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# Classroom Approaches and Japanese College Students' Intercultural Competence

Joan Elizabeth Gilbert  
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# Walden University

College of Education

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Joan Elizabeth Gilbert

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,  
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Walden University  
2017

Abstract

Classroom Approaches and Japanese College Students' Intercultural Competence

by

Joan Gilbert

MA, Columbia University, Teachers College, 1996

BA, University of California, Los Angeles, 1983

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Education

Walden University

November 2017

## Abstract

Preparing college students to be contributing members of local and global societies requires educators to analyze the capabilities and needs of their students and to adjust instructional content and practice. The purpose of this mixed-methods study was twofold: (a) to explore how classroom approaches designed to facilitate students' questioning of assumptions and beliefs regarding different cultural beliefs, social structures, and practices might influence Japanese college students' self-reported development of intercultural competence, and (b) to investigate whether or not the students developed their potential for intercultural competence. Mezirow's transformative learning theory informed this study. Archival qualitative data were from 137 Japanese undergraduate students' journals from a course with approaches designed to facilitate questioning their assumptions and beliefs. Multilevel coding was used to support thematic analysis. Archival quantitative data of students' pretest and posttest scores on the Intercultural Adaptation Potential Scale (ICAPS) were too few for meaningful analysis. Limited trend interpretations of the quantitative data helped support the qualitative data findings. Key findings included students identifying the importance of opportunities to discuss conflicting cultural beliefs, social structures, and practices; several questioned their assumptions and enhanced their intercultural competence. Expanded research into the challenge of enhancing cultural competence is needed. Positive social change is possible when intercultural competence and understanding the importance of dealing with cultural conflicts in an informed manner are enhanced. Students who expand their comfort levels and understandings will gain membership into multiple societies, reflect critically on their worldviews, and be able to take positive actions during conflicts.

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## Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation study to my late mom, who always believed in me. In addition to her love and support, she showed me that with a passion for learning, I could bring meaning to my life. I hope that through believing in my son, Yoshihide, he will also find the joy of learning and use his special gift of fostering cultural understandings.

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Without my family and friends, I would have found it difficult to complete this study. In particular, my family for all their love and support, and my husband, Hideshige, who has been and continues to be loving, patient, and understanding, and my friend, Etsuko Ofuka, whom I thank for listening to, consoling, and encouraging me all these years.

## Table of Contents

List of Tables .....	iv
Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study.....	1
Background .....	1
Problem Statement .....	5
Purpose of the Study .....	6
Research Questions and Hypotheses .....	7
Theoretical Framework.....	8
Nature of the Study .....	9
Definitions.....	10
Assumptions.....	12
Scope and Delimitations .....	12
Limitations .....	13
Significance.....	13
Summary .....	14
Chapter 2: Literature Review .....	15
Literature Search Strategy.....	20
Theoretical Framework.....	21
Transformative Learning as a Dynamic Process .....	22
Intercultural Adjustment and Adaptation.....	23
Emotional Intelligence .....	25



Openness .....	27
Flexibility .....	28
Creating Classroom Experiences .....	29
Critical Thinking .....	35
Discourse .....	37
Collaborative Inquiry of Conflicting Perspectives .....	42
Reflective Journals .....	45
Summary .....	46
Chapter 3: Research Method .....	49
Setting .....	49
Research Questions .....	50
Role of the Researcher .....	52
Methodology .....	53
Instrumentation .....	54
Data Analysis Plan .....	58
Evidence of Quality .....	59
Summary .....	61
Chapter 4: Results .....	63
Setting and Student Demographics .....	64
Data Collection Process .....	65
Data Analysis .....	67

Journal 1 Themes .....	71
Journal 2 Themes .....	76
Journal 3 Themes .....	80
Journal 4 Themes .....	84
Results .....	88
Evidence of Trustworthiness.....	90
Credibility .....	90
Transferability.....	91
Dependability .....	91
Confirmability.....	92
Summary .....	92
Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations.....	94
Key Findings.....	95
Comparison to Similar Studies .....	97
Limitations .....	107
Recommendations.....	108
Implications for Social Change.....	109
Conclusion .....	112
References.....	117

List of Tables

Table 1. Type and Number of Theme Responses ..... 70

## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Preparing college students to be contributing members of local and global societies requires educators to analyze the capabilities and needs of their students, which often cause educators to struggle with instructional content and methodology (Chiang, 2009; Dimitrov, Dawson, Olsen, & Meadows, 2014; Durden & Truscott, 2013; Richardson, 2014). Most educators at institutes of higher education feel compelled to foster students' capabilities to meet the challenges of uniting students from culturally diverse backgrounds. Although the need for students and educators to develop intercultural competence to adapt to changes in both global and local societies is prevalent, the methods to achieve this vary.

In this chapter, I present the background for this study, identify the research problem, and discuss the study's purpose. I list the research questions and hypotheses, outline the theoretical framework, and detail the nature of the study. I provide key definitions, list assumptions, and describe the study's scope, delimitations, and limitations. Finally, I discuss the significance of the study and its potential for positive social change.

### **Background**

Over 30 years ago, a global approach in curricula at educational institutions in the United States and the United Kingdom was fueled by the political, cultural, and social changes that came about following foreign policy related to increased citizenship and mobility (Lawless, Tejada, & Tejada, 2016; Standish, 2014). Educators felt that there was

a need for students to gain knowledge, skills, and ethics to promote global connections for more humane and just societies, so they created courses that offered subjects in peace and conflicts, human rights, and social justice. Not only were students encouraged to take these courses and participate in international study programs to gain global skills, but they were also led to believe that their chances of finding employment opportunities would be enhanced (Deardoff, 2006; Standish, 2014). However, global education, which emphasizes bridging gaps and similarities, is limited because it does not allow for critical discussions or reflections on differences of worldviews, values, and ethics. Adapting or adjusting to different ways of thinking and approaches to encourage social change requires people to develop intercultural sensitivity or understandings of cultural differences while maintaining their values.

According to Stokke and Lybæk (2016), multiculturalism is controversial as both policy and theory. For example, Europeans connect multiculturalism to immigration policies. In Canada, however, multiculturalism is linked to minority groups, like French Canadians, who have been historically disadvantaged, mainly through top-down approaches (Stokke & Lybæk, 2016). In addition, while multiculturalism depends on national context and focuses on stereotyping group identities or religious practices, interculturalism stresses culturally sensitive practices and diversity to encourage respect and interaction between groups and individuals (Stokke & Lybæk, 2016).

While global education might have its place in some fields of study, many policymakers at institutions of higher education now promote interculturalism, especially

through study-abroad programs. Policymakers claim student mobility helps students gain overseas experiences and develop competencies for their futures (Cai & Sankaran, 2015; Holmes, Bavieri, & Ganassin, 2015; Prieto-Flores, Feu, & Casademont, 2016; Taylor & Rivera, 2011). Other policymakers create on-campus intercultural activities based on globally or internationally-themed activities as a way to foster students' intercultural sensitivity (Chamberlin-Quinlisk, 2005; Soria & Troisi, 2014). Bloom and Miranda's (2015) study of short-term study-abroad programs was inconclusive regarding student development of intercultural competencies. Baker-Smemoe, Dewey, Bown, and Martinsen (2014) claimed that a combination of classroom approaches that helped students develop intercultural sensitivity before participating in a study-abroad program resulted in facilitating students' second-language acquisition and cultural learning. Several researchers have discovered that college students' development of intercultural competence varies according to factors such as length of study-abroad programs, on-campus activities, and a combination of classroom approaches and study-abroad programs. Few studies, however, have explored how college students' abilities to adapt to another culture are related to how and why they reflect critically on their cultural assumptions to develop intercultural competence (Lee, 2006; Mezirow, 1991).

Fostering college students' intercultural competence is important because failure to do so can encourage prejudices and stereotypes when students interact with people from different cultural backgrounds (Fall, Kelly, MacDonald, Primm, & Holmes, 2013; Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 2012). Fall et al. (2013) claimed that because not all

students will have opportunities to participate in overseas activities, educators have a responsibility to encourage students' intercultural competence (p. 3). Creating a learning environment that encourages students to develop awareness of cultural differences and make informed decisions through discourse and critical reflection should be promoted (Mezirow, 2000).

By employing Mezirow's principles of transformative learning in the classroom, educators can encourage students' developmental process of understanding alternative values and norms to reflect more critically on their assumptions. According to the theory of transformative learning, this developmental process can help college students adapt their worldviews or meaning perspectives to take positive action (Mezirow, 1991). A classroom approach, informed by Mezirow's principles of transformative learning, might help students develop intercultural competence through awareness of cultural differences, critical reflection on differences through collaborative discussions, and development of interpersonal skills to express those differences if or when there are challenges to their worldviews.

Challenging students' assumptions in certain cultural or social settings or situations with the goal of creating disorienting dilemmas to assist with critical reflection may create complications. Globally, students have diverse communication styles and cope with conflicts in various ways (Gudykunst, 2004; Kim, Cohen, & An, 2010; Ohbuchi & Takashi, 1994; Triandis, 1989). For example, Nakatsugawa and Takai (2013) claimed that Japanese people tend to avoid conflicts for two main reasons: (a) to protect

themselves or “self-face” so they are not looked upon unfavorably, and (b) to follow social and moral standards in Japan that require “a superior to be respected and not challenged” (p. 54). If students continue to employ avoidance strategies to prevent conflicts, they might not be able to reflect critically on their assumptions and beliefs and therefore employ the necessary interpersonal skills when challenged.

Interpersonal skills require discourse and critical reflection for development, including dialogue that encourages reflection on the assumptions or set beliefs of the self and those of others (Mezirow, 2000). At any institution of higher education, locally or overseas, students and educators alike may be biased when interpreting their experiences because those experiences may originate from social and cultural norms (Lee, 2006; Mezirow, 1991). Dialogue or other forms of effective discourse might facilitate a better understanding of unfamiliar concepts when students or educators have contradictory viewpoints by introducing reasons, evidence, and other perspectives (Mezirow, 2000). There is a need, therefore, for college students to develop intercultural competence; those who do not may be less able to view themselves as members of local and global societies and reflect critically on their worldviews to guide proactive actions.

### **Problem Statement**

At the time of this study, researchers had not conducted mixed-method studies on college students’ development of intercultural competence through a classroom approach based on the principles of the transformative learning theory. Most researchers in the field of education had investigated the development of intercultural competence through



educational practices, such as teacher training (Chiang, 2009; Dimitrov et al., 2014; Durden & Truscott, 2013; Richardson, 2014) or on-campus activities (Chamberlin-Quinlisk, 2005; Soria & Troisi, 2014). In addition, several researchers had focused on study-abroad programs (Cai & Sankaran, 2015; Taylor & Rivera, 2011) as effective means of transformative learning. King, Perez, and Shin (2013) investigated how students experienced intercultural learning and found that students varied in their levels of learning. Students and educators vary in the ways that they express their worldviews because they have different linguistic and cultural knowledge, which may cause misunderstandings (Chiang, 2009; Naiditch, 2011). Students can learn, however, to question differences through rational or explicit discourse to establish understanding (Mezirow, 1991). This study was focused on helping students develop intercultural competence through classroom approaches.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this mixed-methods study was twofold: (a) to explore how classroom approaches designed to facilitate students' questioning of assumptions and beliefs regarding different cultural beliefs, social structures, and practices might influence Japanese college students' self-reported development of intercultural competence, and (b) to investigate whether or not the students developed their potential for intercultural competence. I hoped this research would provide valuable insight into how educators at institutes of higher education can cultivate the intercultural competence of a culturally-specific group of college students to facilitate their membership in both local and global

societies and enhance their abilities to reflect on their ways of thinking for positive actions when faced with challenges to their worldviews. *Intercultural competence* is the capability to recognize and respect cultural differences in ways of thinking and acting by practicing emotion regulation, openness, flexibility, and critical thinking of truths and values in appropriate and effective ways (Matsumoto, 2007; Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 2012). Intercultural adaptation is an indicator of intercultural competence (Leung, Ang, & Tan, 2014; van der Zee & van Oudenhoven, 2013); therefore, for this study, I assessed archival data consisting of students' pretest and posttest scores on Matsumoto's (2007) ICAPS.

### **Research Questions and Hypotheses**

The following research questions guided this mixed-methods study:

1. To what extent will the pretest and posttest scores on the Intercultural Adaptation Potential Scale (ICAPS) differ between students who experience an intervention of a transformative classroom learning environment designed to facilitate students' questioning of assumptions and beliefs regarding different cultural beliefs, social structures, and practices and those who do not?
  - $H_o$ : There will be no significant difference in changes in scores between the students in classes with the intervention and students in other course sections.

- $H_a$ : There will be a significant difference in changes in scores between the students in the intervention and control groups.
2. During participation in a transformative classroom learning environment designed to facilitate students' questioning of assumptions and beliefs regarding different cultural beliefs, social structures, and practices, how do the students reflect upon their intercultural communication and competence?

### **Theoretical Framework**

Mezirow's (2000) transformative learning theory provided the theoretical framework for this study. I explored Mezirow's proposition that people might interpret and act in dissimilar ways in relation to the same or similar experiences because they interpret their experiences consciously or unconsciously from different frames of reference: a habit of mind and resulting points of view (Mezirow, 2000). Mezirow's claim that transformative learning is possible when individuals' assumptions are challenged, prompting them to reflect on their beliefs critically, adapt their worldviews or meaning perspectives, and take action, was the basis for this intervention. Because cultural frameworks and social norms influence students' frames of reference, it is important for them to identify differences between their culture's "artifacts, norms, values, and assumptions" (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 2012, p. 33) and those of other cultures to develop meaning perspectives. In Chapter 2, I present a detailed explanation of the application of transformative learning theory in peer-reviewed studies investigating how educators at institutes of higher education can cultivate the

development of intercultural competence in a culturally-specific group of college students through a classroom approach.

### **Nature of the Study**

This study was designed to be a parallel mixed-method quantitative plus qualitative design. I collected the archival quantitative strand data used for analyses at the same time as the qualitative strand, and the data were integrated to support any inferences and conclusions made in this study (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009, p. 144). The independent variable for the quantitative analyses was the classroom approaches or intervention. The dependent variable was the students' perceptions reflected in the quantitative scores on pretest and posttest administration of the ICAPS. The use of an explicit theoretical lens in a mixed-methods study like this one was recommended to inform the "purpose and questions being asked" (Plano Clark & Creswell, 2008, p. 177).

For the quantitative section of the study, I used archival data collected from students in the intervention and control groups from the ICAPS. For the qualitative section of this study, I used the archival data from reflective journals from students in the intervention groups. While researchers have investigated intercultural sensitivity using qualitative approaches including interviews (King et al., 2013), reflective journals and interviews (Covert, 2014), and quantitative approaches using surveys (Morita, 2014; Soria & Troisi, 2014), few studies have employed a mixed-methods approach with reflective journals and a survey. I used this approach in the hope that it would enable me to form interpretations on whether students' intercultural adaptation ability is convergent

or divergent with their perceived changes in their intercultural competence (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Whether I found consistencies or discrepancies between the quantitative and qualitative findings, the transformative learning theory provided a suitable lens for evaluating them to make metainferences (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). An unanticipated limitation in my work was the inadequate amount of quantitative data the university had available.

### **Definitions**

*Affective components:* The development of capabilities to examine, question, and revise assumptions developed through past experiences by regulating emotions (emotion regulation), being open to differences (openness), and being flexible (flexibility) regarding alternatives (Cranton & Taylor, 2012; Matsumoto, LeRoux, Bernhard, & Gray; 2004).

*Cultural beliefs:* How people of a common cultural identity share their perception of relationships and events—how they and others believe gender, social, or racial roles are alike (Mezirow, 2012).

*Critical multiculturalism:* A bottom-up approach that supports minority groups' demands through social movements (Stokke & Lybæk, 2016).

*Cultural social structures:* Patterns of behavior and interaction including instructor-student interactions or senior-junior interactions and expected behavioral patterns that vary from culture to culture (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 2012).

*Critical thinking:* The ability to reflect on differences critically to bridge the gap between former and present meaning perspectives (Mezirow, 2000).

*Emotion regulation:* When a person faces a conflict or dilemma, the person can control negative feelings and think critically (Matsumoto, Yoo, & LeRoux, 2010, p. 45). Without emotion regulation, it would be difficult for a person to cope with cultural differences and transform to an ethnorelative state. In testing the construct, Matsumoto et al. (2010) found that people with high emotion regulation have “positive social skills and abilities” (p. 49) and can manage successfully in the conflicting situations needed for intra- and intercultural adjustment.

*Flexibility:* The ability to be continuously open to new ways of thinking—how interactions and expected behavioral patterns vary from culture to culture to adopt new meaning perspectives (Matsumoto et al., 2001).

*Intercultural competence:* The capability to recognize and respect cultural differences in ways of thinking and acting by practicing emotion regulation, openness, flexibility, and critical thinking concerning truths and values in appropriate and effective ways (Matsumoto, 2006; Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 2012)

*Interpersonal competence:* Involves learning how to question cultural differences through rational discourse or explicit discourse to establish understandings by reflecting critically on one’s own and others’ cultural assumptions or set beliefs (Mezirow, 2000).

*Openness:* Having an open mind in relation to different ways of thinking (Matsumoto et al., 2010). If people can become aware of differences between their

meaning perspectives and those of others, they can become critically reflective on those differences. Openness also refers to how people of a common cultural identity share the same beliefs regarding everyday existence (e.g., how people believe gender, social, or racial roles are defined, and how those beliefs differ from culture to culture).

### **Assumptions**

Before the start of the study, a primary assumption was that quantitative data would be sufficient for statistical analysis. A second assumption was that the sample of Japanese college students, who were part of the intervention group and in their first year at the university, had a strong enough command of English to complete reflective journals for use as archival qualitative data. In addition, I assumed that the archival data would be representative of the population of first-year, undergraduate Japanese students at a university in Japan so that I could make inferences from the data.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

A private Japanese university located in western Japan provided me with deidentified data. Japanese students who participated in the courses were ages 18 or 19 and in their first year of college. All students who took the ICAPS were volunteers. Student journals were part of the coursework for the section in which the intervention took place and were not part of the other sections of the course. The university provided only student perceptions.

### **Limitations**

The main limitations of this study were the use of archival data from a single site collected during a single semester. Even though the data were analyzed to infer multiple student perspectives, the students were a cultural-sharing group of Japanese university students. In addition, my worldviews and biases might have influenced my analyses of the quantitative and qualitative data because I was not part of the students' culture group. Specifically, there could have been cultural or language misinterpretations because I was not both bilingual and bicultural. However, because I had lived in Japan for over 20 years and spoke and understood the language, I assumed that I had an advantage over outside researchers and that my worldviews might add an outside perspective to the study. Furthermore, I hoped that the archival quantitative and qualitative data would facilitate my discovery of "inconsistencies" (Patton, 2002, p. 556), which would help me to view the study at a deeper level or from a different perspective. An unanticipated limitation was the leading nature of the journal questions, which influenced the breadth of the students' responses regarding elements of accuracy and truthfulness.

### **Significance**

This study may encourage social change by providing insights into how educators at institutes of higher education could cultivate a culturally-specific group of college students' intercultural competence through classroom approaches. Classroom approaches could help students develop awareness of their culture and values and how they differ from those of others—skills needed before effective communication with people from



different cultural backgrounds can take place (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 2012). In addition, students who do not develop intercultural competencies may form prejudices and stereotypes (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 2012). Increased intercultural competence could facilitate college students' membership in local and global societies as well as assist them in reflecting critically on their worldviews for proactive actions. There was a need to fill the gap in the literature regarding how educators at institutions of higher education could cultivate college students' intercultural competence through a classroom approach. While study-abroad programs or campus events could encourage college students' awareness or knowledge of cultural differences and help them develop interpersonal skills, not all students can participate in such programs or events.

### **Summary**

Providing all college students with the opportunities to develop awareness of cultural differences and reflect on those differences could help students adapt and adjust to cope with future cultural conflicts. In Chapter 2, I summarize and synthesize recent studies related to transformative learning, intercultural adjustment and adaptation, classroom approaches and experiences, critical reflection, and discourse. I address how the research literature that applies to transformative learning theory has expanded and changed Mezirow's transformative learning theory while focusing on three main assumptions of transformative learning experiences: creating classroom experiences, critical reflection, and discourse.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

Seminal theorist Jack Mezirow (2000) conceptualized transformative learning theory, a process in which transformative learning is made possible through challenges to individuals' assumptions. This challenge creates a need for individuals to reflect critically and confirm their assumptions through discourse to participate in proactive actions (Mezirow, 2000). According to Taylor (2009), the theory has evolved into two frameworks: Scholars such as Daloz, Dirkx, Kegan, and Cranton have used the first framework and stressed individual transformative experiences, while Freire, Tisdell, Johnson-Bailey, and Alfred have used the second framework and linked social and individual change through a process (p. 5).

Mezirow expanded the transformative learning theory in 2006 to include three learning processes. The first learning process occurs when students question how to elaborate, augment, or reexamine their present knowledge systems. Students take their present knowledge base and question how they can change it or add to it. The next learning process is when students build on their knowledge base and alter it in a way that is still within their comfort zone. The final process is when students change their knowledge base by reexamining it to develop new ways of thinking through critical self-reflection. This implies that through discomforting or conflicting experiences, in which the students do not have the knowledge to make sense of their experiences, they engage in reflection and discover a different way of thinking to change their present knowledge systems.

In earlier works, Taylor (2001) stressed the importance of emotions for debating assumptions over critical reflection because emotions are necessary for reasoning. More recently, however, Taylor (2009) suggested that students can develop new perspectives through prior experiences and classroom activities that include critical reflection and classroom dialogue while involving difficult conundrums (p. 7). Capabilities, including emotion regulation and critical thinking, could facilitate transformative learning.

Before Mezirow, seminal theorist John Dewey (1938/1997) asserted that, by fostering students' capabilities in an appropriate educational environment, educators could help students adapt and adjust to cope with future conflicts. Such an environment would allow students to share their experiences and build on their past to grow intellectually and emotionally (Dewey, 1938/1997). However, Dewey warned that not all experiences in the classroom facilitate students' development—some students might be unable or unwilling to use their knowledge to gain understandings of experiences (p. 27). This means that some students might be unable or unwilling to use their present knowledge base to gain understandings of experiences if the experiences are not conflicting for them. Classroom interventions need to encourage students to develop awareness of varying perspectives that might contradict theirs so that they can have opportunities to develop new perspectives through a learning process of questioning, discussing, and reflecting. For example, if American students believed that educational institutions provided a safe environment to share any controversial thought or comment on social networks then they would be discomfited to know that they could be arrested

or at least suspended from school for engaging in such activities. After becoming aware of this fact, the students might discuss and debate not being able to express their opinions freely under the freedom of speech act before reflecting on why making such insulting or degrading comments on social networks could be damaging to societies. Thus, for moments of discontinuity to develop into learning processes, students need to make reflective connections between their ways of thinking and how outside communities perceive them.

Since Dewey, numerous researchers have investigated transformative learning experiences (Cranton & Taylor, 2012; Johnson-Baily, 2012; Mezirow, 1978, 1991, 1998, 2000, 2009, 2012; Taylor & Cranton, 2013). Other researchers have studied educators' creation of classroom experiences that encourage transformative experiences involving intercultural competencies (Nieto & Booth, 2010; Soria & Troisi, 2014; White & Nitkin, 2014), while others have contributed insight about discourse (Dimitrov et al., 2014; Lockwood, 2015; Matsumoto, 2011). Further, many researchers have found that college students can benefit intellectually or linguistically from having overseas experiences (Cai & Sankaran, 2015; Stebleton, Soria, & Cherney, 2013; Taylor & Rivera, 2011). Thus, although Dewey's seminal work on the influences of learning environments and student experiences has expanded over the years, critical reflection on how educators can provide opportunities for students to redefine their present knowledge base is perennial.

While Mezirow (2000) asserted that criticism of transformative learning is common because it is a dynamic process that not all people, including college students,

experience, it is clear that transformative learning is possible if learners have the support and capacities required to examine their ways of thinking critically. According to Mezirow (2000), college students need to gain capabilities to adapt to changing or conflicting situations created by cultural difference. Students, who do not interact with others from different cultural backgrounds, might continue to avoid interactions even after they become members of societies. However, most societies are made up of people from different cultural backgrounds, so cooperation between those people is needed to ensure the societies can develop and prosper. Therefore, students should have experiences that allow them to develop critical thinking skills, opportunities to express their perspectives, discover their potentials, and cope with adversities or obstacles (Matsumoto et al., 2004; Mezirow, 1978, 1991, 1998, 2000, 2009, 2012).

To critically assess why people from different distinct cultural backgrounds think and behave the way they do, college students need to develop the capability to challenge why and how they and others from dissimilar cultural backgrounds have differing assumptions. According to Alcántara, Hayes, and Yorks (2009), this capacity can assist students in creating solutions and expressing themselves in both national and global societies. Matsumoto et al. (2004) stated that intercultural adjustment—the ability to analyze conflicting issues and discover solutions to them—is possible if college students can regulate their emotions, be open to differences, be flexible, and think critically by using a process of critical inquiry.

Several researchers have conducted studies on different individual constructs that are related to intercultural adjustment. These studies include research on emotion regulation (Jain, 2012; Pulido-Martos, Lopez-Zafra, & Augusto-Landa, 2013), openness (Woo et al., 2014), flexibility (Chung, Su, & Su, 2012), and critical thinking (Azevedo, Apfelthaler, & Hurst, 2012; Bloch & Spataro, 2014; Reid & Anderson, 2012; Yoshida et al., 2013). There is a deficiency, however, of mixed-methods studies that focus on intercultural competence and include the four constructs of emotion regulation, openness, flexibility, and critical thinking. *Intercultural competence* refers to the capability to recognize and respect cultural differences in ways of thinking and acting by practicing emotion regulation, openness, flexibility, and critical thinking (Matsumoto, 2006; Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 2012).

The purpose of this mixed-methods study was twofold: (a) to explore how a classroom approach designed to facilitate students' questioning of assumptions and beliefs regarding different cultural beliefs, social structures, and practices might influence Japanese college students' self-reported development of intercultural competence, and (b) to investigate whether the students develop their potential for intercultural competence. The theoretical framework for this study was Mezirow's (2000) transformative learning theory, specifically, three main assumptions of transformative learning experiences: creating classroom experiences, discourse, and critical reflection. In the following literature review, I provide an overview of recent studies related to transformative learning and of concepts related to intercultural adjustment and adaptation, classroom

approaches and classroom experiences, critical reflection, and discourse. In addition, I address how researchers have expanded and changed Mezirow's transformative learning theory.

### **Literature Search Strategy**

I conducted searches using the following databases in the Walden University Library: Academic Search Complete, Business Source Complete, Chronicle of Higher Education, Emerald Management, ERIC, Expanded Academic ASAP, ProQuest Central, PsycARTICLES, PsycINFO, SAGE Open, SAGE Premier, ScienceDirect, SocINDEX with Full Text, Taylor and Francis Online, and Thoreau Multi-Database Search. I used the following keywords and keyword combinations when searching databases: *adult learning, adaptation potential, adjustment, business curriculum, business students, classroom approaches, classroom environment, collaborative learning, collaborative inquiry, collaborative spaces, college students, communicative learning, communication skills, conflict resolution skills, cope with conflict, critical reflection, critical thinking, cross-culturalism, cultural competence development, cultural differences, cultural beliefs, cultural social structures, cultural practices, emotional competencies, emotional intelligence, emotion regulation, English education, flexibility, frames of reference, globalization, global education, global perspective, global societies, habits of mind, higher education, intercultural adjustment, intercultural communication competence, intercultural communication strategies, intercultural conflict, intercultural sensitivity, intercultural sojourners, interculturalism, intergroup, internationalization, intracultural*

*adjustment, intracultural communication competence, inquiry, Japan, Japanese, Japanese undergraduates, learning environment, meaning perspectives, multiculturalism, openness, problem-solving, reflective journals, reflective thinking, reflective practice, self-reflection, student mobility, tolerance, transformative learning, and university students.* When searching these databases, I limited results to full-text, peer-reviewed articles published after 2010. I also examined reference lists from the articles cited in my literature review and, using Google Scholar, located some of those articles to add depth to my analysis. Finally, I referenced books related to transformative learning, collaborative learning, higher learning, education, theory, reflective practices, and inquiry.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Mezirow's (2000) transformative learning theory and its three main assumptions of transformative learning experiences—creating classroom experiences, discourse, and critical reflection—formed the theoretical framework for this study. Mezirow posited that when adult learners make decisions, those decisions need to be based not just on facts and assumptions but also on value judgments derived from validating assumptions using critical analysis (p. 7). Mezirow also noted that people might interpret and act in dissimilar ways to the same or similar experiences because they consciously or unconsciously interpret their experiences differently.

Cranton and Taylor (2012) argued that educators and adult learners need to communicate their needs, expectations, and preferences to create varying educational approaches. Johnson-Baily (2012) claimed that Mezirow's adult learning theory is based



on a “Western concept” (p. 266) because Mezirow posited that students who experience a disorienting dilemma would reflect critically on their assumptions or beliefs to develop new perspectives and discover solutions. This type of transformational learning is challenging unless students are autonomous and educators are committed to a student-centered learning environment where they can feel safe to express their thoughts and opinions freely (Johnson-Baily, 2012). When addressing claims that Mezirow’s transformational learning theory is void when considering cultural differences and social positions, however, Johnson-Baily admitted that studies had proven otherwise. The key is to have students discuss conflicting topics in a culturally sensitive manner (Johnson-Baily, 2012). Ntseane (2012) claimed that Mezirow’s transformative learning theory could be enriched by being culturally sensitive, for example, by creating “inquiries based on relational realities as well as forms of knowing that are predominant among non-Western ‘others’” (p. 275).

### **Transformative Learning as a Dynamic Process**

Transformative learning is “a process of examining, questioning, and revising” (Cranton & Taylor, 2012, p. 3) assumptions developed through past experiences. This developmental process of continuous adjustment and adaptation involves constructive discourse to gain awareness of others’ assumptions (Mezirow, 2012). Unlike a linear progress of sequencing of skills, transformative learning is a dynamic and complex process that requires emotional maturity, openness to other perspectives, imagination for alternative interpretations, and critical reflection (Mezirow, 2012, p. 85). According to

Bird and Mendenhall (2015), *adjustment* means “adjusting to broader aspects of living and working in another country,” while *interaction adjustment* means “adjusting to cultural differences in norms and modes of interaction” (p. 119). Although emotions alone can enhance or inhibit learning (see Kucukaydin & Cranton, 2012), being able to adapt and adjust to a different culture requires the holistic development of emotion regulation, openness, flexibility, and critical thinking because people tend not to have identical reactions to similar or even the same experiences.

### **Intercultural Adjustment and Adaptation**

According to Matsumoto et al. (2004), living in a different culture can facilitate students’ intercultural adjustment and adaptation, which involves the capability to analyze problems, regulate emotions, take initiative, and make decisions (p. 300). In a study involving 136 undergraduates studying in the United States, Matsumoto et al. compared five instruments: The Intercultural Adjustment Potential Scale, the Cross-Cultural Adaptability Inventory, the Big Five Inventory, the Millon Clinical Multiaxial Inventory-II, and a demographic questionnaire. Their results indicated convergent validity of the ICAPS and the big five personality inventories, indicating that emotion regulation, openness, and flexibility facilitate adjustment (p. 287).

In a different study involving 145 university undergraduates in the United States, Matsumoto et al. (2004) correlated the ICAPS with the California Personality Inventory, the Millon Clinical Multiaxial Inventory-III, the Social Opinion Questionnaire, the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, and a demographic questionnaire. The findings of

Matsumoto et al. suggest that the ICAPS's construct of emotion regulation is highly correlated to the California Personality Inventory's emotion regulation, measuring "social ascendancy and normative behavior" (p. 292). The ICAPS's openness, flexibility, and critical thinking positively correlated with the California Personality Inventory. The ICAPS and Myers-Briggs Type Indicator were also correlated in emotion regulation, openness, flexibility, and critical thinking (Matsumoto et al., 2004). The ICAPS and Social Opinion Questionnaire's overall scores were correlated, indicating that people with high scores have "a high level of social involvement and caring for others" (Matsumoto et al., 2004, p. 292). The ICAPS is a scale that allows users to predict intercultural adjustment and adaptation by measuring emotion regulation, openness, flexibility, and critical thinking. By using this scale, educators can make decisions on how to promote intercultural competence in educational programs (Matsumoto et al., 2004).

While promoting the development of students' intercultural competence at home or in a host country, it is necessary to ensure that both educators and students find value and purpose in the approaches used. One qualitative study done by Webb and Radcliffe (2016), which employed focus group interviews with students as well as individual interviews with students, teachers, and policymakers to gather data, demonstrated how government-led, intercultural programs the government in Chile failed to help teachers and student adapt and adjust to racial and ethnic diversity. In the study, the authors focused on four schools that were rated low-performing, with below-par classroom

conditions, inadequate transport infrastructure, and indifferent teachers on short-term contracts. Within those schools, the authors claimed that the government policy on interculturalism was not considered relevant by the teachers, and as a result, the intercultural programs had very little influence on challenging racism and encouraging ethnic diversity. Throughout the article, Webb and Radcliff asserted that one main cause for the dismal outcomes was the lack of teacher training and support because teachers need to, from a bottom-up approach, create culturally relevant classroom approaches.

### **Emotional Intelligence**

According to Jain (2012), competitive workplace environments are becoming more common; therefore, students who develop positive interpersonal skills may enjoy future advantages in organizations (p. 21). Jain examined the impact of emotional intelligence competencies on impression management behavior of employees and supervisors in the workplace. Jain defined *impression management* as “the process by which individuals attempt to control the impression that others form of them” (p. 14). Whereas the majority of the studies on emotional intelligence have examined Western populations, Jain’s sample consisted of 250 Indian managers. Jain used 133 common items from Goleman (1995), Salovey and Mayer (1990), and Bar-On’s (1997) emotional intelligence inventories and reported that only 21 of those items “were found to be factor-analytically meaningful” (p. 16) for the sample of Indian managers. Additionally, Jain found that the participants who were positive about life and tried to make positive or kind comments about their supervisors had “lower career success and supervisor ratings of

performance” (p. 19) because they did not create impressions by exact demonstrations. As a result, employees who were thought to be content were ignored and did not receive promotions. Emotional intelligence is only one construct that could be defined culturally, making an assessment of adaptation in local or overseas social situations difficult.

In another study, Pulido-Martos et al. (2013) used quantitative data to examine how 123 employees’ perceived emotional intelligence based on (a) the Trait Meta-Mood Scale, which measures attention to emotions, clarity of emotions, and emotional repair, (b) the questionnaire on effective negotiation, which measures “the level of effectiveness of negotiator’s behavior” (p. 411), and (c) the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire, which measures the personality dimensions of extraversion, neuroticism, and psychoticism and how these influenced participants’ efficiency during negotiations. Pulido-Martos et al. posited that workers who can achieve the negotiation process of “getting positive results, influencing the balance of power, developing a constructive climate, and achieving a flexible dynamic” (p. 409) between groups, would have high levels of perceived emotional intelligence. The findings indicated that emotional attention, defined by Pulido-Martos et al. as “the degree to which an individual tends to observe and think about their feelings and moods,” was positively related to neuroticism, while emotional clarity, “the ability to discriminate their own emotions and moods,” was not (p. 411). Pulido-Martos et al. stated that the results showed a positive relation between emotional difference and extroversion with the balance of power, emotional clarity and constructive climate, and emotional repair and achieving positive results (p. 412). While there was a

positive relation between emotional repair and the balance of power, the relation between emotional repair and procedural flexibility was negative (Pulido-Martos et al., 2013, p. 414). The main limitation of this study was that the type of negotiations was not defined or taken into account before perceived emotional intelligence was correlated.

### **Openness**

Woo et al. (2014) presented data from three quantitative studies to examine the construct, openness, especially intellect (intellectual efficiency, ingenuity, and curiosity) and culture (aesthetics, tolerance, and depth). Claiming a need to define and develop a measure of the construct, openness, Woo et al. used secondary data taken from 737 local U.S. adult homeowners who responded to a total of seven personality inventories from 36 openness-related scales over 5 years. Woo et al. concluded from the results of factor analysis that there are six facets of openness: intellectual efficiency, ingenuity, and curiosity for intellect, and aesthetics, tolerance, and depth for culture. In the second study, Woo et al. examined how the six facets of openness discovered in their first study related to the Big Five Inventory personality traits. Using a sample of 469 people employed in New Zealand who responded to a Likert-type scale, Woo et al. found a “high correlations ranging from .39 to .61” (p. 35). Finally, in the third study, Woo et al. tested their 90-item scale with the six facets of openness on 254 U.S. undergraduates, 231 Chinese undergraduates, and 216 Chinese midlevel managers who were obtaining their MBAs and found that only 54 items had good model fit. The results indicated that the Chinese participants had higher openness scores overall, but the U.S. participants had higher

intellectual efficiency and curiosity (Woo et al., 2014, p. 38). The scale Woo et al. developed for testing the construct of openness had two subfactors, intellect and culture, and six facets, but it was developed based on English-speaking participants in the United States and New Zealand, making it difficult to generalize the results to other populations.

### **Flexibility**

Stating the need for employees at organizations to be flexible to cope effectively or successfully with challenging workplace conditions, Chung et al. (2012) conducted a quantitative study of employees' cognitive flexibility, insight, and self-reflection regarding their attitudes toward organizational change. According to Chung et al., people who are cognitively flexible are aware of options and alternatives to adapt to situations (p. 737). They describe insight as the ability to identify and understand "personal thoughts, feelings, and behaviors" (p. 737), and state that self-reflection requires an individual to consider and assess thoughts, feelings, and behavior. Chung et al. collected 419 questionnaires from workers at three Taiwanese manufacturing companies and were created from three scales: the cognitive flexibility scale, self-reflection and insight scale, and resistance to change scale. Chung et al. found that self-reflection and insight were related to cognitive flexibility whereas resistance was not and concluded organizations should consider hiring employees who have insight and self-reflection traits (p. 743). This study identifies the need for cognitively flexible people who can cope with changes in work situations; however, it does not provide insight into how people can develop cognitive flexibility.

### **Creating Classroom Experiences**

Seminal theorist, Nevitt Sanford (1962) assumed that a college learning environment could provide students with moral and ethical conflicts or “impulses,” (p. 259). This challenging learning environment could help students make progressive changes in their personalities: their unconscious motives would become conscious motives that develop their personalities. Sanford (1962) noted, however, that students’ social and cultural backgrounds could influence whether they have the capacity to adapt and change to agents, actions, or conditions. In addition, if students think that new classroom experiences are overwhelming, they might become defensive and unable to learn from those experiences (Sanford, 1962). Students tend to be ethnocentric in their first year of college because they desire to conform to their learning communities and value clear rules of behavior (Sanford, 1962, p. 261). Students need to have experiences that allow them to develop critical thinking skills and opportunities to express their perspectives to discover their potentials, which would help them create personal and cultural values. Thus, students’ personalities, as well as their academic and social experiences, would determine how well they could adapt to their college’s culture and academic demands to develop in a positive way (Sanford, 1962).

Besides providing students with information about cultural differences, educators at higher education institutions need to foster students’ awareness of cultural differences while facilitating their development of critical reflection and effective discourse. As college students explore various worldviews including over-generalized assumptions



about cultural groups and engage in discussions or debates, they need to maintain an ethical commitment to their values or norms through critical reflection. According to Mezirow (1991), this includes establishing “comprehensibility, truth, and appropriateness or authenticity” of their discoveries (p. 77). Exploring over-generalized assumptions about cultural groups, including their own, could facilitate a deep awareness of differences, prompt critical reflection, and stimulate the discourse students need before taking appropriate actions (Mezirow, 2000).

In a quantitative study, White and Nitkin (2014) employed pre-post surveys to investigate a long-term classroom approach. In this study, 35 college students at a college in the United States focused on social issues such as poverty, immigration, and hunger and then did research to create “actionable solutions” that the students presented to the class (p. 8). White and Nitkin stated that the approach influenced 40% of the class to change “their major, minor, or course selection” and over 60% of the students to change their behavior by “seeking leadership opportunities or engaging in community service” (p. 21). The survey employed in this study included questions on the impact of the program and instructors at the college and the students’ self-reported changes in behaviors, skills, attitudes, and belonging to the community (White & Nitkin, 2014, p. 16). While the study has implications for classroom approaches, the survey was specific to the participants and campus in the study, making it difficult to generalize the results to other populations.

Nieto and Booth (2010) employed a mixed-methods quantitative-qualitative parallel approach to examine the level of university instructors’ (English as a second

language and non-English as a second language) and students' (American and international) intercultural sensitivity and cultural awareness and to explore the perceptions of the challenges they face in the learning environments at an institution of higher education. Nieto and Booth found that instructors, especially English as a second language instructors, had higher levels of intercultural sensitivity than college students, and that females tended to score slightly higher on the scale of cultural competence than males. The social contribution of this study was to facilitate teachers' awareness of the need to provide support for international students by scaffolding and creating inviting classroom environments. Nieto and Booth, however, investigated the level of instructors' and students' intercultural sensitivity by employing a scale that contained affective factors designed for Western populations.

With the goal of facilitating Vietnamese university students' intercultural competence in an English as a foreign language (EFL) class, Truong and Tran (2014) employed film as a classroom approach and collected data from in-depth interviews with students, student reflective journals and video-recorded class observations. Since intercultural communication includes worldviews, social norms, and values of the speakers' cultures, only providing students with grammar, vocabulary, and linguistic information in an EFL class is insufficient (Truong & Tran, 2014). Therefore, the authors selected a popular Western movie to engage the students in discovering cultural differences, especially in ways of thinking and acting. Truong and Tran (2014) felt that students needed to develop understandings of what speakers mean or do not mean by

interpreting verbal and non-verbal outputs, which are based on social and cultural practices. The findings that students' awareness of different cultural worldviews raised awareness of their own cultural perspectives and that people do not reflect on their cultural identity unless they have opportunities to compare their culture with other cultures and develop alternative viewpoints are valuable insights for developing classroom approaches.

Many institutions of higher education in Europe now have curricula, which stress intercultural competence for the majority of students that do not go abroad (Prieto-Flores, Feu, & Casademont, 2016). One of the reasons for the courses and programs developed by universities in Europe is, according to Prieto-Flores, Feu, and Casademont (2016), because there is little evidence that students who do go abroad or participate in overseas service-learning programs transform or develop critical reflection skills. Citing a need to develop an assessment tool of intercultural competences, Prieto-Flores et al. (2016) used Bennett's (1993) and Deardoff's (2006) research to do a mixed-method study of a quantitative survey with a treatment group and a control group and qualitative daily life stories. To obtain quantitative data, Prieto-Flores et al. created a 4-point Likert scale posttest survey for both the college students in the treatment group, who were finishing a 2-month Nightingale mentoring program in Spain, and the students in the control group, who were on the wait list to join the program. The Nightingale mentoring program matches university students up with immigrant children or adolescents to facilitate their transition into a school and support their studies.

Prieto-Flores et al. (2016) developed 4 categories for their survey based on the aims of the program:

- Attitudes: encouraging university students to have an open attitude toward other cultures.
- Knowledge and Comprehension: gaining awareness and understandings of different ways of thinking.
- Skills: listening, observing, and evaluating.
- Desired Internal Outcomes: empathy and learning how to adapt and adjust to a different cultural environment, communication styles, and learning styles.

The self-reported survey outcomes showed little difference between the treatment group and control group with the exception of the control group showing slightly higher levels of empathy, flexibility, and adaptability than the treatment group (Prieto-Flores et al., 2016). Although the results were not in favor of the program, Prieto-Flores et al. (2016) claimed that the results of the daily life stories of 10 students who were in the treatment group showed that the program was a positive influence on their transformative learning, including intercultural sensitivity. Prieto-Flores et al. felt that the treatment group was able to take a more realistic view of the program than the control group because they had experiences with immigrant children or adolescents that transformed their interpretations of the program. Since both the treatment group and control group were interested in the program, the mixed results are not surprising and offer hope that

curricula that aim at developing nonmobile students' intercultural competence are possible.

For a classroom approach, Holmes, Bavieri, and Ganassin (2015) evaluated the influence of pre-departure materials on two separate groups of students: one group studying abroad at a university in the United Kingdom and the other at a university in Italy. All of the students were part of the European Erasmus mobility exchange program. The students were asked during two classes to do four tasks involving meeting local people in the target host country while staying away from other students or people from their own country, and reflecting on otherising, stereotyping, and essentialism of people abroad through teacher-student interviews (Holmes, Bavieri, and Ganassin, 2015). The data were collected from students' in-group discussions, plenary discussions, and student-conceived interviews in the classes as well as teachers' reflections from online questionnaires of their experiences teaching the materials, and an observer's feedback of a classroom observation (Holmes, Bavieri, and Ganassin, 2015). The authors discovered that the students felt a strong need for information about the host country over critically analyzing otherising, stereotyping, and essentialism of people abroad, and while the teachers claimed the materials could support intercultural awareness, the students thought "they needed more coaching and scaffolding activities" (Holmes, Bavieri, and Ganassin, 2015, p. 28). This study provides evidence for the need for students to be given time to develop intercultural awareness and sensitivity in a manner that is meaningful to them. Thus, as Sanford (1962) claimed, students' classroom experiences need to be suited to

their level, and they need to be given the opportunities to develop personal and cultural understandings through materials that they feel are beneficial at present and in the future.

### **Critical Thinking**

When faced with conflicting situations, people need to communicate their views and reflect critically on others before making a decision (Mezirow, 1998); however, Bloch and Spataro (2014) claimed that most business school graduates lack critical thinking skills. Bloch and Spataro stated that this was not because students are not taught critical thinking skills at institutes of higher education but because of “how” they are taught those skills (p. 250). Bloch and Spataro asserted that critical thinking should not be a skills-development task but rather a “task of creating critical-thinking dispositions in students” (p. 250), which means that students can apply their critical thinking capability as a habit to various situations.

In a qualitative study, Yoshida et al. (2013) explored the capabilities of employees that Japanese companies perceived as important. Using focus group interviews, Yoshida et al. found that employees need both intercultural and intranational communication skills because they need to have open minds, embrace differences, avoid prejudices, and be introspective while having capabilities to work in their culture (p. 79). This study links critical thinking capability to intercultural and intranational communication strategies; however, Yoshida et al. used critical thinking as an umbrella term for openness and flexibility instead of exploring the constructs separately and

holistically to create a broader picture of what corporations are looking for when hiring new employees.

Reid and Anderson (2012) based their quasiexperimental study on investigating whether critical thinking could be taught, internalized, or applied to real-world situations. In addition to employing the California Critical Thinking Skills Test to measure “inductive reasoning, deductive reasoning, analysis, inference, and evaluation” (p. 54) as a pre-post test, Reid and Anderson also used Halpern and Riggo’s quizzes and textbook in the experimental classes to provide examples of case studies. One limitation of this study was that the results of the weekly quizzes were evaluated on “acquisition, retention, and recall” (p. 57), which is not the same as critical thinking. According to Mezirow (2000), students who have benefited from learning experiences that require “critical reflection, discourse, and reflective action” (p. 24) can cope with complexities related to adult life.

Azevedo et al. (2012) employed a mixed-methods approach to evaluate, through a survey and interviews, what undergraduate business graduates and employers perceived as necessary competencies for the workplace. Azevedo et al. found that both graduates and employers in four countries—Austria, the United Kingdom, Slovenia, and Romania—agreed on influencing and persuading, teamwork and relationship building, critical and analytical thinking, and self and time management (p. 17). While the implications of this comprehensive study for educators are evident, there is a gap, as with the study by Yoshida et al. (2013), as to how to develop these skills.

## Discourse

Mezirow (1991) posited that a person's frame of reference—a person's awareness and critical reflection of assumptions and beliefs regarding different cultural beliefs, social structures, and practices—could be transformed by learning how to communicate critically and by developing reflective insights. However, as Hua, Handford, and Young (2015) study shows intercultural communication is culturally defined. Hua, Handford, and Young (2015) examined how online intercultural communication courses in the United States and the United Kingdom conceptualized culture and interculturality. The authors found that in the United States, intercultural communicative competence (ICC) tended to be connected to diversity, including race, gender, and status, whereas in the United Kingdom, ICC was usually associated with business or professional development (Hua et al., 2015). Hua et al. also asserted that recent approaches do not use theory to back practices, such as how to bridge differences stressed in the courses.

The authors found that in the United States, the courses tended to focus on diversity topics, including race, gender, and status, whereas in the U.K., they were usually for students studying business or professional development (Hua, Handford, & Young, 2015). Hua, Handford, and Young (2015) also asserted that recent approaches do not use theory to back the practices, such as how to bridge differences, which they stress in the courses.

In another study, Almarza, Martínez, and Llavador (2015) conceptualized ICC as a communication system, which requires the appropriate use of a target language that is



not only grammatically correct but also culturally negotiated. This implies that to be able to interact with people of different cultural backgrounds, it is important to develop intercultural awareness and sensitivity. Employing a pre- and post-placement questionnaire, Almarza, Martínez, and Llavador (2015) compared two groups of students from British universities and Spanish universities to profile their ICC. While both groups of students felt that they were flexible and could adapt to their cultural surroundings, they did not have the same confidence in identifying and adapting to conflicting situations (Almarza, Martínez, & Llavador, 2015).

In a qualitative study, Lockwood (2015) explored why communication breakdowns were occurring at the company, MetroFin, by using data from a needs analysis, observing communications between teams at two virtual meetings, and recording and transcribing team communication for six virtual meetings. Lockwood claimed that the teams that used English as a lingua franca felt disadvantaged and were perceived as less powerful because they were unable to voice their thoughts and opinions, creating gaps of silence. Lockwood proposed that one of the main reasons for the communication breakdowns was that the teams could have preconceived notions of which team was more powerful; therefore, fear might have played a role. Lockwood concluded by arguing that a clear corporate vision and training in intercultural communication (how and why people use certain kinds of expressions) was needed. This study highlights the differing factors: language ability, perceived roles, and fear that could have influenced how the communication exchanges played out. The study does not

address how people who have developed intercultural sensitivity would have engaged in strategies to prevent communication breakdowns.

Jandt (1995) claimed that people could improve communication and resolve misunderstandings with others from diverse cultures and groups if they develop the competency to select “message behavior that is both appropriate and effective in a given context” (p. 398). While recent studies on the importance of what needs occur to achieve intercultural communication competency are available, how people put their competency into practice in positive ways are limited. One qualitative study done by Kenesei and Stier (2016) that employed interviews of hotel receptionists and customers in a small European country demonstrated that training alone was insufficient and employees need to develop intercultural sensitivity. In particular, employees need to be open to other cultures, flexible in their behavior, and adapt to customer needs to enhance understandings of different expectations while maintaining standards required in the hospitality industry (Kenesei & Stier, 2016).

Matsumoto (2011) argued that the trend for World Englishes paradigm, the acceptance of different varieties of English, forces nonnative English speakers to stay with others who belong to the same cultural group because they do not feel a need to develop mutual understandings and membership. Jandt (1995) claimed that barriers to intercultural communication between groups are created by people’s anxiety, not knowing how to focus on similarities instead of differences, and ethnocentrism by “negatively judging aspects of another culture by the standards of one’s culture” (p. 41).

Matsumoto's qualitative study focused on one aspect of how nonnative English speakers who speak English as a lingua franca could display accommodation strategies to achieve efficiency in intercultural communication. For her study, Matsumoto collected data from recordings of six English as a lingua franca college students, who were separated into dyads and spoke to each other in a communal area and from semistructured interviews. Matsumoto focused on the strategies English as a lingua franca speakers used when pronunciation caused a communication breakdown, and she found that the speakers that used repetition, repair, and confirmation strategies were able to negotiate understandings even when pronunciation hindered interpretability. While Matsumoto's findings add to the field of intercultural communication, her study neglected how cultural differences play a vital role in achieving mutual understandings.

Dimitrov et al. (2014) conducted a qualitative study on how graduate students in a teacher development program in Canada could develop intercultural competence. Out of the 24 participants in this study, 20 of them were from foreign countries and English was not their mother tongue. The program intervention was based on attitudinal, knowledge, and behavior components and included openness to uncertainty and the ability to accept and incorporate feedback, recognize and respect people's diversity, question and challenge the way one operates, and build and maintain relationships inside and outside one's organization and with people from diverse backgrounds (Dimitrov et al., 2014, p. 98). While the study has implications for exploring intercultural competence, Dimitrov et

al. mainly focused on nonnative English graduate students, who are different from the population of a culturally-specific group of students in their home country.

Wang, Heppner, Wang, and Zhu (2014) also examined the need for effective communication in their quantitative study. Wang et al. used an online self-report cultural intelligence scale to examine the cultural intelligence (the ability to cope with diverse cultural situations) of 221 Chinese international students studying in the United States. Wang et al. found that when the participants' language affected their perceived ability to have their opinions or ideas "taken seriously" (p. 55) during interactions with American students, they experienced low self-esteem and life satisfaction. This study examined cultural intelligence from different angles: social self-efficacy, social connectedness, perceived language discrimination, depression, anxiety, and stress as well as described the participants' perceived outcomes. Wang et al. concluded that "being in a different cultural setting does not simply mean that one's CQ (cultural intelligence) will enhance" (p. 60). Unlike cultural intelligence, the development of intercultural sensitivity is through a process of becoming more aware of cultural differences, critically reflecting on those differences, and using interpersonal skills to express those differences if challenged.

According to Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (2012), people need to develop awareness of their culture and values and how they differ from others before effective communication with people from different cultural backgrounds can take place. Mezirow (2000) posited that a person's frame of reference could be transformed by learning how

to communicate critically and by developing reflective insights. Through effective intracultural communication, students could be given equal opportunities to exchange ideas and opinions while critically reflecting on “the reasons for their beliefs and understandings” (Mezirow, 2000, p. 15). In support of this, King et al. (2013) interviewed 161 college students on six campuses in the United States regarding how they experienced intercultural learning and found that the students’ approaches varied from just listening to actual experiences. King et al. also noted that increasing students’ intercultural communication capabilities helped students be less biased toward people who were different from them. While this qualitative research has implications for approaches to encourage students’ intercultural learning, the study was, like the majority of studies to date, carried out in a Western country.

### **Collaborative Inquiry of Conflicting Perspectives**

Taylor and Elias (2012) suggested that educators support and challenge students as they discuss or debate “discourse about competing ideas and differing values” (p. 155). Collaborative inquiry is necessary because awareness alone changes preconceived perspectives, and it helps students develop problem-solving capabilities (Torbert, 2004). Through collaborative discussions, students can gain an understanding of what others mean or engage in what Mezirow (2000) referred to as communicative learning. By encouraging people to seek and share their viewpoints that question the unchallenged norms of a culture, people could, if motivated to do so, come to a consensual agreement (Mezirow, 2000). Golbeck and El-Mosimany (2013) wrote from a developmental

perspective on collaborative learning and claimed that “following the constructivist perspective, knowledge is acquired through a process and transformed through interaction” (p. 44). Because people gain knowledge externally and through communication where individuals create and share viewpoints, it can become internalized.

Some cultures encourage debates and promote skills to negotiate conflicting assumptions. In these cultures, students have opportunities to develop capabilities to challenge others’ assumptions while validating their own (Mezirow, 2012). Nakatsugawa and Takai (2013) conducted a study that explored the reasons Japanese people tend to avoid conflicts. Nakatsugawa and Takai found that Japanese want to protect themselves and follow the social and moral standards of respecting people who are in higher positions (p. 54). In a different study with Japanese participants, Kim, Yamaguchi, Kim, and Miyahara (2015) examined how or why Japanese personalize conflict. The participants were 457 undergraduates from Japan and the United States who completed self-reported measures in their native languages. Kim et al. had hypothesized that participants from Japan, a country that culturally promotes interdependence, might benefit from taking conflict personally because they would become motivated to change and try to fit in with the group. The results indicated that both groups of participants from Japan and the United States took conflict personally and became motivated to change as a result, but the Americans were more willing to change (Kim et al., 2015). How positive behavioral change resulting from conflicts can be encouraged was missing from this study.

In another study that compared the conflict management behavior of American university students with Japanese students, Murayama, Ryan, Shimizu, Kurebayashi, and Miura (2015) found that Japanese students preferred active conflict management or open and direct discussions to complete a task more than American students. Also, when students had differences of opinions related to a task, American students perceived the conflict as a relationship conflict more than Japanese students did. Compared to Japanese students, the American students in this study employed agreeable conflict management or agreeing with other group members opinions more to complete the task (Murayama et al., 2015). The main limitation of this study was that Murayama et al. used hypothetical tasks and asked students to rate their perceived behavior. Observation of the conflict management behavior of both groups of students might provide further insight.

Similar to Murayama et al.'s (2015) findings, Günsoy, Cross, Uskul, Adams, and Gercek-Swing (2015) discovered that people from a collectivistic culture tended to employ active conflict management or conflict strategy. Günsoy et al. compared three groups of participants from Ghana (an honor culture), Turkey (a collectivistic culture), and the northern United States (an individualistic culture). While past cultural research portrayed people from individualistic cultures, like in the United States, as being free to express their thoughts or interests, the results showed that Americans tended to use retaliation, which was defined as talking negatively or embarrassing their opposition (Günsoy, Cross, Uskul, Adams, & Gercek-Swing, 2015). The authors had expected the American participants to confront others verbally, but they found that the Turkish people

were more likely to do so. In the past, people from collectivistic cultures were thought to give in to the stronger opposition or avoid the situation altogether; however, the Turkish participants employed the conflict strategy of quarreling instead of giving in or avoiding.

Günsoy et al.'s (2015) study only focused on Ghana, Turkey, and the northern United States to make generalized statements about conflict strategies; however, perceptions of conflicts alter from person to person, and placing people from different countries into set individualistic or collectivistic cultures and expecting certain responses to conflicts could result in serious misunderstandings. Thus, allowing students to discuss and debate topics of conflict in collaborative groups could allow them to observe the use of different conflict management strategies, generating varying perspectives for constructive actions.

### **Reflective Journals**

Mezirow (2012) claimed that reflection through a process facilitates critical reflection of assumptions. The importance of being able to reflect critically on learning and experiences is “a fundamental skill necessary for learning and decision-making” (Bell, Kelton, McDonagh, Mladenovic, & Morrison, 2011, p. 797). Bell et al. (2011) conducted a qualitative study that explored the use of reflective journals to help business students in Australia develop critical reflection skills. Bell et al. used a coding scheme to assess critical thinking and found that 35% of the participants' journal content was reflection (p. 797). The authors concluded that students' reflections are difficult to assess,



but they recommend the use of journals to facilitate students' capacity for reflection and critical learning.

In another qualitative study, Bisman (2011), like Bell et al. (2011), claimed that assessing students' journal content was difficult and used thematic analysis. In a 5-year longitudinal study with a sample of 37 accounting graduate students, the themes "criticality, reflections on practice, reflections on first-hand experience, reflections on learning and personal opinions" were used for assessing the journal entries (Bisman, 2011, p. 318). Bisman further divided the students' journal entries into either a surface/non-reflective group or a deep/reflective group with approximately 50% in each. Bisman found that students engaged in more reflections if educators provided feedback (p. 327). Bisman and Bell et al.'s studies indicate a need for not only a formative assessment of reflective journals but also summative assessment to ensure more comprehensive understandings of student development.

### **Summary**

The majority of the studies on transformative learning took place in Western countries, and most of the researchers employed qualitative research methodology (Merriam & Kim, 2012, p. 56), whereas studies on constructs related to transformative learning were quantitative. There was a lack of mixed research methodology, especially for a culturally-specific group in their home country. In the instructional intervention used with Japanese college students at a university in Japan, the students were encouraged through a classroom approach to develop the competencies of

emotion regulation, openness, flexibility, and critical thinking to foster their development of intercultural competence and encourage positive future growth. There was a clear need for narrative data to explore students' growth and to gain an understanding of their habitual or changing cultural assumptions and their ability to express their worldviews. By using archival qualitative and quantitative data at the same time, I had hoped to address the overlapping concepts to compare and merge the two databases (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2008). In addition, most of the researchers viewed intercultural sensitivity development as linear, but developmental theories or adaptation models view growth as a complex process (Sample, 2012). In this study, the perception of the development of intercultural competence was dynamic and related to how students' worldviews change or adapt.

Bloch and Spataro (2014), when discussing why students at institutes of higher education do not develop critical thinking skills, claimed that the reason was not that educators neglected to teach critical thinking skills but because of how students are taught those skills (p. 250). The why was addressed in many of the studies, but the how was limited to a few studies (King et al., 2013). I employed a parallel mixed-methods design in hopes of analyzing descriptive and inferential statistics and theme identification to determine whether university students could increase their awareness of cultural differences, critically reflect on those differences, and use interpersonal skills to express those differences if they challenge their assumptions.

While both the quantitative and qualitative studies cited in this study have added to the field of intercultural competence and have highlighted the capabilities needed to adjust and adapt to different cultures, all of the studies had limitations. Jain (2012) found that cultural intelligence was defined differently in India than in Western cultures, leaving a gap in why this occurs. If Jain had employed more than quantitative methods, which examined the what and had also used the qualitative methods, which explored why readers could have gained a more comprehensive understanding of emotional intelligence in relation to the Indian culture. In addition, many of the researchers (e.g., Woo et al., 2014) examined Western populations or examined participants' self-reported perceptions of how their culture(s) was different from the Western culture (e.g., Wang et al., 2014).

This study has addressed the gap of examining what needs to be done to facilitate how a culturally-specific group of students in a non-Western country could develop intercultural competence through a classroom approach while exploring why students changed their perspectives. This study employed a mixed-methods approach because quantitative data could add to an understanding of students' change in intercultural competence as an outcome, and the qualitative data could provide an understanding of how students went through that change of developing intercultural competence as a process. In Chapter 3, I describe the setting and research questions that guided this study. I describe my role as a researcher, the methodology employed, and why I selected it for this study. Finally, I discuss the instrumentation, data analysis plan, and evidence of quality.

### Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this mixed-methods study was twofold: (a) to explore how a classroom approach designed to facilitate students' questioning of assumptions and beliefs regarding different cultural beliefs, social structures, and practices might influence Japanese college students' self-reported development of intercultural competence, and (b) to investigate whether the students developed their potential for intercultural competence. In this chapter, I explain the relevance of the setting, research design and rationale, and my role as researcher. I discuss the methodology used, including student selection, instrumentation, data collection, and data analysis strategies. I also address threats to validity, issues of trustworthiness, and ethical considerations of the study.

#### **Setting**

The setting for this study was a private, accredited university in western Japan with an enrollment of over 22,000 students. The rationale for gathering data from this setting best suited the study's purpose: to facilitate future Japanese college students' development of intercultural competence as well as their potential for successful development of intercultural adaptation. The use of archival data from a site located in Japan with a large population of Japanese college students who had not been on study-abroad programs or resided in a foreign country was deemed necessary to limit the influence of outside variables. The university had characteristics similar to those of other premier higher education institutions in Japan; therefore, findings could be useful for university stakeholders, generalized to other universities, or applicable for readers to

form logical generalizations (Patton, 2002). Finally, the study is in-line with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) Education Policy Outlook 2015, which included two main objectives: "to create environments in which young people are engaged in effective learning, and . . . the strategies for such engagement should best be founded on research about how young people learn best" (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2015, p. 139). Japan's main objective is, according to the OECD's 2015 report, that "students are expected to acquire solid fundamental knowledge and skills, to develop the ability to think, make decisions and express themselves, and then to use these skills and abilities to solve problems" (p. 261). The classroom approach described in this study could foster opportunities for students to develop their capacity to "think, make decisions, and express themselves" (OECD, 2015, p. 261). In addition, the university's mission is based on the principles of Christianity and declares that students should receive knowledge and skills to help them become capable and compassionate individuals who can contribute to local and global contexts. Ideally, the archival research undertaken will help Japanese college students develop intercultural competence as well as to realize their potential for successful development of intercultural adaptation so that they can contribute to local and global contexts in proactive ways.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions guided this mixed-methods study:

1. To what extent will the pretest and posttest scores on the Intercultural Adaptation Potential Scale (ICAPS) differ between students who experience an intervention of a transformative classroom learning environment designed to facilitate students' questioning of assumptions and beliefs regarding different cultural beliefs, social structures, and practices and those who do not?
2. During participation in a transformative classroom learning environment designed to facilitate students' questioning of assumptions and beliefs regarding different cultural beliefs, social structures, and practices, how do the students reflect upon their intercultural communication and competence?

I used a parallel mixed-methods design in which archival qualitative and quantitative data were analyzed separately and merged for interpretation (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). For the quantitative section of the study, the independent variable was the classroom approach or intervention, and the dependent variable was students' perceptions as measured by ICAPS scores. Mezirow's (2000) transformative learning theory was the basis for the theoretical framework and informed the design of this study. Mezirow's principles of transformative learning influenced my assumptions that students could increase their awareness of cultural differences, critically reflect on those differences, and use interpersonal skills to express those differences if they challenged their assumptions. The use of an explicit theoretical lens in a mixed-methods study like this one was recommended by Plano Clark and

Creswell (2008) to support researchers in designing their studies and forming their questions.

The reason that quantitative and qualitative methods were deemed necessary for this study was because the intervention involved a culturally-specific group of Japanese college students in a setting in Japan. Collecting only descriptive statistics from a scale could not provide a complete understanding of whether or not a classroom approach facilitated students' development of intercultural competence and the potential for intercultural competence. There was a need for narrative data to gain an understanding of the students' cultural assumptions and their ability to express their worldviews. By analyzing archival quantitative and qualitative data, I hoped to address the overlapping concepts to compare and merge the two data sets and synthesize the quantitative and qualitative data results to form convergent or divergent meta-inferences (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009).

### **Role of the Researcher**

My role was to analyze archival data to address the purpose and research questions of the study. I am an American residing in Japan; therefore, I believe that my worldviews added an outside perspective to the study. I used deidentified data, so any relationships with the individual students who participated in this study could not be determined. I was an instructor for the students' courses at the university and had some investment in the intervention and the students' growth and development. I addressed my biases by bracketing, triangulating the data, and obtaining anonymous and confidential

data with no individual student identifiers.

### **Methodology**

The archival data were from a sample of 137 first-year Japanese undergraduates who lived in Japan, attended the same university, and had not been on study-abroad programs or resided in a foreign country to limit the influence of outside variables. The student sample was from the School of Business Administration, where the department heads expressed a need to provide students with knowledge and skills to help them contribute to local and global contexts. Administrators were also implementing a new study-abroad program.

All of the archival quantitative data were from first-year students who volunteered to take the ICAPS survey. This data set was much smaller than expected. I obtained qualitative data from 69 students who had enrolled in the two classes that received the intervention and who were the intervention groups. All of the students in the intervention groups had enrolled in a 14-week, semester-long communication course in the School of Business Administration, which met once a week for 90 minutes. For four classes, I instructed the students according to the ministry-approved course syllabi and used the textbook *Global Outlook 1* by Bushell and Dyer (2013). During the final 20 minutes of each class, the classroom intervention was in place for the intervention groups.

While students in the control groups spent the final 20 minutes of class doing reading comprehension questions related to the textbook, students in the intervention groups spent that time for intervention activities. These students were divided into groups



of four or five to discuss conflicting cultural differences that might foster a questioning of their assumptions and beliefs regarding different cultural beliefs, social structures, and practices. While exploring over-generalized assumptions about cultural groups, the students were encouraged to develop a deep awareness of differences, reflect critically on those differences, and discuss those differences in collaborative discussions or debates to establish “comprehensibility, truth, and appropriateness or authenticity” of their discoveries (Mezirow, 1991, p. 77). Students in the intervention group also reflected critically and wrote reflective journals as a class activity on prompts with leading questions taken from themes in the course textbook.

### **Instrumentation**

Data for this study came from reflective journals completed by students in the intervention groups during the third, fifth, seventh, and ninth weeks of the 14-week semester as part of the approved curriculum. Students in the intervention groups were encouraged to reflect critically in their journals, which aligns with Mezirow’s (1991, 2000) transformative learning theory, as part of the course activities on the following prompts taken from themes in the course textbook *Global Outlook 1* by Bushell and Dyer (2013):

- Diversity influences society in a positive way.
- People from a monochronic culture can avoid conflicts with people from a polychronic culture.
- Japanese language and culture should be protected from outside influences.

- Cultivating relationships with people from different cultural backgrounds is important.

Each prompt included the following leading questions:

- Please explain why you think this statement is important.
- How do you think Japanese people's beliefs or thinking about this statement differ from people who belong to a different cultural group? Please explain by giving examples.
- How did your thinking about the statement change after the class discussion or debate? Please explain by giving examples.

The data gathered from reflective journals provided an understanding of whether and how or if students' assumptions and beliefs related to the above four themes with respect to their cultural beliefs, social structures, and practices changed. The coding of the students' reflective journals followed Roessger's (2014) research on critical reflection, reflective practices, and instrumental learning outcomes. Roessger's research was influenced by Mezirow's transformative learning theory, which included defining learning as a process that occurs through activities that require reflection on conflicting issues. Therefore, Roessger's codes—content, process, and premise—were used at first to explore and interpret reoccurring themes regarding students' perspectives on the issues they wrote about for the prompts. For example, if a student wrote that they needed information to find a strategy to cope with a conflicting issue, this was classified as content. If a student wrote about strategies to solve or cope with an issue, this was considered process. Finally,

if students inquired as to why the issue was important to solve, this was viewed as premise. After data analysis, however, additional prominent themes emerged, which I coded following the procedures described in the results section of Chapter 4.

Quantitative data originated from the ICAPS, Japanese version, developed by Matsumoto et al. (2001). The ICAPS received copyright in 2006 by Jeffrey A. LeRoux and David Matsumoto. The use of the ICAPS is for research purposes only and requires researchers to purchase a license and pay a per-participant fee to Humintell (the company that distributes ICAPS) for the use of the scale. All volunteers received the paper-and-pencil ICAPS, which they could complete in 10 to 15 minutes outside of class time. Volunteers determined their own 4-digit numbers instead of using their names to take the ICAPS. The volunteers used the same 4-digit numbers for the ICAPS posttest to check their posted results at the end of the term. The university personnel and I, as the researcher, did not know which students completed the ICAPS.

One reason for selecting the pretest-posttest ICAPS scale was that the data could be used to help assess whether university students were ready to adjust to a new culture and whether interventions could facilitate their progress. According to Matsumoto et al. (2001), practitioners in university or international business settings could help Japanese individuals prepare for living or working abroad by using the scores on the ICAPS as a way to raise their intercultural adjustment potential (p. 508). For stakeholders, including students in this study, this could be meaningful because it could determine whether classroom interventions, like the one in this study, could help increase students' ICAPS

scores. In addition, the ICAPS has been subject to testing and retesting to provide evidence of reliability and validity, which is necessary for an instrument used for a dissertation. Thus, the data from the ICAPS could be used to help assess whether university students are ready to adjust to a new culture and whether interventions could facilitate their progress.

Another reason for selecting the ICAPS was that it had been tested and retested in several studies with Japanese college students in Japan and the United States in both English and Japanese languages. The ICAPS might have facilitated responses by the Japanese college students in this group, ensuring a “native view of reality” (Creswell, 2007, p. 217). In addition to English and Japanese, the ICAPS is also available in Spanish, which has been translated and back translated like the Japanese version from the original English. The results of this study are potentially transferable to not only other Japanese populations but also other populations in different countries.

Finally, the ICAPS is the only scale designed to predict a person’s ease of adjustment to a new culture by highlighting which learned styles of coping could be worked on, making the intervention for this study potentially useful in facilitating students’ progress. According to Matsumoto and Hwang (2013), the ICAPS—tested in eight studies—has evidence for test-retest reliability of .79 for English and .84 for Japanese and parallel forms reliability in different languages of .93 (p. 858). The ICAPS also has concurrent and predictive ecological validities, which predict adjustment and adaptation. Finally, although researchers have used the ICAPS, Cultural Intelligence

Scale, and Multidimensional Personality Questionnaire in mixed-method studies, only the ICAPS has test-retest reliability, an important factor for this mixed method study.

Unfortunately, the data set from the ICAPS was too small to be helpful in my study. In later chapters, I will make recommendations for further research using this tool.

### **Data Analysis Plan**

Archival data from the reflective journals, which were part of class activities, were used to explore and interpret reoccurring themes related to the students' perspectives on their experiences and perceived changes in intercultural sensitivity. The data were analyzed and coded for emergent themes. I used Roessger's (2014) research that followed Mezirow's transformative learning theory to guide my identification of emergent themes. The resulting six overarching themes, which are discussed in Chapter 4, were derived from Roessger's (2014) research that followed Mezirow's transformative learning theory and emergent themes.

The publishers of the ICAPS scored the pretest-posttest ICAPS and provided the scores to the university. The publishers compared the pretest-posttest scores on the ICAPS by employing a *t*-test. The publishers determined the individual students' level of change based on pre-post differences by using a sign tests, a "binomial test that determines if the proportion of positive differences and proportion of negative differences differ significantly from .50" (Matsumoto et al., 2001, p. 501). In addition, to determine the effect size by comparing the raw difference between the *t*-test for the control groups and intervention groups, the Cohen's *d* was employed (Matsumoto et al., 2001).

The use of the ICAPS, which has been tested and retested with the same cultural group (Japanese college students) in both Japan and the United States, facilitated evidence of reliability and validity. According to Plano Clark and Creswell (2008), the community, which in this study was the Japanese university leadership, needs to view the data as valid and reliable, and the study has to have external validity and transferability so that future studies can be carried out (p. 224). This study was based on a theoretical lens to fulfill the above requirements, included multiple data sources, and employed a validated survey tool, which had been tested-retested and translated into the sample population's native language.

### **Evidence of Quality**

Before the start of this study, it was important to receive permission from the site's Research Ethics Committee and Walden's Institutional Review Board (IRB) (Approval No. 06-03-16-0090305). It was important professionally and ethically to receive permission and explain to stakeholders the purpose of the study, how I would use the archival data from the ICAPS scale and reflective journals, and how I would protect the students' data. Since this study was carried out in a foreign country, I adhered to local laws and maintained a professional code of conduct (Patton, 2002). In addition to analyzing and merging archival qualitative and quantitative data, the theoretical framework using transformative learning theory informed my assumptions.

One strategy that added credibility to the study was the use of archival data provided by the site. These data could be confirmed, analyzed, or used for future studies

by others at the site if granted permission by the university. In addition, I used direct quotes from the students, as suggested by Creswell (2007), to present the students' thoughts or beliefs instead of my interpretations. Regarding transferability, the implications of this study could lead to future studies with students in different departments or other universities to encourage intercultural sensitivity. I established dependability by using the same themes from the textbook for the student journals to ensure replicability and repeatability. I protected student anonymity and kept the raw data in its original form (not translated or altered) to achieve confirmability.

The initial primary limitation of this study was the use of only one site. Although my worldviews and biases might have influenced the data analyses, I used archival quantitative and qualitative data to facilitate my discovery of inconsistencies to help me view the study from a different perspective to provide credibility (Patton, 2002, p. 556). In addition, I thoroughly described all stages and constructs for the quantitative and qualitative data to assist in my analysis and interpretations of the archival data. Other major limitations arose due to the timing of the instruction and the various approval processes and communication issues concerning the university in Japan and Walden's IRB requirements. In the end, the amount of data I received from the university was much less than I hoped to be able to obtain and to analyze. This was true, in particular, for the ICAPS data. Ensuring students' anonymity, the non-threatening method of using a flyer for recruitment and a drop box for the completed surveys resulted in insufficient data and limited quantitative analyses. The result was no statistically appropriate

significance could be considered. In Chapter 5, I will discuss recommendations for future research designed to address similar limitations.

I used archival data from first-year, university students who attended a university in the western Japan. Students were enrolled in the School of Business Administration and were ages 18-19. There were 137 students in all the course sections, and 69 students participated in the intervention as part of course activities. I kept the archival data used for this study on a laptop computer that was used exclusively for data management, data analyses, and manuscript preparation. I did not use this laptop computer for any other purpose during my dissertation work. All data were backed up on a USB flash drive, including the reflective journals, (also made into a PDF file). I will keep the USB flash drive in a locked cabinet in my residence for at least 5 years as required by Walden's IRB.

### **Summary**

In Chapter 3, I described the mixed-methods approach for data collection I intended when exploring whether a classroom approach could help Japanese college students develop intercultural competence and for investigating their potential growth for intercultural competence. The gathering of the data began with the selection of the site, a university in Japan, and my role as a non-Japanese researcher. The data were obtained from Japanese students who participated in a classroom approach that included discussing or debating conflicting cultural differences and writing reflective journals, which were aligned with Mezirow's transformative learning theory. The methodology employed was the use of deidentified, quantitative and qualitative archival data, and the



data analysis plan included the creation of six overarching themes. The archival qualitative data from reflective journals provided an understanding of whether and how students' perceptions of their assumptions and frames changed. I used data from students' reflective journals to explore and interpret reoccurring themes related to the students' perspectives on their experiences and perceived changes in intercultural sensitivity. Limited trend interpretations of the quantitative data from the ICAPS helped support the qualitative data. The ICAPS would be an appropriate instrument to use in future studies if more data could be obtained. In Chapter 4, I present the data analysis, results, and evidence of trustworthiness of the study.

## Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this study was twofold: (a) to explore how a classroom approach designed to facilitate students' questioning of assumptions and beliefs regarding different cultural beliefs, social structures, and practices might have influenced Japanese college students' self-reported development of intercultural competence, and (b) to investigate whether or not the students developed their potential for intercultural competence; therefore, a mixed-methods design was employed to include culturally competent practice in an evidence-based approach (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011, p. 392). The site for analysis provided all data after the completion of a 14-week, semester-long communication course in the School of Business Administration; however, challenges arose due to the limited quantitative data available. The following research questions guided this study:

1. To what extent will the pretest and posttest scores on the Intercultural Adaptation Potential Scale (ICAPS) differ between students who experience an intervention of a transformative classroom learning environment designed to facilitate students' questioning of assumptions and beliefs regarding different cultural beliefs, social structures, and practices and those who do not?

I could not address this research question since I did not have enough data to do statistical analyses. I used the limited data provided to see if I could understand any

trends that might be related to the results of the qualitative data analyses. I did have enough qualitative data to address the following research question.

2. During participation in a transformative classroom learning environment designed to facilitate students' questioning of assumptions and beliefs regarding different cultural beliefs, social structures, and practices, how do the students reflect upon their intercultural communication and competence?

In this chapter, I describe the setting, demographics, and the types of data obtained. I discuss the procedures used for data analysis and report the findings of this study. Finally, I present evidence of trustworthiness.

### **Setting and Student Demographics**

I drew the archival quantitative data from a large, private, accredited university in western Japan with characteristics similar to those of other top higher education institutions in the country. This setting best suited my goals: to facilitate future Japanese college students' development of intercultural competence as well as their potential for successful development of intercultural adaptation. The study was also in-line with the OECD's Education Policy Outlook's 2015 two main objectives: "(1) the aim of schooling is to create environments in which young people are engaged in effective learning, and (2) the strategies for such engagement should best be founded on research about how young people learn best" (p. 139). Japan's main objectives, based on the OECD's 2015 report, were that "students are expected to acquire solid fundamental knowledge and skills, to develop the ability to think, make decisions and express themselves, and then to

use these skills and abilities to solve problems” (p. 261). In addition, the university’s mission, which is based on the principles of Christianity, states that students should receive knowledge and skills to help them become capable and compassionate individuals who can contribute to local and global contexts. Hopefully, research such as mine will help Japanese college students develop intercultural competence so that they can contribute to local and global contexts in proactive ways.

The archival quantitative data were from first-year Japanese students, who were 18-19 years-old at the time of the study and in either the two classes in control group or the two in the experimental group. All students were enrolled in the School of Business Administration at a 4-year university in Japan. The archival qualitative data were from 69 first-year Japanese students who were in the experimental group. These students were in two classes during the spring semester of 2016. I excluded incomplete data from a total of 14 students from the analysis; therefore, the archival qualitative data used in this study came from a total of 55 students (28 males, 27 females) who completed all four journals during their course experiences.

### **Data Collection Process**

The archival quantitative data were from students’ performance on the 55-item ICAPS, Japanese version, pretest and posttest. Although 137 first-year Japanese students, who were in either the control group or the experimental group, were invited to take the ICAPS outside of the class sessions, the available data were from 49 students who took the pretest, 27 students who took the posttest, and 19 students who took both the pretest

and posttest. Any comparisons, therefore, were applicable to only the results from the 19 who completed both.

The archival qualitative data used in this study came from students' reflective journals, which were part of the approved university curriculum. Out of the 69 students in the experimental group, I used data from 55 students (28 males and 27 females) who completed all four journals. The assigned reflective journals the students completed included the following prompts taken from themes in the course textbook:

- Diversity influences society in a positive way.
- People from a monochronic culture can avoid conflicts with people from a polychronic culture.
- Japanese language and culture should be protected from outside influences.
- Cultivating relationships with people from different cultural backgrounds is important.

Each prompt included the following leading questions:

- Please explain why you think this statement is important.
- How do you think Japanese people's beliefs or thinking about this statement differ from people who belong to a different cultural group? Please explain by giving examples.
- How did your thinking about the statement change after the class discussion or debate? Please explain by giving examples.

### Data Analysis

Humintell, the company that distributes the ICAPS, calculated the students' ICAPS scores. Data reviewed included the archival quantitative data from students' performance on the Japanese version of the 55-item ICAPS, pretest and posttest. Based on the limited data for the ICAPS, the students in the experimental group had a slightly larger change in total score on the ICAPS. This would mean that the students may have been more able to adjust easily to another culture. Changes across the separate scales were mixed and less clear. No valid interpretations are possible at this time due to the small number of students who completed both the precourse and postcourse scales.

I excluded incomplete journal entries from a total of 14 students from my analysis of the qualitative data. I examined and coded data from the 55 students who submitted all four journals under a priori themes from the literature: content, process, and premise (Roessgner, 2014). The theme *content* (students expressed a need for information) was not supported by much data from the journals. According to Bernard and Ryan (2010), it is not unusual for predefined themes to fall short because it is impossible to anticipate what themes will appear in the text. In addition, there were few responses connected to the theme *process* (strategies to solve or cope with cultural conflicts, such as taking action). There were several responses I could link to the theme *premise* (why students thought the statement was important and how an action or process could be carried out).

Bernard and Ryan (2010) described metacoding as the discovery of “new themes and overarching metathemes” (p. 67) in relation to prior themes and short texts, such as

the texts from the students' reflective journals in this study. By using this coding method, researchers can quote from the original data "to illustrate the most important themes" (Bernard & Ryan, 2010, p. 67). Through the process of identifying keywords that the students focused on in their journals, highlighting quotes from the copied student journals, and sorting these into piles, I created six overarching themes relating to the guiding questions for the journals. Additionally, I used quotes to provide evidence to support my analysis for each theme so that readers could understand that the themes were created from the students' journal entries and were valid (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011).

Each of the four journals had the same three guiding questions. Under the first guiding question, "Why you think this statement is important?" most of the students focused on the word *important* and responded by explaining why, which fell under the theme, *premise*. Some students, however, copied from the textbook to explain why they felt the statement was important. A few students were able to explain in their own words why they thought the statement was important and how an action or process could be enacted. Therefore, for the first guiding question, I coded the reflective journals under three themes: *copied from textbook*, *premise*, and *premise plus process* (why the statement is important and what action could be implemented, such as a strategy or way to cope).

I had supposed the second guiding question, "How do you think Japanese people's beliefs or thinking about this statement differ from people who belong to a different cultural group? Please explain by giving examples," would prompt the students

to reflect on the differences between cultural groups and how to seek information or content; however, the results were different. Instead, the theme *comparison* (comparing beliefs or ways of thinking in Japan with another country) emerged. Therefore, the fourth theme, comparison, was added.

The third guiding question, “How did your thinking about the statement change after the class discussion or debate? Please explain by giving examples,” produced a clear, overarching theme, transform. Many of the students focused on the words *change* or *thought*, and they responded in their reflective journals by explaining how their ways of thinking changed after participating in the class discussions or debates. A limited number of students expressed in their journals not only how their ways of thinking changed, but also what action, such as a strategy or way to cope, might be effective. Thus, for the third guiding question, the reflective journals were coded under two themes: *transform* (changed their ways of thinking) and *transform plus process* (how they changed their ways of thinking and what action could be implemented, such as a strategy or way to cope).

Originally, I had planned to analyze the qualitative data with the aid of the software program NVivo. It was necessary, however, to read each journal entry carefully rather than rely on key phrases or words such as *change* or *thought* to identify whether students felt that they had changed their ways of thinking or transformed. Thus, I organized the 55 journal sets (220 entries) under the guiding questions and themes. A summary of the type and number of theme responses appears in Table 1.



Table 1

*Type and Number of Theme Responses*

Question 1: Why do you think this statement is important?				
Themes	Journal 1	Journal 2	Journal 3	Journal 4
Copied from textbook	19	43	7	0
Premise	26	3	30	34
Premise plus process	3	2	1	8

  

Question 2: How do you think Japanese people's beliefs or thinking about this statement differ from people who belong to a different cultural group? Please explain by giving examples.				
Theme	Journal 1	Journal 2	Journal 3	Journal 4
Comparison	11	34	21	16

  

Question 3: How did your thinking about the statement change after the class discussion or debate? Please explain by giving examples.				
Themes	Journal 1	Journal 2	Journal 3	Journal 4
Transform	27	15	15	8
Transform plus process	3	5	1	4

### Journal 1 Themes

The prompt for Journal 1, “Diversity influences society in a positive way,” and the first guiding question, “Why do you think this statement is important?” facilitated the students’ journal entries. Under the first theme, copied from textbook, 19 of the 55 students reproduced portions of the text, such as the following statements: “I think it makes life interesting,” and “In my opinion, diversity can make whole systems possible.” There could be several reasons why students copied from the text. For example, the journals were not graded or rewarded within the course, so the students might not have invested time and energy into providing in-depth answers. Moreover, the issue might have been too complex for some of them to comprehend, especially given that the questions were written in English, which they use and is not their native language. In addition, the students might not have had an awareness of the issue or experiences relating to the issue, which could have made it difficult to answer the prompt with confidence and detail.

For the second theme, premise, approximately half of the students included responses that I identified as fitting the theme premise, which related to why they thought the statement about diversity was important. The students focused on the words *diversity* and *important*, and they responded by explaining why. For example, one student wrote, “In my opinion, Diversity is important. Because Diversity enable [*sic*] us to share our perspectives and Diversity give [*sic*] us knowledge.” The student stated that diversity is important because people can share their ways of thinking and gain knowledge. Another

student wrote, “I think that diversity is important. This is because a view and a way of thinking spread. I think that it is very important to see [this] from various directions for one topic.” The students’ responses indicated that they felt that diversity was important because people could gain varying perspectives on the same issue and disseminate a new way of thinking. The students provided reasons to support their assumptions. Either the students had an awareness of the conflicting issues before the course began, or they may have gained awareness from the classroom approach.

For the third theme, premise plus process, three students’ responses contained premise and process (why it is important and what action could be implemented, such as a strategy or way to cope). Some students went beyond concentrating on the word *important* and reflected on why they thought “diversity influences society in a positive way,” by not only giving reasons but by providing actual actions. One student stated,

That is because diversity makes people’s life rich. All people are different from each other. I meet [*sic*] a lot of people since I was born. They taught me many things. And next, I’ll teach next [the] generation many things. And Society will improve.

The student indicated a belief that diversity could help people from one generation to the next through the transmission of knowledge. Another student was able to form connections to widen their perspective by stating,

I think that diversity has many good points. For example diversity loses [*sic*] a social barrier, and diversity helps the social advance of the woman [*sic*]. In

addition, like Einstein and Bohr, an idea spreads by sharing a thought with various people.

This statement suggests that the student connected prior or post awareness of diversity from the statement with past knowledge to form viewpoints on how people in the past influenced present-day society in positive ways.

When addressing the second guiding question, “How do you think Japanese people’s beliefs or thinking about this statement differ from people who belong to a different cultural group? Please explain by giving examples,” 11 students’ responses fell under the fourth theme, comparison (comparing differences between Japan and another country). One student wrote,

I think Japanese people don’t think much of it [how diversity influences society in a positive way], compared to Americans. For example, Americans like being with foreign people and being different from another people, while Japanese people prefer to be with Japanese people rather than to be with foreign people and [they] like to be the same as another people.

This response indicates that the student had some background or had gained enough knowledge of cultural differences to reflect and write an answer. Another student’s response indicated feeling that people would not be treated the same if society was diverse: “For example, Japanese people thinks [*sic*] the equality is good so we believes [*sic*] that diversity is not good. But other countries like [the] USA believes [*sic*] that unlike Japan diversity is good.” This suggested that the student believed that Japanese

value equality over diversity, and that diversity (the idea that people are different and treated differently) was not positive. Thus, this student viewed diversity as culturally defined.

The third guiding question was the following: “How did your thinking about the statement change after the class discussion or debate? Please explain by giving examples.” Under the fifth theme, transform, 27 students indicated they changed their ways of thinking after participating in the classroom approach using discussion or debate and writing reflective responses for their journals. Key expressions, such as “before class,” “I thought . . . before,” or “I thought . . . however, . . .” were used to identify and code the responses categorized as transform. For example, one student had a change in thinking and wrote:

Before class, I thought diversity is bad. I had a reason. If everyone is [the] same, [and] we can live peaceful [*sic*]. However after class, I think diversity is good. I noticed that diversity exists everywhere. Diversity makes life interesting. If every things [*sic*] are [the] same, we can't discover anything. I think diversity is good for us.

The student indicated they had thought about diversity differently before the classroom approach and was able to develop a different perspective afterward. There were several other marked examples; one student wrote:

I didn't think diversity makes society good very much [*sic*]. However, after the class, I change [*sic*] my idea. I felt diversity influence [*sic*] society from every

angle in a positive way. Diversity enriches our life. I thought we should create [a] more diverse society.

It appears from this journal entry that the student experienced a transformation.

For the sixth theme, transform plus process, three of the students' responses contained both transform and process. This indicates that these students changed their ways of thinking after the classroom approach (discussion or debate) and writing reflective responses for their journals and that they could make a suggestion for action. In addition to the search for the theme, transform, I focused on key words or expressions such as "for example" or "people . . . do," to find students' suggestions for actions. One student wrote:

I have never thought about diversity. However, I learned that diversity influences society in a positive way in the class discussion. For example, it makes life interesting and it makes whole systems possible. After the class discussion and working on the journal, I thought that Japanese people need to understand about various thoughts around the world and cooperate with foreigner [*sic*]. If Japanese people will do it [cooperate], for example, [the] labor shortage will be solved in care services. I would like people to understand the importance of variety.

It appears that the student was influenced by the classroom approach and thought that a different way of thinking could facilitate change in society.

### **Journal 2 Themes**

The prompt for Journal 2, “People from a monochronic culture can avoid conflicts with people from a polychronic culture,” and the first guiding question, “Why do you think this statement is important?”, elicited the students’ responses. Under the first theme, copied from the textbook, 43 out of the 55 students copied their responses, and most of them copied the same statements: “Respecting each other’s different attitude toward time may reduce conflict.” It appears that some students did not create their own responses through the classroom approach of discussions or debates. According to Schön (1983, 1987), this may occur because an issue was novel and not connected to the students’ lives at that time to have meaning for them.

For the second theme, premise, only three of the 55 students’ responses contained this theme. The lack of responses, especially compared to the other three journals, is noteworthy. For example, one student wrote,

It is important to know each other’s culture traits [to gain] the understanding for the action of the partner [what actions the other person will carry out] to know each other’s culture. And I think that, as a result, it reduces the conflict.

The example shows that the student felt the conflicting issue was a matter of cultural differences, and that knowledge of cultural difference could lead to better relations.

Another student who concentrated on the difference in the concept of time wrote, “There

are many thoughts about time in the world. For example, Japanese people tend to be punctual but African [*sic*] tend to be more flexible regarding schedule. However, people can understand each other.” This example suggests that the student became aware of a cultural difference and felt that it was important for people to recognize differences to develop relationships.

For the third theme, premise plus process, two of the 55 students’ responses contained premise and process. For example, a student stated, “Monochronic people and polychronic people have different thinking about ‘time.’ So, even if polychronic people is [*sic*] late for appointments, monochronic people must not get angry and respect each other’s different attitudes toward time.” The student responded directly to the prompt, “People from a monochronic culture can avoid conflicts with people from a polychronic culture,” by giving an example and providing a course of action.

For the second guiding question, “How do you think Japanese people’s beliefs or thinking about this statement differ from people who belong to a different cultural group? Please explain by giving examples,” 34 out of 55 students’ responses fell under the fourth theme, comparison. Under this theme, the students’ responses suggest that they viewed the conflicting practices as a cultural difference. In the following example, the student was able to compare and expand by providing an up-to-date example.

Japanese people tend to come before [the] time to meet. But in other countries, there may be the person who does not come on time. Therefore, when the various people gather, it is thought that conflict happens. For example, when the Tokyo



Olympic Games is [*sic*] opened, the people of various countries gather [*sic*].

People of polychromic culture [*sic*] may not come on time. If this situation happens, people of monochromic culture [*sic*] should not [be] angry and receive it.

The above excerpt shows that the student not only found (through comparison) the cultural difference to be distinct, but they also found it to be meaningful. The student also suggests that by being able to compare cultural differences, people could think of strategies to create understandings of cultural differences. In another response, a student used outside information not included in the textbook to compare and provide an example:

Japanese people take it for granted [to arrive] five minutes ahead of time.

However people of polychromic cultures tend to change plans often and easily.

For example It's [*sic*] the rule we must be late for a party in France. I think that respecting each other's different attitudes toward time may reduce conflict.

By providing outside cultural information regarding arrival time for a party in France, the student demonstrated that inquiry and reflection about the topic were carried out during the process of writing the journal.

The third guiding question for Journal 2 was: "How did your thinking about the statement change after the class discussion or debate? Please explain by giving examples." Fifteen students had responses that fell under the fifth theme, transform. As in the first journal, the students used key expressions such as "before class," "I thought . . .

before,” or “I thought . . . however, . . .” to indicate that they had altered their perspectives through the influence of the classroom approach. For instance, one student stated that their thinking changed by writing, “I changed my thinking. To begin with, I didn’t know there are two types of cultures. And I think monochronic culture’s people have to research when polychronic culture’s people come [to their country] because polychronic people can’t come on time.” The statement indicates that the student’s lack of awareness of this issue might have led that student to experience future misunderstandings with people from different cultures. Following the same thought process, a student wrote, “I think my former self would be angry if a friend is late for one hour. However, I read this statement. I knew that it was different in how to catch [*sic*] at time by culture, and I felt that respect for other culture [*sic*] was necessary.” Thus, the important finding was that students need to gain awareness of conflicting issues before they can change their worldviews and take actions.

For the sixth theme, transform plus process, five students’ responses contained both transform and process as in the following example:

I had thought that punctuality is very important and natural before. But, if I go abroad or if I associate with a foreigner, I may feel difference [*sic*] with them. So I think I must know the different view about the time. I want to reconsider the difference with a foreigner, and communicate successfully. In doing so, the conflict will be reduce [*sic*].

This response indicates that the student was capable of changing perspectives and planning how to implement change through actions. Most noteworthy is that the student suggests that being able to “communicate successfully” is a key component to resolving differences. In another example, a student stated that respect is needed to overcome conflicting situations and adapt new perspectives: “I had thought that monochromic people can’t adopt polychromic culture. And the condelon [condition] will make conflict. This is certainly true but by respecting each other, they can understand each other, I felt.” The student indicates that they changed their thinking and suggests that if people can gain awareness and respect of cultural differences, then cultural misunderstandings could be avoided.

### **Journal 3 Themes**

The prompt for Journal 3 was, “Japanese language and culture should be protected from outside influences,” and the first guiding question, “Why do you think this statement is important?” Under the first theme, copied from textbook, seven students wrote: “Traditional cultures and languages are at the same time being respected and, indeed, developed.” This was the only statement copied from the textbook. Compared to the first and second journal entries, I deemed the drop in the number of copied responses important. Thirty responses fell under the second theme, premise, suggesting that students reflected more on the issues. One student wrote,

I think this statement is very important. Because recent Japanese increases [*sic*] words of foreign origin. In addition, the Japanese culture receives a lot of

overseas influence, too. Japan had a lot of traditional culture from long ago. I think that I should protect the tradition carefully.

The response conveys the importance of protecting language and culture for that student. Another student suggests, “Because if our language and culture were not protected, we lose our own [own] value and identities.” The student draws a connection between identity and language and culture.

For the third theme, premise plus process, only one of the students’ responses contained premise and process as shown in the following example:

I think it is important because I want to save our culture and tell it to our descendants. Losing our own culture is the saddest. Therefore we have to protect it by continuing to broadcast in Japanese like Inuit [*sic*] [culture does].

This response suggests that the student’s way of thinking could have been influenced by the textbook because it discussed the revival of the Inuit culture. The student recommends that Japanese people should take the same action as the Inuits to protect their cultural practices through the use of media sources.

The second guiding question, “How do you think Japanese people’s beliefs or thinking about this statement differ from people who belong to a different cultural group? Please explain by giving examples,” had 21 responses that fell under the theme, comparison. Most of the students’ responses compared Japan as a mainly homogeneous culture to the United States or Canada, which are heterogeneous cultures with multiple racial groups. One student stated,

There is only own [one] culture in Japan. On the other hand, there are a lot of culture [sic] in the U.S. and Canada. They accept many different culture [sic]. For the reasons mentioned above, I think that Japanese people tend to protect traditional culture.

When comparing how Japan protects its culture while incorporating positive aspects of foreign cultures, one student wrote,

I think that Japan protects the culture of the [sic] own country [more] than other countries. For example, McDonald's in Kyoto makes a shop Japanese style [sic]. I think that this idea is very good. Because, they protect the Japan of the [sic] landscape and at the same time incorporate the culture of foreign countries. I think that we should widen such a [sic] way of thinking more.

This statement suggests that the student believed that Japan should protect its cultural values while allowing the positive influence of outside cultures.

The third guiding question was, "How did your thinking about the statement change after the class discussion or debate? Please explain by giving examples." Under the first theme, transform, 15 out of 55 students transformed as demonstrated by the following:

I though [sic] that we should protect our language and culture absolutely [sic] before. However, after the class discussion, my thought changed. For example, for the Inuit people and Masai [sic] people . . . changed their lifestyle and adopt [sic]

the other culture to meet the needs of the time. I think it is important not only to protect our culture and language but also to make [a] new culture.

This student's response indicates a change in perspective and a new point of view.

Fourteen other students also provided evidence of transforming. This suggests that they became aware that valuing their native language and culture would help them become more open to other languages and cultures. For example, one student wrote, "I think Japanese culture should [*sic*] be protected more than [it is] now. And we have to know Japanese history, tradition and culture. I want to learn about Japanese culture by learning different cultures." The student adopted the perspective that by knowing the home country culture, it is also possible to learn about other cultures.

For the third theme, transform plus process, only one of the students' responses contained both transform and process:

We are studying English now. And I'm studying Chinese as the second foreign language. I think that it is useful. Surely, speaking English or reading English is important. I had thought that only English would be useful. But I noticed that if I don't know our own language or culture, we can't tell foreign people to [*sic*] our culture. So I think that we should know our culture and tell [others that] Japanese [people are] wonderful.

The above quote shows that the student changed their way of thinking and proposed an action.

### Journal 4 Themes

The students responded to the prompt for Journal 4, “Cultivating relationships with people from different cultural backgrounds is important,” and the first leading question, “Why do you think this statement is important?” For this journal entry, none of the students copied their responses from the textbook. Seven of the students, however, copied part of the university’s vision statement from its website: “a learning community without fences . . . truly global citizens who are both capable and caring,” suggesting that these students attempted to find outside sources to respond to the journal prompts. For the second theme, premise, 34 of the students’ responses contained reasons why they felt the prompt was meaningful. It is important to note that this was the highest number out of the four journals. In one example a student wrote, “If we cultivate relationships with people from different cultural [sic] background [sic], we can understand each other [sic] culture. It [is important to] connect to [each other and] understand each other [sic] human nature so it is important.” This statement indicates that the student recognized the importance of forming relationships with people from different cultural backgrounds to develop understandings. Another student expressed the importance of cultivating relationships with people from different cultures by writing,

Because it is better [knowing about different cultural backgrounds], and it ties a person and a person [and helps people] to cultivating [sic] relations with people from other cultural backgrounds to know as possible the thing [that is] different

from oneself in a view [*sic*] and the way of thinking including words and the lifestyle of other countries.

This quote reveals the student's belief that by developing relationships with people from other cultural backgrounds, it is possible to share perspectives, ways of communicating, and lifestyles.

For the third theme, premise plus process, eight of the students' responses contained premise and process, the largest number for this theme in the four journals. This finding is noteworthy because it suggests the students could go beyond reflecting on why the issue was important to them and suggest actions. One student wrote that people from different cultural backgrounds could combine their talents for mutual benefit:

People have their talent which differ from other people. If people corporate [*sic*] with others, they can do something which people can't do by theirself [*sic*]. So I think it is important for people to understand people who belong to different cultural backgrounds and cultivate relationships with people.

One student commented on the limits of experience in a single culture:

I think cultivating relationship [*sic*] with people from different cultural [*sic*] is so important. Because, people who live in only one culture have only narrow viewing [*sic*]. People who have narrow viewing [*sic*] see only from [one] viewpoint in things. So the solution to problem becomes slow.



Both student examples demonstrate that they were able to reflect on the issue to express why they thought it was important and what actions they thought would be positive to take.

For the second guiding question, “How do you think Japanese people’s beliefs or thinking about this statement differ from people who belong to a different cultural group? Please explain by giving examples,” 16 of the students’ responses fell under the fourth theme, comparison. In the first example, the student compared Japan and Japanese people to other countries in general:

Japan is said to be not progressing [in] globalization in comparison with other countries. In other words, it means that Japanese people are not able to interact with people from different cultural backgrounds. We can learn many things if we interact [with] people of the [sic] different culture. So, we should interact [with] people from different cultural backgrounds.

While this suggests that the student could compare differences in culture, the student did not express how changing the way of thinking could implement positive change. Another student expressed how cultures could vary in the depth in which they encourage interactions with people from foreign countries:

I think not only Japanese but also people who belong to a different cultural group think this statement is important. For example, Japanese is [sic] generally negative about accepting immigrants, but they promote studying abroad. Also

Americans is [*sic*] generally positive about accepting immigrant [*sic*] and they think living with people from different cultural backgrounds is very important. The student's passage indicates that they feel that cultivating relationships with people from different cultural backgrounds is considered important in Japan and America. However, the student believes that the kinds of relationships and situations in which people develop relationships with others differ between cultures.

The third guiding question was: "How did your thinking about the statement change after the class discussion or debate? Please explain by giving examples." Under the fifth theme, transform, eight of the students' responses indicated they transformed, which was the lowest number of the four journals. The journal responses indicate that most of the students felt that cultivating relationships with people from different cultural backgrounds was important before participating in the class approach and writing their reflective journals. However, one student wrote about how their thinking changed:

Honestly, I thought Japanese should to [*sic*] have relationship with Japanese, [and] American [*sic*] should to [*sic*] have relationship with American, because if one contacts foreign people, war may happen like old days. But I thought [that] to have [a] relationship with foreigner is to make one's human nature [help Japanese fit into today's society].

It is possible that the student changed their way of thinking after the classroom approach or during the process of writing the journal. Another student focused on business climates and wrote about the positive influence of diversity by stating, "In my opinion, a lot of

Japanese people want to prefer to act together. So, Japanese like team performances. But after the class discussion, I think we should be evaluated [as] individual [*sic*]. So, we must look to diversity [*sic*] workforces.”

Thus, both of these students’ responses demonstrated how they perceived the need for change.

For the sixth theme, transform plus process, four of the students’ responses contained both transform and process, as in the following example:

I have little chance of cultivating relationships with people from [a] different cultural background. So I may have been biased without awareness. But, I have noticed that real experience will do me good. From now on, I want to take [a] chance to cultivate relationships positively.

The students indicated that they not only gained awareness of the importance of cultivating relationships with people from different cultural backgrounds, but they were also able to create a way to take positive action.

## **Results**

The archival quantitative results from the ICAPS survey scores were limited and not enough for statistical analyses, so the planned hypotheses were not considered or used to answer Research Question 1. The data from the nine students who completed both the pretest and the posttest indicated that the students who participated in the course discussions had a greater change in ICAPS scores.

The findings from the archival qualitative data from the reflective journals were used to answer Research Question 2: “During participation in a transformative classroom learning environment designed to facilitate students’ questioning of assumptions and beliefs regarding different cultural beliefs, social structures, and practices, how do the students reflect upon their intercultural communication and competence?” I gathered all data from the students’ statements regarding how they reflected on their assumptions and beliefs using four different prompts, which focused on cultural beliefs, social structures, and practices.

While quite a few students copied from the textbook for the first two journals, only a few students did the same for the final two. This may indicate that the students were able to reflect more on the issues during the classroom approach of discussions and debates to find meanings and connections, as indicated in their responses. Unlike in the first two journals, in the final two, more than half of the students wrote why they felt the issues were important, indicating an awareness of the issues. In addition, a few of the students were able to indicate what action could be implemented, such as a strategy or way to cope with the issue. When asked to compare the differences between their country, Japan, and another country, 21 students expressed ideas linked to intercultural competence. A clear demonstration of students’ intercultural communication and competence were evident in their responses to the third leading question, “How did your thinking about the statement change after the class discussion or debate? Please explain by giving examples.” These results indicated that several of the students transformed

their ways of thinking, demonstrating intercultural communication and competence.

There were only a few students, however, who were able to change their perspectives and find meanings and connections to suggest action.

### **Evidence of Trustworthiness**

I designed the study so that archival qualitative and quantitative data would be analyzed and merged for interpretation (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). Strategies for triangulating the data were proposed to provide evidence of trustworthiness. The theoretical framework informed the design of the study based on transformative learning theory. Mezirow's (2000) principles of transformative learning informed my belief that by challenging students' assumptions, they could increase their awareness of cultural differences, critically reflect on those differences, and use interpersonal skills to express those differences.

### **Credibility**

The archival quantitative data used for this study were limited and cannot be deemed valid or reliable. The strategy for triangulating data did not occur and could not be used to add credibility. The archival qualitative data used for this study were from students' reflective journals, which were part of the approved curriculum during the spring 2016 semester. The journals could also be used by future researchers (with permission from the university) to reproduce the study. To add credibility to this study, I employed the strategy of "giving voice to the participants" (Creswell, 2007, p. 212) so that the students' could speak about their experiences. I quoted raw data from the

students' journals (written in English) with all grammatical, wording, and spelling errors. In several of the student responses, I inserted words in brackets to clarify meaning or assist the reader in understanding context.

### **Transferability**

The results cannot be generalized to other populations; however, knowledge gained from the qualitative data analysis may have transferability to a similar context (Plano Clark & Creswell, 2008). Given the positive implications of this research, I recommend additional studies with students in future courses, different departments at the same site, or at other universities.

I used a combination of a priori and open coding to organize the data into categories and themes. I organized the 55 journal sets or 220 entries as follows:

- First guiding question themes: copied, premise, and premise plus process.
- Second guiding question theme: comparison.
- Third guiding question themes: transform and transform plus process.

### **Dependability**

Several factors determined dependability. The archival qualitative data were from 55 of the 69 students, who completed all four journals, allowing for some dependability. However, future analysis of the data is needed to confirm or disconfirm the accuracy of the data analysis.

Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) stated that “reliability has limited meaning in qualitative research”; however, they suggested several individuals should code during the

analysis stage for “intercoder agreement” (p 212). While I was the sole individual who coded the archival qualitative data, I employed a coding scheme that identified key words students on which the students focused, highlighting quotes with different color pens and sorting them into piles. After that, I created six overarching themes supported each with evidence from student quotes (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). The topics for each of the four journals were from the textbook, and the three leading questions were the same for each journal; therefore, replicability or repeatability of the study, using the same themes, could be done. I had a peer debriefer review my interpretations to help with bias and clarity of presentation of the themes.

### **Confirmability**

The use of the archival data in this study complied with the ethical and legal guidelines at the site in Japan and Walden University. In particular, I preserved student confidentiality (Corti & Thompson, 2014). Also, I did not translate any documentation or written text into Japanese and used the students’ quotes as evidence. After publication of this study, I will present my findings to the site heads in whatever form they prefer, such as a PowerPoint presentation or in writing. I will also return the raw data as agreed.

### **Summary**

While the quantitative findings from the mean ICAPS pretest and posttest scores were meant to indicate a difference in changes in mean scores between the students in the intervention and control groups, there were insufficient data for statistical analyses. Data from journal entries indicated that some students were able to reflect on why they thought

the given prompts were important, adapt their ways of thinking, and consider actions such as strategies or ways to cope. The sample responses for each theme demonstrated some of the students' newfound awareness of the conflicting issues, illustrated their reflection on the issues, and their ability to express with intercultural sensitivity how their ways of thinking changed.

In Chapter 5, I describe how the findings of this study confirm, disconfirm, or extend knowledge from the peer-review literature described in Chapter 2. Also, I examine the limitations of this study and provide recommendations for future research. Finally, I describe the potential impact of this study for positive social change and provide recommendations for implementing the classroom approach.



## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this mixed-methods study was twofold: (a) to explore how a classroom approach designed to facilitate students' questioning of assumptions and beliefs regarding different cultural beliefs, social structures, and practices might influence Japanese college students' self-reported development of intercultural competence, and (b) to investigate whether or not the students developed their potential for intercultural competence. Transformative learning theory and the three main assumptions of transformative learning experiences—creating classroom experiences, critical reflection, and discourse—formed the basis for the theoretical framework for this study. This study addressed the need for college students to gain capabilities to adapt to changing or conflicting situations created by cultural difference through classroom experiences. The classroom approach was designed to help college students develop critical thinking skills and provide students with opportunities to express their perspectives and discover their potentials to cope with adversities or obstacles (Matsumoto et al., 2004; Mezirow, 1978, 1991, 1998, 2000, 2009, 2012). In this chapter, I include the key findings of the study, a discussion of how the findings compare to those of similar peer-reviewed studies, and an interpretation of the findings. I discuss the limitations of the study, suggestions for further research, implications for social change, and recommendation for future action.

I selected a mixed-methods study to support changes in educational policy, which requires both quantitative and qualitative data. Makrakis and Kostoulas-Makrakis (2015) stated that both quantitative and qualitative data are necessary to encourage critical

reflection on how positive changes could be carried out and facilitate action for planning and assessment decisions. Makrakis and Kostoulas-Makrakis investigated the implementation of planning and evaluation of teaching, learning, and curriculum for sustainable development and concluded that these could be done more comprehensively by supporting assumptions with both quantitative and qualitative data. Whereas the archival qualitative data used in this study captured the process of how students critically reflected on conflicting issues and adopted new ways of thinking, the limited archival quantitative data were insufficient to determine differences in teaching approaches and learning practices.

### **Key Findings**

The findings from this study provided valuable insights into how educators could promote a culturally-specific group of college students' intercultural competence to facilitate their membership in local and global societies as well as to help them gain the ability to reflect critically on their worldviews and recommend positive actions. The archival quantitative data from the ICAPS that I accessed were used to answer Research Question 1: To what extent will the pretest and posttest scores on the Intercultural Adaptation Potential Scale (ICAPS) differ between students who experience an intervention of a transformative classroom learning environment designed to facilitate students' questioning of assumptions and beliefs regarding different cultural beliefs, social structures, and practices and those who do not? Based on the very limited data from the ICAPS, the students in the experimental group had a slightly larger change in

total score on the ICAPS. This could mean that the students might be more able to adjust more easily to another culture. Changes across the separate scales were mixed and less clear. No valid interpretations are possible at this time due to the small number of students who completed both the precourse and postcourse scales.

The findings from the archival qualitative data from the reflective journals were used to answer Research Question 2: During participation in a transformative classroom learning environment designed to facilitate students' questioning of assumptions and beliefs regarding different cultural beliefs, social structures, and practices, how do the students reflect upon their intercultural communication and competence? As demonstrated by their rich responses, the students, under the same circumstances, interpreted the leading questions with different levels of awareness and understanding. The varying levels are natural, according to Mezirow (2000), because individuals have different assumptions, expectations, or ways of viewing the same or similar experiences. Some of the students' reflections indicated that the awareness and knowledge gained from the classroom approach facilitated their critical reflection of paradoxical topics and transformations. Specifically, out of the 55 students who submitted all four journals, 16 students' reflections indicated that they transformed (changed their ways of thinking after the intervention), and three students' reflections demonstrated that they transformed and recommended actions after the intervention.

### Comparison to Similar Studies

While the limited quantitative data turned out less than I had envisioned and, as a result of unforeseen logistical problems, were insufficient for statistical analyses, the results were promising and similar to those from a study conducted by Matsumoto et al. (2001) with 30 third-year Japanese university students who completed the ICAPS 1 month before going to the United States for a 2-week program. In that study, after arriving in the United States, the students attended a 1-day event, which included intercultural seminars; following this event, the students took the posttest. The results indicated that the students' overall ICAPS scores were significantly higher—the same finding for the students in the experimental group in his study. Similar to the Matsumoto et al. research, several studies support individual components of the ICAPS: emotion regulation (Jain, 2012; Pulido-Martos et al., 2013), openness (Woo et al., 2014), flexibility (Chung et al., 2012), and critical thinking (Azevedo et al., 2012; Bloch & Spataro, 2014; Reid & Anderson, 2012; Yoshida et al., 2013).

Similar to the ICAPS component of emotion regulation, Fall et al. (2013) used a survey to investigate the correlation between university students' levels of emotional intelligence and intercultural communication. Fall et al. found that the higher the students' emotional intelligence, the lower the students' intercultural communication apprehension. The authors concluded that higher education business faculty should “strongly consider integrating EI into their business and professional communication curriculum” (Fall et al., 2013, p. 420). As in the Fall et al. study, the sample population

was university students. Both Fall et al. and I note that all students do not have opportunities to be immersed in another culture, so classroom opportunities to help university students develop emotional intelligence are needed.

Jain (2012) discovered that out of 133 common items from Goleman (1995), Salovey and Mayer (1990), and Bar-On's (1997) emotional intelligence inventories, only 21 of those items "were found to be factor-analytically meaningful" (p. 16) in their sample of Indian managers. For this study, I used the Japanese version of the ICAPS, a survey designed, tested, and retested on Japanese university students to ensure that the questions were valid for native Japanese speakers. According to Matsumoto and Hwang (2013), the ICAPS (tested in eight studies) yields evidence for test-retest reliability of .84 for Japanese and concurrent and predictive ecological validities (p. 858).

Similar to Jain's (2012) study, Matsumoto and Hwang's second and third constructs, openness and flexibility, could be difficult to define culturally. Woo et al. (2014) examined the construct of openness and found that the results for the American and Chinese participants were different, making it difficult to generalize the results. Chung et al. (2012) conducted a quantitative study and investigated employees' cognitive flexibility, insight, and self-reflection about their attitudes toward organizational change. This study's single-culture sample (Japanese) is similar to the single culture-sample (Taiwanese) used by Chang et al.; therefore, the results are difficult to generalize to other cultural groups. However, unlike Chang et al., I used data gathered from the outcomes of a classroom approach, including reflective journals, which could be generalized to other

cultural or mixed cultural groups. Future studies will need to be carried out to confirm or disconfirm this assumption.

Critical thinking, the fourth concept in this study, is the ability to reflect on differences critically to bridge the gap between former and present meaning perspectives (Mezirow, 2000). Although the limited number of students in the experimental group demonstrated higher progress on the prepost average mean ICAPS score for critical thinking, the limited data prohibits assumptions. However, qualitative data gathered from students who wrote reflective journals indicated that 35% of the students produced journal entries that bridged the gap between former and present meaning perspectives. I organized these data under the themes: transform and transform plus process. Following Bloch and Spataro's (2014) assumption that students need to be encouraged to use the critical thinking capability as a habit and Mezirow's (1998) assertion that people need to reflect critically before making a decision, students were encouraged to employ their critical thinking ability four times. Each journal entry had a different prompt but the same leading question, "How did your thinking about the statement change after the class discussion or debate? Please explain by giving examples," and was meant to encourage students to discuss or debate the conflicting issue and reflect critically before coming to a conclusion.

The archival qualitative data from 220 journal entries were informative. I coded the data for the first leading question, "Why do you think this statement is important?" under three themes: copied from textbook, premise (why it is important), and premise

plus process (why it is important and what action could be implemented, such as a strategy or way to cope). For the second leading question, “How do you think Japanese people’s beliefs or thinking about this statement differ from people who belong to a different cultural group? Please explain by giving examples,” I used the theme of comparison or comparing differences between Japan and another country. Finally, for the third leading question, “How did your thinking about the statement change after the class discussion or debate? Please explain by giving examples,” I coded the data under two themes: transform (changed their ways of thinking) and transform plus process (how they changed their ways of thinking and what action could be implemented, such as a strategy or way to cope).

Although the Bell et al. (2011) study on reflective journals had a small sample of only seven students, compared to 55 in this study, the results were similar. Bell et al. modified the Kember et al. (1999) coding system to evaluate reflective writing and coded higher level reflection under the themes *process reflection* (how or the method or manner to perceive, think, feel or act) and *premise reflection* (a significant change in perspective). Bell et al. stated that 35% of the journal entries could be reflective, which matches the results of this study. After averaging the mean percentages of the four journals, 35% of the entries were coded under the themes transform (the students changed their perspectives) or transform plus process (the students not only changed their perspectives but also suggested actions, such as strategies or ways to cope with the conflicting issues).

My rationale for selecting reflective journals to gather data came from the theoretical framework for this study, transformative learning theory, and its three main assumptions of transformative learning experiences: creating classroom experiences, discourse, and critical reflection. As seminal theorist, Sanford (1962) claimed, students can develop their personalities if provided with moral and ethical conflicts in learning environments that allow them to gain awareness of those conflicts. Sanford also stated that if students have opportunities to develop critical thinking skills and express their viewpoints to discover their strengths, including their values, they can adapt to social and academic demands more effectively. Thus, the intervention's design originated from the assumption that college students need opportunities to explore various worldviews and participate in discussions or debates to maintain their values or norms through critical reflection and establish the "comprehensibility, truth, and appropriateness or authenticity" (Mezirow, 1991, p. 77) of their discoveries.

The intervention for this study occurred during the final 20 minutes of class. Students (in groups of four or five) were asked to discuss or debate topics designed to facilitate students' questioning of assumptions and beliefs regarding different cultural beliefs and social structures. As Mezirow (2000) posited, individual awareness and critical reflection of assumptions and beliefs could be transformed by learning how to communicate critically and by developing reflective insights. There does seem to be support for Mezirow's theory in the form of the students' reflective journals. Further, Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (2012) claimed that people need to develop



awareness of their culture and values and how they differ from those of others before effective communication with people from different cultural backgrounds can take place. The third journal prompt, “Japanese language and culture should be protected from outside influences,” was added to encourage students to gain awareness of their cultural background and values. Additionally, the second leading question, “How do you think Japanese people’s beliefs or thinking about this statement differ from people who belong to a different cultural group? Please explain by giving examples,” was provided to encourage the students to share their knowledge and understandings of cultural differences through class discussions and debates before reflecting on them to write the journals.

King et al. (2013) interviewed 161 college students on six campuses in the United States regarding how they experienced intercultural learning. While approaches varied, students who developed intercultural communication capabilities were less biased toward people of different cultural backgrounds (King et al., 2013). The long-term outcomes of this study are important to follow, but as the following passage from a student’s reflective journal indicates, some students gained awareness and adapted their thinking:

I have little chance of cultivating relationships with people from different cultural background. So I may have been biased without awareness. But, I have noticed that real experience will do me good. From now on, I want to take chance to cultivate relationships positively.

In a classroom environment, sharing different perspectives on conflicting issues could be accomplished through “learning what others mean” (Mezirow, 2000, p. 9) during collaborative discussions. Xialoi and Huibin (2016) questioned if it is possible to teach the skills to analyze, infer, and evaluate varying topics, viewpoints, or conflicting issues through debate or discussion with people of different cultural backgrounds. However, the design of this study followed Golbeck and El-Mosimany’s (2013) claim that “following the constructivist perspective, knowledge is acquired through a process and transformed through interaction” (p. 44). Through discussions, therefore, people can share their perspectives and alter their viewpoints. The classroom approach in this study allowed for a safe environment for students to exchange their viewpoints, question their peers, and develop new ways of thinking in collaborative groups as evident in one student’s journal entry:

I have never thought about diversity. However, I learned that diversity influences society in a positive way in the class discussion. For example, it makes life interesting and it makes whole systems possible. After the class discussion and working on the journal, I thought that Japanese people need to understand about various thoughts around the world and cooperate with foreigner [*sic*]. If Japanese people will do it, for example, [the] labor shortage will be solved in care services.

I would like people to understand the importance of variety.

As this reflection indicates, the class discussion in groups made it possible for some students to gain awareness of the issue, integrate knowledge, reflect on the discussion,

apply the new knowledge to a problem, and evaluate how to use the new information for positive change.

The findings of this study indicate that the theoretical framework—Mezirow’s (2000) transformative learning theory—were able to “provide a lens for making meaning and guiding a transformative practice” (Taylor, 2000, p. 5). Based on Mezirow’s principles of transformative learning in the classroom, I encouraged students to gain awareness and reflect on cultural differences through class discussions and debates to gain interpersonal competence. For example, in a reflective entry following the discussion on how people from monochronic or polychronic cultures perceive time differently, one student wrote:

I think my former self would be angry if a friend is [*sic*] late for one hour.

However, I read this statement. I knew that it was different in how to catch at time by culture [*sic*], and I felt that respect for other culture was [*sic*] necessary.

The student was able to come to an understanding that cultural practices related to time, and in this case, differ according to a person’s cultural background. Specifically, the student expressed that they changed their way of thinking (“my former self”) to conclude that the difference in the cultural practice needs to be respected.

While the archival qualitative study data were gathered from students who reflected on conflicting topics to write their journals, a future study could be done to explore whether students reflect in during collaborative discussions or debates, following Schön’s (1987) model. By recording and documenting how students engage in reflective

practices during collaborative discussions or debates educators might be able to discover approaches to help students make connections between their new frameworks and past ones to develop awareness of cultural differences.

Before the start of the study, I was curious to discover if facilitating students' development of intercultural competence and interpersonal skills through the discussions and debates on conflicting issues would be difficult, especially for Japanese students. Japanese people, according to Nakatsugawa and Takai (2013), tend to avoid conflicts so as not to lose face or challenge others. However, the students in this study seemed to embrace the opportunities to discuss or debate conflicting cultural beliefs, social structures, and practices and gain new perspectives on differences. For example, one student indicated that when coming up with a solution for a complex problem, it is important to have knowledge of other cultures to develop different ways of looking at the problem because people would find fault with a singular viewpoint. The student expressed that having knowledge and being able to think about a complex problem from different viewpoints would help a person discover better solutions or ways to cope. This indicates that the student was able to grasp the value of debating a conflicting topic from various perspectives, which is different from the stereotypical image of Japanese people being from a collectivistic culture, reluctant to confront others, and always agreeing with one solution. It also shows that dialogue helps people reflect critically, especially if they are open to alternative points of view (Mezirow, 2009).

The results of this study that indicated that students did not avoid conflicts align with the results of Günsoy, Cross, Uskul, Adams, and Gercek-Swing's (2015) study. Günsoy et al. (2015) demonstrated that people from a collectivistic culture tended to confront others verbally instead of using other conflict management strategies, like avoiding or giving way to stronger opposition (Günsoy, Cross, Uskul, Adams, & Gercek-Swing, 2015). In fact, Ogihara, (2017) found that while collectivistic values in the form of respect for parents exist in Japan, individualism is increasing, creating independence and freedom. Ogihara (2017) explored factors, such as family structure (divorce rate and household size), naming practices, words in books, and social values in both the United States and Japan. Although Ogihara's study was limited to two countries, the results indicated that cultures change with time, and stereotyping cultures could constrain not only students from voicing their thoughts freely through discussions or debates but also educators from creating teaching materials to foster students' development.

In the present study, students encountered conflicting topics meant to challenge their worldviews; however, the students did not avoid discussing, debating, and reflecting on these issues. In fact, 80% of students completed all four journal entries and the remaining 20% completed at least 50% of the journal entries. In addition, during the semester, only eight students were absent from the intervention once or twice during the semester, suggesting the students felt safe and willing to participate. One factor that could be explored as a future research topic is how the learning environment plays a role in the development of students' intercultural sensitivity. Thus, the students in this study

exhibited capability and willingness to express their viewpoints on conflicting topics related to cultural beliefs, social structures, and practices, and some of them were able to question their assumptions to demonstrate increased intercultural competence.

### **Limitations**

This study was meant to fill the gap in the literature by examining what classroom approaches are needed to facilitate a culturally-specific group of Japanese college students' development of intercultural competence while exploring why students changed their perspectives. Although the archival reflective journals provided rich data on how and why students changed their perspectives, the quantitative data from the ICAPS survey were limited. As stated in Chapter 1, the main limitations of this study were that data collection was from a single site during and collected during only one semester. Additionally, since the archival quantitative data were limited, only qualitative data could be used to offer insights into how classroom approaches could foster or deter Japanese college students' intercultural competence. Thus, for this mixed-methods study, the archival qualitative data were employed for my interpretations of the classroom intervention and the students' self-reported development of intercultural competence.

Before the study, I assumed that I might have to contend with cultural or language challenges because I am not Japanese; however, there was no perceived limitation. Because the students were English as foreign language learners, their responses to the reflective journal prompts were often short and contained grammatical or word selection errors. Also, some students did not answer the leading questions. It is probable that the

answers could have been more complete if the students were able to read or to answer the questions in Japanese. At the same time, if the students used their native language, this might have influenced their ways of thinking. I suggest that having the directions in both Japanese and English might be helpful in another research attempt. Finally, all researchers are biased when coding data because their knowledge, understandings, and perceptions influence their work. After creating the coding system, I was careful to use only data that fit the themes and provide sample responses. I had the help of a peer debriefer as I created the final dissertation document.

### **Recommendations**

I originally selected a mixed-methods approach as the design of this study. I anticipated that quantitative data could provide an understanding of the students' change in intercultural competence as an outcome and that the qualitative data could elucidate understanding of how they went through that change of developing intercultural competence as a process. Since there were limited quantitative data for meaningful statistical analysis, I used the limited quantitative data as an additional form of qualitative data. Due to the loss of meaningful statistical analysis, I recommend that researchers perform other studies with a larger sample over a longer period. Another limitation was that only one site was used for this study, making it impossible to generalize the results to other populations. Because of the encouraging results of this study, I suggest larger scale studies at multiple sites. While it would be beneficial to see additional work undertaken in the Japanese university context, the broader possibility of a study involving several

universities in different countries could provide valuable data, add to the literature, and contribute to social change on an international scale.

This study was carried out without funding. Future larger-scale studies might benefit from funding and outside support for the implementation of different classroom approaches, providing a clear vision for all administrators, faculty members, and educators. Adequate funding would also assist in obtaining approval from Japan's Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (also known as MEXT) or other government organizations and paying for the ICAPS scale. If this is made possible, several researchers could employ the classroom approaches at the same time and use the same coding system while hiring outside raters, adding interrater reliability. The cost of conducting research on the scale needed to promote positive reforms at institutions of higher education is more than most individual researchers can afford. In addition, the sample populations from universities in more than one country could be generalized to a larger population, adding to the trustworthiness of this future study.

### **Implications for Social Change**

This study could encourage social change by providing valuable insights into how to implement classroom approaches that encourage college students' development of intercultural competence at institutions of higher education. The findings from the archival data from students who experienced the classroom approaches indicate that some students questioned their assumptions and beliefs regarding different cultural beliefs, social structures, and practices, resulting in increased intercultural competence.



College students who develop intercultural competence are more likely to gain membership into local and global societies, reflect critically on their worldviews, and take positive actions. The results of this study show that some students developed awareness of their culture and values and how they differed from others—skills needed before effective communication with people from different cultural backgrounds can take place. The results also indicate that 13 students were able to reflect critically on their assumptions, discover new ways of thinking, and suggest positive actions, such as strategies or ways to cope with conflicting issues.

Nationally, classroom approaches in Japan could promote social changes that are in line with the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology's reforms and laws. The recent changes in Japan's educational system are the result of numerous factors, such as the declining birthrate resulting in fewer students and the aging population, which has caused a drop in the workforce. The changes have created a need to ensure Japan's competitiveness on a global scale and have prompted educational changes. Under Article 7 of the revised Basic Act on Education, universities are now responsible for promoting the development of society through education and research available to larger numbers than in the past (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, n. d.). In addition to Article 7, Japan's Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology claims that higher education should "function effectively in building the characters of individuals, encouraging lifelong learning, as well as promoting social, economic and cultural development and improvement and

securing international competitiveness” (n.p.) as well as encouraging people to solve global issues. This statement implies Japan has taken steps to promote educational initiatives that foster students’ capabilities to promote positive actions in societies. This study could add to this movement and the limited literature on classroom approaches while being a source of information for the university’s administrators and faculty.

Outside of Japan, scholars recommend similar classroom approaches to the one described in this study. As Fall et al. (2013) claimed, there are some students who are unable to participate in study-abroad programs, and it is the responsibility of educators to provide learning environments in which students will have opportunities to develop intercultural competence or emotional regulation, openness, flexibility, and critical thinking to cope and contribute to societies. Through discourse or collaborative group discussions and debates, college students can learn how to express their assumptions, reflect critically on their assumptions and those of others, develop alternative viewpoints, and discover effective actions to take, such as strategies or ways to cope with conflict.

Furthermore, one major finding of this study was that cultural topics need to be connected to both educators and students’ sense of values, purposes, and ethics to be engaging. This was most evident in Webb and Radcliffe’s (2016) study that showed the government-initiated policy on intercultural programs in rural secondary schools in southern Chile did not succeed because the classroom approaches were not culturally relevant for both teachers and students. Most importantly, engaged students, according to Karakas et al.’s (2015) findings, inquire about present and future alternatives to lead

positive actions. As D'Souza, Singaraju, Halimi, and Mort (2016) demonstrated, university students who developed intercultural competence were able to enjoy more positive interactions with people of a different cultural background. This study illustrated that most of the students, who gain awareness and knowledge of conflicting cultural beliefs, social structures, and practices through the classroom approach, could construct different ways of thinking. While only a few of the students in this study were able to create options and actions, the value of the classroom approach is evident.

### **Conclusion**

The ability to participate in interactions, including arbitrations, mediations, or transactions with people who belong to the same culture, is challenging. Participation in these interactions with others from different cultural backgrounds, however, could be perceived as provocative or threatening without the development of intercultural competence and interpersonal skills. The students in this study belong to the College of Business Administration, and some of them could be in situations, business or personal, where expressing their viewpoints, reflecting critically on their own and others assumptions, developing alternative viewpoints while maintaining their values and ethics, and discovering positive actions will benefit them and their communities. Findings from recent studies have shown that unless college students have opportunities to develop intercultural competence, they might form prejudices and stereotypes if they are forced to interact with people from different cultural backgrounds (Fall et al., 2013; Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 2012).

In this study, classroom approaches were evaluated to discover ways to facilitate college students' questioning of assumptions and beliefs regarding different cultural beliefs, social structures, and practices. The students had opportunities to discuss and debate in collaborative groups in a safe learning environment for the final 20 minutes of class and express their reflections by writing their journals as homework. These activities were in contrast to what students normally do in the same class environment. In the traditional class environment, students spend the final 20 minutes doing reading comprehension questions. While some students might be able to gain awareness of conflicting issues by reading texts and answering comprehension questions, they might have a hard time expanding on their understandings to gain capabilities to adapt to changing or conflicting situations without experiences.

Previous studies have shown that experiences gained through study-abroad programs and on-campus intercultural activities could foster students' development of intercultural sensitivity (Chamberlin-Quinlisk, 2005; Soria & Troisi, 2014); however, not all students have opportunities to enjoy such experiences or gain this sensitivity from those experiences. The class experiences of collaborative group discussions and debates created opportunities for students to use their past experiences, employ critical thinking skills, and reflect on new, conflicting issues helping some create new experiences and discover new coping skills. The results of this study suggest that some students in the intervention group who explored over-generalized assumptions about cultural groups,

including their own, could gain an awareness of differences, develop critical thinking skills, and through discourse and reflection, discover the appropriate actions to take.

This study filled the gap in the literature by examining what needs to be done to facilitate how a culturally-specific group of students in a non-Western country could develop intercultural competence through classroom approaches. Although I applied a mixed-methods approach with the hope that archival quantitative data could help provide an understanding of students' change in intercultural competence as an outcome, the data were limited. The archival qualitative data, however, helped provide an understanding of how some students were able to change their ways of thinking and consider actions such as strategies or ways to cope.

There are many unanswered questions left by this study that may lead to future research projects. One area that needs closer examination is how critical multiculturalism, which addresses power relations, and interculturalism, which focuses on diversity and promoting dialogue between people from different cultural backgrounds, could be merged and employed as a classroom approach (Stokke & Lybæk, 2016). With an increased ability to exchange views with people from the same or different cultural backgrounds, students could develop intercultural dialogue to respond to unfamiliar situations and behaviors. Also, instead of students' stereotyping people from the same or different cultural backgrounds into groups, encouraging students to develop intercultural sensitivity could help them maintain their identities and values while recognizing not only individual differences in each culture but differences between cultures.

As Almarza, Martínez, and Llavador (2015) claimed, social norms and values include culturally-specific verbal and non-verbal behavior. This implies that classroom approaches could help students, who are going on study-abroad programs, confirm or disconfirm their knowledge and gain awareness of cultural practices in the countries they will stay in through interactions with students from those countries or with other students who have returned from those countries. In another approach, Vezzali, Crisp, Stathi, and Giovannini (2015) found that college students who practiced imagined intergroup contact were able to decrease their anxiety toward a foreign culture and spend more positive time with people from that culture in a pre-departure program. As students in this study also imagined conflicting situations between their culture and a foreign one, a future study could reveal if the mental stimulation from the course intervention had a beneficial influence on their quality of overseas experiences and intercultural understandings by reducing their anxiety. For non-mobile students, awareness of different cultural worldviews could raise their cultural worldviews, and as Truong and Tran (2014) found in their study, people need to compare their culture with others to discover differences and develop alternative perspectives.

In addition to university students, graduates who experienced this kind of classroom approach could, after leaving the safe environment of the university, use their new perspectives and coping strategies to deal with conflicts. Being able to gain different ways of thinking through discourse and reflective practice could facilitate them in future local and global situations. Thus, cultivating a culturally-specific group of college

students' intercultural competence through an effective classroom approach like the one described in this study could help students develop mutual understandings and effective ways to deal with inevitable cultural conflicts through effective discourse and actions that benefit societies.

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