

# Are International Students Culturally Deficit in Japanese Society? Crossing Cultures Without the Professor's Intervention

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## Introduction

In this article, I shall examine the international experiential learning of multinational students who undertook the student-centered practical projects while studying abroad in a Japanese university. This article investigates the way international students conducted the projects without a professor's intervention to connect them with local agencies. The projects that were undertaken by international exchange students who participated in the Hiroshima University Study Abroad Program (HUSA Program)<sup>1</sup> from October 2015 to July 2016 were titled under the umbrella term of "Development of Multicultural Local Society Practical Group Research Project (DMLS Project)" (*Tabunka Kyōsei no Chiiki Zukuri Jissen Kenkyū Gurūpu Purojekuto*). With the goal of developing a multicultural local society in Japan, international students were assigned with the challenge of cooperating with local schools and public offices. The way the students conducted their group project presents a significant meaning of situated cognition for international students in intercultural education, which involves the issues of students' agency and the cultural paradigm, and the limitations of students' projects without educational intervention. The efforts of the multinational students strategizing a way to work with local agencies without any intervention by an authoritative intermediary revealed many future research issues pertaining to the intercultural education framework in Japan.

When multinational students take the initiative and exercise their agency in Japan, they operate a cultural paradigm that is different from that in the practicum of my internship course, titled "Globalization Support Internship" (Tsunematsu 2016a). In the DMLS Project, without the professor's intervention, the students became agents of the project operation regardless of their involvement of local agencies, and they selected the cultural paradigm with which they felt comfortable.<sup>2</sup> Encounters with unanticipated realities resulted in some groups giving up

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<sup>1</sup> Henceforth, I will refer to "Hiroshima University Study Abroad Program" as "HUSA Program." Hiroshima University has concluded exchange agreements with 76 universities in North America, Europe, Oceania, and Asia in approximately 27 countries and two consortiums in the world (as of November 2016). Approximately 40 students attend the HUSA program annually, and a majority of them study at the Hiroshima University for one academic year. I will refer to the participants of the HUSA Program as "HUSA students" and the HUSA students who took the internship course as "intern students."

<sup>2</sup> Voices of the culturally diverse multinational students on the learning outcome and their self-evaluation are to be researched in detail in another article.

being associated with local bodies: Such outcome differs greatly from the internship practicum, in which the students began their practicum experience by listening to the professor's talk about the cultural dilemmas, conflicts, and incongruity that they will experience in their association with the conservative local culture. By incorporating the comparative perspectives based on my internship course,<sup>3</sup> I shall examine how international students attempted to make their practical project feasible without the intervention of the professor in helping to bridge them with local schools and organizations. I shall also present the limitations of student-centered projects as platforms for international experiential learning when detailed academic guidance is not provided.

### **Discourse on Internationalization in Higher Education in Japan**

In the discourse of internationalization of higher education in Japan, educational development of intercultural communication and cross-cultural understanding have yet to be sufficiently analyzed. Furthermore, real human interactions between international students and people in the local context as well as the resulting authentic conflicts and cultural dilemmas have not been examined in-depth in the research on higher education in Japan. Whitsed and Volet (2011: 146) observed, whereas the intercultural dimensions of internationalization in higher education have been emphasized in the Anglo-European discourse, limited attention has been given to the same issues in the Japanese context. In the discussion of the development of internationalization of Japanese higher education, fostering student competences for globalization and developing "global human resource" ("*gorōbaru jinzai*") have been actively discussed from economic perspectives (Ninomiya, Urabe, Almonte-Acosta 2015; Okada and Okada 2013). The general belief held by the business sectors pertaining to the incompetence of Japanese higher education in educating students with a global mindset with trained knowledge (Willis et al. 2008: 506) is frequently raised. Howe (2009: 386) summarized the phenomenon, in which "Japan's internationalization has been largely driven by government rhetoric and market economics." However, although the role of the university in producing global human resource has been emphasized, practical research on developing intercultural communicative competence and pedagogical development based on the actual students' experiences and situated cognition has not been sufficiently conducted. Howe (ibid.) raised a critical question of whether the increase of international students, international faculty, and courses taught in English have benefited students, institutions, or the nation by introducing some researchers'

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<sup>3</sup> The HUSA program comprises the general group of HUSA students undertaking the DMLS Project. Among them, a subgroup of HUSA interns is selected to participate in the internship practicum.

argument that many Western efforts at internationalizing higher education are merely a commodification of English-language programs.

Kelly (2000: 162) critically observed that in the Australian context, internationalization discourse is based on “education for profit” and values the importance of intercultural contact engineered as part of formal study to create social cohesion (Volet and Ang 1998: 219). However, social cohesion of students from various cultural backgrounds does not happen naturally by the mere presence of international students and staff on campus or by increasing the number of international students. Kelly (2000: 162) introduced the remark of Gursewak Aulakh et al. (cited in Patrick 1997: 6), which states that “using culturally inclusive teaching practices, accessing teaching and learning resources that reflect diversity, and offering high quality courses that are internationally relevant,” are what matters in internationalization of the curriculum in higher education. The discussion of the internationalization of higher education in Japan needs to incorporate the issues of curricula and educational designs that refer to the core values of students.

International students need non-systematized, informal, everyday cognition through interaction with real people in Japan so that they learn to integrate various resources and knowledge to cope with people in real situations (Tsunematsu 2016a: 17). Lave and Wenger (1991) argued that learning in practice is acculturation of joining a community of practice, rather than the application of skills or principles, and specific skills are important by themselves; however, various kinds of skills, knowledge, and experiences need to be combined. Lave and Wenger (ibid.) further proposed that the legitimate peripheral participation is the critical part of the socialization into practice (ibid). Similarly, the experiences gained from the international students’ peripheral participation in a community of practice, which required them to combine different kinds of knowledge and resources in a real life context, resultingly become an educational asset to them.

In Japan, various official policies for promoting internationalization have been implemented recently, and one of them is the development of “Multicultural Co-existence Promotion Plan” (“*Tabunka Kyôsei Suishin Puran*”), which is promoted by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communication since 2006.<sup>4</sup> However, the cultural dilemma and incongruence of cultural differences in the actual scenarios of connecting foreigners with local people are rarely discussed openly, and we need to investigate these realistic issues more extensively from academic, social, political, and educational perspectives. In addition to highly idealistic theoretical discussions on intercultural education, real life issues of cultural

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<sup>4</sup> For further details of the Multicultural Co-existence Promotion Plan promoted by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communication, see the proposal by the Ministry on its homepage.

identities, power relations, and cultural incongruence and dilemmas, need to be examined, including educational, social, and political agendas as well as real human relationships.

### **When International Students Initiate Actions towards Local Schools: Unexpected Reaction**

Approximately 40 international exchange students from North America, Europe, Oceania, and Asia, participate in the HUSA Program annually, and a majority of them study at Hiroshima University for two semesters, starting from the fall semester until the spring semester of the following year. The participant is required to be proficient in either English or Japanese. A majority of the students with high Japanese language proficiency are from Korea, China, and Taiwan. The major field of study of the HUSA students varies, such as Japanese, Asian Studies, International Relations, IT, Business, Engineering, Anthropology, Economics, Biochemistry, amongst others. HUSA students have a strong interest in Japanese language acquisition and Japanese culture, and the majority of the students take one or two Japanese language courses out of the five levels ranging from elementary to advanced level.

The DMLS Project was assigned to all the participants in the HUSA Program 2015-2016, and students were divided into seven multinational groups of five to six students. The following main goals of the DMLS Project were conveyed to students: (1) to develop the ability and skills to apply their academic knowledge of Japanese language and Japanese society to real life settings in Japan; and enhance practical knowledge, (2) to carry out the project to develop multi-culturalism in Japan, (3) to develop leadership and management skills via situated cognition, and (4) to acquire knowledge and skills to connect themselves with the local people in Japan. Students were required to cooperate with one of the local schools, associations, or public organizations that they have selected.

The HUSA students began this one-year project in late October 2015, one month after their arrival until the project completion in July 2016 after which they returned to their home university. Students were expected to conduct several presentations in open international seminars: the project plan presentation in late October, midterm presentations in November and December, and final presentation in July 2016. In these seminars, we invited professors, graduate students, a city council member, local government officials, high school teachers, and industry representatives for evaluation and feedback. Before the presentations, each group was expected to submit to the professor, myself, the worksheet in which the students reported the content of their project, role divisions, progress, communication language, and gains and obstacles working in a multicultural team as well as difficulties in involving the local people. I also gave a short lecture on the hint for HUSA students' successful management of the

projects.

The group projects that the HUSA students undertook were “Introduction to Multicultural Differences through Interactive Ways” (Group 1), “Cultural Exchange via National Celebrations” and “Day Trip to Kagamiyama Castle Ruins” (Group 2), “Introducing Cultures in Elementary School” (Group 3), “Amazing World Culture Festival” and “All English Village” (Group 4), “Wedding and Divorce Traditions across the World” (Group 5), “Japan in Eyes of Foreigners” (Group 6), and “Kurahashi Festival International Exchange” (Group 7). The group conducting the “Kurahashi Festival International Exchange” project joined the activities of the HUSA interns in the “Globalization Support Internship” practicum. The DMLS Project forcibly created the opportunity for international exchange students to interact with other students in the same group, and simultaneously to face the outside world without any authoritative protection. By following the requirement to involve local agencies, students initiated contact with local schools and public offices. This exposed them to the outside world without any artificially created framework and official support by the university or local schools. Unlike the HUSA interns who had studied to acquire knowledge of formal Japanese language usage and formal behavioral codes in official settings, the HUSA students who did not take the internship course had not acquired knowledge of business Japanese nor Japanese behavioral codes.<sup>5</sup>

The challenges of the DMLS Project undertaken by the seven groups of multinational students resulted in three main patterns: (1) teaching English or introducing foreign cultures in the public offices, (2) introducing foreign cultures in elementary schools through the assistance of the Japanese students’ intermediators who had been working as volunteers in the schools, and (3) introducing foreign cultures or conducting presentations about cultural differences on campus, after having decided not to contact the local schools following accounts of other groups’ rejection. Among the seven groups, three groups could work with local schools or public offices; however, all the three groups were initially either ignored or rejected. A shared and strong characteristic of the students’ projects involves the usage of English language, which is perceived as bringing educational merit for the participating public agencies. Creating the opportunity and setting for English practice or introducing foreign

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<sup>5</sup> Every year, several HUSA students take the course, “Globalization Support Internship I: Career Theory and Practice” and “Globalization Support Internship II: Practicum.” Initially, I set the requirement of the advanced level of Japanese proficiency to register for the practicum; however, I now allow enrolment of students regardless of their Japanese language proficiency level. My main criterion, at present, is that the student is highly motivated and determined to undertake the practicum as an intern. This creates cultural diversity in the team of HUSA interns who would be interacting directly with the Japanese society. Furthermore, I have been facing challenges in the theoretical development of the international students’ internship as part of their intercultural education in Japan.

cultures in schools using English is usually welcomed and appreciated.

One of the most notable and radical challenges for the students was the requirement that they had to contact people outside the campus and cooperate with them without the intervention of the professor. Although I had conveyed to my students that they could consult with me whenever they need advice, the students strictly adhered to the requirement of the “non-intervention” policy; consequently, none of the students contacted me for any consultation throughout the year. Rather, all the groups found the possible ways to complete the projects in different ways, although there were only a few groups that involved local agencies as required. The DMLS project posited quite an unusual scenario in international students’ education in a Japanese university on the point that they are exposed to the real society without any cultural intermediation by authoritative figures. It opened the students’ eyes to see Japanese society and its people from new perspectives. Whereas in international exchange events there are intermediators and organizers, such as the professor or schoolteachers, in the DMSL Project, the students interacted directly and independently with the principals or teachers in school. When the international students initiated the interaction, they were at risk of facing an unanticipated non-welcoming reaction. Some students expressed their realization about low social status of students in Japan, with the comment, “In Japan, working people treat students very low in the social hierarchy.”

In the DMLS Project, “the international students’ position shifted to quite a low position from the special, important, or welcomed position with which everyone in the schools often accorded them, especially when they were invited as guests for events. Without the presence of the professor in the process of negotiations, students were ignored, trivialized, or made unwelcomed by the local schools in most of the cases. Even if they were given the opportunity to visit a school, their position differs remarkably from the position when they were invited to international exchange events planned by the schools. When the students were not under the “umbrella of academic protection” of their professor, they were placed in a very different social position in the hierarchy in regard to their relationship with the schools in Japan. Therefore, most of the HUSA students who had experienced an overnight homestay planned by the local school encountered two drastically different positions. This contrasting experiences made them wonder the reason for the different treatment. Critical comments by some students, such as “those international events are just one dimensional” and “some events are for people here, not for us” depict the fundamental difference between artificially created events and real life. Some students felt inclined to disengage from this artificial framework set by the schools and proposed that “you should not restrict yourself to those kinds of events” and “regardless of your Japanese level, it is better to explore new opportunities.” The more the

students were exposed to authentic situations, the more strongly they appreciated the value of challenges and new undertakings in natural circumstances.

What are the possible difficulties faced by the HUSA students in the DMLS Project? Difficulties lie in various factors, such as how to cope with cultural barriers, courtesy expected in Japan in organizational interactions, concept of social hierarchy, managing *uchi/soto* (inside/outside) relationships<sup>6</sup>, and how to present the project to schools in a way that makes sense for them. In the seminars, the students expressed their recognition of their lack of appropriate language skills, acquisition of courtesy, and knowledge on how people initiate their first contact in Japanese social settings—They explained, “I do not know how to use *keigo* (honorifics).<sup>7</sup> Casual friendship and talking to officials outside the campus is a different category. I am so scared.” Their lack of knowledge of appropriate courtesy expected in Japanese society and appropriate usage of Japanese language in official contexts resulted in the students backing off or giving up, in some cases, when their request for an appointment for visitation was declined by the school. The students expressed their fear of official interaction where they are expected to use formal Japanese language, which they have not mastered.

The statement, “In order to make [the project] more culturally Japanese, we need to know the culture and also Japanese language. Without learning these, we cannot do this,” reflects the belief of the students that solely taking Japanese language courses and cultural classes would not suffice in building their confidence to use what they have learnt to interact with real officials and teachers. I could see the crucial difference between the DMLS Project without the professor’s intervention and the practicum of the “Globalization Support Internship” course where students are given detailed guidance and strict training by a professor for language usage and appropriate forms of behavior not only in classrooms but also through situated learning. Actual interactions with local government officials and people from an industry make a significant difference in the students’ development of confidence.

What makes international students take a step further beyond their limit, go out of their

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<sup>6</sup> Rosenberger (1994:91) proposes that social life operates along an axis with the “outer pole of more distant, authoritative relations” and the “inner pole of more intimate, spontaneous relations”. In the *soto* context, discipline and detachment from personal feelings are encouraged, to enhance the group’s productivity in relation to other groups. In contrast, in the *uchi* context, the expression of personal feelings as individual selves is allowed (Bachnik 1987; Lebra 1976; Rosenberger 1989). Bachnik (1992:155) points out that for Japanese, learning “the ability to shift successfully from spontaneous to disciplined behavior, through identification of a particular situation along an ‘inner’ or ‘outer’ axis” is a crucial social skill in achieving adulthood.

<sup>7</sup> In Japanese language, people differentiate speech levels based on social hierarchy and relationships. The speaker’s concept of social statuses, hierarchy, and relationships about himself/herself and the addressee is reflected in the selection of speech levels to be used. In real life, the concept of hierarchy, formality/informality, and relationships is very complex. Kondo (1990) examined the complexity of identity and power relationships, both of which shift depending on the various contexts in Japanese society.

cultural frame of reference, and undertake a challenge in a new cultural environment? Why in the DMLS Project did the majority of groups decide to give up cooperating with local agencies? We need to consider some factors that affected the students' attitudes, besides the lack of Japanese proficiency, as expressed by some students in the statement, "since we did not know the appropriate usage of *keigo*, we could not communicate well." Appropriate knowledge of *keigo* could definitely help with cross-cultural negotiation in Japan; however, there are more factors that affected the students' decision to withdraw from these challenges, such as difficulty of managing the project, lack of cooperation among the members, motivational issues, role assignment and work divisions, and leadership, which need to be considered. For students to be able to manage these issues, the value of educational intervention cannot be underestimated, as such intervention can increase and stimulate their knowledge and skills, such as leadership, to overcome the challenges of the project. This notion was clearly expressed in the following student statement: "Without the guidance of the professor, students do not know where they are going, and therefore, they try to finish the project within their safety zones."

### **Students Go Out of their Own Frame of Reference: When Students Feel Safe**

Brewer and Cunningham (2009: 13) argued that in order to produce real experiential learning, students need to be taught "how to learn experientially," which is "how to observe, listen, describe, interpret, and reflect." International students who study abroad in Japan usually have a strong interest in Japanese language and culture, and they have often taken such related courses. However, to be able to apply their academic learning in real life, students need situated cognition in which they would learn the behavioral code and appropriate usage of Japanese language, based on their derived understanding of the social positions of the people involved, including the concept of *uchi* (inside) and *soto* (outside). Educators need to be aware that considerable amount of time and efforts are needed for international students to reach the stage where they feel comfortable in their association with Japanese people in public settings. Students do not feel safe speaking Japanese officially even if their Japanese proficiency is advanced. One of the reasons why the majority of the groups in the DMLS projects eventually came to avoid being associated with local schools and decided not to diverge from their own cultural framework is because of their feelings of insecurity to explore what they know theoretically. When students do not feel safe enough to go out of their frame of reference, they stay in their safe cultural paradigm. I have observed cases in which international students struggled with their feelings of security in official settings with regard to their Japanese



language usage and behavior.

For example, in official meetings with public officials where appropriate courtesy and appropriate use of *keigo* are required, even the students who have acquired an advanced level of Japanese language would usually become quiet. HUSA interns usually start exhibiting confidence after using *keigo* with class instruction from the professor. Aside from learning different types of language register, students gradually gain confidence in the process of learning how people can be hierarchically positioned within organizations in sensitive ways, and how any person involved is expected to behave accordingly (Tsunematsu 2016a). HUSA interns begin speaking *keigo* with confidence and taking initiatives in greeting the officials. This is not to say that HUSA interns who experienced internship practicums are better educated, but rather, I am presenting the different cultural paradigms in which the students have chosen to operate, depending on the type and level of educational interventions to achieve the goal. The way in which international students exercised agency to carry out the project in the Japanese cultural context should also be noted. They might not have involved the local people, but they carried out the project without losing their agency. International students were never passive in the process of carrying out the project; furthermore, they chose their own cultural paradigm.

One of the crucial differences between the DMSL Project and internship practicum is that student interns feel “safe” in experiencing trials and errors, being academically supervised and supported by a professor, and being encouraged to try what they can do without being afraid. King et al. (2013: 80) introduced their findings in that the feeling of being safe is a critical factor in students’ willingness to engage in intercultural learning, and that in a safe environment, students can explore, ask questions, and examine their own beliefs about other cultures. Students need to be placed in a safe space where they can openly ask questions about the cultural differences, express doubts, and critically analyze their own interpretations about other cultures. Intern students develop courage to make mistakes in their usage of *keigo* and in their understanding of *uchi/soto* and hierarchy. These subtle and sensitive factors, which are very difficult to understand yet crucial in association with Japanese people, can intimidate international students and discourage them from challenging themselves, unless they are initially placed in an educational environment where they feel safe to test their capabilities. Experiential learning in a safe, supportive, and encouraging environment makes a significant difference in students’ confidence. Further, the academic support of the professor and social support of the local people enable students to develop a strong sense of responsibility. In addition, they are given autonomy to make decisions about their project, and this empowers them (Tsunematsu 2016b).

Brewer and Cunningham's suggestion of students' need to have a grasp of the intercultural theory (2009: 12) should be noted if educators want to foster students' intercultural competence. Learning intercultural theory, which explains the workings of people's mindset within their own cultural framework that limits interpretation of people's behavior in other cultures, can help students become aware of their own mindset. However, merely teaching the intercultural theory in a classroom does not help students to venture forth from their cultural framework since students cannot connect theory and actual practice in real life very easily. The language code input by the teaching of the theory in the classroom does not necessarily correspond with the students' language coding of their real life experiences in different cultures. Education where students can connect theory and practice via reflection, explanation, and instruction is needed.

### **Encountering Cross-Cultural Dissonance: Meaning of Educational Intervention**

King et al (2013: 69) discussed the significance of educational intervention suggested by a considerable number of studies. Educational intervention can increase students' knowledge of other cultures, cross-cultural sensitivity, and capacities for intercultural communication. The value of a professor's educational intervention is in her/his role to create appropriate educational settings by theoretically defining the assets of the international students so that they can exercise their agency (Tsunematsu 2016b). When international students experience cultural differences, barriers, and sometimes even cultural dilemmas, which do not allow them to carry out smoothly their assignment, the use of educational intervention can bring in new perspectives and approaches. Students tend to evaluate and judge Japanese culture as the conclusive cause for their dissatisfactory result without reflection.

To shift from such a perspective, students need to reflect on the implications of their experience. Behind the cause, there are significant cultural, social, political factors that entail great learning for students concerning educational and social policies in a global context as well as in Japanese society. Educational intervention can foster students' examination about Japanese society through their real life experience with local schools. Brewer and Cunningham's (2009: 12) highlighted the productive meaning of the experiences of "understanding the nature of intercultural dynamics and the cognitive, behavioral, and affective dimensions of the experiences of cross-cultural dissonance." Experiencing cultural dilemmas and cross-cultural dissonance becomes a key for students to learn real cross-cultural communication by situating them in the real dynamics of peoples' lives that are deeply embedded in the local culture and history.

For cross-cultural learning, Brewer and Cunningham (2009: 14) advocated for the description - interpretation - validation - explanation (DIVE) model rather than the description - interpretation - evaluation (DIE) model suggested by Bennet et al. (1977). They argued that the validation step is crucial since interpretation can easily slip into evaluation, which takes place only within the students' existing frame of reference. In order for students to be pushed further into another frame of reference, the cycle of description - interpretation - validation plays a significant role. The issue of how students can get outside of one's own frame of reference to "see" another culture and enhance their deep learning needs to be examined carefully since both evaluation and judgment can be closely connected (Brewer and Cunningham 2009: 14).

In the DMLS Project, the majority of the students did not go out of their cultural frame of reference after having interpreted that Japanese society is closed to foreigners and does not generally accord respect to students. As a result, the majority of the students gave up contacting the local schools, except for a few groups that could acquire the assistance of Japanese students as intermediators to connect them with the schools. After they gave up their original plan, they changed their directions to complete the project—mainly based on the Western paradigm in which they fully utilized English throughout their project and behaved accordingly without adjusting themselves to the Japanese behavioral code or without actually involving local schools or associations. On the contrary, in the internship practicum, judgment and evaluation of Japanese rituals and practices that appear "alien" to the foreigner are more like the starting point of the learning process, and from there, students begin to create working solutions and strategies for their project.

The other reason for international students to refrain from going out of their cultural frame of reference is emotional barrier. Students' feelings and emotions in their struggle to negotiate with elementary and high schools and the ensuing rejection by these schools cannot be underestimated. Their emotions in their experiences of intercultural contact affect their perception of Japanese people and society as well as their future association with Japan. King et al. (2013: 75) introduced, based on their analysis of students' narratives, the significance of students' emotional reactions in educational context that influence their perception of intercultural experiences and choice for future intercultural interactions. The importance of international students' emotional reactions through their intercultural interactions in their study abroad experience cannot be overstated. When students evaluated and judged their experiences within the students' existing cultural frame of reference (Brewer and Cunningham 2009: 14) in the DMLS Project, they chose to change the direction of the project. They felt uncomfortable or dejected after the unexpected rejection and inferior treatment, as such, they saw no reason

to continue the same process without any form of immediate academic guidance provided. They would not wait for useful feedback from professors and other working people attending the upcoming open seminar.

### **Students Enter the New Sphere of Different Cultural Paradigm**

A crucial difference between the DMLS Project and internship is whether international students go out of their “safety zones” of their cultural frame of reference, and challenge themselves in making sense of their presence in a new cultural context. The students’ reflection of the differences in people’s values, behavioral codes, and social expectations generates different experiences. Without educational intervention and instruction, students feel “unsafe” in official settings due to the prospect of facing different sets of values and expectations, and such apprehension narrows down the spectrum of students’ reflection of their experiences. As a result, they tend to regress from a new challenge of utilizing their Japanese language and cultural understanding in a new and unexperienced field. King et al. (2013: 76, 80) introduced the case of students who felt disappointment, isolation, and anger, in an environment where they felt unwelcomed and unsafe for respectful intercultural experiences. Their study showed that the students withdrew from intercultural learning experiences in contrary to their initial interest. This is very similar to the majority of the HUSA students who decided to withdraw from the new challenges.

In the internship practicum designed to closely work with local industries, administration offices, and schools, the significance of the Japanese cultural paradigm and the intern students’ recognition for it cannot be underestimated. When I negotiated with the local bodies, I had no choice but to deal with them in the Japanese cultural paradigm as an intermediary (Tsunematsu 2016a). The local people’s lives are deeply embedded with Japanese cultural context, and there is no way to operate any form of negotiation using the Western paradigm, which is the main cultural framework of the HUSA students. When intern students cooperate with local organizations, whose lives are locally embedded deeply, following the custom is a must. Concomitantly, I need to teach Japanese organizational relationships, appropriate behavioral code in Japanese society, and formal Japanese language usage to intern students, if I were to connect them successfully to local agencies in formal ways.

When the international students managed the DMLS Group projects without the intervention of the professor, they operated the projects within their cultural paradigm that makes sense to them and that can realistically function without any struggle. All the groups of multinational students eventually found a way to complete the projects focusing on

multiculturalism by using predominantly the Western paradigm where students speak English. Among the seven groups, only one group worked with a public office and carried out the project for children to study English or introduce the students' culture in Japanese. In these kinds of events, the international students' use of the English language is highly valued and appreciated, as some students expressed, "we were treated like important dignitaries." The students' high position was well shown in the way the public office treated them, such as providing pick-up service to take them to the office, or seating them in the important person's seats in meetings. These unwritten signs are indications of the officers' perception of the hierarchy and power relations of the involved parties. When English teaching is involved without any cost, there is more possibility that international students are appreciated and valued, although its value differs depending on who needs to hold the event.

## **Conclusion**

Voronchenko et al. (2015: 1489) proposed that in the twenty-first century education, "the role of a teacher has shifted from an expert to a designer of reflective and collaborative projects as means of providing students with effective learning contexts." To enhance learning outcomes, I continuously had to re-examine the course design by reflecting on the difficulties and challenges faced by the students, such as taking the leadership role, managing time, workload, motivation of team members, and integration of skills and knowledges (Tsunematsu 2012). Brewer and Cunningham (2009: 12) argued that students need to have "a basic understanding of the cultural, social, political, historical, and environmental dynamics of the place" when they study abroad, in addition to knowledge of the language spoken. To enhance the learning outcome of students, educators will need to create intercultural learning settings that enable students to learn to combine the dynamics of their knowledges from multiple perspectives.

The international students' experiences via the DMLS Project proves that they are able to initiate, plan, manage, and complete a project without a professor's intervention if the challenges are not too extreme. Rather than interpreting international students as culturally deficit in their trials of practical projects in Japan, their exercise of agency, and the fact that they found ways to practically carry out the project should be highly valued. Some students expressed the feeling of achievement, and this can be attributed to the sense of self-efficacy, generated in the social context where "the student feels that her/his contribution towards a particular task is valued by the team" (Brennan, et al. 2013: 76).

Lillyman and Bennet (2014: 63) pointed out the tendency to highlight international

students' experiences at university level from a deficit perspective, rather than from a positive perspective. Similarly, Marginson (2014: 8) questioned the way a host country's culture is normalized, and international students are seen as "in deficit in relation to the host country's requirements," and suggested that "international students form their self-trajectories somewhere between home country identity, host country identity, and a larger set of cosmopolitan options" (Marginson 2014: 6). Marginson (ibid.) contended that an international education program is needed to "strengthen the agency freedom of students, and its scope and resources, to facilitate this educational process of self-formation." The way students expressed themselves by fully exercising their agency and putting together the team members' resources, even without the professor's instructions, should be highly valued and recognized.

Having recognized the value of the students' trials in the DMLS Project first, the limitations of the operation and the achievements of the student-centered DMLS Project should be analyzed. Student-centered projects that are associated with the local people, without educational intervention, can be carried out in a limited cultural paradigm. The DMLS Project recommends the significant role of educational intervention so that students can be assisted to go out of their own limited frame of reference. In order for students to utilize their theoretical knowledge of Japanese society and Japanese language in new cultural settings in which they perceive will affect their courtesy and maturity, they need to be given relevant instruction prior so that they can feel safe in practically applying their knowledge without being too worried about misjudgment.

When students feel safe about their new trials in sensitive areas, such as courtesy and judgment by others in an educational environment with a foreign culture, and feel supported by an educator, they would try to go beyond their limitations and frame of reference in that new culture. Students' trials and errors in situated learning in an emotionally and academically safe environment can create new enriching experiences. The meaning of educational bridges to connect international students to people in a new and seemingly too foreign and unsafe culture cannot be underestimated. The way international students carried out the student-centered projects suggested new possibilities for intercultural education in Japan in which students' agency can find ways to be associated with real people. Furthermore, it suggested the significance of the educators' role for the development of intercultural education that can help students broaden their spectrum and approach new cultures in a new paradigm. Experiential learning in study abroad experiences opens up new possibilities for students to face the fluid, hybrid, and complex world today in the process of their self-formation; therefore, the educators need reflective analyses for its further development.

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