

Self-Assessment of Intercultural Communicative Competence

Kevin Ottoson

Nagoya University of Foreign Studies

Reference Data:

Ottoson, K. (2016). Self-assessment of intercultural communicative competence. In P. Clements, A. Krause, & H. Brown (Eds.), *Focus on the learner*. Tokyo: JALT.

Developing and assessing intercultural communicative competence (ICC) is a complex endeavor due to the variety of components involved. Byram (1997) described ICC as the attitudes, knowledge, and skills for communicating effectively and appropriately across cultures in a foreign language. In this qualitative study, researchers examined students' perspectives about the self-assessment of ICC using one of Byram's (2000) formats for self-assessment of intercultural experience. The perspectives from two 1st-year, non-English majors were monitored as they reflected on their own assessments of the cultural experiences they had during a 4-week study abroad experience in Australia. Findings from this study suggest the participants were able to begin to monitor their intercultural experiences and identify the short-term and long-term benefits of self-assessing intercultural experiences. It is hoped that the results of this study will lead teachers and administrators to include more opportunities for study-abroad participants to engage in self-assessment of ICC.

教室における異文化間コミュニケーション能力 (ICC) を開発し評価することは、様々な構成要素が含まれるため、かなり困難である。Byram (1997) は、ICCを、文化を超えて効果的にまた適切に外国語でコミュニケーションを取るための「態度」、「知識」、「技能」と説明している。本質的研究では、異文化経験の自己評価のためのパイラムモデル (Byram, 2000) を用い、ICCの自己評価に関する学生の見解を調査した。大学1年生2名 (非英語専攻) が、4週間のオーストラリアでの経験を振り返り、異文化での経験を自己評価し、その見解をまとめた。本研究で、学生は自分でICCを評価することができること、また、異文化経験の自己評価の短期的、長期的な利点を見出すことができることが分かった。今後、更に多くの学生を対象に教師や教育機関がこの研究を進めることで、外国での経験をより理解し、それぞれの必要性や目標に合わせた自己評価が可能になることを望む。

Assessing the attitudes, skills, and knowledge necessary to communicate effectively across cultures in an L2 is a complex endeavor. One problem faced by foreign language teachers is that most models that have been developed to assess either intercultural competence (IC) or communicative competence (CC) were developed outside the foreign language teaching context (for a discussion of this, see Borghetti, 2013). One noticeable exception is Byram (2000) who provided two formats that could be used to assess IC in an EFL setting. Byram's formats for self-assessment incorporate the five elements that he believed to be necessary for IC: attitudes, knowledge, skills of interpreting and relating, skills of discovery and interaction, and critical cultural awareness/political education. These formats are unique as they allow students to self assess their own IC through the use of language portfolios. This is important because language portfolios, such as the European Language Portfolio (ELP) or *LinguaFolio*, make it possible for language learners to engage in longitudinal self-assessment in the classroom, something that is necessary if we are to be able to assess students' IC effectively. This study used one of Byram's formats to discover more about the IC and intercultural communicative competence (ICC) of short-term study abroad participants by having them engage in a self-assessment of the intercultural experiences that they recorded in a diary over the course of their study abroad experience.

Theoretical Framework

Intercultural Communicative Competence

Literature related to intercultural communication often includes CC, IC, and ICC. While this study focused on the last of these three competences, to understand what ICC is, it is first necessary to understand what CC and IC are and how ICC relates to these two competences. CC refers to a learner's grammatical knowledge of the target language as well as the social knowledge that allows him or her to use that language appropriately. According to Canale (1983), CC is made up of four competences, all of which are needed to communicate effectively and appropriately in an L2: grammatical competence, socio-

Ottoson: *Self-Assessment of Intercultural Communicative Competence*

linguistic competence, strategic competence, and discourse competence. Van Ek (1986) later added sociocultural and social competence to this list.

CC requires a degree of grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, and discourse competence, but IC looks at communication across cultures irrespective of the learner's L2 CC. Individuals possessing IC "have the ability to interact in their own language with people from another country and culture" (Byram, 1997, p. 70). If IC is the ability to communicate across cultures in one's own language, then ICC is the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately across cultures in an L2. Individuals with some degree of ICC are able to "interact with people from another country and culture in a foreign language" (p. 71). During interactions across cultures in another language students with a degree of ICC are able to draw upon linguistic, sociolinguistic, and discourse competences to communicate effectively.

Byram's Models of ICC

For this study, one of Byram's (2000) formats for self-assessing intercultural experience was selected as the most appropriate tool to have students use when doing their self-assessment activities. This self-assessment format is based on Byram's (1997) model of ICC. It differs from other ways of assessing IC or ICC as it was specifically designed for use by language instructors. One important aspect of this format is its connection to the Common European Framework of Reference for languages (CEFR; Council of Europe, 2001), a framework that describes what learners need to learn to communicate in another language and the skills they need to improve in order to act appropriately and effectively across cultures. The CEFR is useful because it provides teachers with clear communicative and functional goals (Tono & Negishi, 2012). Another reason for choosing Byram's format for this study is that it allowed for the assessment of individual experiences. This is because Byram does not focus on ICC as merely a process with the end goal being intercultural communicative competence but rather looks at each experience as having its own intercultural communication and competence goals.

Byram's (1997) model of ICC describes the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary for students to communicate across cultures in a foreign language (see Figure 1). This model of ICC breaks down the skills needed to communicate with people from other cultures into five general components: knowledge, attitudes, skills of interpreting and relating, skills of discovery and interaction, and education. The most important component of Byram's model is the educational component, symbolically placed in the middle for its importance and significance to the foreign language-learning classroom. According to this model, the goal of foreign language teachers should be to raise their students' awareness of how their

values, attitudes, and beliefs create a cultural lens through which they view the world and that affects their interactions with it (Byram, Gribkova, & Starkey, 2002)

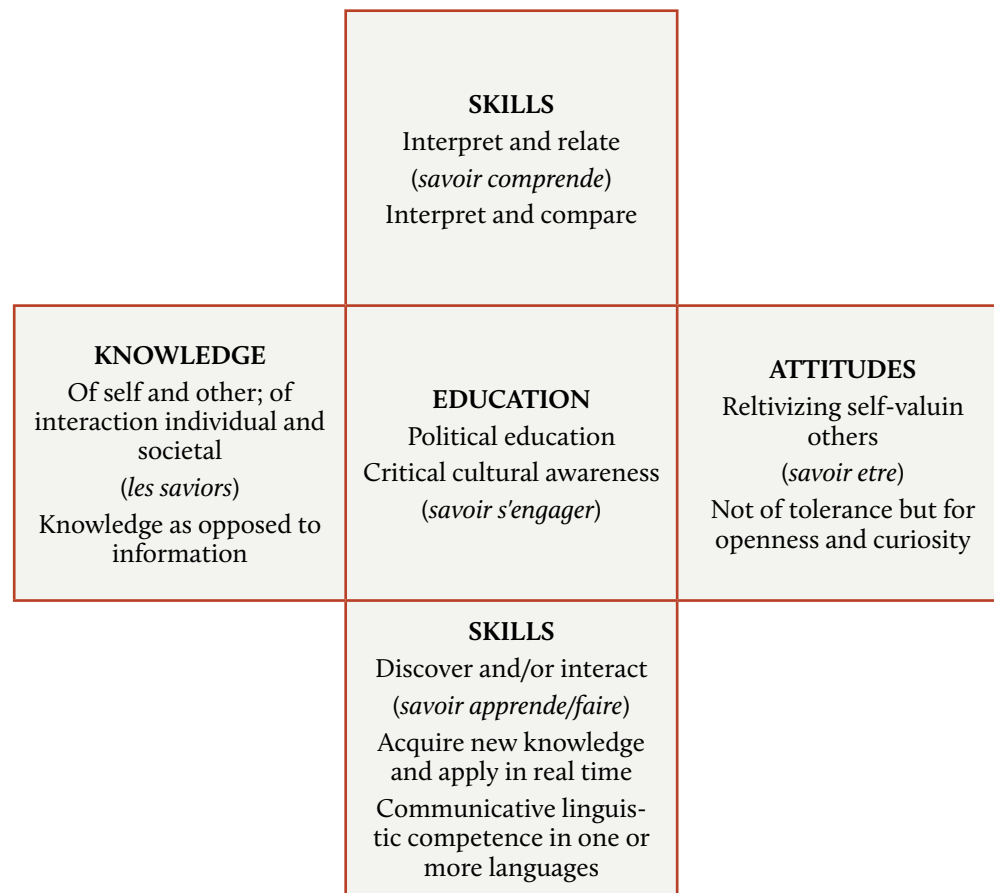


Figure 1. Byram's (1997) model of intercultural communicative competence.

Byram's format of self-assessment is based on this model of ICC but was developed as a tool to be used by language teachers with their students as a means of self-assessing their ICC. This model was created in conjunction with the Council of Europe for use with the

Ottoson: *Self-Assessment of Intercultural Communicative Competence*

ELP, which is a portfolio for language learners to record and reflect on their intercultural and language experiences (Council of Europe, 2011), and describes how students can use Byram's model of ICC for self-assessment as part of the language portfolio. The simplicity of this model, along with the fact that it was developed for language teachers and students, made it the most appropriate model to use when asking the language learners to assess their own intercultural experiences in this study.

According to this learner-centered self-assessment format, students have to identify their emerging ability to meet the five components of Byram's model of ICC (see Table 1).

Table 1. Self-Assessment of Intercultural Experience

Component	Examples
A. Interest in other people's way of life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I am interested in other people's experience of daily life, particularly those things not usually presented to outsiders through the media. I am also interested in the daily experience of a variety of social groups within a society and not only the dominant culture.
B. Ability to change perspective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I have realized that I can understand other cultures by seeing things from a different point of view and by looking at my culture from their perspective.
C. Ability to cope with living in a different culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I am able to cope with a range of reactions I have living in a different culture (euphoria, homesickness, physical and mental discomfort, etc.)
D. Knowledge about another country and culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I know some important facts about living in the other culture and about the country, state, and people. I know how to engage in conversation with people of the other culture and maintain a conversation.
E. Knowledge about intercultural communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I know how to resolve misunderstandings, which arise from people's lack of awareness of the viewpoint of another culture. I know how to discover new information and new aspects of the other culture for myself

Method

Participants

The participants of this study came from a group of 18 students who participated in a 2015 study abroad experience to Australia as part of a short-term study abroad program at a private university in Japan. Two of the students were selected to participate in this study. This selection process was done based on the descriptive critical incidents recorded in their notebook and on their participation in a voluntary focus group. The students were selected because the incidents that they recorded were descriptive and encompassed all, or almost all, of Byram's (1997) components, and they actively participated in the focus group by sharing descriptive experiences from their time in Australia. Both participants were 1st-year, non-English majors. The pseudonyms of Riko and Sari have been given to the two participants to protect their privacy.

Materials and Procedure

Prior to their 4-week, short-term study abroad experience in Australia, all participants were given a notebook in which to keep a record of their experiences. Reflection prompts, adapted from Spencer-Oatey and Franklin (2009), were attached to the inside-cover of the notebook (see Appendix). This was a voluntary, ungraded exercise. Participants were encouraged to write about their experiences at least three times a week in either English or Japanese. In one of their pre-study abroad orientation meetings they were presented with the notebooks and given a brief explanation of how to record any experiences that they thought were interesting in any way. Additionally, study abroad notebooks that had been written by other students and that included writings in English and Japanese and drawings were shown to the students as examples of what previous students had done. No other guidelines on the length or style of the entries were given.

One month after their study abroad experience, participants were invited to join one of two focus group sessions to discuss their experiences. Four months after these initial focus groups, two of the students were contacted and asked to participate in a more detailed pair-depth interview. The reason for the 4-month gap was to give the students time to reflect on the critical incidents recorded in their journals, something that Ziamandanis (2013) and others have found to be beneficial. In this semistructured, paired-depth interview, the two participants were interviewed together in an effort to have them open up about or articulate their experience in more detail. The interviews started with general questions about their experience and then moved on to more specific questions. The questions were based on Byram's (2000) self-assessment format and focused on the

Ottoson: *Self-Assessment of Intercultural Communicative Competence*

students' interest in culture, change of perspective, ability to cope in a different culture, and their knowledge of the culture of their host country. The paired-depth interview format was chosen as it has been shown to give the interviewer more room to explore the participants' answers with follow-up questions (The Association for Qualitative Research, n.d.).

One week after the interview, the two participants were asked to code their journal reflections using Byram's (2000) self-assessment format of intercultural experience. Both participants were given Byram's self-assessment of intercultural experience format in English and Japanese along with a brief explanation of the format. The participants were then given copies of the journal entries they had written during their time in Australia. After reading through their journal, the participants were asked to find the entries that they thought would fit into one of the five categories of intercultural experience. I was present to answer any questions the students had as they attempted to code their entries. After the coding session, the participants were asked to reflect on their experience with self-assessment through a second paired-depth interview. This second interview was transcribed and analyzed thematically to determine reoccurring themes.

Results

Self-Assessing Intercultural Experience

During this stage of the study the students were asked to code their journal entries using Byram's (2000) self-assessment format (see Table 2). Most of the entries that were coded by the participants were categorized as "knowledge about another country and culture." In these journal entries, participants described their experiences and demonstrated their knowledge of Australian and Japanese culture. Participants described what they noticed and what they thought it meant. They then reflected on how it compared or contrasted with Japanese culture.

The second most frequent category coded by the participants was "interest in knowing other people's way of life and introducing one's own culture." The entries that the participants coded into this category demonstrated an interest in verbal communication, nonverbal communication, and special events. The presence of entries that fit in this category indicates that the students possessed the intercultural attitude necessary for communicating across cultures.

The next most frequently coded category was "ability to cope with living in a different environment." In the entries that the participants coded into this category, they talked about activities that had helped them when they were experiencing stress as a result of

being in a new environment and being away from their family and friends. The act of shopping and eating sushi and rice were activities that both participants cited as helping them to cope with homesickness.

The category "ability to change perspective" was only coded by one participant. Sari mentioned the cultural norms and material culture that caused her to change her perspective. The only category that was not coded was "knowledge of intercultural communication." For this reason, it has not been included in Table 2.

Table 2. Examples of the Self-Assessment of Intercultural Experience Entries

Category	Examples self-coded from student's diary
A. Interest in other people's way of life	In February, many people of host family and their relatives have their birthday, so they celebrated. I've seen body contact (skinship) for the first time. I think that Japanese people don't, but it was nice attitude and they were friendly, made me welcome and I did these skinships, too. (Sari) Today was Valentine's Day! I gave chocolates to my host mother. That chocolate looks like a rose! She was really pleased! So I was so happy! (Riko)
B. Ability to change perspective	Everything in supermarket was much bigger (than Japan). (Sari) It was my first time to ride on a bus in Australia, and the bus doesn't have the device or the system for announcing next stop or bus. So I was nervous a little bit whether or not I lose the way to go to shopping center. (Sari) I was sad and disappointed that student's bag was stolen, but at the same time, I had reflected on something carelessly...probably. (Sari)
C. Ability to cope with living in a different culture	At first I was a little bit stressed out and I was kind of nervous, but I used to be accustomed perfectly. I think when I miss my family. I should talk with someone, then it will be better. (Sari) I went shopping with friends this afternoon. It was fun! I ate sushi. I have never eaten rice since I came to Australia. I was really happy! This week was really good! Awesome! (Riko)

Ottoson: Self-Assessment of Intercultural Communicative Competence

Category	Examples self-coded from student's diary
D. Knowledge about another country and culture	<p>I learned the difference of food and culture between Australia and Japanese. It inspired me; it was a good chance to know new things and to understand people who have their own culture differ from our culture. And It makes my knowledge or thoughts be richer and wilder. (Sari)</p> <p>I think that children know and learn other country's culture by education of Japanese. It was pretty good in some ways...whether or not people like it...Anyway, I think it maybe it was good chance for a person who want to be a Japanese teacher in future or is interested in about Japanese education to know the real situation of Japanese education in Australia. And they serve Lamingtons, which is famous food of Australia and the sweets with morning tea. I would appreciate it (Sari)</p> <p>I have never been to market before it was difference between Japanese culture. At market, there were a lot of shop and someone were singing. They were listening to music with friend. They looked really happy and enjoyed. (Riko)</p>

thereafter in the interview, Riko demonstrated an initial frustration with her inability to find examples of demonstrating knowledge of intercultural communication. But eventually, she opened up about where she did demonstrate an interest in other cultures. "In my journal a lot of A (Interest in other people's way of life). Maybe I learned a lot of new things. So maybe my thinking changed a lot. There is a difference in interest."

Next, Sari shared examples that she thought demonstrated her knowledge of other cultures that were not written in her diary.

And I had a lot of knowledge about other people and culture. For example, Australian people go to bed early and they are really friendly. The bus driver made us fun. On the way to sand boarding, he (the bus driver) drove down a strange street and the bus driver stopped when he saw a wild kangaroo, but these things never happen in Japan because the bus driver would keep driving. I learned these things in Australia. I did not know these things before. And people are too friendly. Shiho's (pseudonym) home mother gave two dollars to a stranger she doesn't know. This old lady was in trouble. She forgot her wallet. Or I don't know. But she couldn't go home. And in Japan, maybe we don't talk with strangers. (Sari, interview)

Through this self-assessment process, Sari was able to remember other key events and interpret them through an intercultural lens.

Paired-Depth Interview

In the second paired-depth interview, the participants spoke about three areas of the self-assessment process: their initial reactions to the self-assessment process, what they noticed while doing the self-assessment process, and the benefits of doing self-assessment of intercultural experiences.

Initial Reactions

Initially the students found the activity quite challenging and were concerned that they were not able to find entries that matched some of the categories. When asked about the coding activity Riko said, "It was a little bit difficult. I can't find E." However, both students seemed to recognize the benefits of participating in this type of activity. Sari said, "This activity I think is a good chance to know myself. To think about other cultures and Japanese culture."

Students' Observations of the Self-Assessment Activity

When asked about what they noticed from doing the self-assessment activity, both participants mentioned different aspects of the activity. During the coding, and shortly

Perceived Benefits of the Self-Assessment Activity

Finally, when asked how they felt about expanding this activity to include all of the participants, both participants had positive feelings. Riko mentioned how it would help other study abroad participants by helping them to develop a heightened self-awareness of their intercultural experiences.

It's good! We can learn about ourself. If I didn't do this, I would just write a lot of journal and finish. It is not good. Because I almost forgot what happened in Australia. But I read my journal then I did this assessment, I remembered a lot of things. And I realized I have to keep thinking about other cultures things. Cause its important. (Riko, interview)

Sari concluded the interview by mentioning the benefits of the self-evaluation process for her and other students if they were to do a similar activity in the future. Sari mentioned how the ability to change her perspective combined with her knowledge of cultures and intercultural communication might be attractive to future employers.

Ottoson: Self-Assessment of Intercultural Communicative Competence

In an job interview . . . I can describe how my old thinking, my common sense changed from this experience and this experience I know other culture intercultural communication or something and make my thinking more broad or wider and yeah. (Sari, interview)

Responses from this second paired-depth interview showed that this type of activity was perceived as being beneficial by both of the students.

Discussion

This exercise in self-assessment was positively received by both of the participants. The participants were able to begin to assess their own intercultural experience based on Byram's (2000) self-assessment model of intercultural experience. Initially, the students seemed to struggle with the coding activity and coded entries from their journals into one category when they seemed to better fit another category. However, with further explanation of the categories in Byram's model, Riko and Sari changed the categorization of some of their entries.

In regards to the second-biggest category that the participants coded, "Interest in knowing other people's way of life and introducing their own culture," it could be argued that the entries that they coded into this category demonstrated the participants' interest in verbal communication and nonverbal communication. However, some of the participants' entries detailing verbal and nonverbal communication may have been better classified as what Yashima (2002) describes as an international posture and, therefore, would have fit better under another category; for example, category C (Ability to cope with living in a different culture) or E (Knowledge about intercultural communication). In Sari's entry about the use of body contact (shown in Table 2) she showed the ability to cope with a different culture's use of nonverbal communication. This demonstrates an openness to discovering new aspects of a culture, the ability to cope with cultural differences, and the skills and confidence to adapt in real time. This posture and confidence in L2 communication is one of the components found in MacIntyre, Clement, Dörnyei, and Noels's (1998) heuristic model of variables influencing willingness to communicate (WTC).

Finally, self-assessment allowed these participants to see the experiences that they had through the lens of culture. Both participants shared comments that mentioned the benefits of the reflection that they were doing, saying that they thought it would lead to heightened self-awareness. Additionally, Sari mentioned the possible benefits of her ability to communicate this heightened self-awareness in the future. It bears mentioning that following this self-assessment exercise, Sari typed out a two-page composition

sharing other experiences she had that were not recorded in her journal or mentioned in the interview. Each critical incident was met with a comparison and a reflection on Japanese culture. This suggests that Sari was able to demonstrate her emerging skill of interpreting and comparing, a core component of Byram's (1997) model, following this self-assessment exercise.

Conclusion

This initial exploration into self-assessment of intercultural experience has demonstrated some promising potential in its further use with short-term study abroad participants. Although small in scope, this study suggests that, when given the appropriate self-reflection activities, non-English majors from Japanese universities can demonstrate an emerging ability to begin to self-assess intercultural experience.

Moreover, this study shows that short-term study abroad participants are able to identify the possible benefits that they can gain from assessing their own ability to communicate effectively and appropriately across cultures. Engaging in self-assessment of ICC allows participants to interpret their experience abroad not only in terms of linguistic development, but also in terms of interest in culture, ability to change perspective, ability to cope with living in a different environment, and knowledge of cultures.

Future studies could expand students' self-assessment of intercultural experiences during a short-term study abroad program. Adopting a portfolio similar to an ELP or *LinguaFolio* may help students think critically about their intercultural experiences. Students may also carry their portfolio with them in the future to demonstrate their abilities to interact effectively and appropriately across cultures. This portfolio may be used in future classes, graduate school, or for professional development in their future careers. Sari's idea of describing her intercultural experience to future employers may be a real possibility for her and other study abroad participants. Not only could she and other participants describe their linguistic development, but they could also elaborate on their intercultural development.

In sum, assessing only linguistic development following a short-term study abroad experience is selling the experience short for administrators, teachers, and students. Reflecting only on students' linguistic development, or lack thereof, through the use of standardized test scores does not take into account the students' emerging intercultural development. Future studies establishing a baseline of students' attitudes, knowledge, and skills prior to their time overseas would help the researcher to ascertain how much a students' ICC changes or develops during their time abroad, using the self-reflection activities described in this study. This would also be useful for the participants because it

Ottoson: *Self-Assessment of Intercultural Communicative Competence*

would allow students to see the importance of developing these skills. Raising students' awareness of intercultural development may, in turn, foster a deeper satisfaction with their study abroad and may encourage them to engage in future intercultural experiences and further develop their ICC skills.

Bio Data

Kevin J. Ottoson is a full-time lecturer at Nagoya University of Foreign Studies (Japan) in the Center for Language Education Development. He is an EdD student at the University of New England. His research interests include intercultural communicative competence assessment, sociocultural theory, and study abroad. <kottoson@une.edu>

References

- The Association for Qualitative Research. (n.d.). *Paired depth interview*. Retrieved from <<http://www.aqr.org.uk/glossary/paired-depth-interview>>
- Borghetti, C. (2013). Integrating intercultural and communicative objectives in the foreign language class: A proposal for the integration of two models. *The Language Learning Journal*, 41, 254-267. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09571736.2013.836344>
- Byram, M. (1997). *Teaching and assessing intercultural competence*. Clevedon, England: Multilingual Matters.
- Byram, M. (2000). Assessing intercultural competence in language teaching, *Sprogforum*, 18(6), 8-13.
- Byram, M., Gribkova, B., & Starkey, H. (2002). *Developing the intercultural dimension in language teaching: A practical introduction for teachers*. Strasbourg, France: Council of Europe. Retrieved from <<http://lrc.cornell.edu/director/intercultural.pdf>>
- Canale, M. (1983). From communicative competence to communicative language pedagogy. In J. C. Richards & R. W. Schmidt (Eds.), *Language and communication* (pp. 2-27). London, UK: Longman.
- Council of Europe (2001). *The Common European Framework of Reference for languages: Language, teaching, and assessment*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press. Retrieved from <http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/source/framework_en.pdf>
- Council of Europe, (2011). *European language portfolio*. Retrieved from <http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/education/elp/elp-reg/Compiling_guide_EN.asp>
- MacIntyre, P. D., Clément, R., Dörnyei, Z. & Noels, K. A. (1998). Conceptualizing willingness to communicate in a L2: A situational model of L2 confidence and affiliation. *The Modern Language Journal*, 82, 545-562. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4781.1998.tb05543.x>

- Spencer-Oatey, H., & Franklin, P. (2009). *Intercultural interaction: A multidisciplinary approach to intercultural communication*. Basingstoke, England: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Tono, Y., & Negishi, M. (2012). The CEFR-J: Adapting the CEFR for English language teaching in Japan. *Framework & Language Portfolio SIG Newsletter*, 8, 5-12. Retrieved from <http://www.tufs.ac.jp/ts/personal/tonolab/cefr-j/Tono&Negishi2012forJALT_FLPSIG.pdf>
- van Ek, J. A. (1986). *Objectives for foreign language learning*. Strasbourg, France: Council of Europe.
- Yashima, T. (2002). Willingness to communicate in a second language: The Japanese EFL context. *The Modern Language Journal*, 86, 54-66. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/1540-4781.00136>
- Ziamandanis, C. M. (2013). Qualitative and quantitative cultural gains from short-term study abroad. *Monograph: The Acquisition of Second Languages and Innovative Pedagogies*, 10, 138-143. <http://dx.doi.org/10.7203/attic.10.2339>

Appendix

Reflection Prompts Adapted From Spencer-Oatey & Franklin (2009)

Please keep a daily journal in Japanese or English during the Australia Study Program. Please keep a record of experiences that are noticeable to you in any way, either negatively (e.g., made you feel particularly stressed, annoyed, or ineffective) or positively (e.g., made you feel particularly happy, proud or self-satisfied, or struck you as affective).

オーストラリア研修の間、日本語か英語で日記を毎日書いてください。

研修での経験のなかで、あなたが気づいたことや感じたことを記録してください。(ストレスを感じたことや、イライラしたこと、無意味だと感じたことなどネガティブな経験、とても嬉しく感じたこと、誇りに思ったことや満足したことなど自分の為になったと感じたポジティブな経験、両方記録してください。)

Use these questions to help you write. 以下の質問を、日記や記録を書く際の手助けにしてください。

1. Where the incident took place? どこでその出来事は起こったか?
2. Who else was involved? 他に誰が、その出来事に関わったか?
3. What was your emotional reaction to what happened? その出来事に対する、自分の気持ちは?
4. How did you deal with what happened? どのように、その出来事に対処したか?
5. What was your reflection on the incident several days later? 数日経ったあと、その出来事を振り返ってみると?