

Developing Global Mindset Onboard. Challenges of the Ship for World Youth Program of Japan

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Abstract

The Ship for World Youth (SWY) program, operated by the Cabinet Office, Government of Japan, for the past 23 years, is a program that involves youth from 18 to 30 years of age from Japan and countries around the world. It aims to promote cross-cultural understanding and global cooperation among youth by exchanging knowledge and experiences, and developing their leadership skills through open dialogue and practical learning activities while they live onboard for 43 days.

The study examines how the 22nd SWY program in 2010 tried to connect intercultural communication theories to onboard practices for participants to develop global mindsets in a unique closed environment; limited space, time pressures, different languages and behaviors, with which to adjust were some of the challenges. It gives one aspect of an educationalevaluation using the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) (Hammer 1999; Hammer and Bennett and Wiseman 2003; Hammer2007) to evaluate participants' development of cross-cultural sensitivity, which is the fundamental mindset for global education. The result of the IDI showed the participants' growth through intercultural interaction; the participants were guided to shift from absolute dualism (inwhich right or wrong are clearly marked) to contextual relativism (in which one evaluates any position by its appropriateness to a defined context) and went beyond. The participants had to be responsible for creating their own humanistic guidelines, making personal choices, which are believed to be the crucial attitude to work successfully in global contexts.

Key words: international youth program, cross-cultural sensitivity, global mindset

Background of the "Ship for World Youth" (SWY) Program

The Ship for World Youth (SWY) program, operated by the Cabinet Office, Government of Japan, is a program that involves youth from Japan and countries around the world. Each year, approximately 140 Japanese youth and a similar number of youth from overseas (12 youth from 12 different countries) board the SWY for a 43-day journey⁵⁷.

In 2010, with approximately 280 participants, the 22nd SWY left Yokohama port on January 22nd, visited Dubai and Chennai for three days each, and returned to Tokyo Bay on March 5th. For residential space, each participant shared a cabin with two other participants from other countries. Many challenges were faced by participants, such as communication gaps, differences in life style and personality, not to mention cultural and language differences, although most of the participants were fluent enough in English to carry out discussions. The program literally isolated youth from the Internet, mobile phones or even a

⁵⁷See the appendix

TV, and forced them to cooperate and train themselves to be leaders in the future society. They had to solve problems and challenges within this limited space on the ship.

Cross-cultural understanding as a discussion course

One of the structured activities onboard and the most focused curriculum was the course discussion. Seven different themes were offered for these discussions: Youth Development, Volunteerism, Education, Environment, Corporate Social Responsibility, United Nations, and cross-cultural understanding. All participants were assigned to one course, based on their theme choice for the most part (some arrangement was done to even numbers). This study focuses on the participants of the Cross-cultural Understanding course (CCU hereafter), as I was requested to be the advisor (the person who facilitates and teaches the CUU course) this year. During the voyage, seven sessions of the course were held. Participants implemented what they learned in the course during their daily lives onboard the ship.

The participants

The CCU course had 42 participants (from ages 18 to 30 years). Among them, 20 were overseas youth, with one or two from 12 different countries (Australia, Bahrain, Ecuador, Egypt, Greece, India, Kenya, Oman, Sri Lanka, Turkey, UAE, and Yemen) and the rest were Japanese participants. Among the 42 course members, 27 were female and 15 were male. All of them had either graduated from or were still attending universities, the length of stay in countries other than their own ranged from 0 to 2 years (each person), and the average length was 1.5 months. Most of their former cross-cultural learning/training experiences were limited to courses at their universities. None of them had taken specific training for cross-cultural communication or cross-cultural understanding. The type of exposure to "cultural others" varied; some of them were interacting/working with cultural others in offices or universities, and some explained, "I do not recognize any foreigner in my daily environment." Some common aspects of the CCU course participants were their keen interest in the subject of cross-cultural understanding and their desire to work effectively with cultural others after the program. In short, participants were not those who were already knowledgeable about or had experiences in cross-cultural settings. The common language on the ship and in the course was English, and most of their language skills were sufficient enough to handle discussions on various topics related to cross-cultural understanding.

Main learning objectives and theoretical frameworks

The main objective of the course was to find individual answers for better cross-cultural understanding. The main course questions were: what is cross-cultural understanding and how can we be successful with it? I used three main key words for the CCU course: empathy, suspension of negative judgment, and acceptance. These are described as follows.

Empathy

Empathy has been recognized as one of the key elements in communicating across cultures (Bennett 1986a; Bennett 1986b; Broome 1991; Calloway-Thomas 2009). Participants reached a common recognition that empathy was the key for cross-cultural understanding; it was important to put oneself in the other person's shoes.

Suspension of negative judgment

Besides empathy, another essential concept for CCU was to "suspend judgment," or avoid an attitude of value judgment (Ataman 2005). Since the program had youth from many different regions, countries, and religions, with intense everyday interactions, this was the attitude on which I wanted to focus.

Acceptance

Acceptance is one of the fundamental concepts for diversity training (Sonnenschein 1999). Acceptance can vary from "a tendency to recognize patterns of cultural difference in one's own and other cultures" (Hammer) to "acceptance of or adaptation to cultural difference" (ibid). In this CCU course, the focus was to "indicate a worldview that can comprehend and accommodate to complex cultural differences" (Hammer and Bennett 1998).

In this diverse multicultural context, it was important to give participants some framework to develop their attitudes toward cultural sensitivity, so the Development Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (Bennett 1986a) was introduced for this course, where "acceptance" was considered to be a crucial step to an ethno-relativistic attitude. Throughout the program, participants were encouraged to reflect upon their own learning strategies and to apply their experiences to Kolb's model of the experiential learning cycle (Kolb 1984).

Cultural Assimilator

"Cultural Assimilator" was used as one of the methods to teach how to decipher cultural interactions or conflicts happening onboard. It was first developed in the 1960s for the U.S. Office of Naval Research to train sailors and ambassadors of the U.S. Since Cushner and Brislin published their book *Intercultural Interactions* (1986), the technique has been used for various training occasions (Landis and Bhagat 1996; Bhawuk, Podsiadlowski, Graf and Triandis 2002; Shaules and Katsura 1998).

The cultural assimilator technique involves one episode or a story called a "critical incident" that involves two parties from different cultural backgrounds and beliefs (usually a typical belief of that culture) (Wang et al 2000). However, one unique cross-cultural learning aspect aboard the ship was the context of "cultural general" (Cushner 1996) approaches; there was no particular "host culture"⁵⁸ to which to adapt so the participants would establish their own multicultural rules for working together. Many concrete incidents arise during this type of program that allow participants to discuss these concepts, but incidents that embarrass participants should be avoided.

After using cultural assimilator the question becomes, "Now that I know the reason, what can I do to 'accept' the cultural values of this other person and still live happily in the same cabin together?" The participants' discussion was guided to the conclusion that there is no one "correct" answer, but both parties have to communicate when a similar incident happens. One could still say you are not comfortable sharing a toothbrush with someone, even after recognizing someone's reason. Cultural acceptance does not necessarily mean you "agree" with the value (Bennett 1986). The two parties could also establish rules when needed. Communication was always noted as the key to expand participants' views of "common sense", which is the first step toward the acceptance of other cultural values. Participants were encouraged to use their own cultural experiences in their daily lives onboard to apply the model of the Experiential Learning Cycle with DIE analysis.

DMIS theory

The growing discovery and awareness of the participants was guided through the stages of the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) introduced by Bennett (1986a, 1986b, and 1993). The way the individual interprets the cultural experience and places it into her/his worldview can be seen as a result of the complexity of cognitive structure. Hammar and Bennett (2003) state that "The DMIS constitutes a progression of worldview 'orientations toward cultural difference' that comprise the potential for increasingly more sophisticated intercultural experiences" (Hammer and Bennett 2003) with five stages. In other words, if the

⁵⁸Although, Japanese law was enforced onboard for legal matters.

intercultural experiences and training are successful, the participants' worldview would progress from "Denial", "Polarization", "Minimization", "Acceptance", and then to "Adaptation"⁵⁹.

In general, cross-cultural training requires the trainer to observe three dimensions of the participants, as it also requires handling complex situations (Paige and Martin 1983). Those dimensions, as applied to this course, would be: 1. Behavior requirements, 2. Culture learning focus, 3. Risk of failure and/or self-disclosure. When introducing the DMIS model, the level of the risk of self-disclosure should be monitored, as the model can be taken as judgmental and a threat to participants (Shaules 2008). Fortunately, the CCU course had very open-minded and potentially accepting youth, so it did not require too much effort for me to create a safe learning environment. Nevertheless, I acknowledged that for some participants this would be a distinctive learning experience that might make them uncomfortable if their beliefs and values were challenged.

Evaluations of the course

IDI

To determine the education measurement of the CCU course, the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI), which is based on the theory of DMIS, was used. IDI was developed by Hammer and Bennett (1998) and is currently in its 3rd version of the computer-based edition. For an onboard activity without PCs, the IDI version two was used, which is a 50-item paper and pencil instrument that measures six stages of DMIS. It has been translated into twelve languages, and the participants were able to choose between the English and Japanese versions. The 42 CCU participants took the inventory twice, three days before the onboard program started (Jan. 18, 2010) and three days before the program finished (March 2, 2010).

Results from IDI

The results are summarized in the following table. In Table 1, Perceived Sensitivity indicates "how you rate yourself in terms of intercultural sensitivity" (Hammer and Bennett 1998); in other words, it is a person's idealistic worldview that does not include the person's actual development. On the other hand, Developmental Sensitivity indicates a person's "developmental" intercultural sensitivity that is "adjusted to show the effect of ethnocentrism on the development of ethno-relativism" (ibid.); this is the way a person can actually rate him/herself on intercultural sensitivity. The result shows the overall increase of both "Perceived" and "Developmental" scores by percentage.

The second section, Worldview Profile, indicates the changes of a person's actual development within each stage of DMIS. The actual "Profile" explains (ibid.):

DD (denial–defense) Scale: Indicates a worldview that simplifies and/or polarizes cultural difference.

R (reverse) Scale: Indicates a worldview that reverses "us" and "them" polarization, where "them" is superior.

M (minimization) Scale: Indicates a worldview that highlights cultural commonality and universal issues.

AA (acceptance–adaptation) Scale: Indicates a worldview that can comprehend and accommodate complex cultural differences.

EM (encapsulated marginality) Scale: Indicates a worldview that incorporates a multicultural identity with confused cultural perspectives.

⁵⁹ The current DMIS model is slightly different as the instrument to measure the sensitivity (IDI) was upgraded from v.2 to v.3. http://idiinventory.com/pdf/idi_sample.pdf

Table 1: Changes measured by IDI (group average, n=42)

	Before the program	After the program	Change before and after the program
Intercultural Sensitivity (out of 145)			
Perceived Sensitivity	120.00	124.48	3.1 % ↑
Developmental Sensitivity	88.94	96.50	5.2 % ↑
Worldview Profile (out of 5)			
DD(denial-defense) Scale	3.92	3.92	0%
R(reverse) Scale	3.56	3.78	4.4 % ↑
M (minimization) Scale	2.78	3.00	4.4 % ↑
AA (acceptance-adaptation) Scale	3.43	4.00	11.4 % ↑↑
EM (encapsulated marginality) scale	3.80	4.00	4 % ↑

The calculated numbers in Table 1 show the average scores of the 42 participants. When the figure is larger than 3.66, developmental issues in this area are said to be "resolved"; these are shown in bold-face numbers. If the figure is between 2.33 and 3.66, developmental issues in that area are "in transition." The figures lower than 2.33 indicate that developmental issues in that area are "unresolved." For this group, none of the issues were in the "unresolved" condition.

Results showed that the participants' development on the DD (denial–defense) Scale did not seem to change, the R (reverse) issues are resolved, but the M (minimization) Scale went up, although it was still in the "in transition" stage. From this result, the developmental change in the AA (Acceptance–Adaptation) Scale is the largest. However, when the profile is further broken down to detailed clusters, it disclosed the particular challenges of this program.

Table 2 shows each scale (except for R Scale and EM Scale) broken down to clusters, and further, the Denial Cluster and Adaptation Cluster have two categories under each of them. Among them, "Avoidance of interaction with cultural difference" in the DD (Defense–Denial) Scale decreased by 6.6%, although, it stayed in the "resolved" area. This is the only category where participants' development moved backwards. It is almost as if participants decided to back off from their initially active interactions.

Table 2: Detailed changes measured by IDI (group average, n=42)

	Before the program	After the program	Change before and after
DD (Defense-Denial) SCALE	3.92	3.92	0%
<Denial Cluster>	4.00	4.00	0
Disinterest in cultural difference	3.75	4.00	5 ↑
Avoidance of interaction with cultural difference	4.33	4.00	- 6.6 ↓
<Defense Cluster>	3.83	3.83	0
R(Reverse) SCALE	3.56	3.78	4.4↑
M(Minimization) SCALE	2.78	3.00	4.4↑
<Similarity Cluster>	2.80	2.80	0
<Universalism Cluster>	2.75	3.25	10 ↑↑
AA (Acceptance-Adaptation) SCALE	3.43	4.00	11.4 ↑↑
<Acceptance Cluster>	3.60	4.20	12 ↑↑
<Adaptation Cluster>	3.33	3.89	11.2 ↑↑
Cognitive frame-shifting	3.25	3.75	10 ↑↑
Behavioral code-shifting	3.40	4.00	12 ↑↑
EM (Encapsulated marginality) SCALE	3.80	4.00	4↑

Minimization was also an area that participants found difficult to develop. If a person was not used to collaborating with people from so many different cultures, it was understandable that they kept focusing on avoidance of conflict. One way to avoid conflict would have been to enforce the area of "minimization" by focusing on commonalities, which kept the participants in the "In transition" phase.

The development of the AA (Acceptance–Adaptation) Scale is more significant than the other developmental scales. This result shows that the overall targeted educational goal of SWY was achieved in both cognitive and behavioral development.

It is assumed that participants accepted each other's cultural differences and interactions through different tasks and daily activities by living onboard. Nevertheless, they wanted to somehow avoid close interactions with each other from time to time. As formerly mentioned, this program is unique in the sense that no one can physically escape from the closed environment of the ship for 43 days, and additionally, everyday life was filled with the expectation to interact with people from different cultures during the discussions and volunteer activities.

Discussion

The overall result shows that this program could not simply give seven sessions on "cross-cultural understanding" and expect participants to feel that they "understood" each other. In order to improve results, a number of pre-departure seminars also need to be given, plus full support for those who face culture fatigue, and a more structured CCU curriculum should be provided to all the participants, not only those who take the CCU course. If those who took the course and learned some theories to monitor themselves gave the above results, then I wonder what would happen if all participants took a CCU course. Nevertheless, this program has been known as a life-changing event for most participants of the past twenty years, and keeps its high reputation in and out of the country.

For many participants, the environment onboard was tougher than they had expected. No personal space for privacy, challenging language barriers, limitations on food choices, pressure from the group work, conflict in leadership styles, inexperience in cross-cultural interaction, false expectations, time restrictions, and more would make most young people in the world fairly frustrated. Nevertheless, they have their pride and responsibility as representatives of their countries, and moreover, this is a program they chose to join. Knowing that they cannot complain about the environment, they had to choose how much interaction they were willing to undertake, and how they would be willing to stretch their limits to accept whatever "weird" behavior their peers demonstrated. It was quite commendable that all of them not only survived, but left the ship with strong peer bonding, carrying ideas for post-program collaborations across the world. As Seelye (1996) quoted from Perry (1970), when a person shifts from dualism (in which right or wrong are clearly marked) to contextual relativism (in which one evaluates any position by its appropriateness to a defined context), then one will go into "commitment in relativism", where "it is possible to accept the viability of many points of view but one makes personal choices which are grounded in a critical assessment of context. In this stage, one becomes responsible for creating one's own ethical guidelines and making personal choices" (ibid.). Indeed, this program challenges participants to use their ethical guidelines, and if the individual didn't have much experience of their everyday beliefs or cultural values being challenged, one could have easily felt threatened when they had to choose their actions based on their ethical guidelines. The choice may not have been the same as their cultural peers would have made, which could create further confusion for that person. I observed that the Japanese participants particularly struggled with this since they are used to following a group decision but now had to develop their own ethical guidelines; and this is the direction for further education and training for youth development in this world of globalization.

Several remarks made me believe in the enormous possibility of the participants' capacity to change. One very religious Muslim participant told me in the early days of the program that Islam was the only way to save "poor" and "confused" people in the world, and he thought it was his mission to save the world. He was pretty serious and somehow judgmental about the

other participants' behaviors. His IDI scale showed "unresolved" in the DD and M scales before the program started. During the program, his comments became positive as he was really enjoying the variety of people and thoughts. His worldview changed so much that he even worried about his re-entry culture shock at the end of the program. His IDI scales shifted to "resolved" in DD and AA, with an M scale "in transition." One cannot deny the power of religious beliefs and those beliefs may sometimes make a person stay at the Minimization stage. Nevertheless, my experience on the ship with the young participants convinced me that the openness and flexibility of youth is the power of the world.

Current issues of the SWY program and future direction

The biggest challenge of this SWY program is that no one except for its alumni association (as NPO) has full continuing experiences of this program. The administrative staffs from the Cabinet Office of the Japanese government, who are in charge of the program onboard, do not have the educational or training background to fully understand the cross-cultural struggle of participants. Not only that, their stint for overseeing the program is limited to two years, hence there is no commitment to the program thereafter. Advisors are mostly one-timers with no connection to each other and with limited information passed on from the previous years. It could even be a miracle that this program has kept its good reputation among the participants' countries, which gives even more credit to the quality of the participants. It is time to restructure this program incorporating long-term and short-term educational goals.

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