

Internationalization and Study Abroad Narrative Inquiry of Japanese Female Exchange Students in the United States

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Introduction

IN ORDER TO LIVE INTERDEPENDENTLY in this global society, scholars and leaders around the world have urgently called for education that prepares young people to become “world citizens” (Nussbaum, 1997). While foreign language learning is one way to foster positive attitudes toward the languages and their speakers, study abroad programs are recognized as the most powerful tool available to achieve these goals (Kauffmann, Martin, & Weaver, 1992). Accordingly, many countries have promoted study abroad programs for young students (e.g., Abraham Lincoln Study Abroad Fellowship Program, 2005; Council on Standards for International Educational Travel, 2007a; Monbu-kagakusho, 2003). Not only are universities developing study abroad programs at a rapid rate (Open Doors, 2009), but students at lower school levels, such as high schools, are also participating in various study abroad programs (Council on Standards for International Educational Travel, 2007b; Monbu-kagakusho, 2005).

During the 2008-2009 academic cycle, the Council on Standards for International Educational Travel (CSIET) identified over 2,016 U.S. high school students who spent a semester or a year abroad (CSIET, 2009), and more than one third of U.S. students studying abroad do so in a variety of non-traditional destinations, such as in Western Europe (Abraham Lincoln Study Abroad Fellowship Program, 2005; Institute of International Education, 2007; Open Doors, 2009). At the same time, the number of foreign high school students coming to the United States were nearly 28,000 in 2008 (CSIET, 2009).

Although the underlying purposes of high school student exchange programs are to advance diplomatic and foreign policy goals by fostering positive academic and social experiences (Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, 2007), scant research investigates what exactly these young students experience across culturally and linguistically diverse contexts. More in-depth work is needed in this area to understand students’ perspectives of their cross-cultural learning experiences. Therefore an overarching goal of this study was to investigate the impact

of study abroad on students' identities by examining the challenges encountered by students who study abroad in culturally diverse societies. I consider identity as something that reflects one's culture, such as language, norms, beliefs, values, attitudes, backgrounds, and every other aspect of one's life (e.g., Bhabha, 1994, 1996; du Gay, 1996a, 1996b; Hall, 1990, 1996, 1997a, 1997b). Specifically, in this narrative inquiry, I explored the cross-cultural experiences of five Japanese female youth exchange students who came to the United States for one academic year, then returned to Japan to finish their high school education. My study focused on the students' voices during and after their one year exchange stay in the United States. I aspired to develop a narrative understanding of the students' cross-cultural experiences in the investigation of the impact of study abroad at the secondary school level on their personal development and language learning trajectories. The implications of the study may contribute to study abroad programming in secondary schools, and also universities, by understanding what students may experience during their study abroad in culturally and linguistically diverse destinations.

Methodology

Research Questions

This article is drawn from a narrative inquiry on five Japanese female youth exchange students, Chie,¹ Ume, Kaori, Erika, and Sakura (Ileleji, 2008a). As a former exchange student, I have been told countless times how I “changed” after my high school study abroad experiences in the United States. My ways of speaking (including gestures and facial expressions) have changed. My perspectives, values and priorities in life have changed. Some of my close friends and families in Japan were surprised at these changes (both positively and negatively). Now most people both in Japan and in the United States comment that I am not a “typical” Japanese female; this was the start of my quest, “who I am” and “how I became who I am” as a former Japanese female youth exchange student in the United States.

In this article, I focus on one of the three primary research questions of this study: How does learning a new language and culture in new communities affect the development of the Japanese female youth exchange students? In particular, my discussion in this article is on the Japanese female youth exchange students' personal development, such as language skills, learning skills, cross-cultural attitudes and skills, leadership skills, and coping skills.²

Fayettestown and Five Japanese Youth Exchange Students

Chie, Ume, Kaori, Erika, and Sakura, female youth exchange students from Japan stayed in Fayettestown, in the Midwest region of the United States, for the 2005–2006 academic year. I selected these primary participants through two international youth exchange programs in the Midwest region of the United States. In the early spring of 2005, I sent written information of the study and my contact information to several prospective exchange students in Japan. I received an e-mail from Erika that she was interested in participating in the study but did not want to make a commitment because she did not know if she would adjust well in the United States. As soon as most Japanese youth exchange students arrived in the United States in early August 2005, I invited the students to participate in the study for the second time. At this time, Ume, Kaori, and Sakura agreed to participate. Chie hesitated to participate in the study for awhile because she

did not want to be around Japanese people in the United States and because she thought participating in my study would be in conflict with her interests (see Ileleji, 2008b). In addition to the five primary participants, my field texts were collected from their families, two teachers (of Japanese language and of English as a Second Language [ESL]), and their counselors at their hosting high schools in the United States.

Collection of Field Texts (Data)

Field texts were collected during and after the participants' year-long exchange program: between July, 2005 and April, 2008 (from July, 2005 to June, 2006, both the students and the researcher were in the United States; and from June, 2006 to April, 2008, the students were in Japan and the researcher was in the United States). I collected field texts from interviews, conversations, focus-group discussions, open-ended naturalistic observations, letters/e-mails, student journals/blogs, documents, photographs, and other personal artifacts designed to elicit stories from the participants.

I conducted three to six formal interviews and conversations privately with each participant, depending on the student's availability and needs throughout the year in the United States. In addition, I spent time with the students by showing them the town, going shopping, baking cookies, chatting in cafés, and visiting them at events in school and through the exchange programs. This way of collecting the field texts was popular with the Japanese students in my study. Focus-group discussions were conducted in order for each student to communicate not only with me but also among the other students who participated in my study. Therefore, Chie only attended the first meeting as she did not want to be around the other Japanese students. Observations were conducted as I participated in a variety of activities with the exchange students, such as orientations, family gatherings, and after-school programs. Letters and e-mails were used the most between the students and me. I often sent announcements from the exchange program to all the participants and their host families, as well as asking how they were doing via e-mails. E-mails also enabled me to communicate with some of the exchange students' parents in Japan, who had concerns about their daughters in the United States. Students were encouraged to keep a journal in order to reflect on their cross-cultural experiences as well as to keep records. Through the writing process, I hoped the students would enhance their thoughts and bring depth to their stories of experiences (Van Manen, 1990). However, the decision on whether or not to keep a journal and how much of it to share with me was left to each participant. Despite not having access to any of the students' journals, I was able to read the students' entries on their experiences in the United States on their publicly available blog sites. I was also able to observe some interaction between one student and her friends in the United States via a social networking website. Photographs and videos were used as visual records while observing and participating in various events. I also encouraged students to take pictures and share them with me. On some occasions, students were eager to show their photographs and video clips when we met. These shared visual materials richly supported the students' cross-cultural experience stories. The students were also encouraged to share other personal artifacts, which might prompt stories of their cross-cultural experiences, such as charms the participants carried around all day, their notebooks from their youth exchange programs' orientations in Japan, stuffed animals they received from their friends, and so on. Some students shared the stories behind their personal artifacts, allowing me to understand what was important to the students.

Data analysis was done in collaboration with the students. When field texts were collected, all the materials were sorted in each student's folder. All field texts were categorized into several themes. After the themes emerged from the field texts, I chose one student's experiences to represent commonly observed experiences across the five students. Drafts of each student's narrative represented as her diary were written by me and were sent to each participant for verification and feedback. However, the decision on how to provide feedback to me was left to each participant. Kaori and Ume provided feedback on factual errors, interpretations which were not true or very true, and their reflection after reading their own stories (Kanno, 1996). Sakura acknowledged receipt of the draft but did not provide any comments. When the students chose not to give much or any feedback on their diary written by me, I contacted their host families and teachers to give me factual verification of the stories. This phase of interpretation was the core of my study in order to have direct access to the participants' interpretation of their stories.

Findings

As I explored the cross-cultural experience stories of Chie, Ume, Kaori, Erika, and Sakura for nearly three years, I could see that the students' norms and abilities had been challenged. Many participants in youth exchange programs believe that learning new cultures and languages was life-changing (e.g., American Field Service Intercultural Programs, AFS Iki hakensei; Boyd, Giebler, Hince, Liu, Mehta, Rash, Rowald, Saldana, & Yanta, 2001). Their international experiences in new cultures and languages placed them outside of their comfort zones and known environments. Using the environmental metaphor of cultural identity—picturing each individual's cultural identity as a forever-changing tree (see Figure 1; Ileleji, 2008a)—their cultural identity trees were reshaped and remolded by factors in the host communities. Each individual's cultural identity tree also influenced factors in the environment of the people in the host communities. For example, the presence of the cultural identity tree (the exchange students) influence the amount of sunshine under the tree (how schools respect cultural diversity), fertilizing the ground by decaying leaves (educating teachers and administrators for solid foundations for future students), and exchanging carbon dioxide in and oxygen out in return (learning how to communicate in the language spoken in the host communities and impacting communication styles in the host communities). These factors also influence how the cultural identity tree transforms into “who they are.” While the Japanese students experienced new and unfamiliar encounters on a daily basis during their participation in international youth exchange programs, they learned to develop new skills and strategies. In the following sections, I shed light on five skills concerning their international cross-cultural experiences and personal development: language skills, learning skills, cross-cultural attitudes and skills, leadership skills, and coping skills.

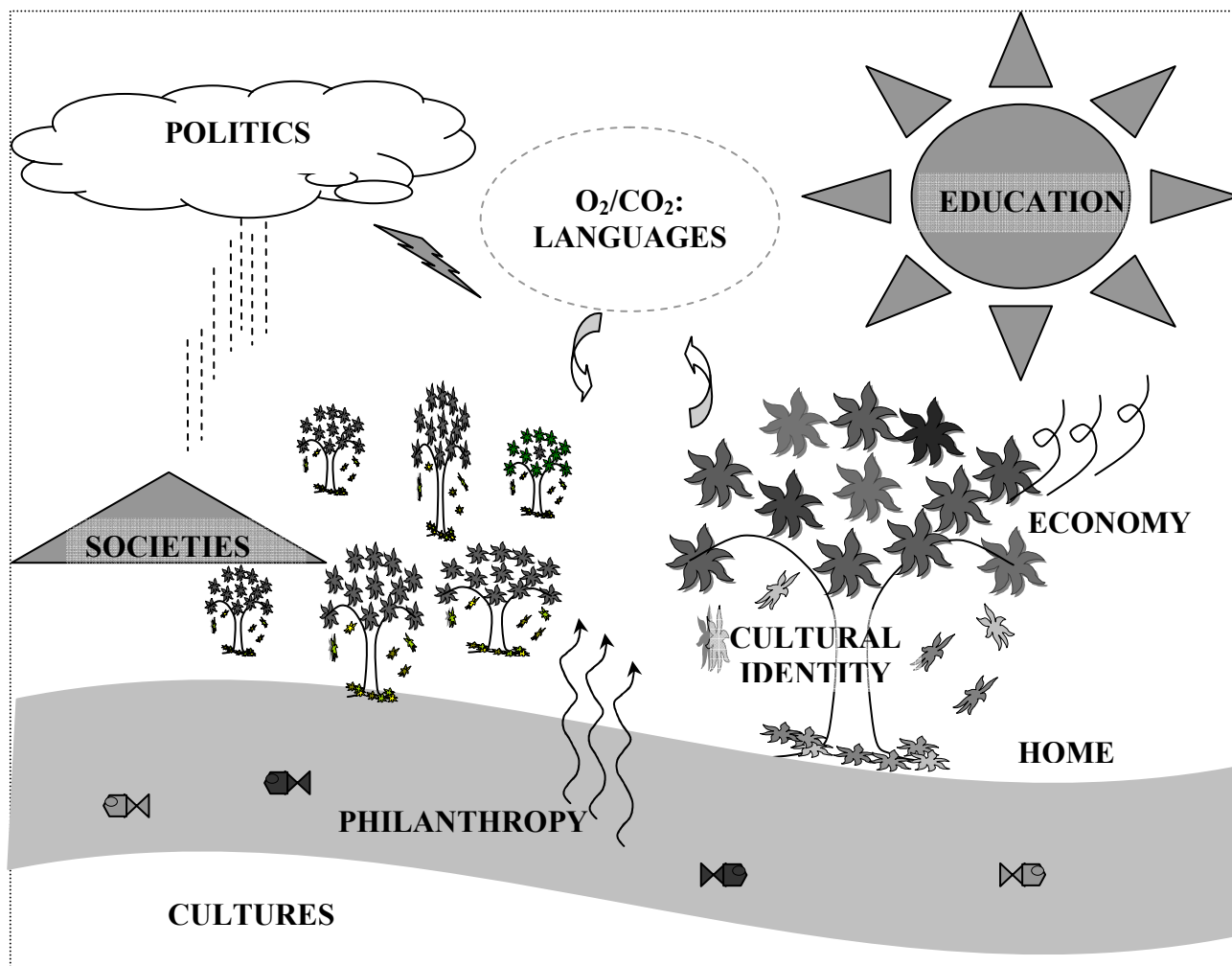


Figure 1: Environmental Metaphor of Cultural Identity

Developing Language Skills

Chie, 16 years old, had longed to come to the United States as an exchange student. Her first priority during her exchange stay was to master English. Some people thought that she was not a typical Japanese girl. However, she did not care what other Japanese people thought of her. In order to learn English language as fast as she could, she avoided speaking in Japanese as much as possible. Accordingly, she chose not to closely interact with any Japanese people in Fayette town.

Language learning is one of the most popular reasons for youth exchange students to participate in study abroad programs. All five Japanese youth exchange students in this study desired to acquire communication skills in English while living in the United States. However, while Chie strived to speak like a native speaker of English, Kaori hoped to be able to ‘get by’ in the host communities. The level of language expectation of each student varied depending on their cultural identities, determination in learning, future goals, and priorities in relationships (Ileleji, 2008b). Chie, who came to Fayette town through a different exchange organization from that of the others, had a much stronger determination to learn English than the others. She believed that she would acquire English communication skills better if she could avoid using Japanese lan-

guage by not associating with other Japanese people in the host communities. Insisting on not speaking in Japanese, she developed strong social networks among her U.S. peers (many of them were her classmates from an English class at the host school) after only a few weeks of her exchange stay. As a result, she appeared to converse in English comfortably much earlier than other Japanese exchange students. However, when there were opportunities to serve the Fayette-town community by sharing Japanese culture and language with U.S. students, Chie showed no interest in giving back to the host communities.

All the Japanese students in my study had fear and anxiety about their language learning at the beginning. This was the first phase of the language learning pathway that the Japanese students took while in the United States. Erika, who academically excelled in Japan, expressed her anxiety by comparing her language learning process with others':

September 20, 2005 (Tuesday)³

I saw Chie during lunch time again today. She was with many friends and seemed to be speaking English very well. To be honest, I was stunned by how naturally she was speaking with them. I am very worried about my English now. I have been talking too much Japanese with Kaori and Ume at school. (Ileleji, 2008a, pp. 262–263)

In contrast, Kaori did not seem to be concerned about the great amount of interactions she had with other Japanese exchange students; she even changed her class schedule at the host school so that she would be in the same classes with the other Japanese students. She also enjoyed spending time with Erika and Ume after school and on weekends. Accordingly, Kaori had less opportunity to develop her social networks in the host communities and struggled with the initial adjustment process. This was explained by Smalley (1963) as “language shock”; the more social interaction the students were able to partake in, the fewer adjustment problems, including language adjustment problems, students experienced.

After overcoming a period of fear and anxiety about their language learning at the beginning of their study abroad stay, all five Japanese students started seeking opportunities to improve their skills in the target language, English. They learned to believe that interacting too much in Japanese hindered their English learning opportunities. Chie was the only one in my study who was determined not to interact with Japanese people from the very beginning of her exchange stay. Sakura did not have daily interaction with Japanese people in the United States. Yet at the beginning, she seemed to seek out opportunities for speaking in Japanese. On the other hand, Kaori did not believe that speaking in Japanese among Japanese students prevented them from learning English until several months after her exchange stay had started. Sooner or later during their exchange stays, all five Japanese female youth exchange students realized the importance of making U.S. friends and sought opportunities to interact with the people in the host communities.

During the third phase of their language learning pathway, the Japanese exchange students gained confidence in speaking and/or writing in English. During the first and second phases, the students were concerned about their English language development. However, once they found more opportunities to interact with U.S. peers, their concern with their language learning diminished, which was observable even by people in the host communities. Regardless of their diverse experiences and personal relationships in the host communities, by the end of the program all five participants in my study were confident and satisfied with their skills in the target language (English) obtained during their exchange stays in the United States. In other words, using the environmental metaphor in study abroad contexts (Figure 1; Ileleji, 2008a), the Japa-

nese female youth exchange students were able to “breathe” in the host communities by communicating in the target language.

Learning Skills

Kaori was 16 years old at the beginning of her exchange stay in the United States. She was good at dancing and spent a lot of after-school hours at a dance studio in Japan. Her grades were rather poor; yet she was popular and often the center of attention among her classmates. She decided to participate in the year-long exchange stay in the United States because of her mother’s past experiences as an international youth exchange student about 25 years ago. Kaori discussed one of her learning experiences in the United States as follows:

August 3, 2005

I am having so much fun at the English camp with other Japanese exchange students. It is our first Friday in America, and we had a dance party! All the American high school students came to the party too, but I enjoyed being silly with other Japanese students. This camp is supposed to help us learn English before we are going to be in the “English-only-world.” We talk too much Japanese among the students to learn English, and several teachers told us that we should speak English. I think it is more important to enjoy life. I am glad that my mother encouraged me to join this camp. In fact, I would tell future exchange students to come to this camp. This will teach them a lot. I am learning not to be too shy among my new friends. I think this camp has been teaching me how to have fun in America. (Ileleji, 2008a, pp. 85–86)

Two of the five Japanese students (Kaori and Ume) joined a two-week-long English camp at the beginning of their exchange stay in the United States. Despite Brecht and Robinson’s (1995) findings that classroom instruction was valuable, both Ume and Kaori did not believe that the English camp they participated in directly contributed to improving their language skills. Instead, Kaori attributed high value to the camp for her learning to be a positive thinker, and she recommended it to future international youth exchange students. Kaori believed that learning to be a positive thinker helped her adjust to new cultures and acclimate into new communities. Although this aspect of their learning may not be visible, their change in attitudes toward learning also contributed to their academic achievement beyond their exchange stay in the United States.

Moreover, some of the Japanese exchange students noticed great improvement in their grades, not only in English but in all subjects, after their year-long sojourn in the United States. Erika was a 17 year-old student who was both academically and athletically gifted. She received a full-scholarship to participate in the international exchange program and always tried her best. Her priority during her participation in the program was focused on her academic success, such as learning English and preparing for college entrance examinations in Japan as well as contributing to sports at the host school. However, she was concerned with her rather slow improvement in oral English, especially at the beginning of her exchange stay. Moreover, balancing the time for study and socializing with her host family and friends was challenging. In Japan, most students’ learning style entailed sitting for hours at a desk in a quiet environment, for example reading textbooks, learning rules, and memorizing terms and formulas for examinations. While they were in the United States, the Japanese exchange students felt that the language learned by spending

time with their host families, friends, and people in the host communities would not be adequate for the college entrance examinations they would face when they returned to Japan.

Nevertheless, after returning to Japan, all five Japanese exchange students realized their new learning skills gained in the United States. Sakura discussed her academic successes after the year in the United States:

After I returned to Japan, I noticed I had learned to be patient. My grades at school became better and better. Of course, I am the best student in English classes, but also other academic subjects, and I am now among the top three students in my class. I now know that there are wide varieties of possibilities for my future academic plan. I began to consider that studying at home is such a small pain when I compare it with the pain I went through during my study abroad. (Ileleji, 2008a, p. 414)

The learning skills obtained during their exchange stay gave the Japanese youth exchange students perseverance and made them be persistent towards their ultimate goals.

Improving Cross-cultural International Attitudes and Skills

Sakura was 17 years old when she came to the United States. Her academic grades indicated that she was a good student in Japan, but she told me that she was always “forced” to study by her mother. She spent a lot of time with her family daily before she came to the United States. However, in the United States, she never felt that she was a member of her host family and spent most of her time alone in her room or with her friends at school. While she was at school in the Fayetteville community, she was able to interact with the students from a variety of cultural backgrounds.

When I was in America, I had a lot of Mexican friends. I was very impressed by their pride in their culture and also I realized I didn't know much about my own culture. Through this experience, I became interested in various problems about culture. For example, there is a problem where Western culture which is very strong overwhelms smaller cultures. I want to find out how to interact with different cultures. As for me, I had a big experience with Mexican friends, so I want to think about cultural problems by studying Spanish and their culture as a starting point. I chose this university because here, I can study English, Spanish, Latin, and Japanese cultures, which I am very interested in. I believe this university is the best place for me to pursue my interests. (Field text, March 17, 2008, Sakura's statement of interests to a Japanese college)

By developing language skills in the target language, the Japanese female youth exchange students in my study also became interested in minority language(s) in the communities. By becoming a non-native speaker of the dominant language spoken in the host communities, they improved their attitudes and skills towards language and cultures other than their own. The Japanese students perceived that they were more sensitive to other cultures, more aware of global events, and more involved in community activities than they were prior to their participation. Kaori and Ume volunteered to share their experiences to the future exchange students during their pre-departure orientations. Furthermore, most of the Japanese students realized how little they know about themselves and their country. Moreover, they learned that what they thought

about their country and cultures were portrayed differently in the United States. In addition to being motivated to learn about other cultures, their appreciation as well as interests towards Japanese language and cultures grew after their year-long exchange stay in the United States.

Developing Independence and Leadership Skills

Ume, a 17 year-old student, was somewhat quiet in a group and more mature than the other Japanese exchange students. She met Kaori at the two-week English camp at the beginning of their exchange stay. In spite of her desire to interact with U.S. students in the host communities, especially for the first half of her exchange stay in Fayetteville, Ume spent most of her time at school and after school with other Japanese students.

Ume: ...I was afraid to be by myself. ...But at school here, the U.S. students are independent, so I became more independent since I came to the United States. ...I decided to interact with my American friends so I can change. ...If I ... (switched to Japanese) *If I were still the same as when I came to the U.S., I would have continued the winter guard [with Kaori].*

Researcher: Why do you think you would not do that now?

Ume: American friends and only Japanese is fun. [It is fun to be an only Japanese among American students.]

Researcher: But in Japan, did you say you were afraid to be alone?

Ume: Yes. ...I wanted to have people around [me]. ...I could not go anywhere alone. But now I like to be alone sometimes. Not always...

Researcher: Do you think this is something American?

Ume: Yes! (switched to Japanese) *For example after some practices in a field, Japanese students would wait for friends from the other side of the field to walk back to a building. However, in the U.S., it is not that I am following someone else to walk back inside a building. It is rather I go back with them just because they happened to be there (walking next to me). Go home, go home, go home...* (gesturing U.S. students going back to a building individually). (Field texts, November 7, 2005; Ileleji, 2008b)

Becoming independent and not group-oriented is one of the common experiences observed by former Japanese youth exchange students (Youth For Understanding, 2006). Sakura also realized that she had learned to be independent through the experience of being away from her family, on whom she used to rely. Likewise, Kaori commented on how U.S. students seemed to have much more freedom at school but know how to take responsibility for whatever they do (Field texts, February 3, 2008). By learning how to be self-governing, the Japanese exchange students developed leadership skills at schools in Japan.

Coping Skills

The students in my study developed a variety of skills to cope with difficult situations (Ileleji, 2008a). Erika reflected on her experiences in the United States after returning to Japan:

I am proud of being able to live in the United States, but on the other hand it was not that simple. After I came back to Japan, I felt strongly that I was influenced by living sur-

rounded by Americans who express their opinions directly. It seemed that my friends were confused when I imposed my opinions more than before I left for abroad. I also was troubled that I could not communicate with them well like before. However, over the summer break, I came to realize that it is a good and bad aspect of Americans, and I am in the position of being asked to understand both Japanese and American uniqueness. Since then, I am not bothered and I think I am adapting to both.

By remembering how they were able to overcome difficulties in new and unfamiliar environments, the Japanese female youth exchange students became confident that they could take risks and overcome difficulties in order to pursue their envisioned goals and their desires for the future (field texts, February 6, 2008). Study abroad experiences for youth seem to be more complicated and associated with complex relationships in the host communities; those experiences made the students' cultural identity trees hardy and healthy and ready to be adaptable in uncertain circumstances and unfamiliar environments.

Conclusion

In the midst of the worldwide trend in study abroad as a way of internationalization, this study examined the nature of students' lived-experience abroad and the impact of these experiences on their personal development. By living with host families and going to local schools in the host communities, the students gained the skills that would not be learned staying in comfortable environments of home. In this article, the discussion focused on five major skills that were affected by learning a new language and culture in new communities. Although these skills appear to be achievements for personal benefit, they are also skills needed for today's leaders of the world. The international cross-cultural experiences for international youth exchange students should be considered global experiences rather than simply personal experiences. We also need to recognize that much of the learning that affected the students during their study abroad occurred in social settings as lived experiences, rather than via formal instruction in schools. It is important to construct study abroad curriculum not only in the contexts of schools, but also in various other environments, such as the home, community, region, religious beliefs, attitudes, and morals, which comprise a worldview that fundamentally facilitates the international youth exchange students' learning environments through various cross-cultural experiences in the host communities. In this last section, I propose several considerations to be made when developing study abroad curriculum.

Initial Orientations and Trainings

Although many youth exchange students and their families believe in greatly increased language learning during the study abroad period, these ambitious expectations can create unnecessary stress and anxiety. While the primary purpose of study abroad programs can be language learning (i.e., language camps and intensive language courses), it is important for the international youth exchange programs to ensure that the main purpose of such programs is to advance diplomatic and foreign policy goals (Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, 2007) by fostering positive attitudes toward the people and the language of the host communities.

International youth exchange programs also need to promote students' abilities to adjust to new and unfamiliar environments. Because of the nature of international youth exchange programs—that each experience by individual students are unique and no two students can encounter exactly the same situations—it is more useful for the students to be trained in decision-making skills to overcome any problems they may face while in the programs rather than to be provided a large copy of policies and rules. One of the ways to achieve this is to simulate unfamiliar environments which may encourage students to be creative and flexible in order to survive in the new situations they encounter in host countries.

Another important issue that international youth exchange programs should discuss during their orientations is the roles of the exchange students' parents while their children are on international youth exchange programs. Some encourage their students to limit contact with their family in order to be immersed into the host family and host communities (Harkavy, 2008; Youth For Understanding, 2007). Some host families agreed to the policy after being disturbed by frequent demands from parents, while some expressed the need of parents' involvement in supporting the exchange students. International youth exchange programs need to initiate the initial communications between the parents of the exchange students at home and their host families in the host communities to make an agreement concerning the issue. Clear instructions and stringent policies on the matter (e.g., how often, via what medium) can enhance the students' experiences in the study abroad destinations. Furthermore, it is important for international youth exchange programs to ensure that exchange students are safe and well taken care of on behalf of their parents. Despite many successful stories of such programs, we cannot deny some dangers to the students when the parents at home cannot supervise their children (e.g., Harkavy, 2008).

Support

Those students who did not receive adequate support expressed their disappointment with their exchange stay (Shepard, 1970). It is also important for the exchange students, their host families, and parents at home to understand the benefits of culture shock, which challenges the scope of the students' abilities. Although experiences of culture shock may be unpleasant for the students and those who are around them, this is a pathway for exchange students to grow. It is crucial to understand that avoiding all the negative experiences during the exchange stay does not mean success. Students should also be aware of the pathway of language learning in order to minimize stress and anxiety during their exchange stay in the host communities. It is also important to ensure that the students feel well supported throughout the program. Corresponding to Spenader (2005), my participants sought support from fellow foreign students, rather than people from the host communities, such as host families, teachers, and representatives of the exchange programs.

Practically speaking, international youth exchange programs can provide not only one but a few individuals whom the students can contact in the host communities in case of different needs. For example, it is helpful for international youth exchange programs to find at least one student (ideally who is the same gender, same age or older, and goes to the same school) whom their host family knows well. One suggestion to provide the students with more access to possible support in the host communities is to assign a dedicated individual who can act as a "hospitality friend" at the students' initial entry in the host communities. This "hospitality friend" can initially take the students to social activities with people of their age and help them get to know other peer groups in the host communities.

As Spenader (2005) found, interaction with other students who were learning the same target language (i.e., friends from ESL class in Kaori's case, and other international youth exchange students from other countries in Sakura's case) provided not only emotional support but also opportunities to use the target language. It is also useful for international youth exchange students to be introduced to a group of people to whom the students can be connected. The more diverse the group is, the better for the students who are eager to learn new cultures, rather than a group of people from the same cultural and linguistic backgrounds of the student.

While international youth exchange students were removed from their homes, much like a tree of cultural identity being transplanted in foreign ground, the international youth exchange programs need to provide a support system to the student so that the roots of the tree will be well established in the host communities.

NOTES

1. All names used in this article are pseudonyms.
2. Please refer to Ileleji (2008a, 2008b) for complete discussions of the entire study and other related issues.
3. All the quotations from the field texts were edited for clarity.

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