and that I should just

teach what I thought was best. Feeling simultaneously honored—that they felt I knew best, and horrified—that I did not have my script to rely on, whatever confidence I had gained in my year and a half of language teaching quickly started to evaporate, and was completely gone ten minutes into that first high school lesson.

As I moved between several junior and senior high schools over the years, no school ever presented a syllabus or explicit learning goals or objectives. When I enquired about these, each new school gave a response similar to that of the first high school. The only time I was informed about what the school would like me to cover was a general goal given by a principal during the hiring process. He asked me to make the language learning enjoyable for the students in their junior high school's newly established oral communication courses. It was a general goal, but none-the-less very appreciated. I wanted direction. There was no in-school teacher development being done, not even an occasional classroom teacher observation by a department head to give some feedback. There was some guidance in the form of looking at what the Japanese English teachers, who focus on teaching grammar, reading, and writing were doing. I sometimes chose to follow the grammar structures that they were working on in their classes, and then use that as a basis to center my speaking and listening activities around. In the first few years, I had to do this as I had little knowledge of students' abilities at the various grade levels, and it made sense to be re-enforcing what they were learning in those classes rather than focusing on something completely different. After a while, I started to get a better sense for what students could and could not do, areas that needed more focusing on, and what they responded to. Though not a purposefully planned decision, I had been doing my first needs assessments through classroom observation. Trial and error, along with gaining

classroom teaching techniques and activities from coworkers was my learning strategy. The school year would start with my collection of activities and I would say to myself, “OK this grade has this grammar knowledge so we should practice these structures, using these activities, because they responded well to them in the past.” It was a hodge-podge of activities with no coherent thread or goal to reach. This was how days and weeks were planned.

There was some course design process occurring. Of the course design components, I was doing some basic needs assessment in the form of observation and doing some materials development. I was choosing the materials based on what had worked well in the past, and on my teaching belief that any spoken practice was beneficial to their learning, a belief coming from what I had seen and heard occurring in their grammar, reading, and writing classes. In those classes, their Japanese English teachers were conducting the classes almost entirely in Japanese, with the majority of the classroom time consisting of teacher talk (Locastro 1996). They had the students do written exercise after exercise, translating sentences or unscrambling them and putting them into the correct word order. When I would ask Japanese colleagues why they did not use communicative activities or games to help the students’ grammar learning, they always cited the lack of time. They had to teach all the grammar points that the Ministry of Education prescribed. They, as my graduate school colleague, did not have much freedom to make certain decisions on what or how they could teach. I had a general teaching belief, and I was choosing to focus most of the class the time on oral practice. However, goals and objectives were not formulated. My course design process was deciding which activities to do for the next lesson or two, but never asking, to what end

am I choosing these activities? Sadly enough, one could teach like this for years depending on their threshold for ambiguity and working with little structure. Then the International Course students came along with real immediate language needs and there were consequences for them if not properly prepared. Ambiguity was not an option.

Course 1 - Spring 2000 The First International Course

The purpose for which the students were there was to work on improving their oral and aural skills. Based on what I knew about L2 learning I reverted back to my conversation school drilling days. It was a very familiar script to follow and I thought this would be beneficial, efficient, and doable with a class of only six students. These particular teaching techniques mostly had had to be quickly put to the side in the larger classes because of the numbers and the motivation required of students to focus for that length of time. The lessons also consisted of having the students engage in pair work, some situational role-plays, and in guided group discussions. Discussions were often centered on topics from the texts or around their personal lives. Culture learning was peripheral and arose from students' questions or out of an activity. It was never purposefully planned into any lesson. The lessons were heavily teacher centered focusing on a grammar structure method of teaching. Language learning needs were addressed by choosing language structures that I knew to be challenging to students based on experience. Lessons were usually prepared no more than a day before. No student learning or course assessment was done. This was an after school class and grades were not required to be given to the students. I felt that I was only marginally helping them with just two hours of language practice a week. For the next few years, wondering

would persist on what language would be best to focus on given the time constraints. In 2003, the International Course and my preparation course would take on a new look.

Course 2 - Spring 2003

The International Course was expanded and student enrollment doubled. Students who were not from Teikyo's associated junior high school were now being accepted into the program. My course hours increased to four hours per week. My need for some structure and guidance would also increase. What would best serve their needs was still allusive but even more at the forefront of my thoughts. I had recently completed two years of graduate course work and was equipped with new L2 teaching and learning insights and awareness. There were many things I wanted to incorporate in my practice to better prepare my students. There were four skills to integrate, different methods to eclectically apply, students to connect to, and secure and motivating classrooms to create.

With so many new considerations for the coming course, I made a long list consisting of lesson and course core activities, and language and culture learning to focus on. The course was loosely organized with the first half of the semester focusing on the four skills and the second half focusing on culture. More time was spent organizing and planning than in previous courses, but it still was not adequate to prevent constant planning on the run once the term began. Because of the new context, the first four lessons were focused on community building activities to bring the new mix of students into a single cohesive learning group based on mutual trust and respect. With little time to prepare them for their year abroad, the need to have the students working together comfortably in common learning effort was important.

Speaking and listening skills still remained the focus of the four skills, but I decided to teach active reading skills, which might be useful, to further their language learning while abroad. Speaking activities and techniques included think-pair-share, brainstorming, presentations, role playing, jazz chants, active listening, question-making drills, gap work, and student-teacher conversation journals. Culture was purposefully addressed for the first time. This was a very new area for me, and what to teach was not quite clear; thus, it was addressed eclectically. There were readings on the cafeteria, the prom, sports at school, and dating. This was the part of the “Big C” culture, focusing on the way of American life (Tomalin and Stempleski, 1993). There was also unit to introducing the intercultural adjustment skill of non-judgmental observation (Gaston 1984) that centered on the story of “The Blind Men and the Elephant”. The core course activity was weekly teacher-student conversation journaling. Two presentations were required—one on their personal identity, and the second, a role-play demonstrating their understanding of the concept of non-judgmental observation.

A course assessment was conducted for the first time. It was a questionnaire designed to find out which activities they found useful to their learning, what they would have liked to have studied more, and what the teacher did to help them learn. Feedback from the eleven students was collected. In the written comments section, seven said they would like to have had done more work on speaking skills. Three or less students mentioned they would like to have had studied more listening, reading, and writing skills. Only one student wrote a comment on culture learning. She said, “Culture study was good. We are Japanese, so it was a good chance to know other country [*sic*] and their thinking”. When asked, “Which activities were the most useful to you and why?” she

wrote, “Conversation and culture study, because these things are not able to learn [*sic*] from the normal English class (Japanese teachers).” On a list for ranking the useful learning value of course activities and instruction content, nine students thought the reading of “The Blind Men and the Elephant” and work on non-judgmental observation were either useful or very useful for their learning. I looked at course assessment questionnaires immediately after receiving them, but I made the mistake of not reflecting seriously on the results. After satisfying my curiosity to know how the course went for them in terms of which activities they had responded to and how they felt I had performed in helping them learn, the questionnaires were filed away. I did not fully appreciate what the feedback was informing me of. I failed to use it as a tool to inform me their study-abroad needs. After all, what would they actually know about their needs before going on their study abroad? It would be their perceived needs, and would those be what were really needed? I was of the flawed mindset that I was to be the one who should know what they needed. This was confirmed in several of the students’ feedback. When asked, “Which activities were the most useful to you and why?” one student responded, “All activities were very important to me because I think I am a beginner in English, so everything is necessary.” A similar response was given when asked, “Which activities were the least useful to you and why?” “Nothing, because in this period everything for study [*sic*] English!!” They believed anything would be helpful. I knew there was something that could be more useful, but I was not sure how to find the answers. They gave me some very valuable feedback pointing out where needs existed, but I was not listening. My flawed thinking prevented me from truly reflecting and then properly responding. Reflecting and responding is what the course design process

essentially is (Graves 2000).

Those comments on culture stayed with me for a long time. They struck me as odd due to the little time actually spent on culture study in the course. The first half of the course on the four skills took longer than the planned five weeks, so the “Big C” or visible culture readings were not discussed in much depth, and the non-judgmental observation skill was the focus of about six class sessions. Had I been reflecting, I would have maybe seen the important value of her response. Considering how little culture was covered in the course, the student still emphasized this need. Coupled with 82 percent of the students stating that the lessons on non-judgmental observation were useful, one would think that my next course would fully be addressing culture learning. I should have been using assessment tools to discover the student’s needs, but this had never been an integral part of my practice. The following year I would start an online pen friend activity that that would allow students to correspond with high school peers from their target country. It would provide more opportunities for authentic L2 learning and learning more about their future host countries. This may have been a subconscious response to the feedback on culture.

Course 3 – Spring 2006

In past courses, my lack of having a complete course with a solid foundation was not exposed mainly due to the mature, motivated students who entered the International Course (IC), and by the good rapport I was able to build with the students. Last year I was not so fortunate. I felt pretty good when the course started because I had a little more organization than in past courses. The course was divided into three general themes:

Home, School, and Country, focusing on here and there for each. A schedule was given with due dates for conversational journals and some information on the two presentations they would be doing. We would be doing similar activities as in the past few years.

However, after two weeks, the little course focus which there was, had been lost; thus, I was scrambling the rest of the term trying to stay afloat wondering what was so different from years past. All the flaws and some mistaken decisions were laid bare. As in other years, I was not prepared organizationally and did not have clear objectives and goals for the three general themes. I had a general framework, but there was no defined week-to-week plan with a common thread. Specific planning was done week by week with only the course long activities set in the schedule. When lessons started, they took twice as long with these students. Compared to previous classes, there was an almost complete lack of focus, much more personal side chatter was occurring, often they were not working well together, and many were just simply choosing not to do their assigned work. It was quite baffling, for a group like this had never entered the International Course. When the first due date for their journals arrived, only one-quarter of the students handed them in. Others came late the following week or two, while some were not turned in for over a month or more. Over the course of the term, only a third of the students regularly participated in the teacher-student journaling. I have relied on this important weekly activity to build connection with my students, as well as provide language and cultural learning opportunities.

Teachers of other subjects also complained about this particular group's work ethic and chemistry, so the problems were not unique to my class. However, as much I would like to put the majority of onus on the students, it would be very unfair because of

my lacks of which I have previously detailed. Moreover, a class such as this group shows just how imperative it is for this teacher to be skillful in truly meeting their needs and overcoming the challenges they can throw at us. I was in no position for a class like this. Had I had some clear goals and objectives, I could have possibly salvaged more learning by presenting more simplified and clear activities. Had I created some space with a good plan and organization instead being so hands on with this group, I could have been more reflective. Had I been a more reflective teacher I could have assessed what was occurring and why, and then made the necessary changes. Looking back, I would have done two things immediately. First, I would have backtracked in those first several weeks and focused quite a bit on community building activities. I would have incorporated cooperative learning activities wherever possible for the remainder of the course. The second thing I would have done to help correct the situation would have been a needs assessment to find out their attitudes on learning, what their role should be, and what their expectations were of the teacher and the course. The first, community building, had been done as part of my past courses but was purposely left out, and the second, conducting proper assessment, had never been an active part of my teaching practice.

Due to a reduction in my class hours, from four to three, I made two poor pre-course planning decisions concerning content. The first was deciding to forego my usual four lessons of community building activities. Because the International Course students attend an ESL English camp at a hotel called British Hills prior to the term beginning, I had mistakenly assumed the students would build sufficient community during their stay. Whatever occurred at the three-day camp was not enough, and I forgot to factor in my inclusion in the building of community. Unfortunately, due to budget constraints I am not

permitted to participate in the trips to British Hills.

The second poor decision was discontinuing the pen friend activity. The previous year I had allotted one of my four hours for computer time in the school's computer lab because not all of the students had personal computers or Internet access. I did not think one hour a week should be given up for this course long activity, leaving only two hours for the remaining course work. The limited class time would be better spent focusing on oral and listening skills. Deciding to forgo the activity shows I had still not found the precise role culture learning should play in their preparation. Language skills, mostly absent of culture, were still the primary focus.

Giving up this great resource for authentic language use and cultural learning was also not at all in alignment with my teaching beliefs. It would have provided the students a motivating and secure way to engage students abroad and take more responsibility for their learning. I had always had through the conversation journals, students enquiring about school or home life and concerns they had. However, there may have been some students who did not feel comfortable or felt were imposing by asking the teacher questions. As Naoya, now a junior wrote in his journal the year before, "I'm sorry that I only ask you." The pen friend activity had not been fully implemented at that time. Reflecting later on what he wrote, told me the need for having more cultural information as well as providing other resources. Again, I had not been listening. How many questions were not asked? How many learning opportunities were missed? In last year's course, most students were not even regularly participating in the conversation journaling. They were not asking me, and my decision took away an opportunity for them to ask someone else. The pen friend activity might have been one this particular group

would have responded to. In fact, in a recently conducted questionnaire, feedback from the students who had done this pen friend activity the year before expressed how valuable it was. Ten out of fifteen students responded very positively to the activity. Four continued writing to their pen friends for months after they had gone abroad.

Decisions were being made solely on contextual limitations without taking into consideration students' learning needs, course goals, and what this teacher believes is important to their learning. The computer and time issues for pen friend project could have easily been worked around, by finding out who did not have access and get them some time at lunch or after school. It did not have to be a mandatory part of the course, but it could have been an elective activity or one of several projects from which they could have chosen. I had not evolved as much as I should have after graduate school courses ended. Reflecting back on the experience of this class shows there had even been a step or two taken in the opposite direction.

Table 1 below shows which components of the course design process were addressed in the three IC courses. Context was only partially defined for all three. This would prove crucial, for it was the not knowing my students' culture well enough, which hindered my ability to better define their needs. My teaching beliefs were never fully articulated over the years. This would also be a reason for not being able to define clearly, what would be best for the students. Without these two well defined, I did not have a solid base for meeting the other course design processes (Graves 2000). Needs were not assessed and thus goals and objectives were never defined. Good decisions were not made, and at times, none was made. What follows in Chapter 3 is what I discovered by finally tuning in to the students context and their feedback. I purposefully set out to find

answers.

Table 1. Course Design Components Addressed in Courses 1, 2, and 3

Course Design Components	Course 1 (2000)			Course 2 (2003)			Course 3 (2006)		
	Yes	Partially	No	Yes	Partially	No	Yes	Partially	No
Context Defined		<input type="radio"/>			<input type="radio"/>			<input type="radio"/>	
Beliefs Articulated		<input type="radio"/>			<input type="radio"/>			<input type="radio"/>	
Needs Assessed			<input type="radio"/>			<input type="radio"/>			<input type="radio"/>
Goals Formulated		<input type="radio"/>			<input type="radio"/>			<input type="radio"/>	
Objectives Formulated			<input type="radio"/>			<input type="radio"/>			<input type="radio"/>
Content Conceptualized			<input type="radio"/>		<input type="radio"/>			<input type="radio"/>	
Course Assessed			<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>					<input type="radio"/>
Course Organized			<input type="radio"/>		<input type="radio"/>			<input type="radio"/>	
Assessment Plan Designed			<input type="radio"/>		<input type="radio"/>			<input type="radio"/>	
Materials Developed	<input type="radio"/>			<input type="radio"/>			<input type="radio"/>		

Source: Kathleen. Graves, *Designing Language Courses: A Guide For Teachers*. (Boston: Heinle & Heinle Publishers, 2000), 3.

CHAPTER 3

TUNING IN

It's as impossible to hit a target you've never seen, as it is to return to a place you have never been (Author Not Known).

This chapter details how the “Thou” and the “It” were discovered through defining my teaching beliefs and needs assessing. There were several triggers which occurred when articulating beliefs and assessing needs, leading to some significant insights and awareness. This has given me confidence that the next group of students will have the opportunity for my course being relevant for their year abroad, and that this teacher is evolving.

Articulating Beliefs

Articulating one's teaching beliefs is one of the foundations for designing a course. Knowing what you believe in helps guide your choices in the design process (Graves 2000). I have held many beliefs, especially since completing graduate schoolwork, but had not yet defined which ones were the most relevant to my practice and to this course in particular. Therefore, I was fortunate to find that articulating beliefs is a defined component in designing a course. Stern's framework was very useful in providing me a way to organize and clarify my beliefs. The four views for articulating one's teaching beliefs are: 1) your view of language, 2) your view of learner's and learning, 3) your view

of teaching, and 4) your view of the social context of language (Graves 2000).

The view of language I hold comes from my experience of teaching in secondary schools in Japan. I have seen the language learning slowly cease to have much meaning in use or aims (other than passing university entrance examinations) for many students over the course of their six years of mandatory English language education. I have taught first year junior high school students who begin their language learning excited to learn the language for its communicative purposes. Having taught from seventh grade to twelfth grade, it is disheartening seeing that for large majority of students, the eagerness and joy fading each year. By their last year, they seem have to given up being able to be proficient communicatively or look at the communicative learning part as a tiresome task. English language learning in secondary education in Japan is taught as a content course like learning a science (LoCastro 1996). The Japanese English teachers do approximately 70 percent of students' language instruction. The main purpose of their learning is for passing the university entrance exams, and the main approach used in their learning is the grammar-translation method. Native English teachers who focus on communicative language learning do the remaining instruction. With just one or two contact hours a week, it is a challenge for me to bring meaning and different purposes to the students. I am very fortunate with this particular study abroad course, for I have the opportunity to instruct students who after three years have very positive attitudes towards language learning and have similar views on language as mine. They have seen other importance in learning a language despite an educational system that tends to limit their view of language as being rule based with one purpose.

My view of learning and learners comes from rich learning experiences in and

outside of the classroom. Outside the classroom, one just has to take up rock climbing to find how quickly one learns by passing through all the four phases of the experiential learning cycle many times in the matter of minutes, if not seconds. Though I cannot recall much any particular history teacher said to me in junior or senior high school, I can clearly recall the valuable learning a junior high history teacher provided, when he gave us a reading project. We chose a novel from an assigned list connected to the historical period that we were studying at the time. Then periodically, we met individually with the teacher to report on what we had read, connect it to the period, and express our thoughts. It was a simple activity, reading and reporting, but this one assignment encapsulates what I believe about learners and learning. It was experiential learning like the climbing. The act of having first to reflect by summarizing, explaining themes, and personal feelings, then generalize, by relating it to the wider historical context, and lastly, furthering the learning through discussion with the teacher was very rewarding. Like the rope for the climber, the learning was also secure. The one-on-one meetings with the non-judgmental teacher, who had built great rapport with his students, were actually inviting. I chose what would be shared and had the chance to engage with the teacher and the book in a non-threatening way. As the responsibility for decisions on the rock wall rests with the climber, the assignment put the responsibility on me to make personal meaning, and the teacher acted only as a guide. The act of climbing is a simple process and a suitable wall is all that is needed. For the history assignment, all that was needed to provide rich learning was an engaging book and the opportunity to share. Less was more.

My view of teaching is also reflected in the history assignment. The teacher removes himself as the focus of the learning and centers it on the students and an

engaging subject. The teacher guides the students in the learning process and does not just become a dispenser of knowledge. Teaching consists of providing a safe learning environment where students feel secure to explore the subject and discover new awareness and understanding. The security allows students' voices to be heard, which in turn provides possibilities for obtaining valuable feedback. Teaching is also building classroom community where sharing and trust lead to more possibilities for maximized and deeper learning.

The first three parts of Stern's model were useful in helping organize and focus on the beliefs essential for this course. Reflecting on the last one, the social context of language was an awareness raising exercise on an area of language teaching that I had just never addressed properly. Language and culture were always taught as separate content in the study abroad course. The few times I did address culture, the focus was on either on some "Big C" cultural behaviors, absent of the underlying beliefs and values influencing them or some intercultural awareness skills with a goal of creating some measure of difference-holding (Tang 1995). Both were important, but the first was lacking in the opportunity to provide deeper cultural understanding. Having an understanding "small c" culture (also referred to as invisible culture), would have helped them cope with the challenges the cultural differences would bring. Developing an intercultural skill such as, non-judgmental observation is vital to for a clearer understanding of cultural differences. The feedback from the students in Course 2 revealed the study of non-judgmental observation was interesting, but was this focus meeting the students' most immediate needs?

I now know that I was missing a very important area of cultural learning. I was

surprised and privately embarrassed that I had not been addressing either the sociolinguistic or the sociocultural issues purposely. Reflection on these issues immediately triggered something my student Miyu had told me when I interviewed her after she had returned from her study-year abroad in England. I had asked her what some differences were between Japanese and British culture. Recalling a conversation she had had with a British girl about a movie they had both just seen, she said:

Miyu: “ I liked the movie.”

British Girl: “What? I didn’t like the movie at all!”

Miyu told me she had thought, “*How* do I respond to *that*?” when hearing the British girl’s response. I thought to myself, “You just . . .” Her response jolted me. Her question and the bewildering tone told me I had been completely missing a valuable need. I felt that I had let her down by not preparing her for such a cultural encounter. I had not been teaching my students cultural difference, specifically the hidden culture which can cause these types of misunderstandings. I should have been focusing on such differences and how it is reflected in the language. I also was immediately aware that I did not know enough about Japanese culture to have prepared her and others adequately. I now know that to Miyu, this girl was criticizing her instead of realizing that this girl’s culture values expressing one’s personal opinions. Miyu was not prepared for the perceived personal attack. Had she known this, she might have been better equipped emotionally to respond. Had I along with teaching this cultural awareness, provided lots of practice giving personal opinions and how to agree or disagree, she could have had a better and richer discussion with this girl about the movie. Instead, Miyu was shocked at the girl’s behavior for not better considering her feelings.

The interview with Miyu was the first of six interviews with separate students I conducted prior to last year's course. I held the interviews to better inform myself on students' experiences abroad and on the challenges they face with the language and culture. My lack of knowledge on what happens after they depart Japan for their study-year abroad was in vast need of improvement. These interviews were only the second time that I had conducted needs assessment, and they were done with just two weeks remaining before start of the next IC preparation course. This left little time to reflect on the feedback and develop insights that could have led to a useful response for the students in the next course. Similar to the course assessment I had done a few years earlier, I did not fully appreciate the valuable tool that it was. When I made the questionnaires and conducted the interviews, I did not have a clear enough focus on what was important and the scope was quite broad. Thus, I did not fully realize the implications of the wonderful feedback that I was receiving. It took the act of reflecting on social (cultural) context to lead me to finding a serious omission in what I had been addressing on language and culture. Miyu had told me everything I needed to know in one little exchange. Unfortunately, as with the student in Course 2, I was not ready to listen. In this case, it was a jolt, but even that was still not enough to compel the proper reflection and response.

The process of this realization has been a long one of incidents and inklings over the years, with it finally being revealed with the reading of a few lines in a book on course design. What I needed was a plan that allowed for the reflection to understand better what my students were informing me of. This teacher could have then understood their cultural context and responded by creating a course meeting their needs. Assessing their needs needed to be done on a consistent and timely basis.

Assessing Needs

Not getting much information about them, you won't be a very good diagnostician of what they need. Not being a good diagnostician, you will be a poor teacher (Hawkins 1967: 55).

Fortunate to have kept the feedback from the six interviews, a year later I started reading them again this time with more focus on the “small c” culture. Were there other sociocultural issues such as the one Miyu had? Carefully rereading the feedback was truly revealing. All six students had some challenges of varying degree stemming from cultural differences. They were being Japanese and unaware of the cultural attitudes, beliefs, and values of their host country. One was surprised when his host mother yelled, “Stop it!” because he was apologizing for everything even when it was not his fault. He was trying to make the one at fault feel better by sharing in the blame (Sakamoto, Sakamoto 2004). Another had made some friends but quickly lost them because she was contributing little to the conversation. Her silence was acceptable in Japan, but for her American classmates she needed to be interesting and to show interest in them. With her showing little of her identity, they soon tired of her. A third student was taken aback when she was asked by a classmate how her weekend was. For her, it was too personal to talk about such matters with people she was not very close to. In the interviews, they did mention big cultural differences such as the larger houses, and cars, eating steak nightly, and taking the school bus, but it was the small cultural differences that they spoke more in depth on. After rereading the interviews the thought, “It is culture dummy!” came clearly into view, and it is what needed to be at the center of the study abroad course. The language work for the course could be integrated into the various sociocultural issues, which the students have experienced. I had possibly found the “It”.

Five months later, I eagerly conducted my third needs assessment (a questionnaire) with fifteen students who returned from their year abroad. After reading the feedback, another questionnaire was conducted individually tailored for clarification on several of their answers. Their feedback supported what was learned from reflecting on the six interviews. One student responded, “You have to say what’s on your mind or they do not know what you are thinking.” She had been offered some cookies, which she promptly and politely refused. Thus, she did not receive any though she very much had wanted some. She had fully expected the cookies to be offered again. In Japan, refusing them is considered polite and shows one’s modesty. Being offered several more times is customary, whereupon one can then finally accept. Some cultural differences unknowingly caused problems for some host families. “Japanese people are focused on the job all the time, but American families try to make family time. They try to eat dinner together every evening.” wrote one student. This was not a problem for this family or student, but the difference in how the cultures value family time led to problems with several of the Course 3 students who were abroad at the time this assessment was conducted. Their behavior resulted in warning notices being issued by the students’ exchange programs. Their host families complained that the students were not spending much time with the families when they got home from school. The students usually headed for their rooms for hours of studying, video game playing, or TV watching. The head of the English department at Teikyo informed me that they were just doing what they normally do at home in Japan.

Though not all differences were necessarily challenging or created problems, some could possibly have led to missed opportunities. On joining a sports team, a student

wrote, “They seem really enjoying. Even though it is really strict club, Japanese ones aren’t fun as much as it is in Canada. There aren’t any discriminations of age [*sic*].” That brought to mind a conversation I had had with a student over ten years ago. She complained about belonging to the tennis team at her school in Tokyo. The first year high school students were not allowed to hit a ball for the first semester. Their sole role was to retrieve balls for the upperclassmen. Basing a decision on their culture behavioral norms, some students may have avoided joining a team or club, assuming a similar strict hierarchical system with an initiation period existed in their host country.

Adding to increasing chorus of voices informing me, “It’s culture dummy.” was a critical incident which occurred last year in Course 3. A group of five American high school students touring Japan visited our school for a few days and joined three of my classes. One particular activity had them doing rotating group interviews where both groups could learn about one the other’s culture. While most groups were still engaged in the activity, I took the opportunity to ask one of my students, whose group had finished, about what he had learned. The exchange went as follows:

Teacher: “What did you learn?”

Student: “I learned about American culture.”

Teacher: “What did you learn about American culture?”

Student: “I learned it is dangerous in America.”

Teacher: “How is it dangerous?”

Student: “There are a lot of guns.”

Teacher: “Why is that dangerous?”

Student: “Students sometimes take guns to school and shoot classmates.”

I was quite frustrated with this student after his first reply, let alone how I felt at the end of the exchange. What was going on? Because of the lack of effort from many of the students in this class, I immediately concluded he was being lazy or even possibly giving his teacher a difficult time. Neither his language production nor his understanding the meaning was an issue here. The class had been doing plenty of work with KWL charts, so the first question asked was very familiar to him. The students had been working for weeks on being more specific in both their speaking and writing. Why hadn't the student just replied, "Students sometimes take guns to school and shoot classmates." to begin with? So I left the room that day shaking my head at what was occurring in my classroom. When I brought up my frustration over the incident to a dear friend of mine, it was pointed out to me that Japanese teenagers do not want to show their true thoughts in class or in public for that matter. They are afraid others may think they are trying to show off, and they are often teased when standing out from the others.

The lack of any cultural focus in the first years of the course, and then the uncertainty of what type of cultural learning to address in the later courses, can surely be contributed in part to my own lack of cultural awareness knowledge.

Our major task is not, as some teachers believe, to find ever better ways of 'making students talk', but to understand in ever more sensitive ways why they talk the way they do, and why they remain silent: this type of knowledge Clifford Geertz calls 'local knowledge' (Kramersch 1993: 245).

I was in need of that "local knowledge". The above incident, along with the feedback from the interviews and questionnaires, brought cultural need into a very sharp focus for this teacher. The feedback overwhelmingly informed the "I" and "Thou" of the need for cultural knowing. I would quickly discover Kramersch's quote would speak to me on different level as well. The feedback would reveal ". . . to understand in ever more

sensitive ways . . . why they remain silent . . .” had more meaning.

In the same questionnaire, they were asked if they felt they knew enough about the culture before arriving in their host countries and ten out of fifteen replied, “No.” They were then asked to reply to some personal consequences for not having known well how the people of that country think, behave, or what they value. Ten said they felt uneasy, eleven said there was some miscommunication or misunderstanding, seven were worried they would make a bad or embarrassing mistake, and one said it caused some serious problems. When asked a general question on what are some of the most important things students should know before going on a study-year abroad, one-third mentioned knowing either the other culture or their own culture better. Even though two-thirds had said they did not know enough about the culture before they began their study-year abroad, only one-third mentioned cultural knowing as the most important thing students needed to know most. The other two-thirds mentioned or suggested an affective need as the most important thing students should be aware of. Students wrote either, “Never be ashamed of yourself.” or “Always be positive.” They had affective needs. Just as I was feeling confident on what content my course should cover, the tuning in revealed another vital need.

The “It” was not just only the language for communication and for understanding the culture and how language is reflected in it. It also now consisted of students hesitating to purposely engage in the language and culture due to a lack of confidence in their L2 ability and how they might be perceived by others. The feedback revealed strong concerns: that their English sounded unnatural, they could not express their meaning well, or they could not reveal their true identity.

I felt afraid to talk with them because I have Japanese accent when I talk. They won't understand because I have a Japanese accent. Rie

Because they seemed really scary [sic]. And also I am too shy!! Mayumi

I was not confident enough about my English to talk to people that I didn't know so well. I was afraid they'd make fun of me. Ayami

The above quotes were the triggers for this new insight on their needs. They came from feedback on a follow-up questionnaire where they were asked why it took them much longer to feel comfortable talking to their classmates at school than it did with their host families. I read them in somewhat disbelief, for these three were the more confident and outgoing students in my class. How serious of an issue for them was it? To investigate this seeming contradiction, they were interviewed along with three other students who had given similar feedback. Several informed me that they did not feel their pronunciation was good enough. When they had started speaking in school some their classmates replied: "Huh?", "I can't understand what you are saying.", "You sound funny.", or "Wettuce! That is so cute!" These students informed me that they had been quite confident in their speaking ability prior to going abroad, so they were completely shocked at the responses they had received. Though on the surface the comments do not appear to be severe, they had a profound negative impact on these students. They became hesitant to speak for months and some even purposely avoided speaking to others. Some said how they knew their very simple English sounded childlike and despised it. Staying silent was the better option. One said he felt his English should be perfect before he spoke. I was informed that for most, their host families served as their practice grounds until they felt they had reached a level where they were again confident to approach classmates, participate in conversation, and develop relationships.

One major issue was that they could not express themselves in the way they wanted in the L2. It was problematic, because the inability to express themselves, as they are able to in Japanese, led to avoiding the language and for a few, a lower self-esteem (Aveni 2005). One student withdrew from engaging with students and developed a negative attitude towards language use for close to five months. Eri wrote:

I totally felt an inferiority complex at first. It was a complex that my accent. In the very first time, most of people couldn't understand what I said not because of my bad grammar. I think this caused me feeling sad [*sic*] And negative. School was difficult because I did not know anyone well and I could not express myself. I sometimes got disgusted at myself that I couldn't do well.

She told me that she is a very optimistic person but when she went abroad, she said, "The real world hit me in the face." She had avoided engaging in the language and culture at school for almost half of her stay abroad.

Alarmed at what I was hearing, I wondered for how many more of the fifteen students were these major issues. Only these six had given me written responses on these issues, but since several of those students were quite confident and outgoing, I suspected the other nine most likely had also experienced the same issues. A third questionnaire was given to all fifteen students concerning affective issues that can arise in a study abroad program. The results were confirming and revealed the seriousness of the issues. Fifty percent had the fear of sounding foolish. For others it was the worry that others would make fun of them. Eleven out of fifteen believed their English was not good enough for people to understand them. Five students felt they should be perfect before they spoke. Ten students felt frustrated and five felt very frustrated at not being able to show their true selves. These affective issues lasted from two to five months. Nine developed fairly strong negative feelings about using the language, with five avoiding using the language

from two to five months. Avoiding meant not initiating conversation and only responding when asked. The avoiding mainly occurred while at school. For students, the affect it had on their self-image and to their experience was quite negative. “I could not do well in school or at house [*sic*]. I just felt I do not want to be here anymore.” Eri wrote. The universal need for acceptance coupled with the Japanese belief that it is negative to stick out, kept many students from actively engaging in language and achieving some kind of group membership. For the Japanese exchange student, the need for acceptance may be higher than that of the Western exchange student because of their collectivist culture.

The EFL classroom language learning experience in the course did not properly prepare them emotionally for what they would encounter. The classroom here is much securer due to cultural familiarity and students having a greater understanding and sensitivity to the shared learning challenges. The consequences of risk taking are much less severe, and the students can provide support for one another. Being able to show one’s identity is not an issue, except possibly for those occasional short moments during L2 classroom practice. They can and do interject their native language during class, and after the class ending bell, outside the classroom door awaits the familiarity of their world. For the majority of the students at Teikyo, the only exposure to L2 oral communication with a native speaker is the limited to what they receive at school. They have only their teacher and their classmates with whom to compare and notice difference. In addition, the students who enter the course are typically students who have excelled in their English junior high school classes. Thus, the EFL learning context can give students an inaccurate view of the realities of L2 learning and use abroad.

Feedback gathered at the beginning of each course typically shows students are

concerned that their limited L2 ability will prevent them from communicating well with the people of their host countries. Even though they are cognizant that there is much to improve on, the recently conducted questionnaires and interviews shows there was a gap between their perceptions of their L2 ability and what they actually encountered abroad. The gap was too wide causing a kind of “image shock”, even for the most confident and proficient students. Factoring in the cultural differences, their ages, and living far away from the support of family and friends, it is understandable why these students reacted the way they did. The withdrawal from using the language and cultural engagement conflicted with their purpose for the study-year abroad. The affective issues prevented them from entering the culture confidently as early as they would have wished; thus, students missed out on opportunities for culture and language learning, and getting the most out of their study abroad experience.

This new awareness for me was eye opening, for I had only ever considered their affective needs inside the classroom. Their affective needs did not stop at the classroom door. The students were silent for too long after having left the relative security of the language classroom and their culture. They needed more awareness, more confidence in their language use, and strategies for dealing with the challenges in order to eliminate that silence.

The students have stories to tell with extremely valuable teachings. They took me to “places” I had never been, but now having gone there, the targets are being seen. The targets are seen in students’ big, small, and silent voices. One has to provide the opportunities and be sensitive, to allow all three voices to be heard. The targets are also seen in the teacher’s voice, where one diagnoses what is heard and then responds to it in

an affective way in accordance with their teaching beliefs. What follows is the course concept (the syllabus) that our voices informed.

CHAPTER 4

COURSE 4

Course Concept Overview

The culmination of reflecting on past experiences, knowing the teaching context, articulating teaching beliefs, and assessing needs is the course concept (Graves 2000). This course concept is highly student informed and will reflect what they have taught the teacher. Through their stories and married with my teaching beliefs, experiences, and knowledge, the syllabus aims to meet the overall goal of students gaining the confidence needed to effectively engage in the target culture, and thus enabling them to meet their personal goals for their study abroad. In order achieve this, the course will: 1) develop students' speaking and listening skills, 2) deepen cultural awareness of the host country's culture and that of their own, and 3) create student awareness of the affective issues surrounding language learning and use in the study abroad context. The speaking skills to be focused on are conversation strategies, discussion skills, language to express their personal identity, pronunciation skills, and the recycling of grammar structures that have been a challenge for students in the past. Listening skills will be mainly addressed by students doing listening tasks at home with a textbook and CD, though some class instruction time will be allotted. The culture learning will focus on gaining an understanding of how language and culture are connected and being aware of the cultural

differences, especially the invisible ones. With this knowledge, students can better communicate with the people their host country and minimize misunderstanding and conflict. Students will learn about cultural differences through examination of former IC students' study abroad experiences. Knowing the realities of the study abroad experience, having realistic learning and communicative expectations, and understanding the possible affect to their self-image due to limited L2 proficiency will be the focus of creating an awareness of the affective issues. Students will set goals for language learning and cultural engagement and work on improving their pronunciation.

The syllabus will be designed with the core of each unit centered on a cultural difference originating from critical incidents International Course students experienced while they were abroad. The intention is that by seeing how these cultural differences affected their current and former IC peers, students will be more motivated to learn about the cultural issues, and value the language learning. It will hopefully bring greater meaning and purpose to the lessons. All of the experiences are real coming from the three previous classes. Many, if not all of the cultural differences will be new to them, for most have not experienced much cultural difference having lived in a mono-cultural country. The culture focus will be centered on the three underlying differences of collectivism and individualism, equality and inequality, and independence and dependence—the origins of their peers' critical incidents. By building an awareness of the differences, students will be better prepared to understand and handle what they will encounter and gain a better appreciation of both cultures.

The experiential learning cycle will be the instructional framework for the units, allowing deeper connections to take place.

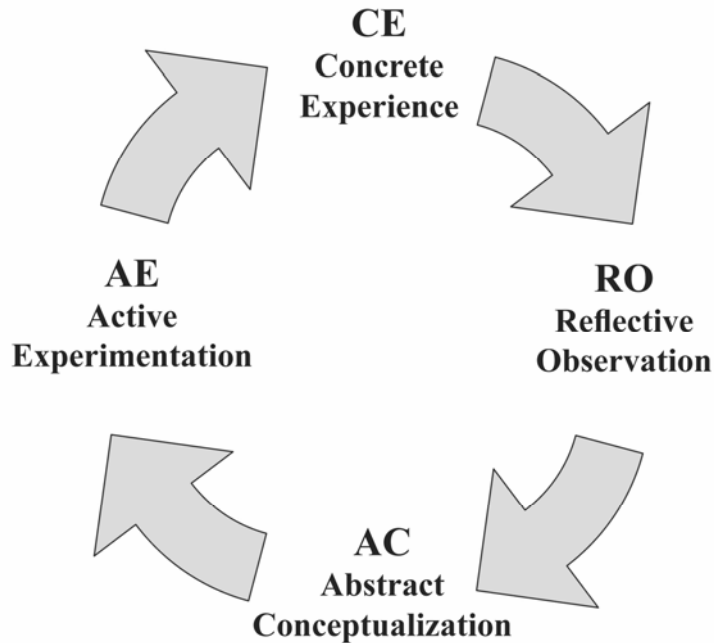


Fig. 1. The experiential learning cycle (Kolb 1984)

Almost all of the fifteen students in the senior class have graciously volunteered to assist in some of the lessons. They will participate in the experience phases, role-playing a few of the critical incidents. The nature of the learning cycle lessons allows students to be active contributors with discussions taking place at the heart of the reflection phase. Active contribution in the classroom, an expected norm in Western classrooms, is not common to students here. This phase will provide the opportunity for sharing their opinions, agreeing and disagreeing, and seeing others' individuality. Specific language learning will be connected with the cultural learning objectives of the unit. Along plenty of language practice and cultural learning, there will be several core course activities to apply and deepen the learning. A detailed discussion of these follows the Course Goals and Objectives Outline and the Syllabus Grid. The Course Goals and Objectives Outline is for the teacher to use in developing the syllabus and assessing the course.

Course Goals and Objectives Outline and Syllabus Grid

A. Overall goal

1. Students will gain the confidence needed to effectively engage in the target culture, enabling them to meet their personal goals for choosing to study abroad

B. General goals

1. Develop speaking and listening skills
2. Develop cultural awareness of own and target
3. Gain awareness of affective issues in language use and learning abroad

C. Specific goals

1. Develop speaking and listening skills
 - a) Develop conversation strategies and discussion skills
 - b) Develop showing personal identity
 - c) Develop pronunciation skills
 - d) Develop listening strategies
2. Develop cultural awareness of own and target
 - a) Understand culture as visible and invisible
 - b) Understand how culture and language are connected
 - c) Understand how awareness leads to better communication and minimizes misunderstanding and conflict
3. Gain awareness of affective issues of language use and learning abroad
 - a) Understand the reality of studying abroad in a complete L2 environment
 - b) Have realistic expectations
 - c) Understand the effect of limited L2 ability on one's self image

D. Objectives

1. Speaking and listening skills

- a) Be able to initiate, extend, and end a conversation
- b) Be able to show interest with comments and questions, repeating in question or comment form, and asking follow up questions
- c) Be able to state opinions and ideas
- d) Be able to make requests
- e) Be able to expand and provide details on a topic
- f) Be able to answer how and why questions and give examples
- g) Be able to respond correctly to tag questions and questions in the negative
- h) Be able to use useful phrases for classroom learning
- i) Be able to talk about self, home, school, and country
- j) Be able to introduce self to others
- k) Understand how to produce /l/, /r/, /s/, and /th/ sounds
- l) Understand tone, rhythm, and question intonation
- m) Do classroom listening practice and daily home listening practice with textbook and CD for gist and specific information
- n) Practice chants for listening and pronunciation skills
- o) Review present perfect, past, past continuous, and future tenses
- p) Evaluate pre and post on-camera interviews, reflect on changes, and rate confidence level on speaking and pronunciation skills

2. Cultural awareness of own and target

- a) Reflect on current and former IC students' critical incidents

- b) Discuss the issues in pairs, small groups, and whole group
 - c) Create and perform situational role-plays
 - d) Be able to explain cultural differences orally and in written form
 - e) Study body language differences
 - f) Be able to talk about self, home, school, and country
 - g) Study the origins of critical incidents
 - h) Explore cultural issues through pen friend correspondence
 - i) Evaluate pre and post on-camera interviews, reflect on changes, and rate confidence level on cultural knowing
3. Gain awareness of affective issues of language use and learning abroad
- a) Reflect on current IC seniors study abroad experiences
 - b) Discuss the issues
 - c) Discuss the issues with a panel of IC seniors
 - d) Establish short and long term goals
 - e) Understand target hosts' limited exposure to L2 learning challenges
 - f) Be able to respond to others' confusion due to usage or mispronunciation
 - g) Be able to turn a negative situation affecting self-image into a positive outcome
 - h) Create and perform situational role-plays
 - i) Explore affective issues through pen friend correspondence and interviews with native English speaking faculty
 - j) Evaluate pre and post on-camera interviews, reflect on changes, and rate confidence level

Table 2. The Syllabus Grid

Unit	Focus	Conversation Strategies	Grammar/Structures	Practice & Application	Pronunciation	Assessment
1 Orientation (6 Classes)	Community Building Course Preview Conversation Journaling Introduce Learner's Dictionaries	Introducing Self and Others Making Requests Classroom Language	Present Perfect Tense <i>Have you ever.....?</i>	Community Building Activities Chant 1 Post It Notes <i>School</i> Journal Entry 1 Listening for Main Idea	Reducing <i>Where are What's your</i>	Pre-Course Questionnaire On-Camera Interviews Journal Entry 1
2 The Culture Connection (5 Classes)	Culture Focus Defining Culture Body Language Language & Culture Connection Pen Friend	Conversation Strategies Discussion Language More Classroom Language More Making Requests	Grammar/Structures Rejoinders <i>So do I. don't. I would like.....?</i>	Practice & Application Culture Questionnaire Body Language Activities Discussion Journal Entry 2 Chant 2 Pen Friend Registration Personal Dictionaries	Pronunciation Question Intonation	Assessment Analyze On-Camera Interviews Journal Entry 2
3 They Left Me! (7 Classes)	Views on Silence/Being Passive Expressing Identity Showing Interest/Sharing Conceptualizing Video Project Content	Sharing Personal Thoughts, Feelings, and Opinions Initiating Conversation Making Interest Questions & Comments Asking Follow-up Questions Expanding Answers Providing Details	What do you like about.....? That sounds.....	Discussion Pen Friend Focus Chant 3 Active Listening Situational Role Play Readings <i>on Self Expression</i> Pocket Notebook Use	/s/ and /th/ Emphasizing Additional Information	In-Class Feedback Session
Midterm Examination Week						
4 I Didn't Like It At All! (6 Classes)	Contrary Opinions are Valued Challenging is Common. Separating the Issue From the Individual The Why? Question Expressing Individuality	Giving Solicited & Unsolicited Opinions Asking For and Giving Reasons Why? The Magic Question	How come you think so? Why don't you.....? Past Continuous	Discussion Pen Friend Focus Journal Entry 3 Multi-Layered Mind Mapping Debate on Local Culture Chant Review Self-observation of On-Camera Interview	Emphasizing Important Words	Exam (3 Classes) Journal Entry 3

Table 2 - Continued

Unit	Affective Focus	Conversation Strategies	Grammar/Structures	Practice & Application	Pronunciation	Assessment
5 Wetuee! That's so cute! (7 Classes)	Awareness of L2 Limits Effect on Self Image and on Language and Cultural Attitude Implications/Repercussions of EFL Learning	Reacting to Unpleasant Comments Asking for Assistance	Tag questions	Discussion Pen Friend Focus Journal Entry 4 Goal Setting Situational Role Play Panel Discussion Reading Telephone Call	/l/ and /r/	Journal Entry 4 Telephone Call Analyze Student Interview Evaluations
Unit	Culture Focus	Conversation Strategies	Grammar/Structures	Practice & Application	Pronunciation	Assessment
6 Mi Casa, Su Casa (5 Classes)	Directness & Indirectness Independent/Dependent	Offering, Refusing, & Accepting Confirming Information	Answering Questions in the negative <i>Don't you want some?</i>	Discussion Pen Friend Focus & Posting Journal Entry 5 Debate on Family Issues Listening for Specific Information	Emphasizing Corrections	Journal Entry 5
7 Mom, I'm Home! (5 Classes)	Expectations Family/Child Relationship Formal/Informal Language Equality & Inequality	Asking for Permission Asking for Favors	"Three" Future Tenses Do you mind if I?	Discussion Pen Friend Focus Cross-Cultural Survey Comparison Situational Role Play Post It Notes Home	Emphasizing Alternative Choices	On-Camera Interviews
8 I'm off to.....for a year! (6 Classes)	Focus: Review and Consolidation	Ending a Conversation		Telephone Call Presentation: Rehearsal & Final Examination		Telephone Call Presentations Analyze On-Camera Interviews Individual Meetings Course Assessment Questionnaire
46 Total Contact Hours (50 Minutes Each)				Final Examination Week		Final Examination 2 (Classes)

Core Course Activities

The core course activities are the vital central learning tools that both the students and teacher will utilize throughout the course to meet the goals and objectives. Students will be conversation journaling with the teacher, pen friend writing online, creating personal dictionaries, and making short digital video in a joint project with their Information Technology (IT) class over the course of the term.

The conversation journaling with students is an activity, which I have always used to build rapport, conduct class management, assess language and affective needs, teach language, and share personal and cultural insights. This will continue but with each weekly or biweekly entry, there will be a more purposeful cultural and language focus and recycling of previously taught items. Students will have specific tasks: expand on only a few topics, be more specific about their study-abroad goals, give and respond to opinions, and give their reaction on something the teacher will have purposely disagreed with in their previous journal entry.

The online pen friend writing activity will be reinstated with also a very purposeful cultural and language specific focus. In the past few courses in which this was done, the purpose was for authentic language production with any culture learning as peripheral and individual. This year, the class will discuss topics and formulate questions to ask their pen friends. What they learn from correspondence will be shared with the whole class. What the teenagers of the target countries say regarding culture and language will be a central part of this activity. Language, which furthers their ability to express themselves and reveal more of their identity, is a very important element of it. The activity also allows the students to explore, taking more responsibility for their own

learning. One assignment will be to continuously revise their self-introductory letter. This will be done individually and as a shared class activity, resulting in a “Best Letter.” Other tasks will have the students purposely asking “Why?” questions or inquiring about the diversity at their schools and their experiences with exchange students and learning languages.

Students will make personal dictionaries allowing for multiple ways of vocabulary and language learning. Students will write a word or phrase on the first page of a notebook. On the second page they will write its definition in English, and on the third they will write an example sentence with a personal connection. The fourth page will be the Japanese definition. They will then be able to study from any of the four pages. Students will be challenged to explain the meaning of the words and use them in context in class activities and on tests. They will be encouraged to add to it daily.

The video project is primarily an IT project, which I purposely have gotten involved in to deepen students learning. Every year students are asked to make a video in their IT course. This project requires a lot of time and energy on their parts. Seeing how much time and energy goes into these projects I wanted to incorporate more English language and cultural learning into their projects. I proposed the idea of doing the project jointly with my course to the IT teacher. He enthusiastically agreed, and it was decided that I would focus on the content, while he handled the production. The students will be asked to make a video in groups of three that shows some aspect of Japanese culture. The end product is to be educational and entertaining which they can take to their host countries to show their host families and friends. Students will make the decisions as to what kind of video they will make and periodically meet with the teacher to discuss the

cultural aspects and language use.

Overview of Course Units

The unit overview briefly describes the critical incidents for each unit and the learning objectives. The Syllabus Grid contains further details on how the unit objectives will be met. References to some assessment activities in this overview and in the Syllabus Grid will be explained in the assessment plan which follows.

Unit 1 Orientation

The first unit for the course is an orientation with the objective of building community and giving the students a preview of the course. Creating classroom community is a priority for this course due to the context and to help ensure that the course learning goals will be met. The Course 3 experience has shown that purposeful building of classroom community cannot be omitted. In the beginning of the course, more class time will be spent on achieving this than in the past, and continued strengthening of community will remain an integral part of lesson activities throughout the course. Because a major thread throughout the course will be the student focus on expressing their personal identity, continuing the community building can be easily accomplished. The course preview will introduce the course goals and objectives, the core course activities, and classroom procedures. Students will receive a handout of the course preview with a simplified statement on the general goals for the course, the teacher's beliefs on learning and teaching, as well as a list and brief explanations of the course activities. There is a copy of the course preview in appendix 1 on pages 83-85.

Unit 2 The Culture Connection

The objective of this unit is to set the base for the course cultural learning objectives and procedures for the remaining units. The cultural learning objectives for this unit are: 1) language and culture are inseparable, 2) communication styles come from one's culture, and 3) the importance of understanding the visible and invisible culture of your own country and that of the host country. To introduce the concepts, students will complete a questionnaire asking them to choose examples of culture from a list, then in groups, discuss how their choices reflect culture. This will also serve as their introduction to discussion language and procedures.

Unit 3 They Left Me!

If you take no action, do not contribute, and just remain quiet, Americans will ignore you. You need to show your personality. Yuki

In an interview, Yuki spoke on how she had made some friends early on, but shortly after, those friends left her. They chose not to hang out with her, because she was too silent. She quickly discovered that her silent nature, though acceptable in Japan, is not in America. Additionally to her being naturally a quiet person, she held the belief that her English skills were not adequate. She felt sad that she could not contribute much, be funny or interesting, and that people probably did not want to be around her. Consequently, she withdrew.

The unit objectives are: 1) understand the problems which can arise from remaining silent or passive which is not considered a negative quality in Japan, 2) understand the value which Western countries place on expressing one's identity which includes showing one's personality, sharing one's opinions, thoughts, and feelings, and

3) gain confidence and competence in initiating and extending conversations. Three volunteers from the senior IC class will perform a prepared role-play at the beginning of the experiential learning cycle depicting Yuki's experience.

Unit 4 I Did Not Like It at All!

This unit derives from the critical incident Miyu had when discussing the movie with her British peer. Students will listen to the brief encounter then reflect on and discuss the experience. Miyu eventually learned that it was OK to state her opinions and not have to worry about offending other people's feelings even though she held a different opinion. She mentioned how great it was to be able to learn from others' different opinions and share her own. Better relationships and cultural understanding grew as a result. The learning objectives for the unit are: 1) understanding that Westerners separate the issue from the person, 2) contrary opinions are valued and challenging someone is common, and 3) understanding the question, "Why?" does not have a negative connotation in the West. Language practice and application will focus on asking for and giving opinions, and stating one's reasons. In Japan, questioning one's opinion is commonly viewed as disagreeing with it. The "Why?" question will be stressed for its learning and conversational value.

Midterm examination week will fall between Unit 4 and Unit 5. One examination hour and two class hours immediately following the official examination week will be used for assessing student achievement. The exam will be in two parts, with the first testing their listening skills, their ability to explain vocabulary, their understanding of the conversation strategies and the two types of culture. The second part will be a role-play

performance depicting an exchange student initiating a conversation with a classmate, using conversation strategies to show interest and be of interest. Evaluation will be done by both fellow classmates and the teacher.

Unit 5 Wetteuce! That's So Cute!

In this unit, students will be presented with the affective issues that can delay or prevent students from reaching their language and cultural learning goals. The learning objectives are: 1) understanding the effect that limited L2 ability can have on one's self-image, on attitude towards learning and language use, and towards cultural engagement, 2) understanding the realities of learning a language here in Japan, compared to the realities of "living the language" abroad, 3) gaining competence on how to react to comments from others and understand their perspective, 4) keeping personal goals in sight, and establishing daily and weekly goals, and 5) improving pronunciation skills. To present the affective issues, three IC Seniors will reflect on their experiences in a guided fishbowl discussion. Their stories will be told, focusing on what happened and why, and what students going abroad should know. This will form the experience for students to reflect and then discuss.

Since many of the former exchange students' problems originated from comments made on their pronunciation, this unit will also focus on: 1) the language and strategies to respond to others' confusion and turn perceived negative comments into positive learning outcomes and 2) continue the on-going work on pronunciation with a discussion on pronunciation learning. To respond to others' confusion, students will practice repeating their intended message or mispronounced word or phrase more slowly, and

make use of their pocket notebooks by spelling out the word. Students will practice turning the possible negative impact on their self-image from comments into a positive outcomes by: 1) agreeing with the person making the comment that their pronunciation needs improving, 2) informing the person of their study-abroad language-learning purpose, 3) informing the person on how challenging it is to learn a second language, and 4) using it as an opportunity to recruit that person in helping teach the proper pronunciation. These strategies will hopefully encourage sympathetic understanding, and give the student control over how both they and others react in the situation. Students need to view it as an opportunity to form relationships and to improve their skills, not retreat.

Unit 6 Mi Casa Su Casa

Japanese do not entirely express their true feelings, but only put 20 percent of what they want to say into words (Itsuka 1996).

In this unit the students will watch a role-play performed by the IC Senior volunteers depicting an exchange student's critical incident in which she politely refuses an offer of cookies. She wanted them very much but to her surprise the expected second offer of cookies does not come. On a different day the same offer comes where she does not hesitate to accept. This experience will be used to bring out the learning objective of the Japanese concept of *enryo*. It means not expressing one's views strongly, and this conflicts with the more direct Western style of communication (Itsuka 1996). Students will be made aware of how their message, due to different communication styles, could either be misinterpreted or completely missed. Westerners will also wrongly perceive the students as being very reserved or not having their own strong opinions. Several students

mentioned in their interviews that they learned you had to state clearly, what you want or what you are thinking; otherwise, Westerners will not understand you. These different ways of expressing oneself will also be linked to the previous unit where the comments made might have been viewed being as being too direct. Japanese might not so directly point out a mistake or mispronunciation, being concerned about others' feelings.

Unit 7 Mom, I'm Home!

This unit derives from the critical incidents that several of the Course 3 students currently abroad have experienced with their host families. The experience will be reading a fictitious report from an exchange program, detailing complaints from the host family about their exchange student. The report states how the student does not spend time with the host family after school or dinner, often retreating to their bedroom to study, listen to music, surf the Internet, or play video games. When they are at the dinner table or in the living room, they do not share much of themselves or their culture or show interest in the host family and their culture. The learning objectives of this unit are: 1) understand the differences in the parent-child relationship, 2) understand the value placed on sharing among family members, 3) gain awareness of the family expectations in hosting an exchange student, and 4) understand the Western behaviors of: showing appreciation, expressing affection, and using proper manners.

Unit 8 I'm Off To...For A Year!

This unit is for review and consolidation of the course learning goals and objectives, and for conducting final student and course assessments. During the final

examination week, students will make a formal presentation either on their personal identity, their goals for their study-year abroad, or on an aspect of culture. Following the final examination week, there will be individual meetings with the students for the teacher to provide feedback on individual pre and post video interviews. A *Sayonara* Party will be held to celebrate their successful completion of the course and their new beginnings. Students will be encouraged to stay in touch with one another via e-mail to share their wonderful ongoing experiences and to offer support during the difficult times that they will face.

Pronunciation

In past courses, pronunciation was not strongly stressed. The pronunciation, which was addressed, was done with the use of several jazz chants focusing on rhythm, question intonation, reduced sounds, and listening work. After conducting the needs assessment, it became very clear that the students' views and my view of what is considered acceptable pronunciation differed greatly. I felt their pronunciation was adequate and comprehensible to native speakers, but I never considered the possible negative impact on them of having pronunciation that made them stand out. This course will actively address pronunciation in my lesson time and in two twenty-minute morning class sessions per week, conducted by another native English-speaking instructor. Lesson plans will be coordinated and will address the areas of special difficulty for Japanese speakers, such as /l/ and /r/, and /s/ and /th/ consonant sounds. Intonation focus will be on Yes/No, Either/Or, Tag, and Confirming Questions. Sentence and word stress work will include emphasizing: important words, additional information, alternatives, and

corrections. Rhythm learning will be accomplished with Jazz Chants and other rhythmic practice materials. Pronunciation learning textbooks and websites will be introduced for those who would like to develop their skills further.

Stressing pronunciation skills in the course will give students more confidence to speak and more control of their speech by having better awareness of proper sounding English. While stressing the correct sounds, students will be made aware to not overemphasize its importance, especially regarding their identity, and their overall language ability. Having realistic expectations and some learning strategies will help prevent, “This is how I really sound!” shock.

Assessment Plan

The course assessment plan will address the following types of assessment: 1) students’ language, cultural, and affective needs, 2) student learning, and 3) the effectiveness of the course. Assessment will be conducted utilizing questionnaires, interviews, presentations, written examination, pen friend and conversation journal writing. This section will look at what will be assessed along with each assessment tool.

A pre and post-course questionnaire will be conducted which asks students to rate their confidence levels in the areas of language ability and cultural knowledge. The teacher will compare the results of the two questionnaires to help determine if the course has met its overall goal. A second pre-course questionnaire will be also conducted to assess student needs and to learn about their goals and strategies for reaching them. A copy of each questionnaire is in appendix 1 on pages 85-88.

Central to the assessment plan are two on-camera interviews, for they include all

three types of assessment and provide washback (Bailey 1998). The teacher will conduct two individual interviews with each student—one at the beginning and one at the end of the course. The first interview will help define students' needs, and comparisons of the two interviews will be used to assess student learning and course effectiveness. There is a self-evaluation component to this tool which is designed for students to learn about themselves as learners with the goal of increasing their confidence. After the first interview is conducted, students will evaluate their own interviews. It will show the students that they have a responsibility for their learning and it will introduce the course content; that is, what is important in their preparation. After the second interview, students will watch both interviews consecutively and reflect on the changes. My hope is their self-evaluation of the interviews will lead students to see areas of improvement and the areas that still require more focus. In doing both evaluations, students have the opportunity to gain a better awareness of their abilities, needs, and learning process and thus depart with more confidence than when they entered the course. As a final learning opportunity, students will meet with the teacher individually to discuss their evaluations and their language and cultural learning goals for the study abroad experience. The teacher will analyze the interviews and evaluations forms. The interview self-evaluation forms are in appendix 1 on pages 88-91.

The midterm examination will be in two parts. Part I will be a written test assessing cultural understanding and vocabulary learning. Part II will be the first of two presentations.

For first presentation, students will create a role-play depicting a Japanese exchange student having a conversation in the first week at their new high school. Both

students and teacher will evaluate the performances. It will serve as an achievement assessment for conversation strategies as well as a confidence building activity. The second presentation is a formal presentation, which will serve as their final examination. Students will give a ten-minute presentation on their personal identity and on their goals and strategies for success abroad.

The conversation journal and pen friend writing will serve as on-going assessment tools. Copies of their e-mail correspondence will be forwarded to the teacher.

Students will receive a term grade scored on one-hundred-point scale. Fig. 2 shows what their grades will be based on and the percentage each is assigned.

Fig. 2. Student Assessment Plan

Grade Based On	Percentage of Grade
Class and IT Project Participation	15%
Completing Assignments	
Conversation Journals	15%
Pen Friends	15%
Personal Dictionary	15%
Midterm Exam: I Written II Pair Presentation	15%
Final Exam: Formal Presentation	25%

The schedule of the assessment plan can be found in the Syllabus Grid on pages 42-43.

The course has been designed, but the learning process continues with the teaching of the course.

CHAPTER 5
A REFLECTIVE RESPONSE
The Guides

The course started with a distinctly new feeling for this teacher. For the first time, I began a course with a plan designed to reach goals based on months of assessment, reflection, and decision-making. I felt the confidence gained from the course design process, yet also felt some uncertainty, for there was so much new to create, teach, and assess in fulfilling the important learning goals. Therefore, the excitement and nervousness of the nine students sitting around the circle was mutual. A few months later, they departed for a year abroad in Canada, the United States, and New Zealand, and I reflected on whether they were prepared for it. In this final chapter, I will discuss the insights gained from teaching the course and from student and course assessment. The guides, which enabled the valuable insights, were the goals, objectives, and syllabus, the strong classroom community, and the assessment plan.

Goals, Objectives, and a Syllabus

For most teachers the idea of beginning a course without first having conducted a proper needs assessment, established clear goals and objectives, or created a syllabus, must seem unwise and irresponsible. It is clear to me now having finished teaching this

course, that trying to do so without first going through the process of defining these course design elements, will provide a less than successful student learning experience and set oneself up for much frustration. I had been delighted to begin this course with these elements in place, for they had served their primary purpose—the creation of the course. What remained was its trouble-free implementation with the goals and objectives, and syllabus guiding the students and I through the units and achieving much learning. They did act as guides but also in unexpected ways. The implementation was far from trouble-free. Issues due to an over-ambitious design and the gaining of a better understanding of students' needs, necessitated major modifications to the syllabus. In previous courses, these elements were not clearly defined so when problems arose, I had no syllabus or clear vision of defined goals and objectives to guide me towards solutions. There was major uncertainty and I occasionally became discouraged. However, the existence of a complete syllabus for this course allowed me to see what could be re-sequenced or cut, and where more emphasis could be placed. Furthermore, the course was designed with months of research and planning giving it a solid foundation. That foundation allowed me to make changes with the confidence that the course would retain its purpose. Some objectives or even a chapter removed would not change the essence of the course. The in-course adjustments were no doubt hectic, and there was a momentary disconcerting feeling of *deja vu*, but it was fleeting. I just made sure the changes would lead towards fulfilling the goals and thus meet students' preparation needs. Below the surface of the sometimes frenetic reworking that was required, there was a tranquil feeling being experienced for the very first time.

The course began with the unit on creating community. The objectives were met,

however, only half of the planned activities were completed. The activities had taken longer than I had estimated when designing the syllabus. This caused me some concern that my mistaken estimates for what was achievable would create problems during the entire syllabus. When Unit 2 began, my concerns were quickly validated. I was only able to complete one-third of what was planned for each class hour. Why had I so misjudged what could be achieved in the time? Were these student's levels of language proficiency lower than the levels of students in previous classes? I was informed by the English Department that this group of students actually had the highest average score on the English section of the high school's entrance exam for a class entering the IC program. The problem was not due to students' proficiency levels but to a combination of having planned too many objectives, introducing too many new activities, and teaching too much new content. Early on, I felt the burden of an over-weighted syllabus that was barely manageable for the teacher and would soon prove the same for the students.

In the first few weeks, I was extremely busy with the setting up of four core course activities, the conducting of the on-camera interviews, and having meetings with the senior volunteers and IT staff. Additional preparation and instruction time were required to meet the learning objectives of Unit 2. This was a new content area for me to teach, and it was proving a challenge to clearly define the three cultural concepts. More time was being spent on this unit as well as the setting up of the core course activities, and this led to a stretching-out-effect of the course. Too much time was passing from the first time something was introduced until it was revisited, with big variety of learning activities occurring in between. I was concerned that students would lose the focus of this unit and those to follow. I realized there was enough in my course design to teach

possibly three terms. Corrections had to be made to make the learning more accessible to the students and more manageable for the teacher to work with-in his capabilities.

Trying to strictly following the syllabus would be impossible. Rushing through to accomplish as many objectives as possible would not be serving their needs. However, I could choose to complete all the units, but many cuts to would have to be made resulting in an insufficient coverage of the conversational strategies, grammar, and pronunciation, and little practice and application. Most of the time would be spent on scaffolding activities required for the understanding of cultural differences and in discussions. I foresaw students leaving the course with a good understanding of the cultural differences and having had a lot of practice sharing their thoughts on these issues, but unprepared for their everyday communicative needs and not be feeling very confident with their overall communicative skills. There needed to be a proper balancing of the specific goals and objectives. To have an opportunity of achieving this, I decided to cut Units 6 and 7 from the syllabus excluding the pen friend and journal activities. I believed completing up to Unit 5 was both doable and needed though some of class grammar focus, practice and application in Units 3, 4, and 5 would also have to be dropped. However, the on-going needs assessment of classroom observation, conversation journaling and pen friend correspondence revealed that this reduction of the syllabus was not all that would be required. Two other issues also quickly surfaced necessitating further course modifications.

The students informed me that they were inundated with too many homework assignments in their other courses making it difficult to complete the assignments in my class. Being Japanese, they considerately avoided pointing out to me that my class

required too much of their time as well. They did not have to tell me, for it was becoming clear from observation why this very hard-working group of students was having trouble completing the personal dictionaries, the pen friends, and the conversation journals. There were too many of these time-consuming activities, which required a lot of discipline for them to do on daily and weekly basis. Along with the joint IT project, and preparation for their midterm presentations, my course was asking too much. Together with their other heavy course loads, proper completion of the tasks was another problem with my course design. I decided to drop the last two journal requirements and discontinue the personal dictionary activity. I encouraged them to keep a personal journal and make additions to their dictionaries when possible, and make use of these learning tools during their stay abroad.

The objectives of Units 3 and 4 were understood, but when I read copies of students' pen-friend letters and their journal entries and observed the classroom practice, it was clear that they were not adequately applying what they had learned in the lessons. They were writing and speaking on many topics but not expanding, providing details, or making enough interest comments. Their questions were often too large in scope. They were not sharing enough about their personal lives and their thoughts and feelings. Much more work was required on these strategies. For my students to have the skills and confidence to communicate with classmates and their host families immediately after arriving, stronger emphasis was needed on the conversation strategies and the language to express their identity. The conversation journaling revealed that students needed to also be more specific in defining their study-abroad goals further. Along with completing up through Unit 5, I decided that remainder of the course would be almost

exclusively aimed at strengthening conversational strategies, expressing personal identity, and more specific goal setting. I decided to focus on two learning tools to meet these needs and to continue strengthening their cultural learning using the pen friend activity and multiple mind maps.

The mind maps were used to assist students in expanding on a single topic and for adding details. I refer to the mind map use as multi-layered mind maps (MLMM). For the work on expressing personal identity, I had students fill in a mind map with the heading, “My Identity” and four main subheadings: “Social Life”, “School”, “Home”, and “What I Value”. For each subheading, students wrote four words or phrases. On a second mind map, they filled in the heading using a subheading from the first mind map, for example, “Social Life”. The four words or phrases, which they had written about “Social Life”, became the new subheadings. On this second mind map, they were asked to write four more words or phrase for the new subheadings. Students filled in three more mind maps in similar fashion using the remaining subheadings from the first mind map. The five pages were stapled together forming their MLMM. Over the remaining weeks, students were asked to write four to six detailed sentences for each subheading. There are two pages of a student’s MLMM and the start of a second MLMM on study-abroad goals in appendix 2 on pages 92-94. The MLMM would become a new core course activity and provide the needed scaffolding to help them: write pen friend letters that were more engaging, prepare them for their final presentation, and perform classroom-speaking activities. To underscore the importance of expanding their English, “Plus 1, Plus 2, Plus 3” would become the class mantra for everything spoken or written. This means that when students made a statement, one to three more statements or a combination of

statements and questions needed to follow it. When they asked a question, they had to offer a supporting statement either preceding or following the question, or ask a double question.

Classroom Community

I knew the benefits of having a strong classroom community, yet three occurrences gave me a deeper appreciation for it. The open dialogue, rapport, and trust that had been established allowed for the negotiation of course content with students, the resolving of a student conflict, and the continued deeper understanding of my students' context.

The course modifications left me feeling confident that the course goals would be met. However, even though I had cut two core course activities and resolved some computer issues, only one-third of the class was fully embracing the pen friend activity. The other two-thirds were not adequately completing the assignments. There was a need for every student to be e-mailing on a regular basis, trying to establish some consistent correspondence with several high school students abroad. If they could not do this, the objectives of using the correspondence for whole class sharing and learning could not be realized. Therefore, we sat in our circle and I informed them on the importance of everyone making an effort to complete the writing tasks and contribute to the shared learning. I had to inform them better on its purpose and how it would be used in the next several weeks. As I spoke, there was silence and long faces with a few heads lowered. I realized that they believed I was admonishing them for not having completed the assignments. I quickly assured them that I was not upset, and I wanted to discuss how to

accomplish this activity. Upon realizing my intentions, each student began to express their thoughts. The class quickly came to an agreement on how much class time would be afforded to writing in the computer room, and commitments were made to do the remaining work at home. What made this event so special for me was not only it the first time to negotiate content by hearing each voice, but also it was the transformation in their facial expressions and attitude once they understood the purpose of the discussion. I believe they were on new ground in negotiating course matters with a *sensei*. It was a special moment to witness.

Three weeks into the course, a student approached me to help resolve a problem she was having with another student who was making some negative comments to her concerning her “poor” English ability. She was very self-conscious about her English ability and his comments greatly upset her. After meeting individually with the both of them, they were able to reach a mutual understanding and resolve the issue. This was the first time a student had ever come to me to discuss a conflict they were having with another student. Students typically impart their problems with classmates or occasionally consult with their homeroom teachers. Maybe this anomaly was just a one-time event, but I firmly I believe the community that had been established allowed for the student to approach me and for me to be of some assistance. I know it helped in the discussions with both individuals and also contributed in many other non-scheduled meetings I had with students. Students came to discuss problems they were having in school, seek some advice, and to release stress they were feeling. Being able to voice their feelings led me to a better understanding of their learning context.

I had known from previous years that the students preparing to go abroad are very

busy with schoolwork, especially the IT video project that consumes many hours of their time. They have the additional pressure of doing well on their midterm and final examinations because their first term grades count for their grades for the entire school year. What I did not know was just *how* heavy the workload is in their other classes and the psychological pressures put on students by some teachers. Students spent hours translating English textbooks in their science, math, history, and English reading classes each week in addition to other assignments. Students did not get a sufficient amount of sleep, and as the midterm examinations approached, some students barely slept at all. This group of students would occasionally break down and cry or snap at one another due to the stress. The students informed me that their reading and writing teacher, who is also the director of the IC program, had threatened them with denying them permission to study abroad if they did not perform well on their exams. No student had ever been prevented from going abroad by the school in the past. The teacher's use of fear to "motivate" students had one extremely concerned student almost in tears two weeks prior to the end of the term, asking me if anyone had ever been denied their study-year abroad. I quickly reassured her that she would definitely be departing for America this summer. Pressures from the course load and for achieving high grades, and the fear of having their dream of being an exchange student end, left this group not feeling very good about learning. Given this was the context; I had been not helping this class or previous ones with my overloaded courses. The importance of having a very clear understanding of student's context was once again being reinforced. However, this time I was able to get the insights in time to make the needed adjustments. I made the course more doable for all of us.

These wonderful students who had been so excited to enter the school and the IC program were struggling with the demands of their first term. A few fell into despair for a while. The changes I made to the course were in partial response to their affective needs. I was now acutely aware of the emotional and physical strain they were experiencing, and I made it my obligation for the remainder of the course to help ease that strain with emotional support through dialogue and with a course that did not contribute to it. During our last class together, students expressed how glad they were to have entered the IC. While enduring the challenges of the school term, strong bonds of friendship had been created. I learned that the classroom community that was built, was not only important for our class, but for their entire program experience.

Assessment Plan

Assessment allows a teacher to see, for without it, there is only that blind wandering. I have now seen how the needs assessment led me to develop my course design and how on-going assessment led me to see where other needs lay while the course was in progress. The course has been completed, and the assessment has now informed me on the effectiveness of the course and on changes for the next study-abroad preparation course. When I reflect back on what occurred and analyze the feedback, I see that students did benefit from this course, that there were areas where they could have benefited more, and that next year's students will gain from my clearer vision. This section focuses on where those benefits did and did not occur in relation to the course goals and objectives. There is overlap in this discussion since the language, culture, and affective learning are interconnected.

Language Learning

Viewing tapes of students' pre and post interviews revealed appreciable improvements in: pronunciation, expanding answers, revealing more of their identity, responding to answers more quickly, pausing less, and using more facial expressions and hand gestures. My constant drumming of "Plus 1, Plus 2, Plus 3" and focus on the MLMM and pen friends made a positive impact their language expansion. One student speaking on the same topic in both interviews spoke for ten sentences in the second interview—a gain of six sentences. When they were asked in the second interview to say something about themselves, several students talked about the same topics as they had in their first interview while others chose to speak on different ones. In both cases, students added more details, used richer vocabulary and developed answers more fully. Not only was vocabulary introduced in class present, but vocabulary their pen friends had taught them. Very few if any answers lacked a supporting statement. Absent were the vague answers that were prevalent in the first interview. One student wrote in her second interview self-evaluation that she felt she had improved on pronunciation, vocabulary, expanding, and fluency. She then went on to say:

The best is expanding. First time, [*sic*] I was so nervous, but the second time, I was majestic.

The pronunciation assessment test in the two interviews showed that almost all of the students were able to produce the troublesome /l/, /r/, /s/ and /th/ sounds properly by the end of the course. Rhythm and question intonation also improved. I was delighted to see the improvement, for having good pronunciation was a stated concern for some this year's students, just as it had proven to be for many of the former exchange students.

Students benefited from actively contributing to the small group and whole group

discussions, which were central to each unit. They understood both the cultural and language relevance of contributing their personal points of views, and the insights that the discussions of the critical incidents would bring. While students were motivated by the learning purposes of the discussions and made effort to contribute, the discussions lacked the spontaneous interaction I had envisioned. There were moments of long silence, turn taking was very predictable, discussion language remained static, and there was very little disagreement occurring or furthering of ideas. Some of this can be attributed to Japanese culture, but I believe most was due to the content. The topics required a lot of vocabulary which they did not readily possess and required some reflection. What would have been more beneficial for developing their discussion skills, would have been to choose some very simple and high interest topics where vocabulary and meaning would not be as big of barriers to the discussion. They would have more space and confidence to contribute more, make their points clear, and experiment with new discussion language. This would have been a better way to develop their skills and scaffold them into the more challenging discussions of the critical incidents.

Culture Learning

Students gained a very good understanding of the cultural differences presented in Units 3 and 4. The critical incidents were both meaningful and powerful, and the students had more engaging discussions and whole-class sharing than in Unit 2. Students practiced the conversation strategies with enthusiasm. They saw the value in this cultural knowledge. In her final presentation, one student stated, “Japanese do not often say their true feelings, but in America we should.” A fellow classmate wrote in her journal on the

importance of stating one's opinion. She said that she knows that at first she will not be able to tell her opinions well in class, but she will try. Students also benefited from the pen friend activity, for example, learning that teenagers in America are not very different from themselves. They asked questions about the procedures for riding a school bus, the cafeteria menu, and colloquial expressions teenagers use. They shared what they had learned with their classmates. "He's hot!" and "Sweet!" were frequently heard being used in class. "I'm goofy." was particular students' favorite. One student's pen friend provided some sociolinguistic instruction concerning the use of word, "Damn!" The pen friend said that one uses this expression when something makes you speechless, but one has to be careful using it around teachers and grandparents who might find its use offensive.

It was reassuring to see many examples of cultural learning occurring especially since Units 6 and 7 were not addressed. I feel the students have gained the basic understanding that differences do exist among cultures, which sometimes result in misunderstanding and conflict. When they experience their own critical incidents this coming year, I believe this awareness will be triggered, and they will try to discover its underlying reasons through dialogue and reflection. In trying to see the other's perspective, I hope the mental picture of the student drawn image we kept in the classroom assists them. It depicted two teenagers talking to one other standing in a pair of 'cultural' sneakers—the Canadian Maple Leaf drawn on one pair and the Japanese Rising Sun drawn on the other.

There were cultural learning successes, but there were failures as well. "I don't know enough about Japanese culture, so I'll do research on the internet before I go." said one student during his final presentation. He was not the only one who held this view. A

comparison of the pre and post questionnaires on confidence revealed that 43 percent of the students actually had a decrease in confidence concerning their knowledge of their own culture. I was surprised at what I had heard and read, and it raised several questions. Was the culture learning too focused on the target culture? Data from that same comparison does support this with 57 percent of the students rating an increase in confidence concerning their knowledge of their host country's culture. Was it a question of not discussing Japanese culture enough? The second half of the course focused almost exclusively on expressing their identity with the creation of the MLMM and the application with in-class activities and with their pen friends. Together with the Japanese culture focus in their IT videos, and the lessons on cultural differences it does not appear that they did not get enough exposure to their culture. What could explain why they felt they did not know enough about Japanese culture? What makes the findings even more surprising is that most of the 43 percent reporting the decrease were the students whose feedback showed the most evidence of cultural learning. They participated fully in writing to pen friends and completed their MLMM. I believe the answer lies in how I approached the cultural learning.

Pre-course assessment showed that students held a "Big C" definition of culture. In their first interviews, they mostly talked about calligraphy, history, and the beautiful city of Kyoto and its many famous temples. I had noted this and had even been expecting it. However, in Unit 2, I was so focused on bringing out the "small c" definition of culture, the language and culture connection, and how cultural difference can lead to problems, that the culture of everyday life somehow was lost in between the two definitions. It is clear that the students did not very well relate the examples and discussions on people's

values, beliefs, and behaviors to aspects of their personal lives around them. I presented many examples and asked students to discuss how these were examples of culture using the new definition and then consider how these might cause conflicts. The approach was not appropriate. I knew they were mostly coming from a “Big C” view so taking a more gradual approach to these new cultural concepts would have made more sense. I should have presented one or more experiences that they could easily relate to in their personal lives to help define the view of culture, rather than define it for them and have them apply it. Many of the examples I used were not easy for them to see as culture since the examples were reflecting values beliefs and attitudes and some of which were of the target cultures. I should have only focused on their culture at first and in the simplest of terms and examples, across all definitions. That is, approach the learning from a place of knowing and move to areas of a new awareness. Do not try to define culture as this or that kind in the beginning, but rather create as a class an all-encompassing definition.

Teaching the material in a second language required much more scaffolding than I had expected. A simpler approach was needed from a purely language learning and usage point of view. For them to discuss it, in a second language was not very doable. In order to make meaning clear and try to remain on schedule, the lessons in this unit ended up with the more teacher talk and less student discovery. Sho, a student in the class, aptly describes how the learning atmosphere of this unit felt in his course evaluation. “I think culture learning is the most useful. But sometimes it was boring, because culture learning is serious.”

Affective Learning

The affective issues students can encounter abroad were revealed powerfully and effectively to the students in a fishbowl discussion with three senior volunteers. It is clear from assessment of on-camera interviews, presentations, role-plays, and MLMM, that students understood the issues that had been presented. When asked in their interviews how they would respond to someone teasing them because their English sounded funny or they made a mistake, most students held a positive attitude and all had a set of coping strategies. Their strategies included an oral response such as, “I think so, too.” or “I know I can’t speak so well now, but I will get better.” and a specific action they would take. They said that they would study harder and ask their friends or host families for help in learning. Some said they would even ask the individual who is giving negative feedback for help in correcting their mistake. They were not going to let negative comments or their limited language ability deter them from having a rewarding experience abroad. In her second on-camera interview, Mao said that she did not want to dwell on her limited English ability and negative comments that she might receive. She said she knew it would take time, but her English would improve and wanted to enjoy her experience. Students also created and performed a role-play depicting such a situation. Whether or not they will ever have to respond to someone’s negative remarks is secondary. Developing strategies on how to improve their skills, having an awareness of the learning process and how they can be challenged because of limited L2 ability, is what is beneficial.

Students used MLMM to set goals for the first week and first month at their new schools and host families. Some examples of established goals were stating their opinion

during class, studying without the use of an electronic dictionary, or wanting to quickly make friends with the members the rugby team. One activity I did with these MLMM on establishing goals was to ask the students to label each of their goals as either a language-learning goal or a culture-learning goal. They discovered that some of their goals could be both. I saw all their goals as affective-learning goals. By setting goals, students begin to take responsibility for their learning, and this helps to instill confidence.

The on-camera interviews and self-evaluations exceeded expectations as a learning tool and for instilling confidence. Students saw either an improvement or a need for improvement in many areas: pronunciation ability, use of details, expanding on topics, use of vocabulary and grammar, making their points clear and needing to know more about their own or target culture. That awareness is invaluable for it allows a student to see their learning process and set learning strategies, and it can motivate them to be more responsible for their learning. Riho wrote on her second self-evaluation form:

I think I could speak better in second video, but I can't speak without long moments [of hesitation]. I think I have to practice talking English [*sic*], speak more in detail. I want to be good at English, so I'm going to speak to American people positively.

Her feedback captures everything I had wanted achieve through this activity. She sees her development and areas of need, forms strategies for success, and expresses motivation and confidence. Another student talked in detail on her strategies for learning while abroad. She said she is going to keep a personal journal and dictionary, will always make an effort of using "Plus 1, Plus 2, Plus 3", and read as much as she can. For a third student, the assessment tool was a source of motivation for her to improve over the course of the term. She wrote, "I thought I want to be able to speak English well by the second interview." The ultimate endorsement of this activity was a simple, "Thanks". She

wrote, “I want to thanks you because these interviews were useful for us [*sic*].”

This tool provided an unforeseen but very beneficial awareness to one student. It allowed her to see a very different view of her English ability than the one she had held. After observing her first interview, Saki wrote:

I did my best for this interview, but when I watched it, surprisingly I couldn’t do that well. So I was shocked.

Better for her to realize this several months before her departure than to experience that shock overseas. She had time to work on areas of need and maybe even more importantly, the new awareness will help prevent some of the affective issues that delayed the language and cultural engagement for many of her upperclassmen.

The final part of the on-camera assessment tool was holding individual meetings with students to discuss their evaluations and their language and cultural learning goals for studying abroad. Unfortunately, there was not enough time remaining in the course to conduct these feedback sessions. After reading several of the second self-evaluations, I realized how vital teacher feedback is. They needed another perspective to help them see what they failed to notice. A few students wrote that they did not improve much or that specific areas such as vocabulary or cultural knowledge showed no progress. I would have liked to have clearly shown them many specific examples of their expanded vocabulary and other aspects of their improvement such as, how they did not easily give up trying to convey their meaning and made great efforts to work around their lack of certain vocabulary or grammar. “I did not feel nervous but my English few improved [*sic*].” wrote one. They did not see being more confident in their communication as an improvement. Mao felt that her cultural knowledge had not improved because she failed to mention cultural differences in her response to the question on Japanese culture. She

did not see that by acknowledging cultural differences she had increased cultural knowledge. I would have also pointed out that what she did say regarding Japanese culture was more in-depth than in her first interview. Students noticed that they had expanded more, used new vocabulary and been clearer, but then in their next answer to the next question asking about specific improvements contradicted themselves saying the exact opposite. A few were self-critical and failed to see more growth. Since one important learning aspect this tool was for students to gain confidence by seeing gains, another view providing informed, objective, and positive feedback was needed. It is clear to me that for better understanding and learning to occur the teacher and student need to strive to get closer to one another's perspectives. Both students and teacher need to provide feedback to one another, and it is the teacher's duty to create the opportunities for feedback.

The pre and post course questionnaire on confidence was to be the key tool in determining course effectiveness. I was hoping to see a dramatic change in confidence levels. Most answers only moved one position on the rating scale. Only 46 percent of students' answers showed an increase in confidence, 34 percent remained unchanged, and 20 percent showed a decrease. The results of this assessment tool at first did not leave me feeling very good about the course effectiveness. However, when I took a closer look at the results, one student accounted for 43 percent of the answers showing a decrease. Even taking in account that one student's answers, the overall confidence level for all students still averaged a 3.2 on the 5-point scale. They felt confident, even the one student accounting for much of the decrease. The results of her questionnaire were mixed, but she felt more confident that she could speak English well, have a conversation with a native

speaker of English, pronounce accurately, and would reach her goals. Most of her decreases in confidence were the specific areas of language ability and cultural knowing. I do not now how accurate this assessment tool was. Had I included a written part to this questionnaire it would have allowed students clarify answers and provide me with more information to assess accurately.

The assessment plan did have multiple assessment tools, which helped me gain a clearer picture of what was learned and gained. Where the course targets met? Did the course leave the students feeling confident about their one-year journey in a foreign land? Are they more prepared for the language, cultural, and affective challenges they will encounter? I believe looking at the feedback that the answer to the three questions is yes. The assessment tools have also shown that they could they have been better prepared. I wish I could have another opportunity to better prepare the same group of students after having learned so much with them. I can honor them by providing greater learning opportunities for the next group of students.

Next Year's Opportunity

Modifications for next year's course will focus on better sequencing and adhering to a strict, "less is more" policy. The midcourse adjustments I made in this year's course showed me that I can and need to reach the goals by doing less. Parker J. Palmer asks in his book *The Courage to Teach*, "Why do we keep trying to cover the field when we can honor the stuff of the discipline more profoundly by teaching less of it at a deeper level?" (Palmer 1998: 122). I had covered the field in my course design by trying to accomplish more than was possible. Fortunately, I was able to reduce what was covered so better

teaching and deeper learning could take place.

The next course will be use the pen friend activity, the MLMM, and the on-camera interviews as the three core course activities. Any other learning tool can be introduced later if there is a specific need or time available. Keeping the design simple and doable must be the constant criteria. If I am finding that it is challenging to conceptualize the course and manage it, as was the case this year, then most likely the students taking the course will find the same difficulties.

At the IC Program Orientation a month before school starts, I will introduce the pen friend activity and have students use the school's computer lab to register and create e-mail accounts. This will at least insure that most students will be ready to use the tool when school starts. I will encourage them to start exploring the site and give them some optional summer vacation pen friend writing assignments. I made the mistake of relying too much on students writing to pen friends and using their replies to form the basis of many activities. That is the preferred choice, but there are many variables that can hamper the in-class sharing, so I will have my own set of e-mails from the site, which we can use for in-class learning. I have already a wonderful collection—the copies of students' e-mails they forwarded to me during this year's course. I would like students to post their own letters on the site increasing the amount of correspondence they receive and if possible, graduate to on-line chatting. I will ask them to give a presentation on one of their pen friends. I hope that that will provide additional encouragement to use this tool frequently. Once this activity is firmly established and only if it is established, I would like to do conversation journaling the last half of the course to continue strengthening the classroom community and have another assessment and teaching tool at my disposal. By

then, students will have much more to express and enquire about and be more comfortable with their teacher and the writing process.

Two MLMM, one for identity and the other for goals and strategies, will begin at the start of the course and become their textbooks for the term. The students will continuously add pages to MLMM deepening their ability to express their selves and become more aware of their learning process and responsibility in it. I will use the MLMM for culture, vocabulary, and grammar learning, developing listening and writing skills. In the interim period before the start of the next course, I will research how different types of mind maps can be best used for different learning purposes.

The third core course activity I will use will be the on-camera interviews. Since this tool has proven to be so valuable and much effort and time goes into it, it makes sense then to extract even more from it. Some possible extensions are: students transcribing their interviews and using them for grammar and vocabulary work, class listening comprehension or pronunciation work, and students critiquing each other's spoken and body language skills and content. I want the learning experience to be a whole class experience, not just an individual one. I would like the class to develop a rubric to have a clearer idea of what and how to accurately assess their own progress. I need to create the time for students to review their interviews several times and for meeting with them personally to give and receive feedback. The individual meetings will include a viewing of the tapes to point out specific examples of growth.

The joint IT video project this year produced some exceptional videos but at a high cost to the students in terms of stress and time. Though I got involved this year to help set the content and use it as a learning tool in my class, it was mainly a movie

production and technology learning activity. After the content had been set in the first few weeks, my class time was not involved much because the amount of L2 content was minimal and frequently changed over the weeks. Most of their time on the project was spent learning production and computer skills, then shooting and editing. Every year this video project ends with the already over-worked students struggling to meet production dead lines. I will ask the IT teacher consider teaching a different skill and postpone the video project until they return. If he does not agree, I will do better in integrating project content with the course making it a more complete core course activity. I will set limitations in what they want to produce so it can be completed more efficiently and allow them to spend more time on the other core course activities. To keep the course manageable there will have to be some course reductions elsewhere and a better preparation will be required for integrating the learning goals into the core activities.

The course will focus on the same overall and specific goals but with fewer objectives for achieving them. The units focusing on cultural differences will form the second half of the course. How things will be sequenced next year will play a vital role in the course's success. This years experience taught me will that I need to start with a more approachable view of culture learning, that is, their local world around them. There will be no explicit effort to define "small c" culture in the first weeks. The focus will be personal using their MLMM on identity, extension activities and the pen friend activity. What they learn from their pen friends will be shared along with what I introduce and will be compared with their worlds. Students will create their own general definition through discussion and sharing of ideas. Once that is established, I will gradually deepen their view of culture by introducing the values, beliefs and behaviors of their own culture

and their host countries cultures—preparing them for the units on cultural differences.

A fundamental question to consider in conceptualizing next year's course is how I can best integrate content so the course is simple and doable. There is actually more content I would like to introduce, but not at the expense of keeping it simple and achievable. I would like to bring in more of the student informed cultural differences - the ones that were dropped from the syllabus mid-course and several more that were not included in the course due to time limitations. It would give them a fuller understanding of the two cultures, and better prevent misunderstandings and cope with ambiguity. I would like to focus more explicitly on their learning processes through classroom discussion and reflection and introduce more language-learning strategies to further their learning while abroad.

Conclusion

There will be no more wandering aimlessly, just the wondering that comes with gaining a solid foundation in the course design process. The wondering is the curiosity and confidence to find the answers that once seemed so unclear and so far. It is not a confidence that comes from any mastery of the course design elements or some aspect of teaching. It derives from the knowledge that now having journeyed through the process I understand how to proceed with the designing of any future course, and that those journeys will yield even more great insights and skills. The curiosity is the desire to answer the questions that have been raised and a desire for the new insights and questions that will emerge.

I have learned what and how we teach is fluid. I used to hold the belief that there

existed the perfect course for my students that was fixed and just needed to be discovered. There cannot be the perfect course because as one strives for that, some new awareness or insight will change one's concept of what it should look like. One would not want it to exist because that would mean new growth would have ceased. The striving for the perfect course must still be the goal so our students will be the beneficiary of our continuous transformations. I have learned what is fixed is the understanding of student's needs and context, and one's teaching beliefs. Conceptualizing a course, instructing the course, and making course modifications require a strong foundation in these elements. To accomplish that understanding, there needs to be a tuning in where the teacher questions and listens to students and colleagues, and reflects on the classroom experiences to discover new truths. Learning does not exist in a bubble, and I cannot remain cut off from the local knowledge of the students' culture, their learning and affective needs, and the institution. Tuning in requires a plan for collecting that information, and an openness to discover what it can reveal. I have learned understanding the students' needs is more easily facilitated by having a well-developed classroom community.

It is a wonderful feeling to begin the search for the answers to new questions from a position of new understanding and skills and confidence instead of the uncertainty and guilt of the past. There remains much to learn for my teacher development about each of the new areas: course designing, culture learning, affective issues learning, and tuning in.

The question of how can I better prepare the learners has been replaced with how can I help the learners better prepare. How they can better take responsibility for their learning, set goals and strategies, and see their learning progress will be important part of

future courses. I would also like to have students become more invested in the course by including the negotiating course content in the syllabus.

The student who developed a low self-esteem and negative attitudes toward the language and culture and subsequently withdrew during the first five months of her stay abroad weighs heavily on me. Which skills and awareness are the most important for students to possess to reduce the prospects of that occurring with other students? If they have a need to withdraw temporarily from cultural and language engagement, what will help in them in soon regaining confidence? I believe the right approach in addressing the affective issues was making them aware of their L2 limitations, having realistic expectations, giving them some control by having them establish goals and objectives, being aware of cultural differences and improving their ability to express their identity. How can I better address this approach? I would like to have a greater understanding of the psychological pressures in general and those specific to Japanese. Exploration here will further my existing need for knowledge my students' cultural context.

Needs assessment for developing the course was almost entirely student informed. I would like to talk with student exchange program directors and teachers who prepare students from both sides of the ocean to discover more needs and learn how they approach the preparation. I will continue to take advantage of the strong relationship I have developed with the students of Course 4 by learning from them while they are in their exchange year and meet with them individually and as a group after they return. I want to inform myself where needs were and were not met.

Now I know. I know why my graduate school classmate said I was fortunate to be able to choose what I wished in my courses. Two reasons stand out. Firstly, not being

given the content of a curriculum or the guide of a syllabus, I was free to do what I wanted. That freedom led me through a long and difficult but extremely rewarding journey, for the learning that the journey provided, I owned. I had the greatest teachers assisting me along the way—my students. Secondly now having the insights with many new areas to explore and questions to answer, I would be not like to be handcuffed with a strict syllabus or curriculum to follow. Now with a foundation and direction, I welcome the endless possibilities of the what and how to teach and the accompanying responsibility in their preparation.

There we were sitting. It was our last fifty-minute class and the nine students and I sitting in our familiar circle looking at now very familiar faces. I can clearly recall what I was thinking and feeling as the minutes of Course 4 ticked off. “This is very different, extremely important, and I am enjoying every minute of this.” It was very different because I was about to conclude what I consider my first complete course. Students and I with smiles and tears in tight community were expressing our thoughts and feelings: the learning that had occurred, the challenges they had overcome, the ones they would have starting in a month’s time, and the friendships that had been formed. It was extremely important in that we had all grown in our own various ways. I was enjoying every minute, for I knew I was fortunate that my teaching had taken on new important relevance, and I was confident that I had been of relevance to my students.

APPENDIX 1

STUDENT COURSE DESCRIPTION AND ASSESSMENT TOOLS

Course Preview

Wednesday April 18, 2007

International Course Class 1-9

Course Introduction

Please read about our course (class).

I. Course Goal:

To have you leave for your host country confident because: 1) you better understand the language, 2) you better understand the people in NZ, Canada or America, and 3) you have a made plan to reach your goals for going abroad.

II. Course Focus

A) You will study **language, culture, and how language and culture are connected.**

Language

You will study communicative English, especially speaking and listening skills. For example, starting and extending conversations, question asking, giving personal opinions, making requests, pronunciation practice, and showing your identity.

Culture

You will study the differences between your culture and your host country's culture.

B) You will learn about the **difficulties (challenges)** of living abroad, how they make you feel, and what you can do to **deal with** them better.

C) You will think about your goals for your study abroad and make a plan to reach them.

III. What you will be doing in Jonathan's Course

The course is very active and there will be many things for you to do at school and outside of school each day.

Pen Friends You will write to high school students in the US, Canada, and NZ daily/weekly.

Conversation Journals You will write weekly with Jonathan. When you write, try to use new vocabulary and challenging grammar. Write a lot about one topic—not a little about many topics. Use details to make it more interesting and to make your English grow.

Making a Personal Dictionary You will add words daily and then study the vocabulary four different ways.

Video Project Your IT Class and this class will do a joint project. You need to decide your groups by Thursday, 4/19. Start thinking of the kind of video you would like to make. You will take this video to your host country and show your new family and friends.

Listening Continue listening to the 80 Conversation CD's at home daily/weekly and check your answers in the answer key. When you finish a book, I will give you a different book and CD for more listening practice.

Presentations

Midterm You and a partner will make and perform a dialogue

Final Exam You will give a ten-minute presentation on *Your Personal Identity and Goals and Strategies for Success Abroad*.

On-Camera Interviews You will have two interviews with me and they will be recorded using a digital camera. One interview will be held next week and the other will be held in the last week of the term. You will watch and compare the two interviews to see how you improved.

Morning Mini Lessons You will have conversation practice and work on pronunciation on Wednesdays and Fridays with Mr. Kevin Trainor. The lessons will be twenty minutes each.

Pocket Notepad You need to always keep a small notepad with you so you can write down any new English you learn from your teachers and classmates. You can write down any questions and thoughts that you have, too.

IV. Students in this class need to:

1. Participate in all classroom activities and try your best to communicate in English.

2. Cooperate with classmates and help each other learn more about the language and culture.
3. Share (contribute) your thoughts, opinions, ideas, and feelings with the class.
4. Ask questions to the English teaching staff, your fellow classmates, the seniors in class 3-8, and your pen friends.
5. Have a positive attitude. Smile. Be friendly. Have fun learning.
6. Not compare your English ability to others. Think: *What can I do better or what do I know more than yesterday.*
7. Do extra reading, writing, speaking, and listening practice on your own.
8. Do extra research about your host country and its people.
9. Be an active learner, not a passive learner.
10. _____.
(What are some other things that you think you need to do?)

V. Grading

<u>You will be graded on:</u>	<u>Percentage of Grade</u>
Class and IT Project Participation	15%
Finishing Assignments	
Conversation Journals	15%
Pen Friends	15%
Personal Dictionary	15%
Midterm Exam: I. Written II. Pair Presentation	15%
Final Exam: Formal Presentation	25%

Good luck in the course! The harder you work now, the easier it will be there. Turn your world into an English one for three months. You can come to the English lounge anytime to ask a question or chat with Tim, Tom, Kevin, or me. Please feel free to e-mail me or call me on my cell phone. The other teachers and I are here to help you. I am looking forward to our time together!

Questionnaire on Confidence

Name _____

Please fill out this questionnaire. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to ask.

- | | | | | | | |
|-------------|---|---|---|---|---|--|
| | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | |
| | | | | | | very confident |
| | | | | | | pretty confident |
| I am | | | | | | somewhat confident |
| | | | | | | not so confident |
| | | | | | | not at all confident |
| 1) | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | that I can speak English well. |
| 2) | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | that I can have a conversation with a native speaker of English. |

- | | | | | | | |
|-----|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 3) | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | that my listening skills fine for my study-year abroad. |
| 4) | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | that my pronunciation is good. |
| 5) | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | that native speakers can understand my pronunciation. |
| 6) | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | that I speak with correct rhythm. |
| 7) | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | that I speak with correct intonation. |
| 8) | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | that I can ask questions well. |
| 9) | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | that I can communicate <u>my point</u> clearly.(what I want to say/my meaning) |
| 11) | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | that can talk about <u>my life</u> in detail. (school, self, family friends, home ,city or country) |
| 12) | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | that I can talk about <u>myself/show my personality</u> in detail. (what I do/what is important to me/my opinions/feelings/beliefs) |
| 13) | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | that I understand the body language in my host country |
| 14) | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | that I know my host country's culture well. |
| 15) | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | that I know my country's culture well. |
| 16) | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | that I can talk about both country's cultures well. |
| 17) | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | that I understand what the people of my host country do, think what is right or wrong, and think is important. |
| 18) | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | that I can make friends easily after I get to my host country. |

- 19) 5 4 3 2 1 to live with a host family.
- 20) 5 4 3 2 1 that I know how to behave (act/do) at the host family's house.

Pre-course Questionnaire

Name _____ Student Number _____
(Given) (Surname)

Nickname (if you have one) _____ Age _____ Birthday _____

I. Language

1. What do you enjoy about learning or using English?
2. What don't you like about learning or using English?
3. What do you think will be challenging/difficult for you about the English language while you are abroad?
4. What is your favorite English word?
5. What was the first English word that you spoke?
6. What specific grammar is difficult for you? Please write an example in a sentence?
7. What is the best way for you to study? (How do you study?)

II. Goals

1. Why are you going to go abroad?
2. What are some specific goals you want to achieve while over there? (*For example, I want to be a cheerleader at school. I want to answer questions in class when the teacher asks. I want to be able to have a two-hour conversation.*)
3. Do you think you will reach your goals?
4. Why do you think you will reach your goals?
5. How will you reach your goals?
6. Why did you choose to go to America/NZ/Japan?

7. Please give some examples of Canadian, American, or NZ culture.
8. What are 3-5 things that you are worried about living abroad?

III. What do you do to help prepare yourself for your exchange year abroad?

1. Please circle the ones that you do.
2. Write how much time you spend each week doing it on the line.

For example: (G) sing English songs 1 hour a week

I~

- A listen to English music _____
- B listen to English conversation CD/tapes _____
- C listen to English AM/FM or Internet radio _____
- D listen to English podcasts _____
- E speak English with my family or friends or classmates (not during Eng. lesson) _____
- F speak English to my teddy bear ,to the mirror, or myself _____
- G sing English songs _____
- H talk in English to foreigners(not Teikyo Teachers) _____
- I keep a personal English journal or diary _____
- J write e-mails to foreigners _____
- K do on-line chatting _____
- L memorize vocabulary lists _____
- M do grammar (*bunpo*) work using a non-Teikyo school textbook _____
- N use an English-English dictionary first to look up a word I do not know _____
- O watch English movies _____
- P have an English lesson with a private tutor (teacher) _____
- Q go to cram school (*juku*) _____
- R go to an English conversation school (Nova, Geos, etc. . .) _____
- S research about my host country using the Internet, library or bookstore _____
- T read English books, magazines, newspapers or websites _____
- U rewrite English notes _____
- V read and do the practice exercises on websites for English learners _____
- W reread your English textbooks from junior high school _____
- X Other
(If you do some other things not listed above, please write it on thedotted line.)

On-Camera Interview Self-Evaluation I

Name _____

Please watch the video and enjoy. Watch it two times and then answer the questions below. Please write two to five sentences for each answer. It is due on Saturday, June 16th.
General Questions

1. What is your general impression of your interview?
2. What do you think about your description of yourself?
3. What do you think about your answers on why you are going abroad?
4. What do you think about your answers on Japan and Japanese?
5. What do you think of your answers about NZ/Canada/America and their people?
6. What do you think about your pronunciation?

Specific Questions

1. Did you expand your answers?
2. How many answers did you expand?
3. Did you use a lot of details?
4. What was something interesting that you said?
5. What did you say about Japan/Japanese and your host country/host country's people?
6. Did you talk about visible or invisible culture?
7. Did you say you are worried about how your English pronunciation sounds to the people of your host country?
8. Did you speak with confidence?
9. How was your pronunciation?
10. What else would you have liked to have said in the interview?
11. How did you look on camera?

Pronunciation Check

Put an "O" on the below the underlined part of the words below that you pronounced correctly, and an "X" below the ones you mispronounced.

Thank you. Open your mouth. 3 months

Clothes Lettuce Carry that load down the road.

I left the rake near the lake. Jerry likes jelly and bread.

On-Camera Interview Self-Evaluation II

Name _____ IC Video Interview

Watch your first interview again. After, watch the second interview. This will take about 12 minutes. Then answer the questions. **Please be specific** in your answers. Give examples. Write 2-5 sentences for each question.

1. What are the most noticeable changes between your first and second interviews? (一度目と二度目のインタビューで、一番大きな違いは何ですか)
2. What areas of language (vocabulary, pronunciation, expanding (+1, +2, +3), saying your point clearly, etc. . .) do you feel you improved?
3. What areas of culture knowing do you feel you improved?
- 4a. What areas do you think you think you still need to improve on?
- 4b. What will you do to improve in those areas before you go abroad?
5. Please circle either Yes or No for the following questions:
 - a. Do you speak more confidently in the 2nd interview? Yes No
 - b. Do you often expand your answers in the 2nd interview? Yes No
 - c. Do you give a lot of eye contact in the 2nd interview? Yes No
 - d. Do you talk about visible/surface culture in the 2nd interview? Yes No
 - e. Do you talk about invisible/deep culture in the 2nd interview? Yes No
 - f. Do you smile in the 2nd interview? Yes No

Pronunciation Check

Put an “O” on the below the underlined part of the words below that you pronounced correctly, and an “X” below the ones you mispronounced.

Thank you. Open your mouth. 3 months

Clothes Lettuce Carry that load down the road.

I left the rake near the lake. Jerry likes jelly and bread.

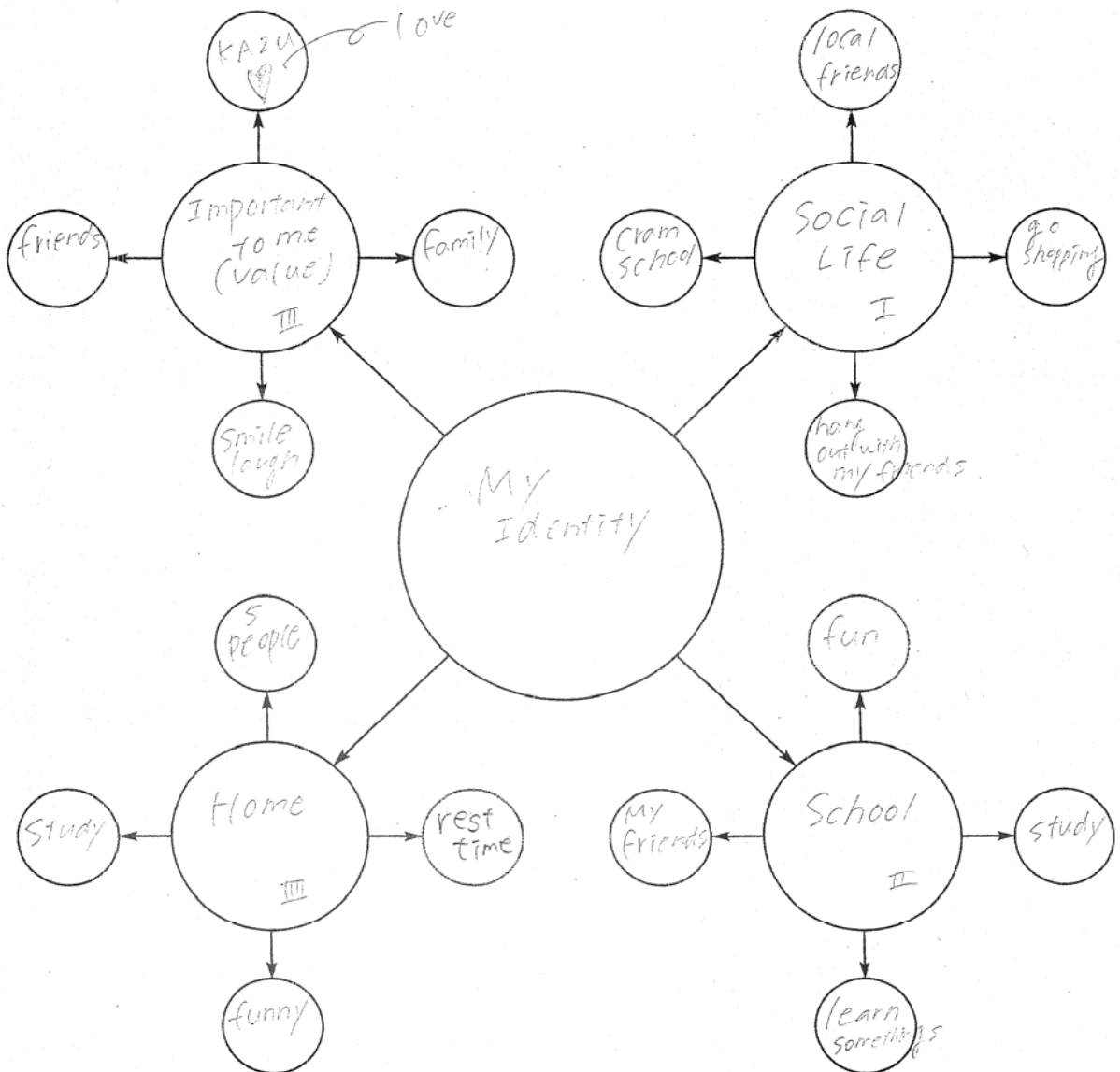
7. What did you think of doing the two interviews, watching them, and then thinking about them? Was it useful to your learning?

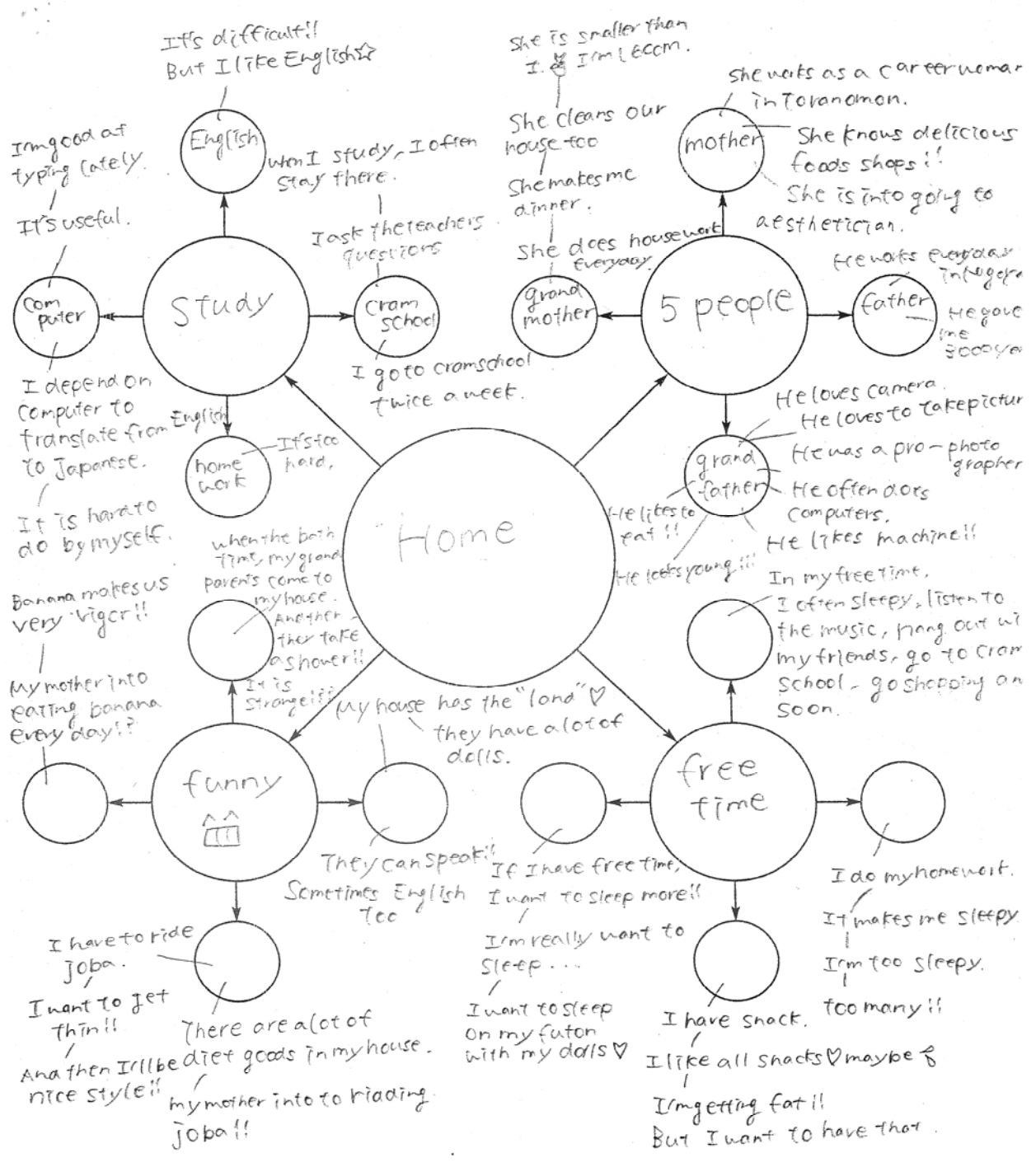
8. Rate the learning usefulness of interview activity from 1-10. Circle the number.

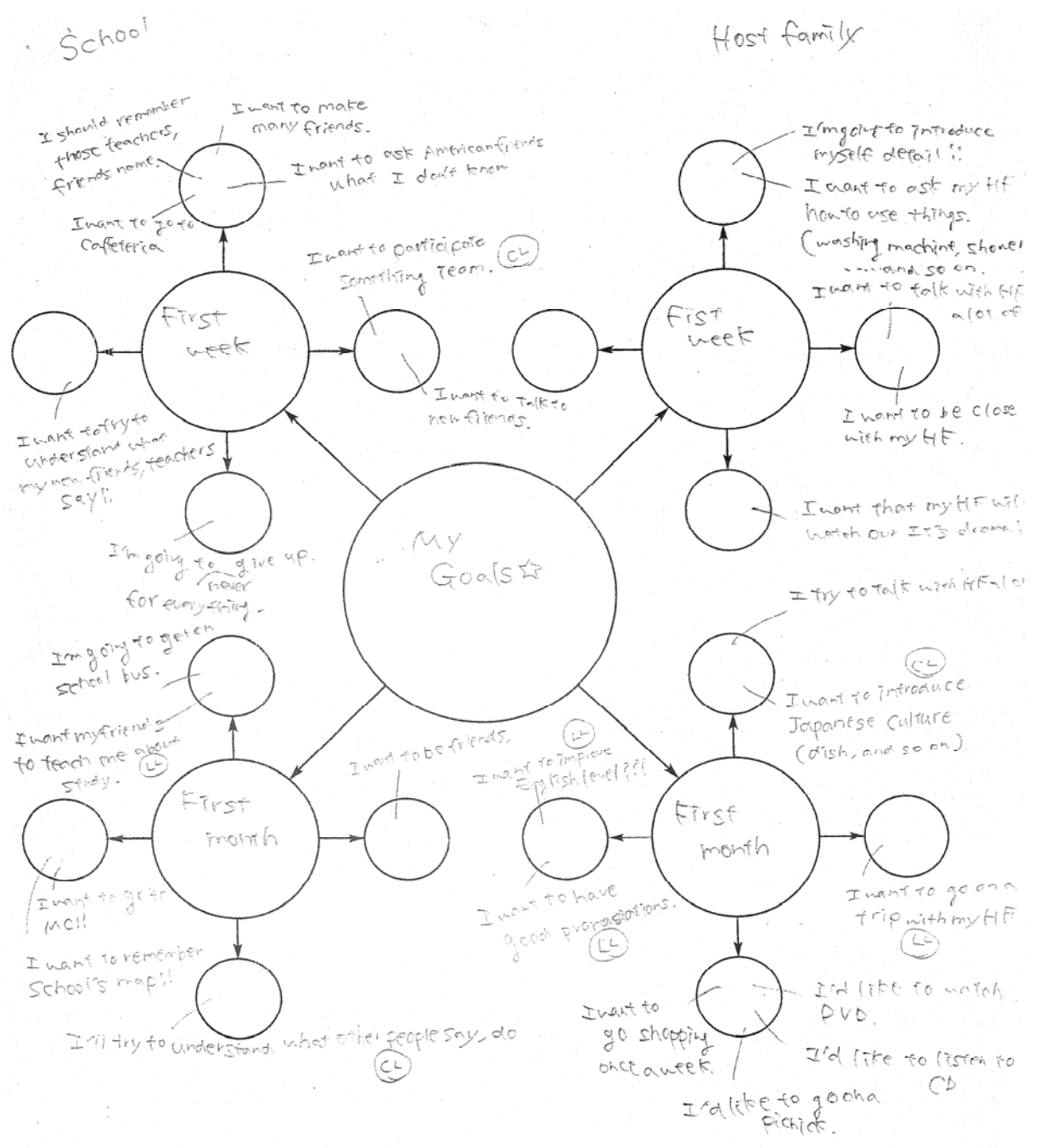
10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
Very					Somewhat				Not
Useful					Useful				Useful

APPENDIX 2

MULTI-LAYERED MIND MAPS







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