Re-entry: A teaching moment for intercultural communication awareness and skills

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After students return to their home country from study abroad, a well-designed "re-entry education program" can improve their intercultural communication awareness and skills by encouraging them to analyze their experiences abroad and the process of re-integration to their native cultures. Despite these potential benefits, few educational institutions provide re-entry education for their students. Therefore, the goals in this paper are to describe: (1) the objectives and rewards of re-entry education, (2) a re-entry education program at the French university Telecom Lille 1, and (3) the educational methods and activities used in a course about Japanese culture which the author taught as part of this program. The course was designed to deepen understanding of Japanese culture as well as intercultural communication concepts, and also to simulate an experience of working in Japan. Ultimately, this paper details a practical approach to facilitate students' intercultural learning following study abroad.

　留学プログラムから学生が母国に帰国した後、効果的なリエントリープログラム（帰国後プログラム）があると、学生は自分の留学体験だけでなく、自国文化への再統合プロセスに関しても分析をすることができる。このような利点があるにもかかわらず、ほとんど教育機関ではこのようなリエントリープログラムが提供されていない現状がある。そのため、この論文の目標は下記の３点について述べるものである。その３点とは、１．リエントリープログラムの教育的目的と利点、２．フランスのリールにあるTelecom Lille1大学でのリエントリープログラム、３．そのリエントリープログラムの一環として、著者が教えた日本文化及び異文化コミュニケーション概念コースで使用した教育メソッドと演習である。

　尚、３点目に挙げたこのコースは日本文化の理解と異文化コミュニケーションの理解を深めることを目的にデザインされたものであり、日本で働くということを疑似体験させるものであった。この論文では留学プログラム後、学生の異文化に関する学びをいかに促進していくかについての実践的なアプローチの詳細について述べている。

STUDY ABROAD programs are a mainstay at numerous Japanese universities as a means of enriching students' educational experiences. Many such institutions take a proactive approach in preparing students for their sojourns, providing pre-departure orientations that cover logistical exigencies and, less commonly, intercultural communication awareness and skills training. However, no matter how wonderful the time passed abroad, if there are no opportunities after re-entry to their home countries for students to reflect upon their experiences or to integrate insights made abroad into their lives back home, then such sojourns may amount to nothing more than superficial cultural tourism. According to LaBrack (1993), it is critical to provide not only pre-departure orientations before going abroad, but also programs after re-entry to students' home countries which encourage them to analyze their foreign

experiences and the process of re-integration into their native cultures. As LaBrack concluded, "Orientation linked to re-entry has a synergistic effect, the sum being greater than the parts" (p. 275).

By leveraging the educational potential inherent in pre-departure and re-entry intercultural training, Bennett and Paige (2008, October) emphasized that educators can facilitate significant improvements in students' "intercultural learning" that remain long after they have returned home. Intercultural learning refers to acquiring increased awareness of the subjective world view of others, as well as oneself, and developing greater ability to interact sensitively and competently across cultures. Intercultural learning—including the empathy, self-awareness, and culture-specific knowledge and skills that it encompasses—is, they contended, both transferable from one culture to another and can be generalized across cultural contexts.

When skillfully managed, living abroad and re-entry can enrich students not only during their university careers, but also once they enter a profession—thus making them valuable educational opportunities. Adler (1981) found that working adult returnees

> reported having enhanced skills in making decisions under ambiguous and uncertain conditions, . . . seeing situations from a number of perspectives, . . . successfully working with a wider range of people, [as well as] increased self-confidence and an improved self-image. (p. 346)

Despite numerous potential benefits, few educational institutions provide re-entry education for their students. Therefore, the goals in this paper are to describe (1) the objectives and rewards of re-entry education, (2) how a re-entry education program was structured at the French university Telecom Lille 1, and (3) the educational methods and activities used in a course

about Japanese culture which I, the author, taught as part of this program. I will explain how my class was designed to deepen understanding of Japanese culture as well as intercultural communication concepts, and also to simulate an experience of working in Japan. Thus, this paper details a practical approach which is designed to facilitate students' intercultural learning and transformation in the wake of study abroad. Ultimately, I hope that readers will be empowered by its contents to create similar courses or re-entry education programs at their institutions.

The goals of re-entry education

The literature described three goals of re-entry education. First, LaBrack (1993) argued that it is essential to "use the actual overseas experience as a behavioral/social text to be deciphered, analyzed, and finally melded with the student's ongoing pursuits and personal development" (p. 245). If students do not have the chance to integrate their foreign experiences with their present lives, or to lock in the advances in intercultural awareness and skills that they developed abroad, then such gains may be lost. If this occurs, sojourns are reduced to little more than pleasant memories and ultimately of scant long-term educational value. Therefore, re-entry education is a golden opportunity to promulgate among students intercultural learning and the personal growth that it engenders.

A second goal of re-entry education is to help students cope with reverse culture shock—i.e., the transitional experience of readjusting to one's home culture—which can have a greater impact than culture shock (Adler, 1975). Despite the confusion and malaise that often accompany reverse culture shock, many educational institutions neglect to teach students effective coping skills. This omission leaves students in a vulnerable position; furthermore, the institutions fail to capitalize upon the teaching moment that reverse culture shock provides.

A third objective of re-entry education is for students to learn from the experiences and perspectives of other classmates who have studied abroad. By sharing stories of their sojourns as well as the struggles faced after returning home, students realize that they are not alone in feeling the challenges resulting from reverse culture shock. Moreover, students become resources for each other in their mutual intercultural learning processes.

The Winter Institute of Intercultural Communication

Understanding the benefits of re-entry education does not necessarily result in educational institutions committing the necessary financial and human resources to establishing and maintaining such programs. A university which is implementing a flagship program in a European setting is Telecom Lille 1—located in Lille, France. It boasts a progressive approach to study abroad in which students spend two and a half months in one of 25 countries interning at companies and staying with host families.

Since this program continues to expand and evolve, the remainder of this section describes the characteristics as of 2010. Before their sojourns, students completed a thirty-hour introductory course in intercultural communication, thus receiving exposure to the basic concepts in the field. After returning to France, each student was required to take a one-week intensive class consisting of 25 contact hours at the Winter Institute of Intercultural Communication (WIIC). Thus, WIIC was the final part of an intentional and systematic effort to foster intercultural learning through curriculum design including pre-departure, on-site, and re-entry activities.

In order to expose students to teachers representing a variety of cultural backgrounds, instructors were invited from abroad (e.g., Japan, Finland, and the US) to teach their academic specialties. Students chose from five classes intended to cover diverse topics and appeal to a broad range of interests. Classes have included "Effective Intercultural Communication With Japanese People," "Culture and Technological Innovation," "Ethnicity and Interethnic Communication," and "Intercultural Facilitation of Corporate Work Groups." Enrollment in each class was limited to numbers (usually 20) which encouraged frequent student-teacher interaction and student-centered teaching methods such as discussion, case studies, and small group work.

The courses all shared certain objectives—namely for students to (1) reflect upon their study abroad experiences, (2) deepen learning related to the country of their sojourns, (3) improve their understanding of foreign cultures (other than those where they sojourned) and their general skills for communicating with cultural outgroups, and (4) facilitate their re-entry into the French cultural milieu.

The course: Effective Intercultural Communication With Japanese People
Educational objectives and guiding principles

The goals of my course, "Effective Intercultural Communication With Japanese People," were that participants would (1) examine Japanese "subjective" (i.e., subconscious) culture (Bennett, 1998) and how to overcome common culture-based misunderstandings between Japanese and non-Japanese people, (2) reflect upon their previous experiences abroad and strategize how to use the knowledge that they gained to improve their general intercultural communication skills, and (3) increase their self-cultural awareness by using concepts from the field of intercultural communication to explain French subjective culture to the instructor.

The course content stressed "subjective" rather than "objective" culture. According to Bennett (1998), objective culture

consists of "*institutions* of culture . . . [while] subjective culture refers to . . . *the learned and shared patterns of beliefs, behaviors, and values of groups of interacting people*" (p. 3). Bennett also emphasized that understanding both one's own and others' subjective cultures is more likely to lead to intercultural communication competence than studying objective culture. Therefore, while topics primarily rooted in objective culture (for example, sumo wrestling, origami, and popular singers) were included to stimulate student interest, Japanese subjective culture (for example, common value orientations and verbal communication styles) was the focus of inquiry.

The students taking this course had, for the most part, *never* been to Japan. Rather, they had lived predominantly in one of the other 24 countries that shared a work exchange program with Telecom Lille 1. On average, each year, only one student actually spent her or his internship in Japan. But in this course, the simulation of working in Japan provided an opportunity for the class members to experience Japan via their guided imaginations. Through the mutually-reinforcing processes of learning about Japan, reflecting upon their actual time abroad as well as their re-entry experiences in France, and acting as French cultural informants to the teacher, students had the chance to revisit and deepen their understanding of the concepts which they had learned prior to their internships in their introductory course to intercultural communication. In other words, they could advance their mastery of concepts and skills that promote effective intercultural communication and actualize deeper self-understanding—thus helping to achieve the broader goals of re-entry education.

Course structure and daily content

The course was divided into a three-step simulation: pre-departure orientation, a one-week work trip to Japan, and re-entry to France. A full agenda of the course activities is included in Appendix 1. During the pre-departure orientation, which was justified as preparation for their imaginary jobs in Japan, students reviewed the intercultural communication concepts that they had studied in their introductory course to intercultural communication while also learning related information about Japanese subjective culture. For example, high and low context communication were revisited, which Hall (1998) defined as follows:

> A high-context communication or message is one in which *most* of the information is already in the person, while very little is in the coded, explicit, transmitted part of the message. A low-context communication is just the opposite, that is, the mass of the information is vested in the explicit code. (p. 61)

To help students strengthen their mastery of these concepts, numerous examples of high context communication in Japan were given, along with the caveat that Japanese people—depending upon the situation and communication partner—also engage in low context communication, but likely not as frequently.

The next stage of the simulation was the students' sojourn to Japan (see Appendix 2 for the complete simulation description). Students were to work temporarily as intercultural communication consultants in a Japanese firm, where their charge was to solve problems between Japanese and American clients. The students "traveled" to Japan for six days—working by day at the firm's Osaka office and socializing at night with their Japanese coworkers or their Japanese host family. They were also to receive instruction in Japanese culture from Japanese colleagues, who felt that such training would help the French students to better analyze Japanese culture and to advise their clients more effectively. This last point made my instruction during the course about Japanese culture one part of the simulation—i.e.,

they were learning these points not from me, but from "Japanese coworkers."

The course agenda was replete with simulated work and social activities. For example, students were regularly presented case studies which described problems reported by their clients or difficulties in intercultural communication that they personally underwent in Japan. In either case, the students were expected to analyze the cultural causes of such friction and to make proposals for resolving them. For each case study (one of which is included in Appendix 3), they answered the same battery of questions which are summarized here but listed in full in Appendix 4.

First, students were asked which cultural differences were most likely at the root of the problem depicted in the case study, and which concepts that they had studied best described such differences. The main concepts used in this course for this purpose were high/low context communication styles (Hall, 1998); the nonverbal communication styles of proxemics, paralanguage, haptics, occulistics, and kinesics (Bennett, 1998); and Geert Hofstede's value dimensions of individualism/collectivism, Power Distance, Uncertainty Avoidance, and Masculinity/Femininity (Hofstede, 1991). Students were then asked to offer advice for how to solve the problem in the case and which of the five conflict resolution styles that they had learned (i.e., Accommodation, Avoidance, Coercion, Compromise, or Win-Win Solution) best characterized their approach. Readers unfamiliar with conflict resolution can refer to Dent (2010) for an introduction.

Next, students speculated as to whether the same conflict was likely to occur between French and Japanese people—namely, they were expected to articulate how French subjective cultural patterns tend to differ from (or be similar to) the Japanese and American ones that were clashing in the case. For example, one case study stimulated a discussion of diverging notions of Power Distance—i.e., the preference for hierarchical or egalitar-

ian human relations (Hofstede, 1991). Particularly, the use in Japan of *keigo*, or honorific language, was a point of conflict. So the students were asked to explain sociolinguistic conventions related to the use of *tu* and *vous* in France. Students also considered how French people might behave in the same situation depicted in the case and related their ideas to common notions of Power Distance in France. Such exercises promoted self-cultural awareness.

Finally, students hypothesized as to whether the same conflict was likely to occur between Japanese people and those from the country where they had interned abroad. This promoted insight into the foreign cultures where they had lived. In the process, the boundaries of the course expanded well beyond Japan, as students examined many national cultures while deepening their heritage cultural awareness.

By analyzing each case using intercultural communication concepts in the systematic manner described above, students enriched their understanding of these concepts and improved their ability to apply them—thus developing critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Moreover, such activities were also designed to promulgate student gains in the four types of intercultural learning described by Brislin and Yoshida (1994): *awareness* and *knowledge* of cultural differences (e.g., in verbal communication style), *emotional acceptance* of these differences with improved attitudes towards cultural outgroup members, and finally concrete intercultural communication *skills* (e.g., those to bridge the gap between indirect and direct verbal communication styles).

In order to further stimulate students' interest in Japan, authentic materials were included. Consequently, students could better appreciate Japanese arts and modern Japanese popular culture. For instance, we enjoyed a tea ceremony with traditional tea-making equipment and a calligraphy lesson using brushes and ink brought from Japan. Under the pretext of going

to a concert with coworkers, students watched music videos of popular Japanese singers. All of these activities were explained as events occurring at some point during students' week in Japan. One night after work, students were scheduled to accompany their host family to a sumo wrestling match, so I gave a short lecture about sumo's rules and history followed by a video of sumo matches. Through such eclectic topic selection, students gained insight into many cultural domains.

Another means of heightening the simulation's sense of authenticity was to "place" students with a Japanese host family in Osaka. Students watched a video introducing them to the host family, the inside of their household, and their lifestyle. This video was made by my wife and five family members in the house where her parents and grandparents were living, so it comprised actual footage of a Japanese family and their home.

The simulation of working in Japan was followed by a re-entry workshop under the guise of helping the students readjust to France after their time in Japan. In this sense, the simulation continued, but the raw material for this workshop which formed the base for our discussions was students' actual experiences abroad and re-entry to France. Students learned about reverse culture shock, studying the "W-curve model" (Adler, 1975), and also useful coping strategies to ease them through this transition. One such strategy is to integrate into their lives in France their most treasured knowledge, skills, and attitudes that they developed while abroad. Knowledge and skills usually were related to foreign language fluency or performance of traditional arts. Common attitudes included newfound interests in diplomacy, or in intercultural communication either with members of a specific culture or as a general field. Finally, students brainstormed how they could incorporate these new dimensions of themselves into daily routines. By putting such gains into practice (for example, by finding a conversational partner in their foreign language of interest, volunteering to help refugees, or taking more classes in intercultural communication), students could secure advances in their intercultural learning. In other words, by integrating into their lives in France their accomplishments and the internal changes which they had experienced abroad, students were able to transfer these benefits from the circumscribed context of their limited sojourns to the present, which in turn helped to transform their long-term world views and permanent skill sets.

Conclusion

In sum, this course and the WIIC program moved beyond even the progressive style of re-entry education elucidated by LaBrack (1993): students not only compared the cultures of their home country and the country where they went abroad, but they also considered a new culture—in this case, Japan. In the process, students had the opportunity to deepen their understanding of intercultural communication concepts, improve their analytic and problem-solving skills, and support their intercultural experiences with intercultural concepts. Ultimately, "global citizenship," or the capacity to shift one's cognitive frame of reference to that of another culture or to adapt behavior to cultural context (Bennett & Paige, 2008, October), was nurtured in a sustainable manner that could be utilized in intercultural communication with Japanese people and also generalized across cultures. Thus, this course was designed to serve as a link between theory and practice for both teachers in actualizing the goals of re-entry education and for students in making their academic studies of intercultural communication part of their deepest selves.

Bio data

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Appendix 1
Course agenda
Day One:

I. Introductions
- A. Instructors
- B. Course Objectives
- C. Students

II. Pre-Departure Training for Japan
- A. Simulation Explanation
- B. Japanese and French Common Sense Quiz
- C. Definition of Culture & Generalizations vs. Stereotypes
- D. Nonverbal Communication in Japan
- E. Verbal Communication in Japan
- F. Japanese Values and Hofstede's Dimensions of Culture

Day Two:

III. Arrive in Japan
- A. Your Mission
- B. Welcome by Host Family
- C. Commute to Work
- D. Greet Japanese Boss
- E. Case Studies
- F. Eating Japanese Noodles
- G. Chopsticks Contest
- H. Homework Explanation: The Culture of Japanese Youth
- I. Video on Japanese Traditional Beliefs
- J. Q & A

Day Three:

K. Discussion: Japanese Youth Culture

L. Japanese Pop Music and Commercials Video

M. Case Studies

N. See Sumo Wrestling with a Friend

O. Case Studies

P. Calligraphy and Japanese Character ("Kanji") Formation

Q. Proverbs Speech

R. Case Studies

S. Japanese Education

T. Goodbye to Japan and Q & A

Day Four:

IV. Back in France: Re-entry Training

V. Explanation of Final Assignments

Day Five:

VI. Student Role Plays and Presentations

VII. Summary and Farewell

Appendix 2

Simulation of intercultural consulting in Japan

Description:

You will spend six days in Japan working as an intercultural consultant. Currently, you are employed by K International, a multinational intercultural consulting company with offices in France (your office), the United States, and Japan. The Japanese office has requested your services. They are facing a large number of cases in which their clients are Japanese and Americans. Your Japanese boss, Mr. Morita, has specifically requested a French consultant because he wants someone who can advise clients without American or Japanese cultural biases. You have been chosen. You will live with a host family, the Fujimotos, and you will advise the K International staff at their office in Osaka for four days about high priority cases. You will also be given instruction in Japanese culture, as the Japanese staff feels that such training will help you to better understand Japan and more effectively advise your clients.

Appendix 3

Sample case study

Justin Time works in a Japanese company in Tokyo. He arrived one month ago with his wife and child. Justin and his family spent the first three weekends moving into their apartment, setting up furniture, and buying necessities. Finally, on their fourth weekend in Tokyo, they planned to relax and do nothing. However, just two days before the weekend, on Thursday, Justin's boss invited him to a hot spring resort with some of the other workers in the department. Justin wanted to get to know his coworkers better, but he really wanted to spend time relaxing with his family. Justin told his boss that he could not go, but he appreciated the invitation and hoped that they could meet another time. His boss, Mr. Tomita, accepted this decision, but he was displeased. He thought that Justin was being selfish because he was not interested in building good relationships with his coworkers and learning to act like a member of a team.

Appendix 4

Questions for debriefing case studies

1. What are some cultural differences that may be causing this communication problem? Describe these cultural differences in terms of one or more intercultural communication concepts that we have learned.

2. If these people could go back in time and behave differently, what would you recommend they do or say? Also, which of the five conflict resolution styles that we have studied (i.e., Accommodation, Avoidance, Coercion, Compromise, or Win-Win Solution) is reflected in your suggested solution? If you are proposing a Win-Win Solution, explain what the deep needs are on both sides and how they are satisfied by your proposal.

3. Would this same situation likely occur between French and Japanese people? Why or why not? How are French people generally different or similar to Americans in the cultural dimensions that are most important in this case study?

4. Would this same situation likely occur between Japanese people and those from the country where you studied abroad? Why or why not? How are people from this country generally different or similar to Americans in the cultural dimensions that are most important in this case study?