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# Abstract

## Understanding Japanese students' intercultural learning before, during, and after studying abroad: Using reflective writing as a pedagogic tool

Misa Furuta-Fudeuchi

This qualitative study aims to understand what Japanese study abroad students learn about self and others through their intercultural communication and intercultural socialising experiences, and how their intercultural learning is supported pedagogically through the use of reflective writing, conducted before, during, and after studying in the US for two months. As opposed to the dichotomous approach of categorising and understanding culture between Japanese and Others, the study draws on Holliday's (2011, 2013, 2016c) *grammar of culture* as an interpretative tool to explore how students develop understanding of culturally diverse selves and others.

The findings illustrated that students' intercultural learning opportunities were not necessarily confined to intercultural encounters and interactions with non-Japanese, but also appeared possible and meaningful within the group of Japanese students. Recognising and deconstructing stereotypically or ideologically constructed image of a culture and the people was critical for students in this regard. Likewise, encountering alternative realities within and across groups of Japanese peers and other students prompted them to realise and construct a stronger sense of agency. They began to express their own realities, and to explore others' realities, more openly, confidently, and flexibly.

The findings also indicated the benefits and challenges of the reflective writing tasks incorporated into the study abroad programme. Guiding students' intentional and analytical approach to reflection was important at the respective phases of the programme in enhancing students' learning from their intercultural communication experiences. In particular, (re)reading their own written entries and others' elicited students' further learning in recognising and examining alternative and multiple interpretations and realities of selves and others. The need to address students' subjective nature of learning (i.e., students' intention to learn, and approach to the task etc.) is also discussed.

The study contributes to research and practice in the endeavours of globalising educational initiatives in Japanese higher education contexts.

**Understanding Japanese students' intercultural learning before,  
during, and after studying abroad: Using reflective writing as a  
pedagogic tool**

**Misa Furuta-Fudeuchi**

A thesis submitted in fulfillment of the requirement of  
the degree of Doctor of Education

School of Education



February 2018

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## **Abbreviations**

IC: Intercultural communication

MEXT: The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology - Japan

RQ: Research question

UK: The United Kingdom

US: The United States

## **Declaration**

No material contained in the thesis has previously been submitted for a degree in this or any other institution.

## **Statement of copyright**

The copyright of this thesis rests with the author. No quotation from it should be published without the author's prior written consent and information derived from it should be acknowledged.

## Acknowledgements

Looking back at my doctoral journey, I feel enormously blessed to have been supported by many wonderful people academically, professionally, and personally.

First of all, my heartfelt gratitude goes to my primary supervisor, Dr Prue Holmes. Throughout my doctoral journey, you have always been supportive, patient, and encouraging, especially in my hard times. I would not have come this far without your sincere help and guidance. Your feedback was always constructive and insightful, and I indeed learned much about research. I would also like to thank my secondary supervisor, Dr Sophie Ward, for your kind and positive support. Your smile and enthusiasm about my study helped me to keep going.

My sincere thank you goes to the students in the study, who have always been cooperative and interested in my study. My dear friend and colleague, Miki Cutting. I often thought of you through my doctoral journey. I look forward to sharing gained insights from the study, and to collaborating with you again.

I am truly grateful to Brett and Yasmeen for your huge help with my translation and editing tasks. Melanie, thank you, too, for always being there as a great supporter.

To my friends from the School of Education, especially Shila, Sara, Judith, Em, Jackie, Aliya, Esme, Miyuki, Mattia, Prathibha, Lan, and Dennis. Thank you for the laughter, advice, and much needed moral support in my tough times. I wish you all the best with your endeavours.

To my dear local friends. Claire and Grant, thank you for always taking me out of the research room for a much needed break over coffee and brunch. And Freddie, Margaret, and Brian. I was so lucky to have met you, and I cannot thank you enough for your welcoming smiles and lovely walkies.

Last but not least, my dear parents, Naoko and Kazuo, my mother-in-law, Sachiko, and my soul mate and husband, Itaru. Thank you for your love, care, and support. I look forward to carrying on our journey together.

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

This qualitative case study focuses on Japanese students' intercultural learning experiences, guided by a before, during, and after two-month study abroad programme in a group setting in the United States of America (US). The study drew on the two focal pedagogic aspects of the study abroad programme: intercultural communication experiences and intercultural socialising processes; and reflective journal writing, which was incorporated into the learning activities to facilitate students' development of multiple frames of interpretations derived from these experiences. As informed by a social constructionist perspective, this study explores students' diverse subjective realities as constructed and reconstructed through different levels of socialisation processes in individual life.

In this introductory chapter, I first provide the context of the study surrounding internationalisation of Japanese higher education, including study abroad opportunities, from the perspective of educational policy and institutional initiatives (1.1). I then present the rationale for the study (1.2), and highlight the research aims (1.3). Next, I explain my researcher positioning, shaping my interest in the research topic and approach to the study (1.4). Finally, I clarify key terms used in the study (1.5), and provide an overview of the thesis (1.6).

### **1.1 The context of the study**

'Global jinzai', a Japanese expression literally translated as 'globally competent human resource', has been widely used in recent years in Japan, representing government initiatives for internationalisation of Japanese higher education institutions. With an aim to increase research excellence, international profile, and competitiveness of Japanese higher education, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) has set up grant programmes such as 'Re-inventing Japan Project' (2011-2016), 'Inter-university Exchange Project' (2011-present), 'Project for Promotion of Global Human Resource Development' (2012-2017), and 'Top Global University Project' (2014-2023). The grants allow selected institutions to structure and restructure their educational programmes and environments, fostering inbound and outbound student mobility, faculty and staff development, and conduct collaborative research to raise the presence of Japanese higher education institutions at a global level. The primary objective of internationalisation is considered to be highly pragmatic due to its focus on the recognition and competitiveness of Japanese higher education as well as the development of abilities of Japanese youth for the globalising economy (Ninomiya, Knight, & Watanabe, 2009; Yonezawa, Akiba, & Hirouchi, 2009).

As for study abroad, the government aims to double the number of study abroad students with goals of 120,000 by 2020 (MEXT, n.d.). Driven by this interest, Japanese universities are actively exploring strategies to promote outbound student mobility. To exemplify this, the number of Japanese undergraduate students who have studied abroad through their home universities on a short-term basis (less than a month) more than tripled between 2009 and 2016 (Japan Student Services Organization, 2016).

*Tobitate! Ryugaku Japan* (Go Abroad! Study overseas, Japan), the first initiative of a nation-wide collaborative project between government and private sector, also supports the government's goal by sending 10,000 Japanese students abroad over the next seven years (MEXT, n.d.). Selected students will not only be funded, but also provided with predeparture training and post-abroad sessions to connect with peer nominees and also representatives from various areas of expertise. This support assists with the desired outcomes of the overseas experience and enhances employability. The large scale project aims to invigorate interest and motivation of youths in expanding their potential and, indeed, employment opportunities across the globe.

As alluded to above, interest and initiatives in internationalisation, including study abroad opportunities, are on the rise in Japan all with a mind to enhance global competitiveness at governmental and institutional levels. The demand for clear objectives, structures, strategies, and quality assurance in international educational opportunities is also strong, especially in relation to meeting governmental standards, attaining related funding and ensuring institutional responsibility to various stakeholders. It has become increasingly important to ensure a clear rationale in designing international educational programmes, and to implement theory based practice. In particular, study abroad should not be considered as an 'almighty' context to adequately equip Japanese students with the necessary skills to be 'globally competent'; instead, it requires multiple approaches in guiding them pedagogically (Ikeda, 2014). This argument represents the broad context of my study, which centres on an international educational initiative, specifically selected and funded by one of the aforementioned governmental grants. The international educational initiative was

set up between two private universities in Japan and the US, through which students from the respective campuses apply to participate in one of the multiple study abroad programmes designed for different levels and objectives of study between the two universities.

This study focuses on one particular academic programme offered to Japanese students within the framework of the abovementioned international educational initiative. The academic programme allows Japanese students to study together through credit bearing courses and intercultural activities specifically arranged for them and taught by local instructors at the partner university in the US. Predeparture and post-study abroad sessions are also incorporated into the programme and offered at their home university to enhance students' academic and cultural experience. Further details of its pedagogical approach are given in Chapter 3. Having identified the context of the study, I discuss the rationale for conducting the study in the next section.

## **1.2 The rationale for the study**

There is extensive research on study abroad focusing on a range of dimensions of students' learning and overseas experience. Much research centring on Japanese students' study abroad experience tends to focus on the pragmatic dimension of English language skill (Kinginger, 2009), students' attitudinal, behavioural factors and social skills in second (foreign) language communication and relationship-building (e.g., Takahama & Tanaka, 2009, 2011; Yashima, 2003), and, lastly, students' cross-cultural adjustment from academic, social, and psychological perspectives (e.g., Toyokawa &



Toyokawa, 2002; Takeuchi, Imahori, & Matsumoto, 2001). Current research also demonstrates a growing interest and focus on intercultural competence and the outcomes of short-term study abroad programmes (e.g., Akiba, 2012; Cutting, 2015; Kato & Suzuki 2017). However, among the many studies surrounding study abroad in Japanese contexts, less research has addressed the following aspects: 1) students' developmental learning process, versus students' gains in targeted skills and competence (Kudo, 2011; Okuyama, 2017); 2) pedagogical approaches designed and offered to enhance students' learning experience in sequence before, during, and after sojourn; and 3) students' intercultural learning taking place within a class/group of students studying together while abroad. Therefore, this study seeks to address these specific aspects to help contribute to research from the perspective of intercultural learning.

As stated in the previous section, the number of short-term study abroad programmes, generally ranging from a few weeks up to three months, is on the rise in Japan. From the institutional perspective, measurable outcomes are of significance in order to identify and demonstrate the educational benefits of such programmes. However, Kudo (2011) discusses that educational benefits should be explored within the multifaceted process of students' experience, rather than focusing on the outcomes (often positive) of their experience. For similar reasons, Okuyama (2017) also draws attention to the lack of a qualitative approach in understanding Japanese students' study abroad experiences. The tendency of employing quantitative based research is high; therefore, this study will shed light on students' diverse and complex intercultural learning.

Second, research demonstrates students' enhanced intercultural learning through institutional pedagogical support (e.g., Beaven & Borghetti, 2015; Byram & Feng, 2006; Deardorff, 2008; Dervin, 2009; Holmes, Bavieri, Ganassin, & Murphy, 2016; Jackson, 2008a, 2008b). While there is some research centring on students' intercultural learning, guided through before, during, and after sojourn, in international contexts, such practices and research are still scarce in Japan. Furthermore, not many studies in the Japanese study abroad context have explored students' reflective processes in sequence. Reflection is called *furikaeri* (meaning 'to look back [on one's experience] or to review'), or *rifurekushon*, as an imported English word in Japanese. More academic terms, such as the noun, *seisatsu* (reflection), and the verb, *naisei suru* (to reflect), are less used for instructional purposes. Although reflection as a pedagogic method is increasingly common in Japanese study abroad settings, it requires further understanding from the perspective of a pedagogic resource. Thus, this study seeks to provide further insights in this regard.

### **1.3 Research aims**

This study aims to understand Japanese students' intercultural learning experience, particularly in terms of understanding self and others, through reflection on dialogic experience and through guided reflective writing conducted before, during, and after a two-month study abroad programme in the US. As one of the two instructors involved in teaching at the students' home university, I serve as an instructor-researcher. More specifically, while engaging as a researcher in the study, I also facilitate students' intercultural learning face-to-face before and after their study abroad, and remotely

from the home campus while they are sojourning in the US. Social constructionism provides the theoretical perspective to the study. On this basis, the reflective writing task is designed to guide students to explore taken-for-granted knowledge, assumptions, and alternative interpretations through their intercultural encounter and intercultural communication experiences. It also facilitates students to recognise and understand how past and ongoing communicative and socialisation processes affect the ways they construct and reconstruct their subjective realities. I use the phrase 'self and others' in teaching and in the study from the perspective that the students are encouraged to be open to potential commonalities and differences among their peers and individuals as they engage in intercultural communication through the process of relating to one another, and as they coconstruct understandings of individuals through their social interactions.

This qualitative case study is based on the multiplicity and fluidity of students' meaning making processes, and their diverse intra- and intercultural communicative experiences while abroad. The qualitative approach allows me to explore and interpret students' multifaceted intercultural learning processes and experiences. Students' accounts are drawn on from their reflective journals (journal entries of 26 students) and individual interviews (18 students), based on which I aim to understand what students learn about self and others from their intercultural communication experiences, and how they engage in reflective writing as a pedagogic tool for intercultural learning. The study seeks to provide insights into study abroad research and practice within the context of a so-called 'hybrid study abroad programme' (Norris

& Dwyer, 2005), where students travel and study together at a particular host university for a certain period of time.

#### **1.4 Researcher positioning**

My personal and professional interest in intercultural communication and intercultural learning was initially triggered from my own study abroad experience during my undergraduate years as an exchange student at Durham University. I clearly remember how I reflected upon my own experience and realised the impactful learning from my exchange year: my focus, both at conscious and unconscious levels, had been directed to linguistic competence through most of my time in the United Kingdom (UK); however, I recognised towards the end of the year that there were many more elements other than linguistic competence which were significant for me in relating to and understanding self and others in friendship. From this experience, I developed a strong awareness of the importance of guiding students' intercultural communication experience, especially at the preparatory stage of study abroad, in order for students to expand their learning opportunities through the anticipated intercultural encounters while abroad.

The exchange year led me to pursue my career in the field of international and intercultural education in Japan for 13 years. Throughout those years, I engaged in initiating and offering guidance and intercultural communication courses to support students' intercultural learning at different stages and types of international educational programmes (i.e., a one year high school exchange programme; and incoming and outgoing study abroad programmes at higher education institutions).

However, my approach to intercultural communication and intercultural learning at the time was based on neo-essentialism in practice, that is, an approach to see cultures in a range of sizes and layers, such as regions, religions, organisations, and less bound by national or ethnic categories to avoid cultural overgeneralisation (Holliday, 2012). It was through the doctoral programme at Durham University that I began to learn and understand a different approach to understanding culture, namely, a non-essentialised approach to understanding self and others. Non-essentialised approach will not presume 'a universal essence, homogeneity and unity in a particular culture' (Holliday, Hyde, & Kullman, 2004, p. 2). Alternatively, culture is fluid, and being constructed and reconstructed through human interactions and socialisation (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). This is opposed to a deterministic and passive way of embracing the existence of a particular culture (Holliday, 2013). It was a significant paradigm change for me personally and professionally. Thus, I developed my research interest as to how this approach provides insights into intercultural teaching and learning in Japanese contexts, in particular, in study abroad programmes designed for Japanese students. In pursuit of contributing to study abroad research and practice in Japan, I conduct the study to further understand Japanese students' intercultural learning experience from a non-essentialised perspective, that is, an approach to explore culturally diverse selves and others as they coconstruct their realities through their social grouping processes (Holliday, 2013).

As for pedagogy, I have incorporated reflection as an essential learning component both in face-to-face communication and writing through my teaching experience. Based on my professional experience and knowledge, along with my own reflective

disposition, I understood the importance and potential of reflection as a means of learning from experience; however, I felt the need to better understand students' engagement in reflection by linking theory and practice. At the same time, the teaching position I took in a private university most recently allowed me to include and facilitate a reflective writing task, incorporated into sequential sessions, and to be conducted before, during, and after a study abroad programme. This condition met my research interest in improving theory-based practice for students' intercultural learning, underpinned by: 1) sequential guidance before, during, and after studying abroad; and 2) the task of reflective writing. I conduct this study as one of the two instructors involved in the target study abroad programme, and as a researcher. My role as an instructor-researcher allows me to gain further insights into the contexts of the study abroad programme, and also helps me with the relationship-building process with the students in the study, which is an important aspect of enhancing the trustworthiness of the research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). At the same time, I am aware of the potential impact as an instructor, which can affect the process of data collection, data analysis, and interpretations of findings. I further discuss this reflexive positioning in the research framework in Chapter 3 (in section 3.4).

### **1.5 Key terms**

I define in this section the following key terms used in the study: study abroad; and intercultural learning and intercultural communication experience. These words are commonly used in research and practice; however, their interpretations and contexts for use can vary, and may not be understood in the same manner as I frame in the study. Thus, I clarify the way I use these terms to support the purpose of the study.

*Study abroad* and *study abroad programme*. At the outset, it is important to mention the lack of consensus on the terms, 'study abroad' and 'study abroad programmes' (Coleman, 2013; Norris & Dwyer, 2005). Multiple terms exist and represent various features and types of programmes surrounding students' international educational experience (Forum on Education Abroad, 2011). With the breadth of classifications in mind, I use the terms, 'study abroad' and 'study abroad programme' for my research based on the following contexts. First, study abroad concerns 'a temporary sojourn of pre-defined duration, undertaken for educational purposes. [It] may fulfil degree requirements or may provide enrichment within a home based degree program, normally at the post-secondary level' (Kinging, 2009, p. 11). The term differentiates itself from the pursuit of a full academic degree in a foreign institution (Forum on Education Abroad, 2011). It is also equivalent to the term, credit mobility, in the European contexts (European Commission, as cited in Jackson & Oguro, 2018). Although some studies specify the length of sojourn as 'short-term' (e.g., Jackson, 2006a, 2006b, 2008, 2009; Tarp, 2006), I decide not to include this particular phrase for the two-month study abroad programme in the study. This is due to the ambiguity of its length without a clear definition in research and practice, ranging from one to two weeks and longer (Kudo, 2011).

Second, I refer to 'study abroad' and 'study abroad programmes' as educational opportunities designed for students to study at one or more particular foreign institution(s) based on negotiated arrangements made between the institutions concerned (Teichler & Steube, 1991). Institutions provide support to assure a certain

quality of educational experience and curricular coherence between home and host institutions, which differentiate itself from ad-hoc or occasional exchange of students (Teichler & Steube, 1991). While I draw on this definition, I also emphasise that every study abroad phenomenon is highly contextual and individually based (Coleman, 2013; Kudo, 2011). A range of factors constitute and contribute to the character or level of students' experience in each programme (Coleman, 2013; Engle & Engle, 2003). Some of the key factors include: 1) length of student sojourn; 2) entry target-language competence; 3) language used in the course; 4) context of academic work; 5) types of student housing; 6) provision for guided/structured cultural interaction and experiential learning; and 7) guided reflection on cultural experience (Engle & Engle, 2003, p. 8). Coleman (2013) also presents twenty parameters to clarify key variables for study abroad research. In light of the breadth and complexity of factors shaping the types of study abroad programme and students' experiences, I do not intend to generalise the findings of the study. Alternatively, I provide details of the context of the target study abroad programme for clarification, and discuss transferability of the study in relation to my research framework in Chapter 3 and in the final chapter (section 6.3).

*Intercultural learning.* I use 'intercultural learning' as an umbrella term, referring to students' learning process and experience from their intercultural encounter. Intercultural encounters indicate verbal and nonverbal interaction between people who perceive one another to have different backgrounds (not necessarily associated with particular national or ethnic affiliations but any social groups which they feel affiliated to), and which affects the nature of interaction in given situations (Holmes,



Bavieri, & Ganassin, 2015). Those social groups can refer to any collectivity of people of varying sizes, such as a family, an institution, or a larger community and society, through which individuals share beliefs, values, and behaviours (Byram, 2008). On this basis, I draw on Borghetti and Beaven's (2018) definition of intercultural learning, that is:

a process which, through the affective, cognitive, and behavioural dimensions of learning, allows individuals to grasp the cultural affiliations which their interlocutors recognise as their own and [to] act upon such awareness (p. 39).

Likewise, I use associated terms, including 'intercultural communication experience' and 'intercultural socialising process' in the study. They are based on the abovementioned concept of intercultural encounter which also includes a focus on students' engagement in communication and social grouping phenomena respectively. Of importance is first-hand experience of the intercultural encounter, accompanied by critical reflection to support students' intercultural learning (Borgethi & Beaven, 2018), which links to the research topic and focus of this study.

## **1.6 Overview of the study**

This thesis consists of six chapters. In the literature review (Chapter 2), I discuss different approaches to understanding culture from the perspectives of essentialism, neo-essentialism, and non-essentialism, and the current discourse of culture in Japanese contexts surrounding Japan's educational policy, research, and practice. The discussion links to the theoretical underpinning of the study. I also review theories on experiential learning, reflection, and reflective writing, which provide insight into my study with regard to intercultural pedagogies of teaching and learning in study abroad

contexts. As informed by the context of the study given in this and the literature review chapter, I present the emergent research questions at the end of Chapter 2 (in section 2.3). In Chapter 3, I elaborate the research framework: the theoretical rationale for employing a qualitative case study approach; the research methodology (i.e., data collection and data analysis); research ethics, and my approach to researching multilingually; reflexivity as a researcher, and the trustworthiness of the study. Chapters 4 and 5 provide the findings of the study, which address the two research questions. Finally, Chapter 6 concludes the study by summarising the findings, providing theoretical, methodological, and pedagogical implications, limitations of the study, and the direction for future research with final remarks.

## Chapter 2

### Literature review

#### Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss the theoretical and pedagogical underpinnings for Japanese students' intercultural learning incorporated in the target study abroad programme. The benefits of study abroad are evident insofar as intercultural encounters and interactions serve as the base of intercultural learning (Byram, M., Barrett, M., Ipgrave, J., Jackson, R., & Méndez García, M.C., 2009; Holmes, Bavieri, & Ganassin, 2015; Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013). However, it should not be confused that students will automatically become intercultural from simply being abroad. On the contrary, it is possible for students to form negative stereotypes of particular people (Jackson, 2010; Kinginger, 2009). They may develop unwillingness to engage with others based on negative feelings about others (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013). Moreover, students' learning can remain at a surface level of cultural experience (Passarelli & Kolb, 2012). In light of these aspects, research and theory-based practices demonstrate the importance and effects of guiding students' intercultural experience before, during, and after study abroad in a structured way, regardless of the length of sojourn (e.g., Beaven & Borghetti, 2015; Byram & Feng, 2006; Deardorff, 2008; Dervin, 2009; Holmes et al., 2016; Jackson, 2008a, 2008b, 2009, 2010, 2015, 2016; Paige & Vande Berg, 2012).

With reference to key literature, I first review different approaches to understanding culture, cultural self, and others, and clarify how I understand students' cultural

realities in the study (2.1). The discussion informs my theoretical positioning as an instructor in the target study abroad programme, and as a researcher in the study. The second part of the literature review focuses on intercultural pedagogies of teaching and learning in study abroad contexts (2.2). I review theories surrounding experiential learning, reflection, and reflective writing, and provide the pedagogical underpinnings for the study. I also draw on current study abroad research to understand key aspects concerning the incorporation of reflective writing. Finally, I present the research questions at the end of this chapter (2.3), which emerge from this literature review, and which reflect the aims stated in Chapter 1.

## **2.1 Understandings of culture, cultural self, and others**

The concept of 'culture' has long been studied from different disciplinary perspectives and purposes, shaping the development of intercultural communication scholarship as well as its research paradigm (Hua, 2016; D. G. Moon, 2008; Spencer-Oatey & Franklin, 2009). As Hua (2016) states, '[w]hile different paradigms complement each other and potentially bring a rich understanding of the phenomenon under study, they can also be a source of confusion for newcomers to the field' (p. 4). Likewise, in educational contexts, different interpretations and approaches to intercultural pedagogies of teaching and learning coexist, affecting the learning objectives, processes of teaching and learning, and assessment strategies of students' intercultural learning experience. The notion of 'intercultural' is still confusing among educators and students (Dervin, 2010; Dervin & Tournebise, 2013). Given the inconsistency of perspectives and approaches, I discuss in this section how I employ the concept of culture to explore the Japanese students' intercultural learning experience in the target study abroad

programme, including essentialised, neo-essentialised, and non-essentialised perspectives of culture (2.1.1); the discourse of culture in Japanese context (2.1.2); and Holliday's (2011, 2013, 2016c) *grammar of culture* (2.1.3) to discuss how I perceive students as acting agents who are engaged in constructing and negotiating multiple social and cultural realities, and how Holliday's work guides the study.

### **2.1.1. Different approaches to understanding culture: essentialism, neo-essentialism, and non-essentialism**

The notion of culture as being relatively static, fixed, and measurable underlies the structural-functionalism approach (Holliday, 2010). The basic principle underlying this approach is a desire to explain people's behaviours (Holliday, 1999), and an aim to reduce uncertainty, dysfunctions or conflicts where individual's taken-for-granted values or behaviours are challenged when encountering culturally different others or in any contexts unfamiliar to them (Martin & Nakayama, 2014; D. G. Moon, 2008). This approach often categorises cultures by ethnic or nation boundaries where people's behaviours and values are differentiated by predefined norms (Holliday, 1999; Martin, Nakayama, & Carbaugh, 2012). In response to a demand for accountable knowledge and theories in the academy as well as in the arena of practice, such as volunteer service and workplace training (Holliday, 2012; Holmes, 2012; D. G. Moon, 2008), cultural characteristics have been sought out and framed in order for individuals to be able to predict and cope with assumed cultural differences across ethnic, national and international groups (Holliday, 2010, 2012). Nevertheless, categorising Others and assuming dispositional difference can lead to stereotyping and more extreme

understandings of cultural difference, such as prejudice, discrimination, or hostility (Allport, 1954; Dervin, 2012; Holmes, 2012; Takano & Osaka, 1999).

A more recent approach developed within structural-functionalism is neo-essentialism (Holliday, 2012). Unlike essentialism, neo-essentialism does not see cultures as being bound by national categories. Rather, it sees cultures as a range of levels, including areas such as regions, religions, organisations, and families (Holliday, 2012). These cultural components come in varying sizes and different layers, making individuals who they are and how they are. This way of categorisation is seemingly more liberal compared to the ethnic or nation-based categorisations, rejecting cultural overgeneralisation and embracing the multiplicity and complexity of individual cultural components. However, Holliday (1999) argues that the paradigm has not yet gone beyond the essentialist foundations where an influential 'parent culture' exists as a standardised reality, accounting for individual values and behaviours to a greater or lesser extent.

While the above two approaches allow researchers and educators to posit phenomena as to how social groups will intersect and interact differently, identifying culture as a default entity, simplifying the concept of culture, and reducing the complex nature of human interactions is problematic (Dervin, 2009, 2012; Holliday, 1999, 2010, 2016b; Holmes, 2012; Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013; Spencer-Oatey & Franklin, 2009). Cultures cannot be essentialised and categorised as deterministic as if the people who live within behave in a consistent way (Holliday, 2010, 2011). One of the critiques concerns cultural value studies. While the cultural descriptions given in such studies are useful

to explain and measure human behaviours, situational and contextual variations are overlooked (Hua, 2016). For example, Takano and Osaka (1999) examined 15 empirical studies looking at the values of individualism and collectivism between the Japanese and Americans. They concluded that the commonly believed attribute that the Japanese are more collectivistic than the Americans is not empirically supported and should be questioned. Referring to situational and contextual specificities, as well as susceptibility to historical and social changes, they shed light on the fallacy of overgeneralised collectivistic image of Japanese. The fallacy is important for this study when investigating how Japanese students perceive themselves, and how they may project themselves to others, whether during a study abroad experience, and more generally.

Another critique of neo-essentialism concerns the problematic positioning of 'us' and 'them', which often evolves around the dominant group of people (*the Centre*) in contrast to the underrepresented or marginalised individuals (*the Periphery*) (Holliday, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2016b). Power relations are always at play in the way cultures are perceived and described (Holliday, 2010, 2012; Kubota, 1999; Martin & Nakayama, 2008), and anything which does not fall into the majority is merely acknowledged as exceptional, atypical, or not 'real' within the group (Holliday, 2010). As Kubota (1999) states, '...what is defined as culture or what constitutes culture is closely related to the question of who defines it and what kind of power relations exist between those who define it and those who are defined by it' (p. 17). Scholars call for criticality and reflexivity in research and everyday encounters to focus on the role of power and the subjective experience of individuals who act or struggle against the prejudiced

expectations within social hierarchies (Holliday, 1999; Halualani & Nakayama, 2010; Martin, Nakayama, & Carbaugh, 2012). Thus, a more complex notion of 'culture' in research and practice is necessary (D. G. Moon, 2008; Tupas, 2014) as discussed next.

### **2.1.2 Discourse relating to culture and the intercultural in Japanese contexts**

In line with the essentialised approach of understanding culture discussed above, the historical and social circumstances of Japanese society have reinforced the tendency to highlight the distinctiveness and characteristics of Japanese culture more extremely than in other cultures (Raz, 1992). The need to recognise, redefine, and reinforce the national identity and cultural uniqueness increased after the loss of World War II and in the course of the rapid economic growth during the 1960s and 1970s (Kubota, 1998, 1999; Hashimoto, 2000). Underpinned by the need to explain the country's economic success (Kubota, 1999) as well as the struggle for power against Westernisation, discourse and research on 'Japaneseness' or '*Nihonjinron* (theories on being Japanese)' flourished in juxtaposition with the movement of 'internationalisation' (Kubota, 2002; Hashimoto, 2000, 2007). It was not until the early 1980s that scholars started to criticise the perceived homogeneity of the Japanese as an ideologically constructed worldview (Befu, 1993, 2001; Kubota, 1998; Murphy-Shigematsu, 2004). Japan's political and economic role and positioning in the global context during the past decades has influenced the way it created and presented Japanese cultural identity ideologically vis-a-vis (especially Western) others (Kubota, 1999, 2002; Liddicoat, 2007; Raz, 1992).



Since the 1990s, the increased awareness of diversity within the society is evident under the keywords of *tabunka kyosei* (多文化共生, multicultural coexistence) and *tabunka kyoiku* (多文化教育, multicultural education) politically, economically, and academically (Japan Business Federation, 2009; Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, 2006; Yuki, 2011). Nevertheless, dichotomous perspectives remain in that the minority groups are still perceived as separate entities in contrast to the majority Japanese (Murphy-Shigematsu, 2004; Okano & Tsuneyoshi, 2011). In particular, research sheds light on the assimilation perspectives underlying the society, school systems, and curricula, especially towards non-Western residents (Horike, 2010; Sakuma, 2010). The concept of *tabunka kyosei* (多文化共生, multicultural coexistence) is camouflaged as a slogan to encourage a sense of respect for other cultures instead of its true sense of facilitating equilibrium (Takezawa, 2009). From this perspective, 'Japanese' is still situated in the centre while visibly different Others are positioned on the periphery insofar as the dominant discourse centres on nationalities and ethnicities (Takezawa, 2009; Yuki, 2011). Unless the dominant values attached to everyday social and cultural practices are critically reviewed, the linguistic and cultural imbalance and contradictions will remain unsolved (Kubota, 1998). Of importance is the attention as to how boundaries of difference are constructed and reconstructed through interactions, involving multiple cultural backgrounds and groups (Okano & Tsuneyoshi, 2011). As Japanese society becomes more diversified, referring to difference external to oneself and cultivating tolerance towards Others is not sufficient. Awareness is needed on the difference within the self, in other words, the mixed or multiple identities existing within the self (Gergen, 1971; Murphy-Shigematsu, 2004). This informs the necessity to understand how Japanese students perceive and

understand the culturally diverse self, and how such awareness can be enhanced in the study.

Despite the issues above, the dichotomous and nationalist approach of English language education and internationalisation remains problematic (Hashimoto, 2000, 2007, 2009; Kubota, 1999, 2002; Liddicoat, 2007; McKenzie, 2008; McVeigh, 2004; Rivers, 2011; Whitsed & Volet, 2011). In Japan, English language education under the title of internationalisation has been ideologically driven in that English enables Japanese people to express their distinct values and identity to gain trust in the international community (Hashimoto, 2007; Kubota, 1999; 2002; Liddicoat, 2007). From this perspective, the essentialised representation of culture and the national collectivity has been appropriated and maintained through English as the means of communication (Kubota, 1999; Liddicoat, 2007). Hashimoto (2000) also argues that the objective of Japan's language teaching and internationalisation implies 'Japanisation' insofar as students are expected to cultivate self-awareness of being Japanese. Alternatively, non-Japanese are encouraged to understand the culture and values by learning Japanese language (Liddicoat, 2007). The underpinning motive of internationalisation in the Japanese context does not align with the Anglo-European literature from the perspective of developing reciprocal intercultural understanding and inclusive social practices (Whitsed & Volet, 2011). Scholars argue for the necessity of critical consciousness among the people, especially educators, as to how the nationalistic view of culture is idealised and embedded in policy discourses, including Japan's language education and internationalisation policy. Despite the increasing ethnic and linguistic diversity within the society since the 1990s, the hegemony

continues to drive otherisation in the domestic context (Hashimoto, 2007; Kubota, 1999, 2002). Otherisation is '[to imagine] someone as alien and different to "us" in such a way that "they" are excluded from "our" "normal", "superior" and "civilized" group' (Holliday, Hyde, & Kullman, 2004, p. 3).

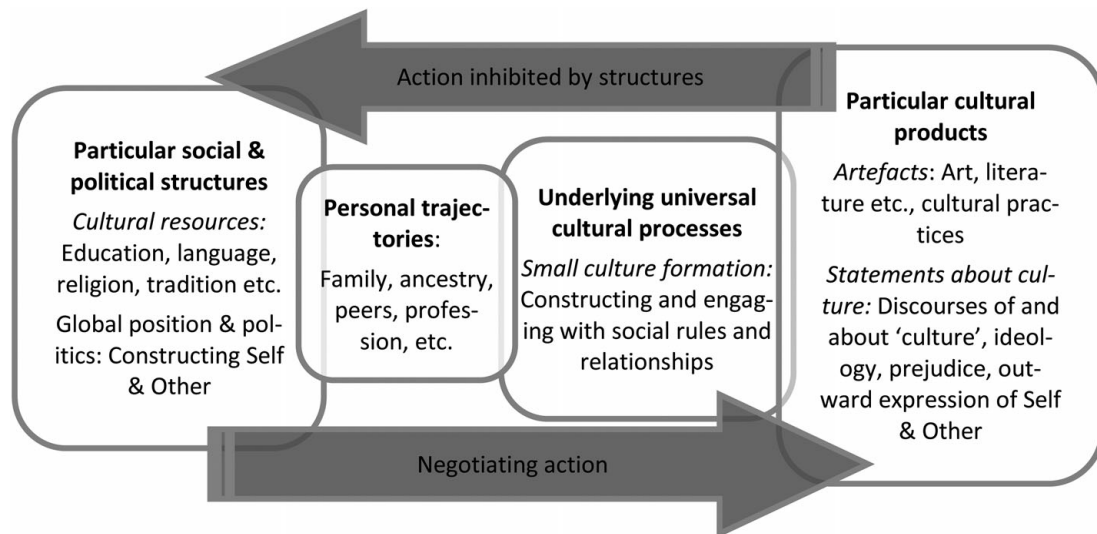
The discussions to this point suggest the need to challenge the concept and discourse of 'intercultural' in the Japanese context. The word 'intercultural' is translated as *ibunka* (異文化) with a primary indication of different (*i* - 異) cultures (*bunka* - 文化). Underpinned by the belief in the linguistic and cultural uniqueness of Japanese people, intercultural understanding (*ibunka rikai* - 異文化理解) is based on a non-critical approach to the contexts and communication of Japaneseness and Others (Liddicoat, 2007). In other words, *ibunka rikai* represents the discourse about the hegemonic Japanese norms and Others on the periphery or beyond the national boundary (Numata, 2009, 2010; Takezawa, 2009). Sato (2015) reviewed past studies in the area of intercultural education, and highlighted that much research centres on transnational mobility of individuals, such as Japanese children who grow up overseas, those who returned to Japan as returnees (commonly called as *kikoku-shijo* - 帰国子女), international students, and non-Japanese children and pupils living in Japan, surrounding the topics of cultural adjustment, identities, language acquisition, and cultural acceptance. Furthermore, Asaoka and Yano (2009) examined Japanese undergraduate students' expectations and perceptions of study abroad, and identified 'deepened intercultural understanding' as one of the major self-reported gains after their return to Japan. However, it is unclear how students construed different cultures, and the people who construct them, and what specifically they learned interculturally.

Given the dominant ideology of Japanese collectivity versus Others discussed throughout this section, the underlying assumption of ‘intercultural understanding’ in study abroad practice and research needs a critical review on its definition and interpretation. Thus, I discuss in the following section Holliday’s (2011, 2013, 2016c) *grammar of culture* as a way to interpret ‘culture’ as an alternative to the essentialist discourse prevalent in the Japanese context.

### **2.1.3 Holliday’s ‘grammar of culture’**

Underpinned by the perspectives of socially constructed reality (Berger & Luckmann, 1966), Holliday’s (2011, 2013, 2016c) *grammar of culture* illustrates how culture operates as a basic social entity across the following cultural domains: *particular social and political structures; particular cultural products; personal trajectories; and underlying universal cultural processes*. Holliday (2011, 2013, 2016c) highlights the dialogic nature of cultural realities, being influenced by and influencing the abovementioned four domains (see Figure 2.1). He describes the fluidity and multiplicity of individual cultural realities as ‘culture threads’ in contrast to ‘cultural blocks’ which represent fixed and predefined images of culture as in essentialism. Inspired by his work, I situate students’ subjective realities within the cultural threads metaphor as opposed to applying the essentialised view of Japanese culture and identity versus Others (the ‘blocks’ metaphor). Drawing on Figure 2.1, I outline each cultural domain, which leads to my inquiry as to how students’ cultures can be fluid, negotiable, and dependable on the way they draw on different domains as a way of understanding self and others.

**Figure 2.1 Grammar of culture (Holliday, 2016b, p. 321)**



*Particular social and political structures.* Holliday (2012) describes this cultural domain, depicted on the left-hand side of the diagram, as large cultural structures, which are often referred to as 'our culture' or national culture (Holliday, 2013). They are the cultural resources which have impacted on individuals in the society they were raised, such as nation states, educational institutions, media, religions, and economic systems. Since the particularities of these resources are distinctive among respective national entities, it is undeniable that the differences affect how the people are and behave (Holliday, 2013, 2016). Thus, individuals are inclined to draw on particular resources characteristic to the given social structure to explain and make sense of certain phenomena, particularly when encountering unfamiliar cultural environments (Holliday, 2016). In addition, in the global context, *social and political structures* can be formed to serve as specific entities which distinguish themselves in competition with others (Holliday, 2013). However, of importance is to highlight that *social and political structures* do not represent 'a culture' per se (Holliday, 2011, 2013). While ideologies

and power underlying *particular social and political structures* may be influential to people, they do not confine what they do and think (Holliday, 2016). Alternatively, it is important to recognise how individuals construct and reconstruct their own realities through different threads of socialisation processes, such as among their family, peers, and other social groups in varying contexts. Hence, individuals are constantly negotiating more particular meanings developed through their *personal trajectories*, rather than being determined by large cultural structures (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Holliday, 2011, 2013).

In the Japanese context discussed earlier, *particular social and political structures* can be tied into the political and policy discourses in language education, citizenship education, internationalisation, or global competitiveness, for example. Parmenter (2006) discusses the influence of the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) on citizenship education, noting that their policies do not draw on the notion of multiple identities transcending national boundaries. She notes how reflection on individual membership and roles is incorporated into moral education and group activities in the domestic context. However, multiple identities are 'capped as soon as the international sphere comes into play by the phrase "with self-awareness as a Japanese person"' (Parmenter, 2006, p. 157). It is possible that such citizenship education, framed within the domestic discourse and evidenced in MEXT's policies, will influence the development of students' cultural identities through the processes of primary and secondary education. Berger and Luckmann (1966) refer to these processes as *secondary socialisation*. The macroscopic meaning of being Japanese is institutionalised and legitimised in such a way that it is objectivated and

experienced in *particular social and political structures* (such as through education) as if the nature of the students' world is pre-given and static to them (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Burr, 2003). *Particular social and political structures* suggests that students are agentic, in other words, producers as well as products of social structures. Thus, apprehending the negotiable nature of student's agency is important. In a study abroad context, Japanese students will be exposed to different structures, which can possibly trigger their consciousness and criticality as to how their taken-for-granted knowledge has been constructed within the social structures in Japan.

*Particular cultural products.* Visible aspects of culture represented in artefacts and social practices are other common features associated with 'our culture' as illustrated on the right-hand side of the diagram (Figure 2.1). The way individuals talk about culture as a cultural act is also considered as 'artefacts of culture' (Holliday, 2011). It is an outward expression of self in a way that individuals wish to project themselves against Others; therefore, it should not be confused as actual descriptions of what they are actually like (Holliday, 2011). From this perspective, artefacts and social practices are underpinned by discourses, affecting how individual realities are objectivated. As a result of such human activities, discourses may confirm or resist the ideological power of social structures (Holliday, 2011, 2013).

The dialogic nature of *particular cultural products* is significantly relevant to the ideologically constructed Japanese images discussed in the previous section. The assumed homogeneity of the Japanese offers individuals a way to talk about themselves in the international sphere. At the same time, such statements of Japanese

behaviours and values confirm the ideologies driven by *particular social and political structures*. Holliday's (2011, 2013, 2016c) grammar resonates with Befu's (1993) argument that '...intellectuals write *Nihonjinron* as prescriptions for behavior. Government turns it into a hegemonic ideology. And the corporate establishment disseminates it' (p. 118). As previously discussed, the Japanese curricula and school activities are influential on the development of students' cultural identities, too. It does not mean that Japanese students are unaware of internal variations, such as class, gender, and region within the nation; nevertheless, the impact of ideologically represented Japaneseness comes into play to a lesser or greater extent (Befu, 1993). Thus, much criticality is needed for students to question the imagined Japanese cultural values and behaviours. To take this discussion further in a study abroad context, of interest is to explore how students talk about themselves and others, how they interpret particular cultural products respectively, and how their interpretations are shaped through interactions and communication with others. The constructed image of self and others can be reinforced or deconstructed, depending on the way students' engage in their intercultural communication experiences.

*Personal trajectories*. Bridging between the *particular social and political structures* and *underlying universal cultural processes* in Figure 2.1 are personal histories, such as ancestry, family, peers, and professions. Such trajectories form the basis of social action along with the *underlying universal cultural processes* outlined after this domain (Holliday, 2011). Simultaneously, *personal trajectories* are associated with social and cultural structures which surround them through life. On this basis, structures come



into dialogue with each other but not to the extent of restricting individual cultural realities.

In this study, I am interested in exploring how *personal trajectories* play a role in shaping the group dynamics of Japanese students participating in the study abroad programme, as well as among the Japanese and local students in the US. The variety of *personal trajectories* underpins the different realities of each student, developed through a range of socialisation processes in life. Instead of perceiving each other as Japanese or American in a collective way, students are expected to explore the complex and particular meanings embodied in individual realities. My interest concerns whether and how such apprehension is made possible through interactions and communication in the *underlying universal cultural processes* as outlined below.

*Underlying universal cultural processes.* Individuals are active agents who are constantly engaged in socialisation (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Through the socialising processes involving different types of individuals at varying levels of social groupings, individuals create group cohesion in which taken-for-granted behaviours and common-sense knowledge are constructed. Holliday (2011, 2013, 2016c) highlights such human activities as *small culture formation*, underpinned by the *universal cultural processes* as indicated in the centre of the diagram in Figure 2.1. *Small culture formation* happens continuously in any environments close to the individuals concerned, ranging from households, neighbourhoods, friendship, leisure or professional groups wherever there is cohesive behaviour; therefore, small cultures serve as ‘the basic cultural entities from which all other cultural realities grow’ (Holliday, 2013, p. 3). Individuals

are always in the process of building such cultural realities (Holliday, 2013) as opposed to the deterministic and passive way of embracing the existence of a particular culture.

This cultural domain is important in the context of students' intercultural learning in this study. As students bring different realities to a new group setting and develop relationships and normalised practices in the given environment, the social grouping processes involve a range of communication and negotiations with one another. Such phenomena foreground the concept of *small culture formation*. On this basis, the concept of *small culture* allows me to explore students' cultural behaviours with 'the potential to be transported across national cultural boundaries' (Holliday, 2012, p. 45), and to resist ethnic, national or international stereotyping. The universality of *underlying universal cultural processes* enables me to explore students' study abroad experience in a more dynamic and fluid way within and outside the group of Japanese students, without dwelling on the crossing of particular linguistic and national boundaries. In sum, I focus on students' intercultural learning as dialogic phenomena which transcend multiple cultural domains as outlined in Holliday's (2011, 2013, 2016c) *grammar of culture*. Of interest is to explore what the students learn about self and others through the *underlying universal cultural processes* and how they articulate their understanding from their experience.

Given the dialogic nature of culture, the way students understand cultures, cultural self, and others are dependent on the way they construct their interpretations of these aspects underpinned in Holliday's (2011, 2013, 2016c) *grammar of culture*. From this

point of view, the grammar offers a theoretical lens for exploring Japanese students' cultural realities as the students apprehend them in a study abroad context.

It is noteworthy that limited studies use Holliday's (2011, 2013, 2016c) *grammar of culture* as an interpretative tool for research. In particular, little research employs Holliday's *grammar of culture* in understanding students' intercultural learning processes, especially in study abroad contexts. For example, previous studies referring to the *grammar of culture* mostly place emphasis on exploring the fluidity of cultural identities based on an interpretive constructivist approach, which 'appreciates the uncertain, subjective and constructed nature of culture' (Holliday, 2016c, p. 24). The findings in these studies highlight the multiple cultural identities of individuals as opposed to fixed identities categorised by nation states (Holliday, 2010a, 2016b). Ganassin's (2017) study on Mandarin Chinese community schooling in England also uses Holliday's *grammar of culture* as a theoretical framework to interpret how discourses of and about culture were represented by the school staff, pupils, and their parents. On the other hand, there are studies drawing on the concept of *small and large culture* (Holliday, 1999), without necessarily referring to the *grammar of culture*, to explore how interactions among students, or between students and teachers, should transcend national boundaries in language teaching and learning contexts (Lee, 2014; Robert, 2006; Tian & Lowe, 2013). Thus, in light of the scarcity of study abroad research based on Holliday's *grammar of culture*, this study provides an insight as to how Holliday's work contributes to knowledge as an interpretative tool in understanding Japanese students' intercultural learning processes.

Recent empirical research on study abroad focuses on the development of key skills, attitudes, and knowledge, such as language proficiency, cultural awareness, and intercultural competence (e.g., Akiba, 2012; Chieffo & Griffiths, 2004; Cutting, 2015; Jackson, 2008b, 2010; Kato & Suzuki, 2017; Kinginger, 2009; Liaw, 2006; Vande Berg, Connor-Linton, & Paige, 2009; Williams, 2005, 2009). In particular, an increasing number of studies employ Intercultural Developmental Inventory [IDI] (Hammer, 2007), a research-based online instrument which measures individual intercultural competence, as a tool to demonstrate the growth of students before and after studying abroad (e.g., Anderson, Lorenz, & White, 2016; Engle & Engle, 2004; Jackson, 2008b; Medina-Lopez-Portillo, 2004; Vande Berg, 2009). As opposed to the growing interest in identifying study abroad outcomes and assessing students' increased competence in recent empirical research, this study addresses the gap of knowledge with regard to the fluid and complex intercultural learning processes of students, especially from the non-essentialist perspective in Japanese study abroad contexts.

### **Summary of section 2.1**

In this section, I discussed different approaches to understanding cultures from an essentialised way to a non-essentialised way. I problematised how Japanese cultural values and identities are essentialised ideologically in contrast to Others in the international sphere. Similarly, the ideologically constructed image of the Japanese majority continues to be central, despite the linguistic and cultural diversity within the domestic context. The dichotomous framework of 'us' and 'them' also remain salient in Japan's language education and intercultural domains of policy, teaching, and research. Given this context, I employ Holliday's (2011, 2013, 2016c) *grammar of*

*culture* to investigate students' intercultural learning on the basis of the *underlying universal cultural processes* in this study. Students' small cultures are not confined to particular linguistic and national boundaries. Instead, I focus on the complex and negotiable nature of their cultures running through the key cultural domains, and the ways in which they perceive those socially constructed realities, in order to explore what students learn about self and others in the target study abroad programme.

Next I discuss pedagogical theories and studies concerning students' intercultural learning in study abroad contexts.

## **2.2 Intercultural pedagogies of teaching and learning in study abroad contexts**

As mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, research and theory-based practices support the importance and effects of guiding students' intercultural experience before, during, and after study abroad, irrespective of the length and type of sojourn (Bathurst & La Brack, 2012; Beaven & Borghetti, 2015; Byram & Feng, 2006; Deardorff, 2008; Dervin, 2009; Engle & Engle, 2012; Holmes et al., 2016; Jackson, 2008a, 2008b, 2009, 2010, 2015, 2016; Lou & Bosley, 2008; Messelink, Van Maele, & Spencer-Oatey, 2015; Paige et al., 2006; Paige & Vande Berg, 2012; Penman & Ratz, 2015; Vande Berg, 2009). Given the range of studies, I first overview current pedagogical approaches incorporated into study abroad programmes, and specify the positioning of my study (2.2.1). I then review experiential learning theories with a focus on Kolb (1984), whose work is commonly drawn on in research and pedagogical practices for study abroad (2.2.2). Lastly, I discuss the role and elements of reflection in relation to experience

(2.2.3) and the nature and effects of reflective writing (2.2.4). These reviews lead to the development of my research questions towards the end of this chapter (2.3).

### **2.2.1 Theoretical positioning of the pedagogy in the study**

The primary aim of incorporating sequenced pedagogical approaches into study abroad programmes is to provide students with a foundation of knowledge and skills, which guides them to make sense of their intercultural communication experiences, and to be able to engage in meaningful intercultural interactions and relationships while abroad and onwards (Deardorff, 2008; Jackson, 2010). However, as discussed in Section 2.1, the difference in interpretations and approaches to understanding cultures affects the way such activities and learning materials are designed and offered to students. Therefore, I discuss how the pedagogies differ based on different theoretical assumptions about the meaning of culture (i.e. neo-essentialised and non-essentialised approaches) (Holliday, 2012), and clarify the positioning of my study below.

The neo-essentialised approach to culture (as applied in intercultural education) tends to aim to increase students' awareness and understanding as to how particular cultures, typically on a national or ethnic basis, may be different from or similar to their own culture. Based on the basic framing of cultural difference, students are facilitated to suspend instant judgments, reflect on and analyse their intercultural experience, and shift frames of reference, while being careful not to stereotype others (e.g., Paige et al., 2006; University of the Pacific, n.d.). This approach equips students with knowledge and skills to recognise and work with potential perplexities, confusions,

or misunderstandings entailing intercultural interactions and communication, and facilitate multiple perspectives and positive relationship-building. Nevertheless, critiques concern the predefined and oversimplified view of individual cultural realities which are more fluid and complex. As Holliday (2012) cautions, '....problems arise when these descriptions are used to explain and indeed predict cultural behaviour and values as though they are contained within the system, giving the impression that individual behaviour is determined rather than autonomous' (p. 38).

On the other hand, a non-essentialised approach focuses on the development of students' criticality and reflexivity. Criticality involves a range of perspectives, based on which students learn to question persistent stereotyping and reification of culture (Tupas, 2014). Reflexivity enables students to acknowledge the role of self in understanding others (Roberts, 2003). Given the breadth and complexity of meanings and practices which individuals share and develop with multiple social groups (Berger & Luckmann, 1966), the emphasis of learning is on the means, or the know-how of analysing, understanding, and relating to other's social world which are brought into interaction (Abdallah-Preteille, 2006; Byram, 1997). Based on this approach, cultural knowledge is not considered as an object to be acquired but to be reciprocally represented, identified, and interpreted through students' experience and communication (Guilherme, 2002).

Furthermore, understanding the complexity and multiplicity of individual identities is central to an intercultural approach (Dervin, 2009; Holliday, 2016b; Holmes, Bavieri, & Ganassin, 2015). How students want to be seen or what they project about themselves

vary by contexts and types of people in contact. Hence, it is with criticality and reflexivity that students begin to recognise and analyse how their perceptions and assumptions affect the way they perceive, understand, and interact with others. Instead of simply cautioning against stereotyping others, students can be invited to understand how stereotypes are formed and coconstructed, and how stereotypes affect their reactions and perceptions about those who resort to them (Abdallah-Pretceille, 2006; Dervin, 2012). As Guilherme (2002) draws on the concept of critical cultural awareness, the pedagogy involves 'a reflective, exploratory, dialogic and active stance towards cultural knowledge and life that allows for dissonance, contradiction and conflict as well as consensus, concurrence, and transformation' (p. 219).

An educational initiative which incorporates the non-essentialised approach into its modules is the *IEREST* (Intercultural Education Resources for Erasmus Students and their Teachers) project (2012-2015). The experiential learning activities guide mobile students, particularly in the Erasmus programme, to go beyond easy attribution of membership, such as nationalities, and to recognise and analyse the variety and complexity within themselves and others (IEREST, 2015). Other projects and learning materials based on the non-essentialised approach include *The Interculture Project*, *Intercultural Language Activities* (Corbett, 2010), and *Understanding intercultural communication* (Holliday, 2013) (for a comparison of aims and objectives of the respective materials, see Cebron, Golubeva, and Osborne, 2015).

Likewise, I position the educational practice in this study within the non-essentialised context. As discussed in section 2.1.3, the similarities and differences among



individuals emerge as products of human activities, which are constantly constructed and reconstructed as cultural threads through multiple cultural domains, and objectivated in society (Holliday, 2011, 2013). In light of the complex and multiple nature of such cultural realities, the focus of students' intercultural learning will be on individual cultural threads. Students need to recognise the threads in their personal cultural trajectories, connect their threads to the thread of others, find threads that they can relate to, and to demonstrate such engagement in the way they communicate (Holliday, 2016b). By incorporating the non-essentialised approach, the students in the study will be encouraged to recognise and understand how their common-sense knowledge and perceptions about self and others are constructed, and can be reconstructed, by questioning and critically reflecting on their intercultural communication experiences through the study abroad programme. In order to explore the pedagogical approaches on this basis, I review the relationship of individuals' learning and intercultural encounters in the next section.

### **2.2.2 Review of experiential learning theories**

Individuals are surrounded by meanings constructed and distributed in social contexts (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). It is through interactions and communication with others, or socialising processes, that individuals work with meaning. From this perspective, experience is coconstructed with others, and understanding experience is to give meaning to it in relation to other meanings (Usher, 1993). As Boud, Cohen, and Walker (1993) state, '[i]t is only by counterposing experience with something which is external to the learner that meaning can be created' (p. 2). Hence, experience serves as the foundation of, and the stimulus for learning (Boud, Cohen, & Walker, 1993). Most

importantly, the key to learning is to work with the experience as learning will not occur automatically or haphazardly (Boud, Cohen, & Walker, 1993; Criticos, 1993; Kolb, 1984; J. A. Moon, 2004; Usher & Solomon, 1999). As Dewey (1938) discusses:

The belief that all genuine education comes about through experience does not mean that all experiences are genuinely or equally educative. Experience and education cannot be directly equated to each other. . . . Any experience is mis-educative that has the effect of arresting or distorting the growth of further experience [sic] (p. 25).

Dewey's (1938) statement significantly relates to students' study abroad experience. Study abroad is generally believed to be experiential by definition (Katula & Threnhauser, as cited in Lutterman-Aguila & Gingerich, 2002); nevertheless, it is not engaging in experiential education unless the programme design is thoroughly underpinned by the principle of experiential learning theories (Lutterman-Aguila & Gingerich, 2002). As discussed in 2.2.1, of importance in a study abroad programme is the pedagogy which facilitates students' critical and reflective engagement in intercultural encounters and communication so that the experience will not result in increasing their ethnocentric and stereotypical perceptions and interpretations.

Experiential learning theories are underpinned by pedagogical discourse, which defines experience in a particular way to reconstruct the process of learning from experience (Usher, 1993; Usher & Solomon, 1999). It is complex to define or generalise the theories due to the breadth of research and practice in different disciplinary contexts (J. A. Moon, 2004). However, it is commonly agreed that systematic approaches, such as observation, reflection, and analysis, key in Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory,

play an important role in the cause of learning (Boud, Cohen, & Walker, 1993; Boud, Keogh, & Walker, 1985; Kolb, 1984; Lutterman-Aguila & Gingerich, 2002; J. A. Moon, 1999b, 2004; Usher, 1993; Usher & Solomon, 1999), and as an educational approach in study abroad (Passarelli & Kolb, 2012; Vande Berg, Paige, & Hemming Lou, 2012). Therefore, I review Kolb's theory below.

As a fundamental principle, Kolb (1984) identifies six characteristics of experiential learning as follows:

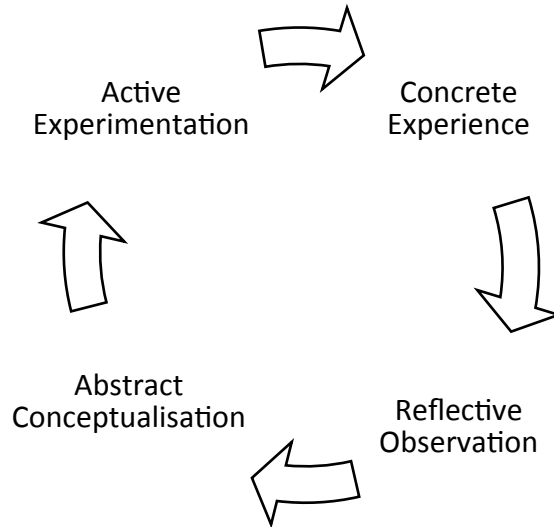
- (1) Learning should be regarded as a process of modifying and reforming knowledge through connected experiences, rather than conceiving it with outcomes as always being evidential;
- (2) Learning is a process of relearning grounded in experience. One's preexisting beliefs and ideas will be examined, tested out, and integrated with new knowledge;
- (3) Learning is driven by the process of resolving conflicts between different internal modes of adapting to the world;
- (4) Learning is a holistic process of adaptation to the social and physical environment. It involves the integrated functioning of the whole person involving thinking, feeling, perceiving, and behaving;
- (5) Learning is based on the transaction between the person and environment. Experience is conceived in dual terms, which are the internal state of a person versus an objective and environmental state;
- (6) Learning is a process of knowledge creation through transaction between social knowledge, which is coconstructed in a sociohistorical context, and personal knowledge which is accumulated from subjective life experiences.

(Kolb, 1984)

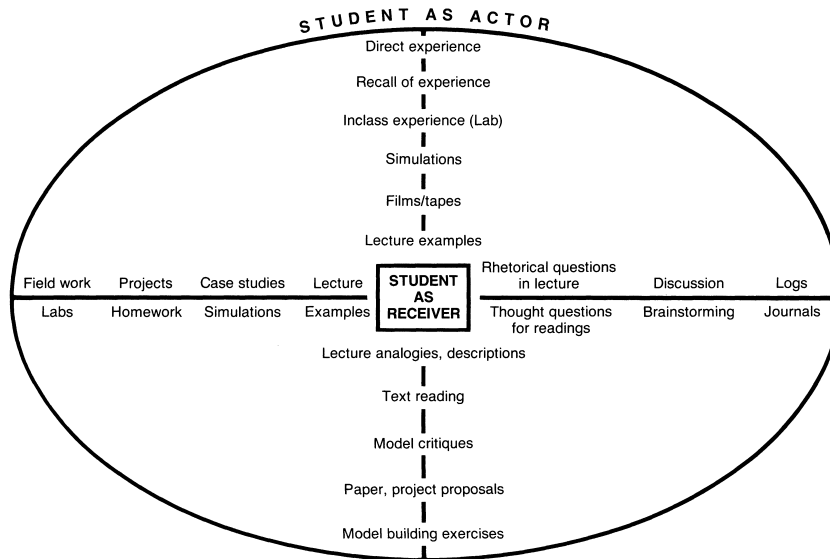
The above principle supports the learning phenomena grounded in experience; however, there is also a need to address students' intention to learn within the theory. As opposed to Kolb's (1984) perspective that experiential learning is intrinsically motivating for the learner, scholars raise attention to the influential factor of learners' intention (Boud, Keogh, & Walker, 1985; J. A. Moon, 1999b, 2004). The need to work with the gap of interests and expectations between students and teaching staff is also specified in study abroad research (Beaven & Golubeva, 2016; Messelink, Van Maele, & Spencer-Oatey, 2015; Holmes, Bavieri, & Ganassin, 2015; Hunter, 2008; Penman & Ratz, 2015). Moreover, Eraut suggests that the pace of experience may not develop into appropriate learning (as cited in J. A. Moon, 1999b). These aspects need further understanding in relation to experiential learning.

In addition to the abovementioned principles of experiential learning, Kolb's (1984) experiential learning cycle is useful as a pedagogical model for instructors to manage and facilitate students' learning activities (Boud, Keogh, & Walker, 1985; J. A. Moon, 1999b, 2004). It depicts a sequential approach of learning surrounding concrete experience. Observation and reflection on the concrete experience will facilitate individuals to form abstract conceptions, which lead to active experimentation where individuals take action and test the implications of the newly developed knowledge (Figure 2.2). Kolb's (1984) experiential learning cycle informs a variety of learning activities underpinned by the four learning modes, based on which instructors are encouraged to create engaging learning environments (Figure 2.3) (Passarelli & Kolb, 2012; Svinick & Dixon, 1987).

**Figure 2.2 Kolb's (1984) experiential learning cycle**



**Figure 2.3 Instructional activities by student involvement (Adapted from Svinick & Dixon, 1987, by Passarelli & Kolb, 2012, p. 157)**



While Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory is influential insofar as it highlights the role of experience and reflection in the learning process, some shortcomings have been identified. One concerns the lack of detailed explanations on the stage of observation and reflection in the experiential learning cycle (Boud, Keogh, & Walker, 1985; J. A. Moon, 1999b). Since students have different perceptions based on past

experience, what they select to learn from experience is subject to their perceptions (J. A. Moon, 1999b). In addition, students' intents, conceptions, and emotional orientations influence their approach to learning, in other words, the way they reflect on the experience (Boud, Keogh, & Walker, 1985; J. A. Moon, 2004). Moreover, students are likely to have a preferred learning style (Kolb, 1984). These various aspects suggest that students' approach to learning may be subjective. Thus, the question at the stage of observation and reflection concerns whether and how students' perceptions are directed to the appropriate element of the experience in line with learning objectives (J. A. Moon, 1999b). The elements of reflection are not thoroughly explored in Kolb's experiential learning cycle, and confusion remains in the way reflection is interpreted and used pedagogically (Boud, Keogh, & Walker, 1985; J. A. Moon, 1999b). This points to the need to focus on and understand key aspects of reflection in supporting students' intercultural learning from experience in the study.

Whereas Kolbian reflection is situated as a bridge to be crossed between particular experience and subsequent conceptualisation for action to be taken, reflection may function at several stages of learning from experience, or even temporarily detached from action (Cowan, 1998; Schön, 1987). Students' learning is a messy process where they may create and recreate meanings in the process of coming to an understanding of the experience or activity (Cowan, 1998; J. A. Moon, 1999b, 2004). Furthermore, experience does not have to be recent for learning to occur (Boud, Cohen, & Walker, 1993; J. A. Moon, 2004). Even though external experience itself may not change, learning can grow over time. By linking new experiences with those of the past, or changing frames of reference, students can find new meanings, different details, or

return to explore any aspects of the experience avoided earlier (Boud, Cohen, & Walker, 1993; Coulson & Harvey, 2013; J. A. Moon, 2004). Thus, the beginning or end of the reflective process is not always definite (Rogers, 2001). These aspects imply the continuous and non-linear nature of reflection in understanding and constructing knowledge from experience. Therefore, the interpretation of Kolb's (1984) single loop experiential learning cycle needs attention that it may not be a direct description of how information is processed by students (J. A. Moon, 1999b). It can be considered as an ever-expanding spiral of learning (Coulson & Harvey, 2013; Cowan, 1998; Rogers, 2001). On this basis, in my study, I take into account the potential that students' learning may not progress in sequence as depicted in Kolb's cycle.

Lastly, from the social constructionist perspective (Berger & Luckmann, 1966), Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory implies a limitation: learning is considered as a transaction between people and the environment. Drawing on the objective meaning given to the environment, Wildemeersch (1989) points out the lack of emphasis in Kolb's theory on the transactions among people, or the communicative processes, which serves as the core element to learning. As Berger and Luckmann (1966) state, conversation is the 'vehicle of reality maintenance' (p. 172). What appears as objective reality in society consists of, and is constructed by, people with multiple subjective realities. People represent segments of the external objective world, while closely linked to the subjective realities of the person concerned. On this basis, Wildemeersch (1989) highlights the role of people, which underpins the interpretative element of experiential learning, since individuals are continuously exchanging and mediating between subjective and objective realities through interactions with others.

Wildemeersch's (1989) point of view is significantly related to a non-essentialised approach to intercultural learning in study abroad. Given the dialogic process of understanding self and others based on the notion of cultural threads (Holliday, 2016b), the close-ended and single loop diagram of Kolb's cycle may not fully depict the fluid and constructive nature of individuals' (and students') intercultural communication experience, in other words, meaning making processes across multiple cultural domains. This ties into the argument that experiential learning theories involve a lack of clarity about the view of experience to which reference is made (J. A. Moon, 1999b).

In conclusion, the use of Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory in study abroad practice and research is widespread; nevertheless, I highlight that it may not simply represent students' intercultural learning process in study abroad contexts. Within the given variables and framework of learning, Kolb's single loop supports the possibility of students' growth of competence and confidence (Brockbank & McGill, 1998). Yet the subjective nature of experience needs more recognition (J. A. Moon, 1999b); it also needs to address the contribution of students' dialogic engagement as a part of their intercultural learning in study abroad, and how they reflect on that. As Criticos (1993) states, 'Effective learning does not follow from positive experience but from effective reflection' (P. 162). Therefore, I discuss theories on reflection in the following section.

### **2.2.3 Reflection in relation to intercultural learning**

Although obvious, it should be clarified at the outset that reflection does not indicate the process of simply recalling something but suggests more processing of thoughts and feelings grounded in experience (J. A. Moon, 1999b). Rogers (2001) analysed



major theoretical approaches (e.g. Dewey, 1933; Schön, 1983; Boud, Keogh, & Walker, 1985; Mezirow, 1991) and presents his synthetic definition. According to Rogers (2001), reflection is:

- 1) an active engagement on the part of the individual;
- 2) is triggered by unusual or perplexing situations or experience;
- 3) involves examining one's responses, beliefs, and premises in light of the situation at hand;
- 4) results in integration of the new understanding into one's experience.

(p. 41)

While many scholars directly focus on reflection in experiential learning and support the effectiveness of the relationship between reflective practice and learning outcomes, the discussion is wide-ranging over different disciplines based on varying terms, purposes, definitional components, timing, contexts, methods, and outcomes with varying levels of depth, complexity, and criticality (Coulson & Harvey, 2013; Harvey, Coulson, & McMaugh, 2016; J. A. Moon, 1999a, 1999b, 2004; Rogers, 2001). The conceptual definition of reflection remains unclear and much theoretical development is necessary (Harvey, Coulson, & McMaugh, 2016; Rogers, 2001). Therefore, in order to clarify the concept of reflection in relation to students' intercultural learning, I review in this section relevant literature on reflection as pedagogical underpinnings for the study.

*The role of reflection in intercultural learning.* From the social constructionist perspective, reflection is essential for developing better knowledge of oneself (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). As opposed to others who are continuously available to the person, the self needs to be appresented by stopping, arresting the spontaneity of

his/her experience, and deliberately turning his/her attention to his/her own self. Such reflection is usually caused as a 'mirror response' to the others' reactions and attitudes towards the person (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 44). Furthermore, the everyday knowledge normalised and internalised in the self through socialisation will remain absolute until the person encounters different realities of others and begins to question the validity of one's own taken-for-granted knowledge (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Hence, intentional reflection on the interactions with others becomes the foundation of developing better understanding of self in relation to others. In addition, students need to understand how their socialisation process shapes different perceptions (Byram, 1998). It is with self-knowledge and self-understanding that students apprehend why their reactions emerge as they do to the experience of otherness (Byram, 1998; Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013).

The role of reflection based on several educational theories also ties into the aim of intercultural learning. I draw on J. A. Moon (2004), Mezirow (1981), and Brockbank and McGill (1998) as follows. J. A. Moon's (2004) discussion on deeper reflection suggests the development of awareness towards the constructed nature of knowledge. She highlights that deeper reflection enables students to start to understand:

- that different people can see the same event in different ways;
- that events can be conceived differently by the same person if she views it with different frames of reference;
- that, for the same person, frames of reference may be different at different times;
- the role of emotions in guiding our conceptions of events or people;

(J. A. Moon, 2004, p. 142)

Mezirow (1990) presents the notion of critical reflection and the central role it plays in perspective transformation. Critical reflection enables individuals to recognise why they attach meanings as they do to their realities, to question the assimilated assumptions and perspectives, and to take action and resolve them. In other words, critical reflection allows individuals to change their frames of reference, which are the structures of assumptions through which they interpret their experiences, shaping individual expectations, perceptions, thoughts, and feelings selectively (Mezirow, 1997). Lastly, Brockbank and McGill (1998) discuss reflective learning in higher education contexts in that reflection facilitates shifts in assumptions about learners' sense of reality rather than being didactic. It involves critical reflection with its potentiality to look at things critically in a different manner than they appear. All of the abovementioned studies inform the key aspect of reflection: to acknowledge individuals' subjectivity in the way they frame their understanding, and to identify other ways of interpreting the world as well as its multiplicity. Such reflective engagement requires students' flexibility and openness to question any previously taken-for-granted assumptions, and willingness to modify any existing knowledge in conflict with the new learning (J. A. Moon, 1999a, 2004). Instead of conceiving knowledge as something given with right answers, reflective habit of mind is driven by open-mindedness and interest in continuously exploring and understanding multiple frames of interpretation (Dewey, 1933, J. A. Moon, 2004)

Likewise, from the intercultural perspective, students' reflective attitude and approach is both a strategy as well as a goal of intercultural learning (Blasco, 2012). It involves students' engagement in decentring from one's own framework when encountering

and experiencing otherness in order to develop alternative perspectives in perceiving the world (Blasco, 2012; Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013; Roberts, 2003). Students need to learn to question the 'natural', to recognise the arbitrary nature of conventions and values, and to act on the newly gained insights into self and others based on reflection and examination of their intercultural experience (Alred, Byram, & Fleming, 2003; Blasco, 2012). Instead of imposing one's own perspectives and assumptions on others, students can develop willingness and ability to step outside their frames of interpretation, to take up others' perspectives from within them by reconstructing their own ways of interpreting, and see others as they see themselves as closely as they can (Alred, Byram, & Fleming, 2006; Bredella, 2003; Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013). Furthermore, it requires students' reflexivity to acknowledge the role of self in understanding others (Roberts, 2003). In sum, the essentialist or stereotypical way of framing and understanding self and others needs to be questioned through the process of reflection (Clark & Dervin, 2014; Dervin, 2012; Holmes, Bavieri, & Ganassin, 2015). All of these aspects are fundamental to the development of students' interculturality.

The above discussion indicates the theoretical importance of reflection in intercultural learning; however, the methodological understanding of reflection is yet to be developed. Moreover, further studies need to link and explore reflection and learning from experience directly or explicitly (J. A. Moon, 2004). Thus, I further look at key elements of reflection, which guides the direction of the study.

*Key elements of reflection.* The specific steps of reflection are not definite and a range of variations is provided by different scholars (Boud, Keogh, & Walker, 1985; Brockbank & McGill, 1998; Cowan, 1998; Dewey, 1933; Mezirow, 1981; Schön, 1987). While Rogers (2001) cautions the scholarly tendency to quantify complex processes of reflection, in order to clarify the link between experience and reflection, I draw on Boud, Keogh, and Walker's (1985) model of reflection in learning. Their model of reflection in learning deconstructs the process of reflection into three elements. As individuals work with experience, they: 1) return to experience; 2) attend to feelings; and 3) reevaluate the experience. The purpose of returning to experience is to recollect what has happened, to notice what exactly occurred in detail without making judgments, and to recognise one's reactions to it in all elements. Re-evaluation of experience involves multiple stages, such as: connecting ideas, feelings, and new information with existing knowledge and attitudes (association); seeking relationships of ideas and arriving at insights into the topic concerned (integration); validating the authenticity of gained knowledge and consequent feelings (validation); and personalising the knowledge (appropriation). All of these elements may not happen in a sequence (Boud, Keogh, & Walker, 1985), or can be carried out in isolation of others (Boud, 2001). Of importance is to bring ideas to consciousness so that individuals can evaluate their experience and start to make decisions of their approaches (Boud, Keogh, & Walker, 1985).

Unlike the traditional notion of education, the abovementioned learning is meaningful insofar as it involves the total response of a person, including thought, feeling, and action, to experience (Boud, 2001; Boud, Keogh, & Walker, 1985; Brockbank & McGill,

1998). In particular, it concerns the affective domain (Boud, 2001; Boud, Keogh, & Walker, 1985; Brockbank & McGill, 1998; Moon, J., 1999b, 2004; Walker, 1985). Acknowledging feelings evoked during the experience, and the effect of giving attention to the first two processes of reflection (i.e. returning to experience and attending feelings) encourages individuals to manage their own reflective activities (Boud, Keogh, & Walker, 1985). In fact, both positive and negative feelings are influential in facilitating or obstructing learning (Boud, Keogh, & Walker, 1985; J. A. Moon, 2004). Negative feelings can result in hindering learning, distorting perceptions, developing false interpretations, and demoralise learners to persist. On the other hand, positive feelings and emotions can encourage learners to focus on the task and give a stimulus for new learning. Both feelings and cognition are closely interrelated and interactive, underpinning the complex reflective process (Boud, Keogh, & Walker, 1985). Thus, feeling and emotion as well as experience, play an important role in creating the conditions for reflection (Brockbank & McGill, 1998).

Similarly, the role of emotion is significant in intercultural learning (Holmes, Bavieri, & Ganassin, 2015; Holmes & O'Neill, 2012; Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013; Savicki, 2008; Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009). Intercultural encounters and communication involve the potential for emotional impact, which is often caused by dissonances of assumptions, attitudes, or ways of understanding the world. The emotional impact, both negative and positive, needs to be considered and interpreted by students to understand why their emotion was evoked by the experience (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013). Students need to reflect on and examine the dissonances in such a way that the negative experience will not lead to a closing down of willingness to engage with diverse others.

On the other hand, reflecting on positive feelings based on any instances of consonance enables students to find new connections or relationships with diverse others (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013). Given the range of emotional reactions surrounding intercultural interactions and communication, students' willingness to recognise their own emotional states, and their engagement to reflect on and manage emotional involvement leads to greater intercultural awareness and further understanding of self in relation to others (Holmes, Bavieri, & Ganassin, 2015; Holmes & O'Neill, 2012; Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013).

I discussed up to this point the key aspects of reflection in relation to experience, and the role of feeling and emotion in students' learning generically and interculturally. The effect of reflection is evident; however, as J. A. Moon (2004) specifies, '[a]ssuming that everyone *can* reflect does not assume that everyone uses reflection effectively to improve performance' (p. 89). There is difference in students' ability, willingness, and depth of reflection when reflection is introduced as a specific requirement (Hatton & Smith, 1995; J. A. Moon, 2004). Rogers (2001) also indicates the importance of individual readiness to engage in reflection in his analysis of major theoretical approaches. These points inform the importance of scaffolding students' reflection, which I discuss below.

*The necessity of guidance and scaffolding.* Instructors can, and should, intervene and assist students in the reflective process; however, as mentioned earlier in 2.2.2, students are in total control based on their intent and approach to learning (Boud, Cohen, & Walker, 1993; J. A. Moon, 1999b, 2004). Students will have different

perceptions of the demands of the task, personal aims associated with the task, emotional orientations and reactions in relation to the task, to name a few. Therefore, in order to enhance students' engagement in reflection, I draw on the following propositions which guide the pedagogical practice in my study.

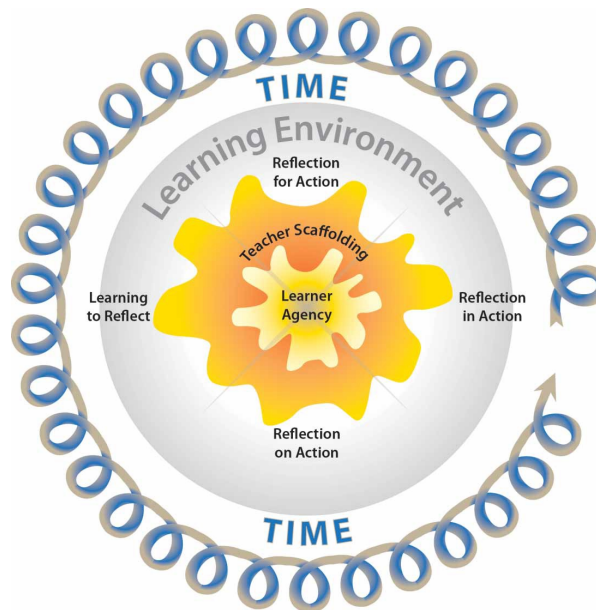
First, the guidance and scaffolding should be introduced at different stages, namely: before, during, and after the experience (Boud, Keogh, & Walker, 1985; Boud, 2001; Cowan, 1998; Coulson & Harvey, 2013; J. A. Moon, 2004). This ties into the previous discussion in 2.2.1 concerning the necessity of facilitation for students' intercultural learning before, during, and after study abroad. Second, the purpose, context, and process of reflection should be clarified and agreed between instructors and students (Coulson & Harvey, 2013; Harvey, Coulson, & McMaugh, 2016; J. A. Moon, 2004; Rogers, 2001). Specifically, in order to scaffold the process of reflection, the use of guiding materials, prompt questions, peer support, as well as a skilled mentor is considered useful (Brockbank & McGill, 1998; Coulson & Harvey, 2013; Cowan, 1998; J. A. Moon, 1999b, 2004; Rogers, 2001; Stevens & Cooper, 2009). In particular, reflection does not have to be confined to an individual activity but can be conducted with others. Learning takes place in a social context as a communicative engagement (Wildemeersch, 1989). Therefore, the reflective process with others can challenge old meanings or alter the meanings they draw from experience (Boud, 2001; Boud, Cohen, & Walker, 1993).

As summarised above, particular guidance and scaffolding is vital when incorporating reflection into study abroad programmes. Thus, drawing on Coulson and Harvey's



(2013) framework, I highlight relevant factors for scaffolding reflection for students' intercultural learning in the study (Figure 2.4). First, 'learning to reflect' is an important phase for instructors and students to establish a shared understanding of the roles and expectations of reflection at the outset. It indicates an ongoing process since students' reflective skills involve time and iterative processes to develop. In order to increase the depth and complexity of reflection, instructors and students may return to this phase at any point of time. Second, 'reflection for action' encourages students to contextualise the use of reflection and to learn to engage in deeper reflection. By exploring and identifying their own expectations, beliefs, and assumptions through strategic questioning and materials from alternative perspectives, students may begin to develop awareness of other ways of thinking in anticipation of the experience. Third, 'reflection in action' involves working with experience and emotions; understanding and developing meaning from experience; and effectively expressing learning. No matter how well prepared students may be, this phase requires a continuous support given the unpredictable and unexpected nature of students' experience. Lastly, 'reflection on action' involves debriefing of experience; processing affective learning; applying learning to future work and lifelong learning skills. For guiding the debriefing, Coulson and Harvey (2013) suggest drawing on theories of experience and reflection, such as Kolb (1984), Mezirow (1991), and Boud, Keogh, and Walker (1985). Coulson and Harvey's (2013) framework not only guides my pedagogical practice as an instructor, but also leads to my research interest in exploring how the Japanese students engaged in reflection in the study.

**Figure 2.4 A framework for scaffolding reflection for learning through experience (Coulson & Harvey, 2013)**



This section centred on the theoretical and pedagogical perspectives of reflection, which foreground the key process of students’ experiential learning. Reflection can be conducted in different ways, one of which is through writing. Thus I look at the nature and effects of reflective writing in the next section.

#### **2.2.4 Nature and effects of reflective writing**

Writing is a powerful means which contributes to learning with its potentiality to offer opportunities and positive conditions for facilitating students’ reflection (Boud, 2001; J. A. Moon, 1999a, 2004; Walker, 1985). Given the positive condition of conducting reflective activities at different stages (i.e. in anticipation of events, during, and afterward), Boud (2001) specifies the significant role which writing plays at each of these stages. To further support this point, I begin by clarifying the key aspects of reflective writing, informing the relationship with experiential learning. I then discuss

particular characteristics of reflective writing from the perspective of expressiveness. Finally, I review study abroad research focusing on reflective writing in order to identify the direction of the study.

*Key elements of reflective writing in relation to experiential learning.* Based on the synthesis of literature, I highlight key elements of reflective writing underpinning experiential learning as follows (Boud, Keogh, & Walker, 1985; J. A. Moon, 1999a, 2004; Stevens & Cooper, 2009; Walker, 1985). First, writing allows students to ‘return to experience’ (Boud, Keogh, & Walker, 1985), through which they can arrest and capture concrete experience, based on the following aspects:

- taking time to focus their attention on their experience;
- describing the experience as it happened as closely as possible, especially in a way that it will not be lost or modified over time;
- slowing their pace of thinking to engage in reflection.

Second, writing enables students to ‘attend to feelings’ (Boud, Keogh, & Walker, 1985) insofar as students recognise and manage emotional states, which may influence the way they reflect on and interpret the experience. Specifically, students can:

- express their feelings in their own words;
- observe feelings, which leads to a deeper appreciation of their way of experiencing;
- discharge feelings to engage in reflection.

Lastly, writing allows students to ‘reevaluate experience’ by ways of relating, synthesising, testing, and personalising new ideas and knowledge (Boud, Keogh, & Walker, 1985). Students can possibly:

- relate ideas to their own experiences or previous knowledge;
- capture ideas for further consideration;
- organise and clarify their thoughts in a structured manner.

These elements also tie into the notion of creating representation of learning (J. A. Moon, 1999a, 2004). Eisner (1993) defines representation as 'the process of transforming the contents of consciousness into a public form so that they can be stabilized, inspected, edited, and shared with others' (p. 6). When students try to represent their understanding of their experiences through writing, they engage in a secondary learning process as they work with meanings (J. A. Moon, 1999a, 2004). Moreover, reading their own writing can lead to further reflection on the implication of given content, or to recognise their own reflective processes, and to identify certain aspects of self (Boud, 2001; J. A. Moon, 2004; Walker, 1985). As a consequence of such engagement, students will begin to develop metacognition with more awareness and flexibility to try to improve or change their approaches to learning (J. A. Moon, 2004).

The abovementioned elements indicate the benefit of reflective writing in relation to experiential learning. It can be, and is, carried out for different purposes in varying forms, especially in a journal style (e.g. Barnard, 2011; Boud, 2001; Mlynarczyk, 1998; J. A. Moon, 1999a, 2004; Moor, Boyd, & Dooley, 2010; Spalding & Wilson, 2002; Stevens & Cooper, 2009; Walker, 1985). At the same time, scholars draw on potential challenges in incorporating reflective writing as learning activities. Reflective writing consumes much time of students (Pearson-Evans, 2006; Walker, 1985). Students' approaches to the task, such as 'get it done' or 'please the lecturer' attitudes, and preference of privacy may also hinder their learning processes (Barnard, 2011; Coulson

& Harvey, 2013; Mlynarczyk, 1998; Walker, 1985). These issues entailing the task of reflective writing need attention when considering its pedagogical effect.

*Expressiveness and language choice.* The characteristics of reflective writing in contrast with formal academic writing is the potential of expressiveness. As evident from the nature of reflection, reflective writing involves the acknowledgement or the expression of emotional state and function (Boud, 2001; Mlynarczyk, 1998; Moon, 1999a, 2004). The use of informal language, as referred to as expressive language, also allows students to create ownership to writing with its closeness to the self and speech (Mlynarczyk, 1998; J. A. Moon, 1999a, 2004). Furthermore, it triggers spontaneity without adhering to conscious goals unlike formal academic writing (Mlynarczyk, 1998). In sum, expressive language supports the exploratory nature of reflective writing. In particular, it helps students with the process of working with situations and issues which are not straightforward (J. A. Moon, 1999a). Thus, the importance of expressiveness in reflective writing suggests the need to consider students' language choice in writing. I briefly discuss the impact of language in study abroad contexts in relation to expressiveness below.

In study abroad programmes, the acquisition and use of the target language is typically expected of or by students. In order to discover and negotiate new and unfamiliar meanings, students will need to develop several competences: linguistic competence for interpreting spoken and written words based on the standard rules of the language; sociolinguistic competence for interpreting implicit or explicit meanings of the language produced by an interlocutor; and discourse competence for identifying

and negotiating strategies for producing and interpreting messages through different modes of interaction at play (Byram, 1997). In addition to these key competences, language is associated with students' identities and self-presentation (Kramersch, 2009; Pallegriano Aveni, 2005). As Kramersch (2009) states, 'Desire in language is the basic drive toward self-fulfillment' (p. 14). For students, the target language can be an instrumental means of communication, or a means of identification with native speakers. Also, it can be an approach to creating their identities; a way of finding personal significance through particular modes of articulation and meaning; or a factor reinforcing their attachment to their native language (Kramersch, 2009). Based on these aspects, it is likely that students' goals of language learning and perceptions about the target language, English, will be diverse and not straightforward in the study. The chosen language can possibly affect the students' approaches to, and the content of, reflective writing. I further refer to language choice in the following review of study abroad research.

*Review of study abroad research related to reflective writing.* In study abroad contexts, reflective writing is conducted by ways of diary, blog, journal, and ethnographic/autobiographic writing with variations in aims and outcomes (Byram et al., 2009; Crawshaw, Callen, & Tusting, 2001; Dervin, 2009; Holmes & O'Neill, 2012; Jackson, 2006a, 2006b, 2009; Jordan, 2001; Lee, 2011, 2012; Pearson-Evans, 2006; Roberts, 2003). Based on more recent study abroad research, I highlight salient aspects and implications of these pedagogical approaches below.

Research shows the advantages of reflective writing through ethnographic projects: the effect in developing students' observant and analytical approaches to understanding cultural differences; encouraging willingness to engage with the local people and community; and increasing metacognitive awareness of self through their intercultural communication experience (Holmes & O'Neill, 2012; Jackson, 2006a, 2006b, 2009). Students also learn to shift their focus from simply evaluating others based on their preconceived ideas and stereotypes, and to be more self-aware of their feelings and emotions (Holmes & O'Neill, 2012). With such reflexivity, students begin to distance their interpretations tentatively in order to identify and evaluate their own assumptions which they tend to depend on, and reshape their understanding of interactions as necessary. At the same time, ethnographic projects can be labour intensive for students, and their challenges concern the research skills necessary for a deeper approach, responsibilities, and ethics (e.g. rapport building, participant observation, interviewing, and confidentiality) (Jackson, 2006a; Jordan, 2001).

Research exploring the use of diary, blog, and journal writing also suggests the potential of students' learning and development through these pedagogic tools. Scholars explore topics, such as: students' identity construction through diaries as a record and reinforcement as in a dialogic formation of self (Crawshaw, Callen, & Tusting, 2001); students' intercultural competence and learner autonomy through the use of blogging and face-to-face ethnographic interviews (Lee, 2011, 2012); and students' academic and personal development supported by the sequenced modules incorporating reflection (Penman & Ratz, 2015). As discussed earlier in 2.2.3, the

necessity of offering continuous guidance is also drawn on in order to promote students' learning through reflection.

The analytical reflection introduced in *Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters* (AIE) (Byram, M., Barrett, M., Ipgrave, J., Jackson, R., & Méndez García, M.C., 2009) is of particular reference to the study insofar as it scaffolds the process of students' self-introspection based on their intercultural encounters. The guiding questions facilitate students to: describe a particular intercultural encounter; reflect on and analyse the emotional reactions of self and others; explore similarities and differences surrounding the situation; and reflect on actions in response to the experience. Méndez García's (2017) study indicates increase in students' self-awareness, meta-learning skills, and change in actions through the engagement in AIE. At the same time, she implies ethical considerations based on its nature as a highly personal document. It may reveal students' heavy emotional load, including suppressed ideas, emotions, and tension. She draws attention to the possibility of triggering students' vulnerability surrounding the experience (Méndez García, M.C., 2017). This informs me of the needed sensitivity in working with students' data as a researcher in the study.

Finally, research shows different perspectives with regard to language choice for reflective writing. For example, the students in Penman and Ratz's (2015) study were instructed to write in their target language while abroad in order to have an opportunity to write long passages discursively. While the overall learning from the sequenced modules was reported positively, Penman and Ratz (2015) do not mention the particular influence of the language choice on students' learning from reflective



writing. Coulson and Harvey (2013) specify the importance of students' language proficiency, which enables them to take a deep approach to communicate distinctions and insights clearly. Other studies also support the use of students' first language for self-reflection in the context of blogging (Elola & Oskoz, 2008; Lee, 2012). Given the scarcity of research on this particular aspect, it is of interest in the study to explore students' language choice and its influence on reflective writing in relation to pedagogy.

The discussion up to this point provides several insights into my study. The benefit of current educational initiatives incorporating reflective writing in study abroad contexts is well supported by theories and research; however, much research explores students' development and outcome of learning as result of the pedagogical approach concerned. Therefore, I intend to focus on the methodological aspect of reflective writing and explore its effect as a pedagogic tool more directly in the study.

### **Summary of section 2.2**

I reviewed key theories and elements of experiential learning, reflection, and reflective writing in this section. Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory is widely acknowledged as influential in study abroad practice and research; however, it may not thoroughly describe students' learning process, given the complex, subjective, and dialogic nature of their intercultural learning experience. To address the gap discussed in Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory, I paid close attention to reflection, which foregrounds students' experiential learning processes. I synthesised educational theories and relevant notions of intercultural learning to clarify the importance of

students' engagement in reflection. Finally, I discussed the role and elements of reflective writing, which may offer potential and positive learning for Japanese students through this pedagogical approach in my own study. Driven by the process of reflective writing, as well as reading their own writing, Japanese students may learn to decentre from their deeply held, taken-for-granted assumptions and frames of interpretation, which affect their interactions and communication through the social grouping process in the given contexts. Students may learn the necessity to suspend judgments, and to explore and analyse different interpretations over time. Hence, these various approaches offer a theoretical lens with which to explore and understand how reflection for learning through experience and reflective writing may support intercultural learning in a study abroad experience.

In the following section, I summarise the entire literature review, and present my research questions in the study.

### **2.3 Summary of the literature review and research questions**

In the literature review, I first looked at different approaches to understanding cultures, cultural self, and others (2.1.1). The Japanese discourse of culture based on an essentialist view was problematised from the perspectives of educational policies, practices, and research (2.1.2). The concepts related to 'multicultural' or 'intercultural' in the Japanese context foreground the dichotomous perception of 'us' and 'them', regardless of the growing diversity within the society. Therefore, the nature of multiple identities and constructions of self, or cultural threads in Holliday's (2011, 2013, 2016c) term, need to be highlighted and understood, especially, in the endeavour of

enhancing students' intercultural learning through their study abroad experiences. I draw on Holliday's (2011, 2013, 2016c) *grammar of culture* as a way to understand students' cultural threads constructed and reconstructed through multiple cultural domains (2.1.3). In particular, the concept of *small cultural formation* underpinned by *underlying universal cultural processes* enables me to explore various levels of social grouping processes within the group of Japanese students, as well as with others, in the study.

As discussed in the literature review, students' intercultural encounters and communication should not lead to increased ethnocentric and stereotypical perceptions and interpretations (Lutterman-Aguila & Gingerich, 2002; Tupas, 2014). Furthermore, it is important to support the development of students' awareness towards underlying cultural threads (i.e. influence of socialisations and intercultural experience on their perceptions and practices, and the fluidity and multiplicity of cultural realities) in understanding self and others. Therefore, I intend to explore what emerges—in terms of understanding of self and others—through the Japanese students' intercultural learning in the target study abroad programme. I frame the first research question as follows:

1. What do students learn about self and others from their intercultural communication experiences through reflection, guided before, during, and after a study abroad programme?

I am interested in how the students talk about themselves and others, how they interpret particular cultural products respectively, and how they construct and/or

reconstruct their understanding of self and others through their engagement in intercultural learning guided through before, during, and after study abroad.

The second part of literature review focused on intercultural pedagogies of teaching and learning in study abroad contexts. Based on a non-essentialised approach, research demonstrates the necessity and importance of guiding students' reflective process as the core basis of experiential learning (2.2.1). I reviewed Kolb's (1984) experiential learning cycle, which may not necessarily depict students' learning phenomena as Kolb's cycle does not necessarily accommodate the subjective and dialogic nature of students' intercultural learning experiences (2.2.2). I also highlighted the key elements and characteristics of reflection, and drew on Coulson and Harvey's (2013) framework for scaffolding students' reflection for learning through experience (2.2.3). Lastly, I discussed the nature and effects of reflective writing in relation to experiential learning (2.2.4). The expressiveness represents and addresses the exploratory nature of reflective writing; however, little research explores the influence of language choice between students' native and foreign languages on writing. Furthermore, much of the focus of study abroad research is directed to students' development and outcomes of learning based on reflective writing. Therefore, I highlight the methodological aspects of reflective writing to understand its effect as a pedagogic tool in the study. The second research question is:

2. How does reflective writing as a pedagogic tool help the students to develop understanding of the self and others?

Based on this question, I intend to understand what particular aspects and processes of writing help, or does not help, Japanese students to learn from their intercultural

communication experiences. In addition, I explore students' perceptions about their language choice and its influence on their writing.

In the next chapter, I provide the research framework for the study, which guides me to answer these two research questions.

## Chapter 3

### Research framework

#### Introduction

As Silverman (2013) points out, 'Methods do not just belong to social researchers. Before choosing a method, you should reflect upon the broader societal context in which this method is located and deployed' (p. 139). To clarify the broader societal context, I will first discuss social constructionism as an overarching theoretical perspective, which directed me to take a qualitative approach towards my study. I will then provide the background and details of my qualitative case study, and methods of data collection and analysis. The methods I adopted help to answer the following two research questions:

1. What do students learn about self and others from their intercultural communication experiences through reflection, guided before, during, and after a study abroad programme?
2. How does reflective writing as a pedagogic tool help the students to develop understanding of the self and others?

Equally important is the discussion on research ethics, considerations on researching multilingually, reflexivity encompassing my role as an instructor-researcher, and trustworthiness of the study. I will delve further into these matters towards the end of this chapter.

### **3.1 Research design**

This section presents details of the research design in the following order: social constructionism as an overarching theoretical perspective (3.1.1); experiential qualitative research (3.1.2); case study (3.1.3); data collection (3.1.5), including participants (3.1.5.1), processes of reflective journal writing (3.1.5.1), the role of semistructured individual interviews (3.1.5.2); and finally, data analysis (3.1.6).

#### **3.1.1 Social constructionism as an overarching theoretical perspective**

In order to understand what the Japanese students learned about self and others through encountering otherness and reflecting on such experience in writing, I draw on social constructionism as an overarching theoretical perspective which informs the methodology of the study. As Berger and Luckmann (1966) stated, 'There is always more objective reality "available" than is actually internalised in any individual consciousness' (p. 53). In short, what I take for granted is what I have constructed through the socialisation processes of my own life trajectories, and I am surrounded by what others state to be their own realities (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Social constructionism guides my approach in that I explore other realities of students, which are both emergent and subject to a multitude of social interactions and social grouping processes in their respective contexts.

Social constructionism centres on the notion that individual common-sense knowledge is coconstructed and reconstructed through human activities, through which meanings are created, maintained, negotiated, and altered by means of linguistic signification in given social contexts (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Walker, 2015). Therefore, processes

(i.e. social interactions and socialisation) and languages are of primary concern from the social constructionist perspectives, underpinned by the dialectical and socially distributed nature of knowledge (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Burr, 2003; Nightingale & Cromby, 1999; Walker, 2015). As Berger and Luckmann (1966) discuss extensively in their book, *The Social Construction of Reality*, what functions as social order, or norm, is an ongoing human production as individuals continually and collaboratively construct their social world. Simultaneously, individuals respond to what appears to be objective reality in social structures, which arises from a sum of habitualised and institutionalised human activities. Primary and secondary socialisations are fundamental stages for individuals in this regard. Whether implicitly or explicitly, and whether consciously or subconsciously, individuals are always engaged in dialogical processes, through which they externalise, objectify, and internalise ideas as they become members of society (Berger and Luckmann, 1966). From that perspective, individuals and society operate in both directions (Burr, 2003; Holliday, 2011, 2013), and also ties into the model of Holliday's (2011, 2013, 2016c) *grammar of culture*.

Different interests and perspectives drive human communication and understanding. Individuals are engaged in the practice and sequence of negotiating meanings and developing knowledge among them. It also evolves across time as Gergen (2003) refers to studies illustrating the historical variation of these conceptual changes. There are no changes in entities themselves but the changes emerge as a result of human activities and communication. Therefore, conversation serves as a vehicle to maintain reality among individuals (Berger & Luckmann, 1966).



Even though there is no single description which adequately captures all of the social constructionist approaches, there are resemblances in the way social constructionists understand the world (Burr, 2003). Social constructionism, for instance, takes a critical stance towards concepts and categories which individuals may instantly or automatically refer to in the world. Burr (2003) draws upon the concept of gender as an example. While people may observe and assume the categories of male and female as the two distinct types of human being, more critical awareness allows us to recognise that there is a degree of ambiguity in how individuals can be classified in gender identity from the perspectives of gender dysphoria or transgender. Social constructionism holds that realities are not necessarily reflected in the way people will be taken for granted in the world (Burr, 2003). What is considered to be cognitively 'true', or legitimised, is only ascribed by specific individuals, and is even reified when they forget their authorship of its creation (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). As a researcher, these social constructionist perspectives guide me to take a critical stance to look for the multiplicity of meanings available out there without labelling meanings as predefined and fixed.

In addition, our concepts and categories are historically and culturally bound and there is no one-size-fits-all description of human nature (Burr, 2003; Nightingale & Cromby, 1999). Burr (2003) also draws a caution that social constructionism does not perceive human nature as something restricted by historical or cultural influences only. Social constructionism aligns with non-essentialist perspectives in that there is no definable or discoverable nature of individuals nurtured and trapped inside themselves (Burr, 2003). Individuals play multiple roles (Berger & Luckmann, 1966) and embrace

inconsistency in concepts of self as they manifest themselves in varying ways and different contexts, depending on a variety of factors (Gergen, 1971). Therefore, in researching Japanese students' intercultural experiences in a study abroad programme, I follow these approaches in trying to interpret the fluidity and multiplicity of students' realities presented as the segment of self in given situations.

The nature of human beings located in their ongoing meaning-making processes indicates that there are no fixed objectives which can be studied or tested as an absolute single truth. Therefore, I employ a qualitative approach to embrace the complexity of the students' individual worlds as they come to understand self and others through intercultural communication. The following section provides further explanations on the qualitative approach.

### **3.1.2 Experiential qualitative research**

As informed by the social constructionist perspective, culture is not homogenous and singular in nature but constantly co-constructed by individuals (Dervin, 2009; Holliday, 1999, 2010, 2011, 2016c). Based on that notion, study abroad students are not simply crossing a national border to encounter a culture but are there to become engaged in shaping their awareness and understanding of the cultural self and culturally different (and similar) others through communication and interactions. As an instructor, and through my teaching materials, I have aimed to develop students' awareness of the complexity and fluidity of culturally different others instead of simplistically assuming someone to belong to certain 'fixed' cultures. In order to understand Japanese students' intercultural learning in my study, it is therefore important to consider the

diversity and complexity of students' interpretations as to what they learn about the self and others through the intercultural communication experience they draw on. I do not intend to validate a theory applicable to certain samples and populations. In contrast, I depend as much as possible on the situations and perspectives of the specific students being studied (Creswell, 2013). The qualitative approach allows me to understand and interpret the multi-faceted intercultural learning processes and experiences of students.

Neuner's (2003) discussion on the dichotomy of teaching and learning also provides insights into the rationale for a qualitative approach. As Neuner (2003) points out, there is no straightforward exchange of knowledge between the two acts of teaching and learning in foreign language educational contexts. Learners always perceive and interpret the contents of the teaching materials and world they encounter through their sociocultural filters. Learners select, categorise, and relate the contents to their own culturally-bound world which they have already created based on their own image of foreignness and/or experience (Neuner, 2003).

Intercultural learning, which essentially involves individual experiences, is also subject to the dichotomy of teaching and learning. Throughout my career of teaching intercultural communication courses, and facilitating intercultural learning activities and study abroad programmes for Japanese and international students in Japan, I have developed awareness towards possible gaps among students and myself in the way teaching materials and relevant theories are located and understood in our respective worlds. For example, one conversation which I had with a Japanese student before

conducting this study, highlights the dichotomy of teaching and learning. In discussing intercultural encounters and communication with others, she brought up the term, 'respect (sonkei in Japanese)', as one of the most important attitudes to embrace; however, the way she interpreted the term was fundamentally different from what I had initially imagined. For her, 'a respectful attitude' meant the necessity to oppress her honest feelings or wishes, even when she does not agree with another or feels uncomfortable about something. As our conversation continued, I began to understand that she had framed the term 'respect' more in terms of conflict avoidance or in the act of 'fitting in'. Little was said about the reciprocal process of negotiating or creating a dialogue as a means of showing and constructing mutual respect. The notion of adhering to a sense of conformity stood out in contrast to how I had originally interpreted the term in the given conversation. It was a personal yet powerful experience to me, and also explains why I employ a qualitative approach in my study. Namely, I consider it important to look at students' intercultural learning and understanding from their perspectives and experiences qualitatively so as not to preframe or misinterpret their way of understanding. Qualitative research makes it possible to 'unfold' their stories and allows me, the researcher, to better interpret how they come to perceive the world as they do.

Given the dynamics of intercultural learning, students' accounts need to be located within specific contexts and cannot be detached from their own experience. Qualitative research is conducted at a local or an immediate level and allows researchers to look at particular contexts (Braun & Clarke, 2013; M. Gall, J. Gall, & Borg, 2003). It becomes possible to find and accommodate unanticipated aspects in the

process of collecting and analysing data, and to reveal the fluidity of students' experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Interpretations tend to be more transitory and situational (M. Gall, J. Gall, & Borg, 2003) and the researcher attempts to 'make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them' (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 3). Instead of verifying a predetermined idea, participants' lived and felt experiences in natural settings will be the focus to discover and uncover (Sherman & Webb, 2011).

Based on the above distinctiveness, the qualitative approach allows me to draw on the processes and diversity of students' intercultural learning in order to answer my research questions. Researchers are considered as instruments in collecting and analysing data (Galletta, 2013; Miles & Huberman, 1994), and I have to be aware of subjectivity (of the researcher, and of the participants, and others in the research context) in conducting the research. This aspect will be further discussed as reflexivity in 3.4.

### **3.1.3 Case study**

As discussed by scholars, such as Bassegy (1999), Flyvbjerg (2011), Gomm and Hammersley (2000), Stake (2000), and Yin (2003), there is a range of meanings and positions taken on case studies as a research strategy. The definition and typology are not standardised or fixed with clarity (Bassegy, 1999; Flyvbjerg, 2011; Gomm & Hammersley, 2000). However, I highlight that the case study allows researchers to understand complex social phenomena in relation to the environment or real-life contexts (Flyvbjerg, 2011; Yin, 2003). It offers context-dependent knowledge (Flyvbjerg,

2011). Since human behaviours and phenomena are never independent from naturally-occurring events, they always need to be understood within the given situations (Flyvbjerg, 2011; Gomm & Hammersley, 2000). From that perspective, the case study is a detailed examination of a case on which researchers take 'an in-depth investigation of the interdependencies of parts and of the patterns that emerge' (Sturman as cited in Bassegy, 1999, p. 26) within important circumstances. The strength of case study lies in that it embraces 'detail, richness, completeness, and within-case variance' (Flyvbjerg, 2011, p. 314), covered by a variety of evidence (Yin, 2003). The close and detailed attention to real-life situations will contribute to the 'development of a nuanced view of reality' (Flyvbjerg, 2011, p. 303) as opposed to simply understanding human behaviours as rule-governed acts.

My study is based on a single-case design. Among the extensive range of study/education abroad programmes, I identified the 'island programme' and 'hybrid programme' (Norris & Dwyer, 2005) as the broad context of this case study. Although there is no standardised taxonomy of study/education abroad programme definitions (Norris & Dwyer, 2005), the aforementioned programmes are typically designed for a group of students with courses/activities specifically arranged and offered to them at the host institution. While the island programme tends to be rather exclusive to them, the hybrid programme comes with more opportunities to interact and collaborate with the host institution (e.g. services offered by the host institution, courses taught by host-institution faculty, etc.).

The focal case in this study takes the form of a hybrid programme, incorporating particular teaching and learning strategies. The distinctiveness includes: 1) an emphasis on teaching and advising before, during, and after study abroad phases; 2) a use of ePortfolio (primarily for reflective journals and formative feedback/interactive comments) before, during, and after study abroad phases as a pedagogic tool for learning; and 3) a multi-layered teaching team structure by home (distance) and host institutions (on-site) while students are abroad. Sharing commonalities with other island/hybrid programmes in the degree and nature of interaction and immersion in the local community, this case study aims to provide educators/researchers with perspectives as to what and why students learn about themselves and others in the given setting with the use of reflective journals throughout the programme before, during and after study abroad. I will detail the case below to help capture the uniqueness of the case.

Details of the case. The case in this study is a two-month study abroad programme in the US designed for a group of Japanese students enrolled at a private university in Japan (hereafter referred to as University A). The objectives of the programme are threefold: 1) to increase academic English skills, encompassing public speaking skills, presentations skills, and critical thinking skills with the goal of attaining a TOEFL score of 550 on a paper-based test or equivalent; 2) to develop understanding of the multicultural society in the US through discussion-based class as well as service learning; and 3) to enhance intercultural communication skills and understanding of self and others. University A is known for its distinct educational environment, such as: 1) the dual language policy which stipulates Japanese and English as the primary

mediums of instructions along with the requirement for students to take courses offered in both languages; 2) the diverse demographics of students and faculty (respective percentages of international students and faculty members versus the domestic population are approximately 50%); and 3) the so-called 'blended education' where a range of strategies and campus resources are offered to enhance interactive and collaborative learning opportunities and interdependence in a culturally diverse community.

The host university situated in the US (hereafter referred to as University B) is also a private liberal arts college with a similar student population as University A. International students make up 10% of the entire study body. Ethnic diversity among the domestic students, active student engagement including peer learning and student-faculty interaction, and extensive study abroad opportunities are well recognised and valued on campus. With both universities holding common educational missions, University A and B run the study abroad programmes collaboratively with express aims to increase the breadth and depth of interactions among students and faculty. At University A, two instructors are involved in teaching at the home campus (in Japan) before and after students' study abroad, and three instructors lead courses at University B (in the US) as local faculty.

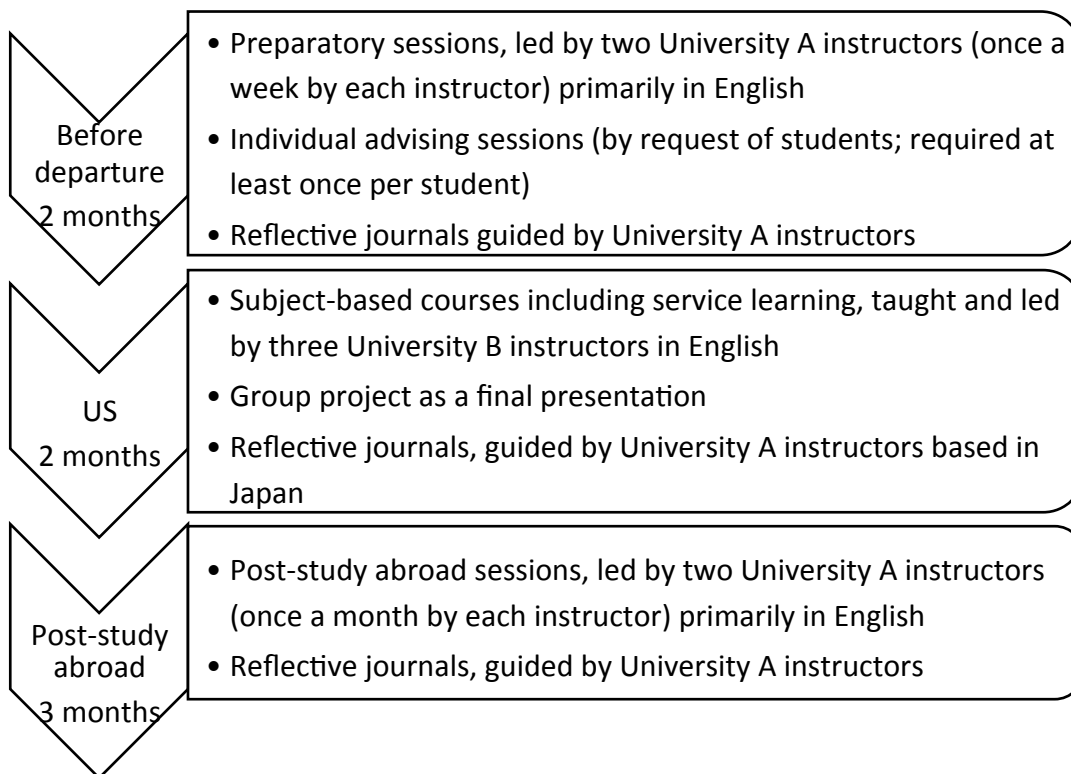
Throughout the programme before, during, and after study abroad, reflective journals are led by the aforementioned two Japanese instructors (hereafter referred to as Instructors X and Y) at University A, using an ePortfolio system. Students' reflective journals are made accessible to all other Japanese students in the programme in



addition to the instructors at University A and B, premised on the idea of creating a stronger learning community, through which students can learn from, and support each other. The instructors post guiding questions on the ePortfolio with different foci, namely: 1) self-achievement including individual goal setting and development of academic English skills (Instructor X); and 2) intercultural communication and intercultural learning about self and others (Instructor Y, myself). The medium of written language used is either Japanese or English, depending on the programme phase. While there are suggested uses of language at the respective phases, students can choose as preferred. Instructor X leads the reflective journals weekly during the preparatory phase, daily during study abroad, and once a month at the post-study abroad phase. Alternatively, Instructor Y (myself) leads the reflective journals weekly during the preparatory and while-abroad phases, and once a month at the post-study abroad phase. The latter reflective journal, centring on students' intercultural communication and intercultural learning about self and others, is the focus of the study. The diagram depicting the overall functions of reflective journals on the ePortfolio is given in Appendix A.

The participants in the study abroad programme selected on an application basis are primarily Japanese in their second or third year at University A. The programme capacity is 30 each year, and there were 28 students when the research was conducted. Once accepted, they start to meet regularly two months prior to departure. The overview of the programme timeline and teaching components are given in Figure 3.1.

**Figure 3.1 Overview of programme timeline and teaching components**



Prior to departure, Instructors X and Y at University A offer preparatory sessions primarily in English separately and concurrently. The foci are in line with the aforementioned reflective journals: 1) self-achievement based on individual goal setting processes, and development of academic English skills (Instructor X); and 2) intercultural communication and intercultural understanding of self and others (Instructor Y, myself). After arrival in the US, the students take courses from the local faculty with an aim to increase public speaking skills, presentation skills, and critical thinking skills. In addition, they develop an understanding of American society through in-class lecture/discussion and service learning opportunities in the local community. While the classes do not involve any University B students, the Japanese students are matched with local students (called buddies) to spend time with outside of class. The Japanese students live in on-campus dormitories. Although there are fewer local

students on campus due to the programme taking place during the summer break at University B, Japanese students still have opportunities to interact with local students remaining on campus for summer session classes. The medium of language among the Japanese students is primarily English. This is discussed and agreed among themselves before departure. The two instructors at University A are based in Japan most of the time while the programme is running, using the reflective journals on ePortfolio as the main communication/advisory tool. In addition to distance supervision, Instructor X visits the site twice: once at the midpoint at the end of June and again in the final week of the programme.

After two months in the US, half of the students in the programme continue to travel to other Asian countries with a group of University B students on a field study programme, while the other students return to Japan. Given the difference of structure and learning objectives of the field study programme, it has been excluded from this study. With an interval of a one-to-two month summer holiday after returning to Japan, the entire student group resumes their studies at University A in the subsequent fall semester. Although not as frequent as the preparatory sessions, post-study abroad sessions are given equal importance and the students meet once a month with each instructor for three months to reflect on and develop their learning from their study abroad. The diagram at Appendix B summarises the contexts of the programme.

### **3.1.4 Data collection**

In this case study, two data sources are drawn from the group of students in the study abroad programme. One is the students' reflective journals kept in the ePortfolio before, during, and after study abroad. The other is semistructured interviews with individual students, which were conducted after the entire study abroad programme ended. The details of participants (3.1.4.1) and methods of data collection (3.1.4.2: reflective journals, and 3.1.4.3: semistructured individual interviews) are given below.

#### **3.1.4.1 Participants**

The participants for this study were selected according to purposive sampling. This indicates that the researcher selects participants who are most relevant to the research question from a qualitative perspective (Bryman, 2012; Creswell, 2013). I approached the students who had participated in and completed the entire phases of the study programme (i.e., before, during, and post-study abroad sessions) since my intention was to gain an understanding of the students' intercultural learning experiences based on the sequence and content of the programme as described in 3.1.3. I excluded two students who did not meet this criterion, and made a call for voluntary participation to the other 26 students. I did so on the last day of the post-study abroad session as it marked the end of the entire programme for them. I explained the purpose of my study and ethical practices in addition to the participant information sheet (Appendix E), and asked the students to sign the consent forms, prepared separately for the reflective journals and semistructured interviews (Appendix F and G) to indicate they would participate in the study. For those who were

absent from that last session, I emailed them and followed the same procedure. Ethical considerations are further addressed in 3.3.

Out of the 26, all students agreed to release their journal entries as data for the study. For the semistructured interviews, 26 students agreed to participate; however, due to availability issues, 18 students eventually undertook the interview. The students were in their 2nd and 3rd year at University A and, with the exception of two students aged 21 and 22, all aged between 19 and 21. The ratios of male and female participants for the reflective journals and semistructured interview were 7 to 19 and 6 to 12 respectively. The demographics are provided in Table 3.1.

**Table 3.1 Number and background of participants**

	<b>Reflective journal</b>	<b>2nd : 3rd year</b>	<b>Semistructured Interview</b>	<b>2nd : 3rd year</b>
Male	7	3 : 4	6	3 : 3
Female	19	17 : 2	12	11 : 1
Total	26		18	

#### **3.1.4.2 Data 1: Reflective journals in ePortfolio**

The students' reflective journals are one of the major data sources I looked at. While two instructors posted guiding questions separately and concurrently in the student's reflective journals throughout the three phases (before, during, and after study abroad), this study focuses only on the reflective topics led by Instructor Y (myself) surrounding students' intercultural communication experiences and intercultural learning about self and others. This is due to the difference of approach taken by the other Instructor X, which focused on students' self-assessment and goal setting

processes to enable personal growth, including language improvement, through study abroad. While Instructor X's approach was particularly important in maintaining and increasing students' motivation and engagement in learning, the focus differed from the intercultural learning journal (taught by Instructor Y, myself), which put emphasis on analytical reflection on students' intercultural communication experiences. Therefore, I decided to exclude the other reflective journal entries from the data.

I led students' reflective writing in line with Coulson and Harvey's (2013) framework for scaffolding reflection for learning through experience (Figure 2.4). First, during the preparatory sessions, I introduced and discussed the purpose, context, and potential learning effects of reflection with students ('learning to reflection' [Coulson & Harvey, 2013]). I also discussed the approach to writing (i.e. explanations on descriptive and analytical writing) ('reflection for action' [Coulson & Harvey, 2013]). Furthermore, once they started the reflective journal writing task, I arranged the students in pairs to give feedback to one another, and encouraged them to read their peers' entries so that they learn to reflect with their peers. Next, while the students were abroad, students were guided to write the reflective journal on their intercultural communication experiences ('reflection-in-action' [Coulson & Harvey, 2013]). Peer feedback was not required at this stage; however, some students occasionally commented on their peers' entries voluntarily. Instructor X also invited some senior students who had participated in the same study abroad programme in the previous year to comment on the students' entries. This was arranged to encourage students' engagement in reflective writing. Lastly, after the students had returned to Japan, I facilitated them to debrief

their intercultural experiences in class, as well as in their reflective journals ('reflection on action' [Coulson & Harvey, 2013]).

The guiding questions in the reflective journals changed each time according to the phases of the programme (see Appendix C). During the preparatory sessions, the guiding questions prompted the students to draw on and analyse previous or ongoing intercultural encounters to understand how individual reactions and interpretations are subject to their own assumptions, and verbal and non-verbal delivery. While abroad, the students were guided to analyse their intercultural communication experience, drawing on differences, similarities, and perspective changes through their intercultural encounters in the US. After return, they were prompted to articulate how they had come to perceive respective societies and people, and how they had developed different interpretations of values as a result of the study abroad experience. Table 3.2 shows the number of journal topics as well as the primary medium of language used for writing at each phase of the programme. The major difference from the other reflective journal led by Instructor X was the frequency of entries, which ran daily while abroad.

**Table 3.2 Overview of reflective journal on IC communication and IC learning**

<b>Time</b>	<b>Primary medium of language</b>	<b>Number of journal topics</b>
Before (April - May)	Japanese	5 (weekly)
During (June - July)	English	8 (weekly)
After (October – December)	Japanese	3 (monthly)

The medium of language for writing the reflective journals was initially suggested by the instructor; however, it was mentioned in class that students could choose whichever suited their needs. The length of the written reflection was not stipulated, and varied from students and by time. Most reflective topics also included multiple questions. Approximately speaking, students' entries per question reached up to 500 or more Japanese characters at the preparatory phase, 300 English words while abroad (occasionally containing short entries of a few sentences), and 500 or more Japanese characters at the post-study abroad phase. Table 3.3 summarises the number of journal entries submitted by students at each phase.

**Table 3.3 Number of submissions per reflective topics**

<b>Time</b>	<b>Number of journal topics</b>	<b>Number of journal entries</b>
Before (April - May)	5 (weekly)	26; 26; 26; 26; 26
During (June - July)	8 (weekly)	25; 23; 23; 18, 23; 21; 23; 19
After (October – December)	3 (monthly)	19; 24; 21

As mentioned earlier in 3.1.3, the students' reflective journals were open and accessible to all instructors and students in the programme with an intention to create a reciprocal learning environment. Nevertheless, for the purpose of this study, it is ethically inappropriate to draw on the journal entries as research data without obtaining the students' consent. Therefore, I followed the ethical procedures as in 3.2.

#### **3.1.4.3 Data 2: Semistructured individual interviews**

As discussed in 3.1.1 and 3.1.2, from the theoretical and methodological perspectives underpinning this study, it is important to look at students' real-life contexts and



experiences, and unfold individual stories. Without understanding the underlying assumptions, expectations, contexts and processes of interactions among the students, significant gaps will exist between their meanings and interpretations inferred. The reflective journals had limitations in this regard. The amount of writing or ways of description were not sufficient enough to understand relevant contexts or details thoroughly and accurately, especially when written in English while abroad. Therefore, I adopted semistructured individual interviews in order to explore in more depth the variety and complexity of situations, and these interviews helped me to gain a better perspective of students' intercultural communication experience besides the written data in the reflective journals.

Alternatively, I could have employed focus groups. Focus group method concerns the breadth of data which is cumulative and elaborative (Denzin & Lincoln, 2007). The conversations have the potential to trigger participants' memories and thoughts as a synergy effect, allowing the researcher to gain rich data (Morgan, 1996). The group setting also encourages participants to query and answer one another. The data generated from the development of conversation provides different perspectives instead of a sum of individual interviews (Denzin & Lincoln, 2007). However, disadvantages exist with regard to the group dynamics. The flow of conversation and individual expressions can be affected by one person who may dominate the group. A collective reaction may also emerge as "groupthink" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2007). Therefore, I decided to conduct individual interviews so that individual narratives could emerge more freely in breadth or depth.

The benefit of semistructured interviews is their versatility since they 'address specific topics related to the phenomenon of study, while leaving space for participants to offer new meanings to the study focus' (Galletta, 2013). I prepared an interview guide (see Appendix H) which helped me to direct the conversation towards the research topics. Through asking questions, I aimed to understand what the students had learned about the self and others from the study abroad experience, and what kind of interactions and contexts had triggered such learning. I also explored how the students had engaged in reflective writing, and how it had helped the students pedagogically. While having the interview guide at hand, given the differences of individual backgrounds and experiences (e.g., students' expectations and goals for the programme, the levels of English proficiency, the degrees of interactions with buddies and/or local people while abroad, etc.), I remained flexible and attentive to the development of conversations so that I could clarify and/or delve into any key topics which emerged during the interviews. Some of the questions were omitted according to the evolving contexts.

I conducted the interviews two months after the post-study abroad sessions had finished. The interviews took place in my private office on campus, lasting for approximately 60 to 90 minutes, following the ethical procedures at the outset of the interviews (see 3.2). In order to ensure students' autonomy with a sufficient command of expression, I also gave the students the choice of using English or Japanese. Except for one student, the other 17 students decided to use Japanese as they could elaborate their thoughts accurately and in detail. As for the student who showed motivation to use English, she found that some parts could not be explained fully and

clearly. When she encountered difficulties, she temporarily switched to Japanese to give better explanations, or I helped her to clarify the points she intended to make. Having the flexibility of using two languages was helpful as a researcher in that I could assist her with the breadth and depth of explanations depending on her need as well as the degree of clarity of my understanding.

All of the interviews were transcribed by me. Since transcripts can never be accurate, as being a 'partially cooked' and 'selective arrangement' (Sandelowski as cited in Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 162) from the actual interview experience (Braun & Clarke, 2013), I aimed to make the transcripts as thorough as possible by noting pauses (long and short), fillers, laughter, and volume which represent the nuance of the emerging narratives. Such paralinguistic helped me to understand the students' emotion, intention, and clarity of ideas in the conversations, and guided my interpretations during the data analysis stage. The notes allowed me to look at the interview data close to the students' original nature in order to retain the information I needed to refer to in the interpretation process (Braun & Clarke, 2006). They also brought back fresh memories as to how the students had reflected on and presented their experience in the interviews. It was particularly helpful when I went back to the data to check the context after an interval of time. They also helped me to recognise how the interviews had been coconstructed between the students and myself as I read the transcriptions. I could see how I had decided to paraphrase or change questions when students had paused or mumbled as a sign of uncertainty, or how I had waited during a long pause until the students were happy with their answers. The notes highlighted how I had been part of the instruments in collecting the data (Galletta, 2013; Miles &

Huberman, 1994) through the dialogical process of the interviews. Although most of these notes are removed from the students' quotations in the findings chapter (Chapters 4 and 5), I intentionally left some notes in a few quotations as they signified certain nuances of the comments.

### **3.1.5 Data analysis**

A qualitative study contains multiple meanings and perspectives which have been constructed within the individuals' (participants' and researcher's) worldviews. Based on this kind of study, the researcher becomes immersed in the data, examines the collected data repeatedly, categorizes and codes its segments, and generates themes and connections from the knowledge of the data (Denscombe, 1998). The essence of qualitative study is not only about analysing data systematically. As Janesick (2011) states, 'The qualitative research should expect to uncover some information through informed hunches, intuition, and serendipitous occurrences that, in turn, will lead to a richer and more powerful explanation of the setting, context, and participants in any given study' (p. 148). With this in mind, I remained open and flexible to any inspirations of ideas throughout the data analysis process to explore the meanings and link the data.

For the contents of students' reflective journals and data from the semistructured individual interviews, I used inductive thematic analysis, a data-driven analysis, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase guide and Saldaña's (2016) coding guide for interpreting the students' intercultural learning experience. I first focused and depended on the data to look for salient aspects instead of pre-framing coding themes

on the basis of theoretical propositions. I also paid attention to latent themes to illuminate and interpret underlying ideas and assumptions, sociocultural contexts, and structural conditions, which might shape the semantic content of students' accounts (Braun & Clarke, 2006). As the data analysis progressed, I found relevance between the emergent aspects and Holliday's (2011, 2013, 2016c) *grammar of culture*, which would guide me to answer the first research question concerning the students' learning about self and others. In other words, I first analysed the data inductively, and returned to Holiday's concepts to compare with my interpretations. Therefore, the final stage of data analysis was based on this theoretical approach to frame the findings. The detailed process of data analysis is as follows.

Prior to analysing the data, I took notes about what I noticed from transcribing the audio-recorded interview data as preliminary jotting for analytic consideration (Saldaña, 2016). I then read the students' reflective journal entries and the interview transcripts carefully and thoroughly. I read the original languages used by the students so as not to lose the nuance and contexts of their accounts through translation. I also continued to take notes to highlight interesting or unique aspects about each student as part of my analytic memos at this stage. This applies to the analysis phase 1, *familiarising myself with data* (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

After the above process, I moved on to phase 2, *generating initial codes* (Braun & Clarke, 2006), or *first cycle coding* (Saldaña, 2016), using a qualitative analysis data software called MAXQDA. The software helped me with storing, organising, managing, and reconfiguring data (Saldaña, 2016). For coding, I referred to a *concept coding*

method (Saldaña, 2016), based on which I assigned a word or short phrase which suggests a bigger idea beyond a single item or action. At this stage, I aimed to look at a range of students' accounts without attempting to fit it into a pre-existing coding frame (Braun & Clarke, 2006), and grasped the overall ideas emergent from the data.

Following the above procedure, I proceeded to identify some levels of patterned responses or meanings in relation to the research questions. Especially for the first research question, the range of ideas was broad; therefore, I tried the process of developing a thematic map of codes several times until I found the coherency of patterns as themes in relation to Holliday's (2011, 2013, 2016c) *grammar of culture* (phase 3: *searching for themes*, Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analytic memo assisted me in this direction. I then examined whether there was a need of replacement or removal (phase 4: *reviewing themes*, Braun & Clarke, 2006). I also reviewed the entire themes to check that the themes accurately represent the meanings reflected in the data set. When the reviewing process was done, I looked at the themes and aspects captured within those themes for further analysis and refinement (phase 5: *defining and naming themes*, Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Throughout the entire phases, I worked with the data in the original languages used by the students. This was to understand the meanings as closely as possible from the students' perspectives instead of filtering them through different linguistic structures and vocabulary. Furthermore, the journal entries written in English needed careful and critical interpretations so as not to mislead the analysis outcome due to the limitations in the breadth and depth of students' vocabulary and use of sentence structures.

Therefore, the data from the semistructured interviews, which were primarily in Japanese (except for one transcript) were used to complement the written data in the reflective journals. I will further address this matter from the perspective of researching multilingually in 3.3.

### **3.2 Research ethics**

Being an insider as an instructor for the programme makes ethical considerations even more important besides my role as a researcher. I ensured students' autonomy as well as their benefits with minimal risks, based on codes of ethics, including informed consent, protection of privacy, and nondeception, as guidelines for moral principles (Christians, 2011) as follows.

After receiving approval of my ethics application at Durham University (Appendix D), I called for participation in the study as in 3.1.4.1. In addition to explaining the purpose of the study, I highlighted the following policies: 1) the voluntary nature of participation and freedom to withdraw from the study at any point; and 2) the guarantee of confidentiality and anonymity. Given my position as an instructor, I was particularly careful not to impose participation on them. Especially, I emphasised that their decision to participate in the study and their responses would not affect their circumstances on campus based on the policy of anonymity and confidentiality. They were also invited to ask questions if anything was unclear prior to making decisions. After providing relevant information, I told the students that they could return the consent forms face down away from my sight before leaving the classroom, or submit it later at their convenience. This was to avoid potential embarrassment or awkwardness they might feel about non-participation.

At the beginning of each interview, I reminded the students of the ethical policies as mentioned above. I told the students that they did not have to answer any particular questions if they wished. I also took permission before audio-recording the interviews. I kept the data in my computer which would not be accessed by anyone else, and engaged in transcribing the interview data myself so that no one would listen to the narratives for confidentiality.

As for the reflective journals. I considered how I would not mislead the privacy protection. Naturally, I gave each student a pseudonym when presenting the findings so that students' identities are protected. However, given that their journal entries are already made viewable in the ePortfolio among all students as well as the staff involved in the programme, I was concerned that students' identities are still recognisable if anybody intentionally searches specific contents based on the quoted accounts in the study. From that perspective, the pedagogical design was not in line with codes of ethics concerning privacy, which resonates with Christians' (2011) discussion regarding the conflictual nature of confidentiality in practice. Therefore, in order to avoid 'an active deception' (Christians, 2011, p. 65), I reconfirmed with the students at the point of member checking whether they agree to be quoted directly regardless of the previously mentioned concern regarding identification via ePortfolio. This was an additional procedure to the initial informed consent to ensure students' autonomy in the study.



### 3.3 Researching multilingually

As a Japanese native speaker conducting research in English and Japanese, it is important to be aware of the complexities and possibilities of using more than one language in the process of the study (Holmes, Fay, Andrews, & Attia, 2013). I illustrate how the two languages were at play through my data collection, data analysis, and presentation of findings in this section.

*Translations of language for the interviews.* The initial difficulty involved the translation of my interview guide. Belonging to an English speaking institution where I obtained ethical approval (Appendix D) prior to data collection, I prepared my interview guide first in English and translated it into Japanese later. In that process, I found that some of the phrases, including key adjectives and verbs, could not be simplified or translated straightforwardly into Japanese. What I particularly struggled was the word, *intercultural*, which is usually translated into Japanese as 異文化 (*ibunka*). It implies 'different culture(s)' with a strong implication of foreignness and boundary against the ideologically driven concept of *Japaneseness* (Kubota, 1999; Liddicoat, 2007; McVeigh, 2004). To ensure that the students' responses would not be confined to the predefined and fixed boundary of foreignness, I added explanations to help with the students' thoughts. As in this example, the actual interview questions tended to be longer and more dialogical than the original texts prepared in the interview guide (see Appendix H) since I provided more words or examples to clarify the points, or to help with their thoughts. The advantage was that it created more interactions between the students and myself while making the purpose and meaning

of the questions clear reciprocally; however, my concern remained that the questions increased their complexity to some extent, instead of being concise.

*Multilingual data analysis.* When looking at the data, I focused on the languages used in the data sets and read them in the given languages (also see 3.1.3). However, through the data analysis process, I used both Japanese and English interchangeably, depending on the tasks. For thinking and questioning the meanings of and links among the data, Japanese gave me more freedom to engage in the process as my ideas flew better in my native language. Therefore, I used Japanese for taking analytic memos and creating theoretical maps of codes accordingly. During the coding stage, I decided to code primarily in English in anticipation of the subsequent categorising and thematising processes. As a researcher, naturally, I had to be careful that the assigned codes reflected the contents of items concerned, but I also had to be careful that the choice of vocabulary and phrases were semantically correct. As the raw data moved on to a more conceptualised level of analysis, I often went back to the raw data and read the original texts as much as possible.

*Presentation of findings.* Taking into account the authenticity of students' accounts and transparency of translation (Holmes, Fay, Andrews, & Attia, 2013), I decided to present the students' accounts in the original language used in the respective data sets. For Japanese accounts, I translated them into English after I had selected what to quote from the data. As for English accounts, I quoted them as the students had written them without correcting the contents, except for obvious typos.

The interview data were particularly challenging to translate due to the linguistic characteristics of conversational Japanese, which involved ambiguity of subjects (which are often omitted in Japanese) and homonyms<sup>1</sup>. In such cases, I carefully went through the context of conversations to identify the subject, or confirm the meaning to the best of my interpretation. The process of translating triggered my awareness anew as to how Japanese conversations depend on contexts in understanding the contents. Furthermore, to help readers understand the quoted accounts clearly in English, I added or modified expressions (indicated in square brackets) to clarify the contents in the findings chapter. For this reason, the quoted accounts are not necessarily direct translations but include my interpretations as needed in rendering them comprehensible. The translation task was not easy and I often looked up the dictionary to search vocabulary and ways of expressions. To help ensure the quality and understandability of all translations, I incorporated the help of two friends, both English native speakers (one of the two specialises in English and Japanese translation), to check the content. I double-checked their refined translations with the original Japanese versions to reconfirm its consistency with the original meaning. However, as far as the aforementioned ambiguity is concerned, I depended on the students to confirm whether they agreed with my interpretations or not. Member checking was important in this regard to increase credibility of the findings (also see 3.5).

Multilingual research practice requires the researcher's strong awareness and purposefulness concerning the roles and functions of languages influential within the contexts of study, the relationship with the researched individuals, and the process of

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<sup>1</sup> An example is an adverb, 'はっきりと (*hakkirito*)'. From the student's account, the two meanings,

seeking and presenting the findings of the study (Holmes, Fay, Andrews, & Attia, 2013). Here, I have presented the reasons behind the choice and management of language and translation. I will further discuss the implications of these approaches in the final chapter (in section 6.2.2 on methodological implications).

### **3.4 Reflexivity**

Every individual carries respective perspectives when encountering the world; therefore, any inquiry essentially reflects the assumptions embedded in the researcher's perspectives (Burr, 2003). As mentioned earlier, researchers are considered to be part of the instruments (Galletta, 2013; Miles & Huberman, 1994) and reflexivity is important in conducting the study. It is vital to acknowledge that I am intrinsically involved in the process of research and that the findings are inevitably co-produced between the participants and myself (Burr, 2003; Finlay, 2003).

When conducting a qualitative study, questions derive from and are driven by the researcher (Burr, 2003). This is evident in interview settings, in particular. Since interviews are highly contextually bounded and stories are mutually created between the researcher and participants, the researcher should not only focus on the outcome of the interview but also be conscious of the process of engagement in the interview (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Galletta, 2013). The researcher plays a key role in eliciting the meanings from the participant by: 1) identifying the points which need more clarification or development of meanings while carefully listening to the narratives; and 2) deciding when and where to ask the participant to elaborate or critically reflect on the phenomena or topic concerned (Galletta, 2013). Of importance is to be critically

aware of the researcher's role and to make sure that the meanings given by the participant are being captured as accurately as possible (Galletta, 2013). Denzin and Lincoln (2005) also draw on the influence of interpersonal space, pacing and pausing, body movement, postures, pitch, and volume in conveying and construing meanings. The researcher's reflexivity on these aspects as well as reciprocity (i.e. clarification, meaning generation, and critical reflection) between the participant and researcher are significant in interview settings (Galletta, 2013).

When I was conducting the interviews with the students, it was important to be cautious about my role as an instructor and researcher. I paid attention to the potential power differential, and considered how that would influence the students' responses. One concern was that the students might feel obliged to give positive statements or conceal their honest thoughts to be polite with me. Therefore, I pointed out that negative comments are also welcome during the interview. I also emphasised the value of their candid narratives in that they provide insights into the study as well as any future participants in the study abroad programme.

With the above in mind, I engaged in trying to understand their narratives through their perspectives as much as possible. Most of the students looked relaxed as we talked. Some of them did not hesitate to provide negative evaluations on certain topics. I also asked them to give examples and explanations to elaborate and clarify their comments. Although I cannot completely remove potential biases and power at play within the interviews, I frequently reflected on how I would phrase and pose questions and how we interacted while unfolding their narratives.

Reflexivity is also critical in data analysis. It is the researcher who looks at the narratives, chooses what to focus on or take out, and construe meanings within the interpretation process. As Denzin and Lincoln (2005) call for attention, 'Researchers should not privilege any ways of looking at the world or at a particular technique but should instead continue to question, question, and question' (p. 697). This occurred especially when I was creating the thematic maps of codes. I kept asking myself whether my interpretations and ways of framing ideas reflected the students' contexts closely and correctly. Sometimes I depended on my insider perspectives as an instructor, which helped me to understand the students' circumstances and situations better. However, I was cautious not to confuse the roles between an instructor and researcher. I remained critical about myself in that my insider's positioning would not mislead my interpretations towards what I 'want to see happening' in the study.

### **3.5 Trustworthiness**

Between quantitative and qualitative studies, there is a foundational difference in the way rigor is understood (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). Qualitative research focuses on in-depth, close-up views of a phenomenon or experience. The importance is to build on knowledge of the given subject on the basis of data with depth, richness, and contexts (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). Supporting the rigor of qualitative studies, Lincoln and Guba (1985) provide a model of trustworthiness of qualitative research as follows: 1) credibility; 2) transferability; 3) dependability; and 4) confirmability.

*Credibility*, which is similar to internal validity in quantitative research, indicates that the descriptions or interpretations of the given experience are recognisable and accurate from the perspective of others who share the experience. For this criterion, I asked Instructor X to check the contextual descriptions of the case (the details of the study abroad programme) and the students (participants) to check the presentations of findings as member checking. For the latter, I asked the students to confirm whether my translations and interpretations reflect their accounts and contexts appropriately. I also re-confirmed whether they agreed to have their accounts quoted in the study (as discussed in 3.2).

*Transferability*, which is similar to external validity in quantitative research, refers to how applicable the findings are when transferred to other contexts or participants. Other scholars call for 'analytic generalization' (Yin, 2003) or 'fuzzy generalization' (Bassegy, 1999). These terms suggest that other researchers are to analyse and draw on any aspects and theories relevant to their own case of interest and develop the knowledge contextually. The ultimate goal is to extend the theory and not to enumerate frequencies in this sense (Yin, 2003). For increasing transferability, I provided thorough and dense descriptions of the case (e.g. demographics, institutional characteristics, pedagogical approaches, etc.) as well as the findings. Every study abroad programme comes with different conditions demographically and environmentally; therefore, I expect other educators/ researchers to look at the many features of the case analytically, and relate any theoretical potentials to other cases.

*Dependability*, which is similar to reliability in quantitative research, implies how much other researchers agree with the decisions made in the research. One of the main concerns of the case study approach is the lack of systematic procedures and possible bias based on equivocal evidence (Yin, 2003). To address this concern, I provided detailed explanations of the methods and procedures of data collection and analysis of this case study.

Finally, *confirmability*, which is similar to objectivity in quantitative research, is highly associated with reflexivity. Being an instructor and researcher in this study, self-critical reflection in the process of interviewing the students and in data analysis is vital and I engaged myself in observing (myself and others), asking (to myself and others), and balancing my roles as an instructor and researcher (as in 3.1.4.3 and 3.4). I will further address the methodological implications of this aspect in the last chapter (6.2.2).

### **3.6 Summary and conclusion**

In this chapter, I discussed social constructionism as the basic theoretical perspective informing the methodology of this study. Locating the students as agents who are engaged in ongoing meaning-making processes with multiple concepts of self, I intend to interpret Japanese students' intercultural learning experience based on a qualitative case study. Among the so-called 'hybrid study abroad programmes' (Norris & Dwyer, 2005), the case of this study consists of: a sequence of teaching sessions before, during, and after study abroad; the use of ePortfolio for keeping reflective journals throughout the programme; and multi-layered teaching structures at home and host universities. Using the students' reflective journals which were kept before, during, and after study



abroad, along with the semistructured individual interviews conducted after the entire programme finished, I aim to understand what the students learned about the self and others, and how reflective writing helped them pedagogically.

The intention of employing a qualitative case study is neither to test or prove hypotheses nor to assess students' learning, but to unfold the realities of students' intercultural learning for a better understanding and educational practice. The details of the case and methods of data collection as well as analysis given in this chapter will help educators/researchers to realise relevant aspects applicable to their contexts or cases. The following two chapters provide the findings of the study, addressing the research questions centring on: 1) students' intercultural learning about self and others; and 2) students' engagement in reflective writing.

## Chapter 4

### Understanding culturally diverse self and others

#### Introduction

Chapter 4 and 5 present the findings of the study and address the two research questions respectively. In this chapter, Chapter 4, I present and discuss the findings of the first research question: *What do students learn about self and others from their intercultural communication experiences through reflection, guided before, during, and after study abroad?* Since the students had been engaged in a variety of intercultural social grouping processes throughout the programme (both in Japan and in the US), I looked at what awareness and understanding of self and others had developed through experiencing otherness and engaging in intercultural communication in such contexts. To address the first research question, I drew on the data from the students' reflective journals and the semistructured individual interviews conducted two months after the post-study abroad sessions had finished in Japan. The students' reflective journals were sequential, starting from the preparatory phase as in Coulson and Harvey's (2013) framework for scaffolding reflection for learning through experience (see Figure 2.4). Therefore, I included the findings from the preparatory phase insofar as the students' intercultural learning had been triggered to varying degrees in different contexts before arriving in the US (in-class discussion and activities in preparation for their study abroad), while abroad (reflections on their intercultural encounters and ongoing intercultural communication experiences), and during the final post-study abroad sessions (the debriefing process of their experiences).

The students' intercultural learning processes at each stage of before, during, and after the study abroad programme are distinctive from one another as follows. First, the findings before studying abroad illustrate how the students learned to be aware of their taken-for-granted knowledge as they reflected on their socialisation and resocialisation processes in their respective *personal trajectories* through their secondary education (Berger & Luckmann, 1966) and tertiary education (Alred & Byram, 2002) in the Japanese context. The reflective process at the preparatory stage showed that students' intercultural learning is not necessarily a new experience by crossing national borders but possibly encountered in everyday contexts. Second, the range and intensity of students' reflective processes tended to increase while abroad as the students engaged in various social grouping processes among their peers and across different groups of individuals in the US context. The students' use of foreign language is also at play in their intercultural interactions and intercultural communication experiences, intensifying the students' meaning making processes. Finally, the students' reflection after studying abroad encompassed a dynamic context between the two social structures (i.e., the US and Japan), enabling them to further develop their understanding of their study abroad experience with newly gained understanding of diverse individual realities.

Drawing from Holliday's (2011, 2013, 2016c) *grammar of culture*, I organised the contexts and topics of the students' reflections into three cultural domains. The findings are presented in the following order and with particular terminologies of Holliday's work italicised throughout the chapter: The relationship between *social structures* and individual cultural realities with a focus on education and career paths

(4.1); the meanings of *particular cultural products* in relation to understanding self and others (4.2); and the increased sense of individuality and attitudes towards understanding self and others through *small culture formations* (4.3). I used pseudonyms for the students' excerpts to ensure their anonymity, and ellipses are given as follows: three spaced ellipsis points (. . .) for omission of data or a pause within a sentence; and four-spaced ellipsis points (. . . .) for omission of data or a pause between two sentences from the original data.

#### **4.1 The relationship of *social structures* and individual cultural realities**

In this section, I present the students' accounts of their educational experiences (4.1.1) and visions of career paths (4.1.2) as *cultural resources* within *particular social structures* (Holliday, 2011, 2013, 2016c). I highlight how the students referred to these *cultural resources* to explain what sets of ideas had been internalised, and had shaped their perceptions and behaviours. I also illustrate how the students developed awareness and understanding of multiple and negotiable realities as a result of encountering otherness across different *social structures*.

##### **4.1.1 Recognising and relating education as a context of legitimised knowledge**

Encountering otherness in different educational contexts and settings brought about opportunities for the students to reflect on and negotiate their taken-for-granted attitudes, behaviours, and beliefs institutionalised through education. Whether the transition was from high school to university or from Japan to the US, the students reflected on how particular sets of thought had developed through school experience and had driven their behavioural choices until they encountered otherness in another

environment. In the reflective journal during the preparatory sessions, the following student, Hiro, described how startling it was to find his Japanese expression incomprehensible among other Japanese friends he made upon entering University A in Japan. He knew that dialects exist but he never doubted that the expression used and taught by his teacher was in fact regional. He also discovered different learning styles as he studied with international students on campus. Drawing on these experiences, he reflected on his previously held belief about the absoluteness of teachers' role as well as the validity of knowledge taught at school, and concluded with his intention to develop criticality and flexibility while studying in the US:

自分の過去を振り返ってみて、今まで自分が学校で習ってきた教育はすべて正しいことだと思ってきたが（中略）日本の教育では絶対だといわれてきたものが、世界ではそんなに重要なことではなく（中略）また、今まで学校で習ってきたことだけが正しいことなんだということを疑い、多文化社会であるアメリカでは柔軟な思考で相手の文化や考えを理解していきたい。（ひろ、事前授業ジャーナル）

Looking back at my past, I have always thought that the knowledge taught at school is right. . . . What is considered to be absolute in Japanese education may not be important in other countries' education systems. . . . I want to be critical in that the knowledge learned at school is not the only truth, and be flexible in understanding other thoughts and cultures in the multicultural American society. (Hiro; reflection before studying abroad)

Another student, Ami, also learned at University A how her taken-for-granted discussion style had been institutionalised in the past educational context. She saw other international students actively expressing opposite views until they felt satisfied as opposed to her simply agreeing with their opinion. This experience triggered Ami to relate her attitude to the way she used to socialise at school. Furthermore, she delved

into deconstructing what had actually held her back from being candid about her opinions:

小学校などの教育では、「皆で仲良く」や「けんかしない」などと教育され、皆で同じ事をしたり、考えたりする事が「善」とされる事が多かった。なので、私は当初ディスカッションの中で、意見に同意すれば仲間意識が生まれ、良い関係になれると思っていた。共通意識が生まれ、話も弾むと考えていた。(中略)そこで、いままで私は誰かの意見に同意し、馴れ合いをしていたのだなと実感した。反対意見を言えば嫌われ、もう立て直せないと思って、躊躇していた。(あみ、事前授業ジャーナル)

In primary school, we were taught to get along with each other and not to fight/quarrel with each other. It was often considered 'good' to think together and do the same way. That is why at the early stage of university life, I had thought that a sense of comradeship would be created, and that we could get along with each other if we agree with others during discussions. I had thought that by agreeing with others, we would be on the same page and the discussion would become more lively. . . . But [as I observed other international students' interaction] I realised that I had been expecting a cozy relationship with others. I had hesitated to give opposing opinions because I might make myself a nuisance and might not be able to recover the relationship. (Ami; reflection before studying abroad)

Ami not only drew on her primary school experience as an influential context where group togetherness and relationality had been typified, but also analysed how the assumptions and interpretations would differ from one another:

恐らく彼らは「自分の意見が無い人」と判断するのだろう。そしてその人はディスカッションの中で役割を果たしていないと判断される事もあるかもしれない。つまり、ディスカッションは皆で一緒だね。と確認し合う事ではなく、互いの少しでも違う考えを衝突させ、吟味していく事だと学ぶ事ができた。そこから、自分の意見を述べる事に恐れず、自信を持って発信していきたい。彼らも自分と違う意見を聞く事を求めていると思う。(あみ、上記続き)

I will probably be judged as 'a person without an opinion' [by other international students]. And I might be evaluated that I am not performing my role during discussions, too. I realised that discussion

is not the place to identify the common ground, but where we put out even the slightest difference of opinions and examine them. I want to get rid of my fear of expressing opinions and speak up with confidence. I think [other international students] are expecting to hear different views, too. (Ami; continued from the above excerpt)

During and after studying abroad, some other students also touched on aspects such as teaching/learning styles and choice of topics dealt with in class to explain how educational contexts and resources are influential in normalising certain behaviours and values, such as a sense of freedom. Drawing on the interactions and communication occurring in the classroom contexts, the students developed an understanding of the underlying assumptions and meanings of particular attitudes and behaviours in the respective settings.

The above accounts indicate that education served as a cultural resource (Holliday, 2011, 2016c) for the students to reflect on and understand the particularity of human behaviours and beliefs internalised in the self and others. Education offers the context of *secondary socialisation* (Berger & Luckmann, 1966) where institutionalised knowledge is produced and distributed as ongoing human activities at a macro level. In such contexts, the institutional tradition is explained and justified as *legitimation* (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). In other words, education is one of the cultural resources underpinned by 'the universal need for group cohesion to provide social continuity' (Holliday, 2011, p. 138), and the validity of knowledge generally remains unquestioned as long as it functions satisfactorily in the given context (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Thus, the students' experiences of moving from high school to university (i.e., regional and academic transitions) or travelling from Japan to the US (i.e., international

academic, cultural, and social transitions) triggered the students' awareness towards what they had taken for granted from the preceding educational process. As a result of the experienced dissonance, they reflected on the 'system of ideas which drive behavioural choices' (Holliday, 2010b, p. 261) in their consciousness and conceptualised how multiple realities (e.g. beliefs and assumptions, underpinning particular ways of expression, behaviours, and attitudes) develop on the basis of the respective educational structures.

On the other hand, the students' accounts also support the fact that education does not confine individual beliefs and behaviours (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Holliday, 2011, 2016b). For example, the aforementioned reflection of Ami concerning the difference in discussion styles illustrates how she developed willingness to adopt a different approach in discussions: she deconstructed the assumption and meaning of her internalised behavior, and reconstructed alternative interpretations based on the interaction with the international students. The following student, Maya, also demonstrated her understanding that individuals are influenced by, but not necessarily confined by educational structures:

This educational difference makes the difference of communication style between Americans and Japanese but one thing I have to remind myself is that it depends on each person (Aoi; reflection while abroad; original writing).

While recognising the influence of *secondary socialisation* on different groups of individuals (Berger & Luckmann, 1966), Aoi's increased awareness on the multiplicity of subjective realities guided her not to essentialise individuals on the mere basis of large educational structures.



Lastly, the following experience of Ken illustrates the student's agency in that he attempted to negotiate conflicting realities between the instructor and himself while abroad. As one of the learning goals was to develop public speaking skills in class, the instructor expected him to instantly give his opinion whenever asked; however, he had given more value to allowing pauses so that he would be prepared to give appropriate comments from his own perspective. He explained in the interview his challenge and frustration over the conflicting expectations and backgrounds:

でもだから自分は言えなかったから、後悔してるとかじゃなくて。(中略) 恥ずかしくて言えないとかっていうわけじゃないっていうのを先生に何回も説明してて。意見があるときは本当にちゃんと言います、って何回も言ってたんですけど。先生(中略) カウントアウトして成績つけてたっていうのもあるんでしょけど、(中略) 次がなかったら成績落とすからね、みたいな感じで言われて。すごいそれが嫌で嫌でしょうがなくって、ちゃんとした意見も言えない、まともなことも言えないのに、こんな状態で意見を言っても自分はなんか・・・っていうのもあって、先生とちょっと喧嘩しちゃったりとかして。そのアメリカでは直感的な意見っていうのをすごい大切にしてるのかな、と思ったり。(けん、インタビュー)

It doesn't mean that I regretted that I hadn't been able to speak up [as much as the instructor expected in class]. . . . I explained to the instructor over and over that I wasn't being shy. I told her many times that I would definitely speak up when I certainly have an opinion. . . . She even mentioned that she would fail me if I don't speak up next time because my participation was counted in the grade. I hated [that I had to do so]. I would have [felt bad<sup>2</sup>] if I said something when I wasn't ready to give a decent comment. I even had a quarrel about that with her. I thought that intuitive opinions seemed to be more valued in America. (Ken; post-return interview)

What he found difficult was the instructor's expectation of quick responses, and that she did not see the point of his not being able to do so. In fact, he had multiple reasons

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<sup>2</sup> My interpretation based on the context since he did not complete the sentence.

behind his reaction, involving his *personal trajectories*, the *small culture* in class, and his cognitive process. First, he intended to increase his active listening skills since he had realised during the preparatory sessions that he had paid less attention to what was being said, and had often negated others' perspectives by taking over the conversation with 'but...(demo in Japanese)'. Drawing from this part of *personal trajectories* (i.e. what he learned from the interactions with his peers before arriving in the US), he developed awareness that he needed to be more mindful about listening to understand others. The second reason was the influence of a particular peer on his participation in class. He felt intimidated by the student who aggressively 'attacked' his opinions and did not feel comfortable about expressing himself. In other words, the *small culture* being formed in the class affected him in a negative direction. Finally, he drew on his cognitive processing, acknowledging that he needed time and efforts to generate ideas. As all of these factors came into operation, he struggled with conflicting realities emergent between himself and the instructor. His struggle signifies the classroom culture which involves ongoing constructions and negotiations of expectations, assumptions, and stories brought in by the instructor and students (Holliday, 1994, 2016a). It also denotes his autonomy in the form of resistance (Holliday, 2011) insofar as he did not simply conform to the expected norm legitimised in the US class setting, but attempted to express and maintain what he considered to be important.

In sum, educational structures served as a common context for the students to recognise and make sense of their taken-for-granted knowledge. They understood and explained their beliefs and assumptions, which had been institutionalised, legitimised,

and consequently, internalised within themselves in the respective contexts of educational structures. In other words, the students demonstrated their awareness and criticality to a greater or lesser extent in questioning the 'natural' constructed through *secondary socialisation* (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Furthermore, the students' accounts indicated their realities of being active agents against *social structures* (Holliday, 2011, 2016c). As the students travelled through different educational structures, they developed alternative interpretations and began to reevaluate and/or modify their own behaviours based on the new context. At the same time, existing power structures may work against the students (Holliday, 2016a). As in Ken's experience, conflicting realities may emerge in the form of dilemma, struggle, and resistance in the classroom context.

#### **4.1.2 Reconsidering the role of self in career exploration**

Job search is a serious commitment and investment of time for students under the traditional recruitment system in Japan. Students usually start their job search from the end of the third year to receive a job offer, specifically targeted at prospective graduating students, within the first half of the final year. Social pressure increases during the peak season of recruitment. Few consider the option of postponing job search until after graduation because they may fall out of the mainstream job market. Not having a job upon graduation also entails a negative impression such as lacking in skills and abilities, being unprepared for employment, and allowing too much uncertainty. Therefore, students often get anxious while still in university to identify their job interests as early as possible in order to be successful in a rigid and competitive recruitment process.

The students in the study shared similar perspectives in this regard. They had drafted a blueprint for the future within the social norm driven by the Japanese recruitment system, and had had little awareness of other possible approaches to career paths until they talked with their American friends. Thus, it came as a surprise when they found that their American friends allowed more time and appeared more relaxed in the choice of career. Through the American friends' views and attitudes towards career paths, the students found a stronger sense of freedom, flexibility, and independence in the way their American friends chose to live.

In particular, the following case of Akane indicates the significance of reexamining her previously held beliefs and that of exploring alternative perspectives surrounding career paths. Initially, Akane's reaction to her American friend was relatively sceptical: she thought her friend was asking too much insofar as he wanted his job to be rewarding to enjoy his life to the fullest. It did not seem realistic to her as she had perceived the job hunting process as where 'companies select the students'. However, from the conversation, she developed a more autonomous self-image in that 'she could be the one who chooses the company' alternatively. She started to feel more accountable for her own choice of career rather than being driven by the established rules and structures. She described her learning as follows:

“Do you shape the world or does the world shape you?” 私は世界に作られていないともうはっきり言うことは出来ませんでした。 ”The world shapes me, but I shape my small world.”と答えました。ちょっと悔しくて苦し紛れにでた言葉でしたが、これは事実だと思います。このような私の常識を破る経験から私はまた違う見方で世界を見ることができ、それを通じてできる私の世界は他の人とは違うものになります。この話をしてから当たり前を当てはめることを無くすようにしていたので、新しい発見をすることが多くなりました。（あかね、留学中ジャーナル）

[When my friend asked me], ‘Do you shape the world or does the world shape you?’, I couldn’t say confidently that it’s not the world which makes me. Instead I answered, ‘The world shapes me, but I shape my small world’. I put that way with a desperate effort because I had felt a slight sense of setback, but I think that’s true. From this kind of experience which breaks my common sense, I will be able to see the world from another point of view. And my world will become different from everyone else’s as a consequence. Ever since I had this conversation, I tried not to apply my taken-for-granted perspectives. Then I started to discover more new things. (Akane; reflection while abroad)

As Akane wrote elsewhere, the fact that she intentionally chose to write this entry in Japanese in order to vividly capture her thoughts indicates how significant the perspective change was to her. She learned from the conversation the value of perceiving things from different perspectives. Furthermore, the subsequent account in the following week demonstrated her increased criticality about the social norms:

私が特に就活の話を通して自分がいかに社会の見えないルールに沿って自分を作っているのかに気づいた。それは私の個性を妨げる一つになるし、それが当たり前になっていたのでアメリカに来るまで何も感じなかった。  
(あかね、留学中ジャーナル)

When I talked about job search [with my American friends], I realised how I had constructed myself in line with invisible social rules. The invisible rules will inhibit my individuality, but they had been just normal to me until I came to the US. (Akane; reflection while abroad)

Akane’s account shows the eye-opening learning experience for her, which resulted from encountering other realities embodied in different social structures in the US, and reflecting on the negotiable nature of her own reality with an increased sense of autonomy.

In conclusion, the topic of career paths projected the significant impact of Japanese social structures on the students' deeply held beliefs until they evaluated how they had framed their realities. It was through their intercultural encounters with the American friends that they began to imagine the self as an independent agent who can shape his/her own life, instead of simply conforming to the externally imposed system of constraints in the Japanese society. From the theoretical perspective, individuals are considered to be constantly negotiating their realities against institutionalised rules and patterns within social structures (Holliday, 2011, 2013, 2016c). However, the Japanese students' interpretations of their experiences indicate that they required a stronger sense of autonomy and criticality to be able to deconstruct the seemingly absolute reality reified in the Japanese job recruitment process. The negotiable nature of relationships between the Japanese students and *social structures* was not spontaneous and straightforward. While every individual has the potential to engage in dialogue with structures of their society, different forces, such as tradition, politics, hierarchy, and prejudice against it, affect the degree of its realisation (Holliday, 2016c). Thus, the students' accounts underpin the value of encountering alternative realities in this regard: it enabled them to envisage themselves as autonomous agents, realising greater potential to shape their realities within given social structures than before.

#### **Summary of section 4.1**

Within their given *social structures*, the students drew on various cultural resources, such as their preceding educational backgrounds and the anticipated job hunting process and system, to reflect on, and understand, how they had internalised particular behaviours (e.g., their assumed ways of socialisation and engagement in class) and beliefs (e.g., teachers' role in relation to students' knowledge construction,

and the degree of flexibility and autonomy in envisioning career paths). They began to understand alternative realities through the experience of travelling across different *social structures* and evaluating their taken-for-granted knowledge in response to encountering otherness. The students' accounts indicated the negotiable relationship between *social structures* and individuals insofar as they attempted to modify or negotiate their behaviors and perceptions accordingly. At the same time, the students' criticality and sense of autonomy affected the extent of self-perception as active agents against the *social structures*. The students' experience of encountering otherness and understanding different realities enabled them to understand the potential for envisaging their own realities independent of the constraints of *social structures*.

#### **4.2 The meanings of *particular cultural products* in relation to understanding self and others**

In this section, I present the students' reflections pertaining to *particular cultural products*. These products are associated with artefacts of a culture, including acts and images constructed and expressed about their own social group or about others' (Holliday, 2011, 2013, 2016c). The findings in this section illustrate how the students reflected on their previous perceptions of Japanese hospitality and the images of self and others, and how they reconstructed their understanding of self and others. I focus on: the sense of hospitality (4.2.1); and the statements about a culture as outward expressions of self and others (4.2.2).

#### 4.2.1 Deconstructing the sense of hospitality

Japan is often introduced as a country where hospitality (*omotenashi* in Japanese) is expressed extensively from the perspectives of politeness, attention to detail, cleanliness, and thoroughness of service and hosting. Throughout the programme from the preparatory sessions until the post-study abroad sessions, it was in fact common for the students to mention this as a typical image of Japan, and for some, a source of pride. However, after spending two months in the US, some of the students began to consider the sense of hospitality and nature of people's kindness from multiple perspectives, and built a new understanding as to how it could be expressed and acted out in different ways. The following student, Chisato, explained her newly developed understanding as follows:

なんか、すごい日本っておもてなしの国って、有名じゃないですか。何に對してもすごい丁寧だし、接客とかも、お客様（下線部強調）みたいなのところがあるじゃないですか。でも、だからと言ってアメリカが全然お客さんのことを思ってないかとか、そうじゃなくって、フレンドリーだけど・・・こう相手を思いやる優しさとか、そういう、フレンドリーだからこそ（中略）会話が弾む、お客さんと店員さんとで弾むのかなあ、って思って。接客スタイルについて、日本の良さもあるしアメリカの良さもあるし。（ちさと、帰国後インタビュー）

Umm, you know, Japan is famous for being a country of *omotenashi*. And it's true that people are very polite, and when it comes to customer service, the customer is [treated with so much respect]. But it doesn't mean at all that Americans don't care about customers. They are friendly, and in fact, they express their kindness and consideration of others in a friendly way. That's why the conversations between the shop staff and customers become lively. There are good things about both kinds of customer service. (Chisato; post return interview)

Chisato is one of the few students who reflected on Japanese hospitality and kindness, leading to their awareness that such an aspect is not necessarily distinctive to the



Japanese. While some students continued to appreciate the politeness and thoroughness of Japanese customer service after returning to Japan, the students constructed their understanding that hospitality and kindness is expressed and represented in different ways of behaviours and practices, depending on the types of people and social contexts. In other words, the students began to recognise and relate to others' cultural threads (Holliday, 2011, 2013, 2016b) by drawing on the commonality of human nature (i.e. goodwill and thoughtfulness as universal dispositions) while also drawing on the contextual differences which shape people's expressions and behaviours in respective ways.

On the other hand, some other students demonstrated criticality as to how Japanese hospitality manifests itself alternatively:

Japanese clerk [sic] always obey a manual like a machine. Also, there are [sic] no room in our heart while working [sic]. For me, I feel tired to follow the manual strictly at my part time job. However, American is optimistic in that point. I like the American style. (Manami; reflection while abroad; original writing)

日本に帰ってきて感じたのが、働く人々が礼儀正しすぎるということです。それは、日本のブランドのようなものなのかもしれませんが、時としてこのことが人々を苦しめているのではないかと感じました。（とし、帰国後ジャーナル）

After coming back to Japan, I felt that the workers are too polite. It may be the Japanese brand but I felt like that kind of approach is sometimes distressing the people. (Toshi; reflection after studying abroad)

Although Manami referred to the American style in an essentialising manner, it was meaningful for her as she could compare contrasting work ethics in different social contexts and evaluate her perceptions. She realised how Japanese workers sacrifice

their emotions in the name of maintaining order and politeness, and gave a new interpretation to the cultural act characterised by the thoroughness of service in Japan. Likewise, Toshi, discovered different values in the way American workers allowed themselves to chat while managing their duties, as they looked happier compared to workers in Japan. In addition to his written accounts, Toshi drew on the same topic in the interview as follows:

日本のおもてなしは、過剰だなって思いましたね。給料もらってて、最低限がこれだよってハードルが高すぎる、モチベーションが薄れちゃうって。日本に帰ってきて、空港で最初に受けたサービスがあまりよろしくなかったんで、なんだこれは、と。ちょっとカチンときてたんですけど。ま、しょうがないよね、って。(中略)みんな、おもてなししなきゃしなきゃって思うんですけど、僕らも期待しすぎなんじゃないかって。だからいわゆるお客様は神様だ、みたいな、ああいう考え方、よろしくないよね、って思いますね、今・・・。(とし、帰国後インタビュー)

I thought that *omotenashi* was excessive. The basic quality expected to achieve [in the Japanese context] is too high for the wage. So it will deprive the people of their motivation. When I arrived in Japan, I received a bad service at the airport which annoyed me. But then I changed my mind. Well, we can't help it. . . . From the workers' perspectives, we assume that we have to demonstrate *omotenashi*, but on the other hand, we are also expecting too much out of it as customers. So I don't think it's good to think like, 'The customer is God<sup>3</sup>', now. (Toshi; post return interview)

The noteworthy point is that Toshi reinterpreted *omotenashi* as a cultural act projected on, and reinforced by, Japanese people, as he described as 'the Japanese brand' in his written account. The politeness and thoroughness of service is expected and acted out at a collective level in society; however, as Toshi critiqued, it is reified as an idealised image driven by the people (Holliday, 2016c). On this basis, the students demonstrated criticality in that they recognised the dissonance between the socially

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<sup>3</sup> A phrase implying the attention and priority given to customers, who are always considered to be right.

constructed image of Japanese culture, as represented in the concept of *omotenashi*, and the more subjective realities embodied in autonomous agents. They began to understand how individuals may conform to or resist the discourse of Japanese culture (Holliday, 2016c).

In conclusion, the students' reflections on hospitality in Japanese and American contexts indicated their change in the way they framed and interpreted particular cultural acts. Instead of perceiving the sense of hospitality as distinctive to the Japanese culture as in the cultural blocks approach (i.e., fixed descriptions of culture and people), Chisato began to see the commonality with, and the difference of, the American hospitality and kindness in a fluid way as in the cultural threads approach. As she stated, 'There are good things about both kinds of customer service'. Her reflection suggests that recognising and relating to others' cultural threads may have the potential to enable students to perceive different expressions and behaviours less judgmentally. On the other hand, the critical views demonstrated by Manami and Toshi imply that they began to pay attention to individual autonomy which had been hidden until they recognised it. As Holliday (2011) cautions, '...we need to be very careful about generalized statements about how certain people, or indeed whole "cultures" are uncritical or "passive"' (p. 140). Instead of taking statements about the particular cultural practice at face value (Holliday, 2016c), Manami and Toshi reconstructed that their interpretations of the seemingly 'real' Japanese *omotenashi* culture may not necessarily be 'real' (Holliday, 2011). Their newly developed understanding suggests the possibility of being 'cultural innovators' who will bring

different interpretations or personal cultural realities into existing structures and contexts as cultural negotiation (Holliday, 2013).

#### **4.2.2 Evaluating the use of artefacts of a culture as outward expressions of self and others**

The students' reflection on cultural resources, products, and statements about a particular culture, which Holliday (2011, 2013, 2016c) conceptualised as artefacts of a culture, enabled the students to recognise the stereotypical and essentialised way of describing a group of people. They began to question the image of Japan constructed and represented outwardly, and developed or modified their interpretations through their intercultural communication experiences. For example, the following student, Mika, referred to the overgeneralised image of Japanese kindness:

親日の方とか外国の方とかたくさんいると思うんですけど、そういう人たちが見てるのは、結構物理的というか、これまでの日本の歴史だったりとか、侍とか武士のこととか、そういうことで。日本人の心とは言うとは思うんですけど、真に日本人がこう、どういう国民性か（中略）理解してるのかってちょっと思ったりしたことがありました。（中略）日本がすごい好きって言ってくれる人は、日本人はすごい優しいし、みたいな感じで言ってくれるんですけど、なんか、こう結構、人にも寄るんですけど（中略）なんか全員が全員そうじゃない・・・ていう。うーん、ちょっとこう海外の人が思っている日本人像となんかちょっと違ったのかな、っていう風になんとか思ったりするんですよ。（みか、帰国後インタビュー）

There are many foreigners who are in favour of Japan but I had an impression that those people are looking at something symbolic<sup>4</sup>, such as Japanese history, or um, Samurai warriors. Well, it's said that the spirit of Samurai warriors represents Japanese mentality but I felt a bit sceptical whether they really understand genuine aspects of the Japanese people. . . . Those people who love Japan compliment the kindness of Japanese but I think that sort of kindness depends on the person. . . . Not all people are like that. I kind of felt that there might

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<sup>4</sup> Mika used the word 'physical' in Japanese.

be a gap in the image of the Japanese people. (Mika; post return interview)

Mika struggled to explain the implication of the dissonance she experienced about the conflicting ideas about the Japanese. However, her account indicated that she had begun to realise that particular cultural resources (i.e. history, tradition) and statements of a culture (i.e. what people talk about the Japanese culture) cannot be projected onto the people in an essentialised manner (Holliday, 2011, 2012). For Mika, her cultural realities based on her *personal trajectories* (i.e. what she had constructed in the contexts of her past relationships) and *small cultures* (i.e. constant socialising interactions in everyday contexts) were truer to her than the somewhat ideological image of the Japanese appreciated by those she conversed with. The discourse of the Japanese culture gave Mika an opportunity to reflect on how an understanding of a particular culture is contextual- and individually based, leading to her awareness that multiple realities cannot be stated in a reductionist manner (Holliday, 2011).

Reflecting on the use of *particular cultural products* also triggered an opportunity to evaluate the meaning of cultural artefacts as outward expressions of self. Yoko questioned why the students, including herself, had often drawn on typical cultural artefacts for introducing Japan on various occasions, such as at a Japanese festival or in a group performance designed for local audiences:

私達が日本を紹介するとき、なぜか着物や浴衣、伝統的な地域の行事や祭りだったり、書道や楽器などの芸能だったりした。これらは、考えてみると、普段私達が本当にやっていて身近にあるのかということそうではない、が、しかし、それらをどうしても私達は海外の人に紹介してしまっていたことに不思議を覚えた。単に海外の人にもわかるように印象深い日本の伝統文化を紹介してしまっているのかもしれないが、じゃあ「今」の日本ってどんな国？と思った時、私はあまりはっきりと思ひ浮かぶものがなく、あやふやだなあと感じた。(ようこ、事後授業ジャーナル)

When we introduced Japan [while in the US], we drew on *kimono* or *yukata*<sup>5</sup>, some traditional regional events or festivals, or performing arts such as calligraphy and instruments for some reason. But when I think carefully, those things are not necessarily something that we actually do [in everyday life] or something that are closely attached to us. I felt curious why we ended up introducing those things to non-Japanese people. We might have introduced these impressive aspects so that the culture will be more tangible to others. But when I asked myself what 'current' Japan is like, I couldn't think of anything particularly identifiable and felt it was vague. (Yoko; reflection after studying abroad)

The implication of Yoko's account is twofold. One concerns the students' motivation of using *particular cultural products*. Especially in the context where people might have had little knowledge of the students' backgrounds, and where the students had to present themselves as a group, they could have been prone to make use of the artefacts of the culture as a way to express, or even for some, to strengthen, their cultural identity (Holliday, 2016b). The students' decision to use *particular cultural products* indicated how individuals may draw on different cultural resources at varying times depending on the circumstances (Holliday, 2016b). On the other hand, as Yoko questioned the said situations, her criticality allowed her to deconstruct the purpose and meaning of *particular cultural products*. In particular, she stated in her subsequent writing that sharing these *particular cultural products* was not enough, and that she wanted to take her intercultural communication experiences further to be able to mediate between and connect with individuals in the endeavour of being intercultural (Alred, Byram, & Fleming, 2003). Yoko's accounts illustrated her awareness of, and her willingness to understand and relate to, individual cultural realities aside from the

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<sup>5</sup> The Japanese traditional clothes.

popular discourse of a culture centring on *particular cultural products* (Holliday, 2011, 2016c). She stated in the interview later that refraining from stereotypical or biased views is one of the important approaches she incorporates into communicating and connecting with others.

Lastly, the students' intercultural encounters and communication with the local people enabled the students to evaluate the tendency of labelling people by nationalities. In particular, the following student, Takashi, expressed his strong resistance to associate people with a particular culture in a stereotypical way. He described in the interview how, initially, he had categorised the Americans, but had changed his approach after meeting a range of American friends throughout his sojourn. He started to enjoy experiencing and interpreting otherness based on the individual diversity through his intercultural encounters and communication with others. Likewise, his resistance to essentialisation grew from the uneasiness he had felt by being labelled himself. While he described his personality as quiet and calm in the interview, it was clear that he separated such traits from the typical Japanese characteristics 'imagined' by others. He explained how and why he is not happy about stereotyping Japanese attitudes and behaviours as follows:

日本人はその・・・そういう意見を言わない傾向にあるとか、そういう言われるのもなんか、あんまり嫌になったというか。こっち戻ってきてからそういうこと言われたりするときもあって（中略）なんかそういう文化を言っていると、なんかそういう風じゃない人も、そういう風になってしまうかもしれない（中略）やっぱり固定概念を持たしてしまうからなんか、あんまり・・・文化はこうだっていうの・・・なんかこう好きじゃなくなった、っていうのもあります。（たかし、帰国後インタビュー）

I don't like to hear [now] that Japanese . . . tend not to say opinions. After I returned to Japan, I was told so on a few occasions. . . . If you talk about the culture that way, those people who do not apply may

also end up conforming to that. . . . I think that [way of talking] will give stereotypes . . . so I developed my preference not to define a particular culture now. (Takashi; post return interview)

Of importance here is that Takashi recognised how stereotypes would be reinforced, and even interfere with, individual cultural realities which are independent of what is said about the culture (Holliday, 2011, 2013, 2016c). He wanted to be perceived and understood as an individual, not by cultural descriptions. Drawing on the negative implication of predefining people, he began to shift his focus on the direct behaviours of, and communication with, people to coconstruct his understanding of a culturally diverse self and others based on their cultural threads (i.e., multiple realities coconstructed and reconstructed through different socialisation processes) (Holliday, 2016b). His disagreement with the discourse of cultural blocks is evident in his statement below:

いろいろな国の人たちがもうなんかいろいろな国に行き来している中で（中略）  
口に出して言ってほしくなくて。同じなんか人間だから。あなたは性格こうで、これ日本人だからね、みたいな大きなくくりの中で言ってほしくないというか・・・。なんかもう、その、そういうのはあまり聞きたくない。  
（たかし、帰国後インタビュー）

Since [so many] different people travel across varying countries. . . . I don't want people to articulate [those kinds of stereotypes]. We are all the same human beings. I don't want people to lump an individual into a big group and describe it like, 'Your personality is such and such and that's because you are Japanese'. I don't want to hear that any longer. (Takashi; post return interview)

Takashi's account indicated his awareness and understanding of the complexity and multiplicity of individual identities, including his own and others, which ties into an intercultural approach to understanding self and others (Dervin, 2009; Holliday, 2016b; Holmes, Bavieri, & Ganassin, 2015).



In sum, the students began to recognise how particular artefacts of a culture are influential in representing and reinforcing the image of the Japanese people as outward expressions of self and others (Holliday, 2011, 2013, 2016c). The dissonance they perceived between their own cultural realities (primarily based on their *personal trajectories* and *small cultures*) and the discourse of the culture triggered the students to evaluate their approaches to shed light on, and to relate to, culturally diverse individuals. The newly constructed awareness resonates with one of the key purposes underpinning intercultural learning: to recognise cultural blocks which appear through statements about a culture; and to understand how they lead to stereotypical and essentialised views of people (Holliday, 2016b; IEREST, 2015).

#### **Summary of section 4.2**

I focused on the students' reflections with regard to the sense of hospitality and the use of artefacts of a culture to illustrate how they had evaluated and reinterpreted *particular cultural products* in relation to self and others. For many students who had initially considered the Japanese hospitality, *omotenashi*, as a distinctive characteristic of the culture, their interactions and communication with the local people in the US allowed them to understand how people would share similar dispositions but express and demonstrate them in different ways. Furthermore, some students developed criticality and shed light on the gap between the idealised image of the Japanese culture and individual subjective realities. Instead of drawing on *particular cultural products*, or referring to essentialised statements about the culture, the students

showed awareness of the necessity to recognise and relate to individual realities emergent as cultural threads among the self and others (Holliday, 2016b).

#### **4.3. Increased sense of individuality of self and others through *small culture formations***

In this section, I present how the students negotiated and reconstructed their previously held perceptions about self and others. The changes were driven through the social grouping processes within the group of Japanese students and other people involved in the programme as they formed their *small cultures* in a variety of intercultural contexts. The term ‘intercultural contexts’ here refers to differences in the geographical and institutional environments, language, *personal trajectories*, and respective roles and statuses in the programme. The contexts are manifold, and are not restricted to the sense of American versus Japanese cultures. I highlight in this section how students reconstructed their self-concept (4.3.1); and how they understood and modified the role of self in engaging with cultural diverse others (4.3.2).

##### **4.3.1 Reconstructing self-concept in relation to others**

One of the significant changes concerns the students’ self-concept: many students began to accept the genuine self and to be comfortable being themselves. More specifically, the students realised that they had been overly conscious of, and had been affected by, others’ perceptions and judgments on what they should do and say verbally and non-verbally. Instead of being preoccupied with their deficiencies or differences from others as in the past, the students learned to acknowledge the self

more inclusively and confidently. A range of accounts indicated the students' positive change from the perspectives of self-acceptance, self-esteem, and self-independence, which I illustrate below.

*Self-acceptance.* I draw on the experiences of Manami and Ken who reconstructed their negative self-referencing beliefs to accept the self more positively through the sojourn in the US. Both students struggled within the context of, and interactions with, Japanese students; however, they began to develop alternative perceptions about the self through the communication with the local instructor and local friends respectively.

The first student, Manami, spent a lot of time questioning her personal identities in response to others' perceptions about her. Since she preferred one-to-one conversations where she would feel relaxed to express herself, she was inclined to be reserved in group contexts. This resulted in giving a quiet impression to others. However, she did not feel that others' perceptions fit her true self since she felt she was actually more spontaneous and emotional and not just being quiet. Throughout her sojourn in the US, Manami had struggled and continuously reflected on the self until she realised that she first had to acknowledge herself:

気づいたことは、今まで自分を無視してきたな、っていうのがあって、で、否定し続けてきたっていうか。自分のことを。周りと比べて、でも私はきつこうだから、っていうのがすごいあたりとか。あと・・・素直に褒められても受け止められないし・・・。たぶん私が言う意見は間違っているんだろうな、とか、そういう全部ネガティブで。知られたくない、自分のことって感じだったんですよね。こんなネガティブな人知られたくない。で、考えてたらやっぱり、その今の自分嫌いなんだって思って。でも、きっと好きになれる努力を、あ、好きになる努力をすれば、自分も自信がついて、意見も言えるようになれるんじゃないかな、っていうのがあって。まず自分のこと好きになるって思いました。（まなみ、帰国後インタビュー）

I realised I had neglected myself before. Or I had kept denying myself. I had always labelled myself in a certain way when I compared myself with others. I hadn't been able to accept someone's honest compliment. I had assumed that my opinions are probably wrong, for example. I had been completely negative about self. And I hadn't wanted others to know that kind of negative self. As I thought [about myself], I realised I didn't like myself at the time. But if I made efforts to like myself, I thought I would gain confidence and would be able to express my opinion. So I told myself I am going to like myself first. (Manami; post return interview)

Manami mentioned a particular local instructor as the most influential on her change: she appreciated the sense of acceptance she felt from the instructor who talked to, and listened to, Manami generously, regardless of her negative self-concept as she had struggled to express herself in class. The consistency of credible and personalistic confirmation of this local instructor (Gergen, 1971) allowed Manami to develop a genuine desire to grow and become 'a person who can smile from the bottom of her heart' (Manami, interview). Her reflective journal towards the end of the sojourn demonstrated how she had reconstructed her self-concept as follows:

I feel that I became emotionally mature. Now, I have a mind impervious to small negative things for me. I am not afraid of saying my idea more than before. I am rather listener, so I do not want to insist [sic] my idea. This is my characteristic. Therefore, I do not have to change myself completely. If I have a chance to say something, I can. This is my proof of growth. (Manami; reflection while abroad; original writing)

Manami's account illustrated that she had not only gained confidence in expressing herself, but had also become more honest with the self. In other words, she began to accept the multiple facets of the self (i.e. her nature as a listener, her newly

constructed role as a speaker), which would be projected to others differently depending on the circumstances (Gergen, 1971; Pellegrino Aveni, 2005). The reconstructed self-concept enabled her to have a sense of security in her personal strengths and weaknesses, along with a feeling of predictability about her future capabilities in that she would be able to express herself whenever possible (Pellegrino Aveni, 2005).

The following student, Ken, also experienced a hard time negotiating how to present himself to others, and learned about himself through the process of struggling to get along with his Japanese peers. In fact, he felt more comfortable expressing himself among American friends while abroad. He was more open and relaxed with them than with his Japanese peers as he found the socialising process with his American friends more welcoming and straightforward. Ken's gradual change in his perception about the self was triggered through the conversations with his American friends insofar as they acknowledged their own strengths and weaknesses more clearly than Ken. Through his American friends, he learned the value of self-appreciation, and began to refrain from comparing himself with others:

ないものに憧れるのをやめたんですよね。みんなお互いそれぞれないものはないし。(中略) そのないものをいくらねだったところで、自分・・・を、その苦痛だと思ふことをこう押し付けているような気がして。それに慣れちゃってもいいのかもしれないんですけど、でもそれはなんか大元の自分とは違う・・・じゃないかなと思って。やっぱり元から持ってるものっていうものはやっぱりどうしても出ちゃうし、消せないものだし。(中略) だったら大元を最大限に引き延ばした方が、後からいろいろ付け加えるよりも素でいた方がいいんじゃないかな、て思って。だからもう、過去のこととか・・・、ま、ないものだった方がいいなあと思ふことは、あまりしなくなった。この人はこの人。自分は自分だし。(けん、帰国後インタビュー)

I stopped yearning for something that I don't have. Every person has something that is missing within him/herself... So I felt that I would

be only inflicting pain to myself if I keep asking for that... It might be okay to get used to that kind of self, but then that means that I'm not being the authentic self. The authentic self inevitably manifests itself and it's not erasable. . . . If that's the case, I thought I'd better make the most of the authentic self rather than adding extras, and be myself. So I think less about the past...or things that are missing within myself or what I wish to be like. The person is the person. I am myself. (Ken; post return interview)

Self-concept consists of the perceptions of the owner of the self, as well as those of others who observe and interact with the person; therefore, the construction of self is inextricably linked to interpersonal relationships in the social surroundings (Gergen, 1971; Goffman, 1990; Pellegrino Aveni, 2005). In the case of Ken, his American friends' friendliness and positive comments on him, as well as the way they acknowledged their own strengths, prompted Ken to develop an alternative approach to understanding the self: he began to accept both negative and positive attributes of the self, as opposed to the past self where he had been inclined to build an inferiority complex in comparison with others through his past socialisation processes. It can be seen that he had been preoccupied by the imagined self (Holliday, 2013) before arriving in the US; in other words, the self image, driven by his desire to fit in and better present himself in the Japanese context. Instead of aspiring to, and forcing himself to, play a particular characteristic mirroring the opinions of others, he began to acknowledge and embrace who he is more openly and honestly through the *small culture* formed with his American friends in an alternative context. The social confirmation from his American friends enabled him to conceptualise and express the self positively in such a way that he began to acknowledge the diverse constructs of

the self (as outlined above) (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Gergen, 1971) as his particular individuality rather than denying them.

*Self-esteem and self-independence in relation to others.* Of equal significance to self-acceptance was the students' increase in self-esteem and self-independence: the students developed stronger awareness of, and confidence in, projecting their own realities aside from the imagined *outward expression of self* in the past contexts. For example, one student, Rika, reflected on how she had been inclined to align herself with similar values of others to meet the Japanese norm before going to the US:

様々な人に出会い様々な価値観に触れ私は常に無意識的に人と同じ価値観にとらわれ人と同じ価値観を共有しているなど感じた。自分自身こうしたいというのがあっても周りの目や人と違うことは少し変だと考えてしまうところが少なからずあり思いとどまることが多々あった。しかし、プログラムが終わり自分の中の価値観は自分がしたいことにあり、自分自身であると強く感じている。(りか、事後授業ジャーナル)

By encountering a variety of people and various values, I realised that I had always been caught up in similar values of others and had been trying to be on the same page with others subconsciously. Even if I had a certain intention of my own, I did have some tendency to perceive my view as a bit strange if it looked different from others. So I often refrained myself from pursuing that. But after the programme, I now strongly feel that my values are within what I want to do, and that is myself. (Rika; reflection after studying abroad)

Rika's account resonates with Holliday's (2011) argument that 'what people say or otherwise project consciously about their "culture" are not descriptions of what their cultural group is actually like – except that there are people who wish to project themselves in this manner' (p. 135). Instead of being bound by the ideological discourse about the homogenous Japanese culture through her *personal trajectories*,

Rika developed self-assurance in projecting her own cultural realities as a result of recognising the multiplicity of culturally diverse others. The students' accounts, including Rika's, inform the necessity to trigger their awareness and readiness to express the cultural diverse self as autonomous agents, instead of being passive based on the particular discourse about the Japanese culture (Gergen, 1971; Holliday, 2011, 2013, 2016c).

Similarly, another student, Ami, described how she had been inspired by the independent attitude of American women:

Recently I really feel my personal change. Through the life in America, I became [sic] not to worry about the other's opinions. I don't think [sic] sad when I am alone. I worried about how I was watched from others and whether people regard me miserable. I lived like it. I think that it is like I live for someone. However American women and girls are much independent. Therefore, they don't care about other's opinions or sights. I thought that they are so cool. I got impressed from them [sic] and I thought that I want to be a person like it [sic]. After that, I could decide what I want to do and do it. I think that it is good for me. (Ami; reflection while abroad; original writing)

Ami's experience was transformative in that she developed alternative perceptions about the way of being identified through the resocialising experience in the US. Her drastic change driven by a strong affective identification with the American women resonates with what Berger and Luckmann (1966) call alternation. The social and conceptual conditions in the American context, where Ami found a strong sense of independence among the American women, enabled her to assign a different accent to her subjective realities in relation to those women (Berger & Luckmann, 1966).



In sum, the students' accounts indicated how their initial self-concept had been affected by, and driven by, ideologically constructed statements about Japanese culture (Holliday, 2011). A significant change emerged as the students acknowledged what they had neglected in the past (i.e., individual uniqueness including weaknesses and strengths for Manami and Ken), and what they had been overconcerned about (i.e., other's perceptions and evaluations based on the imagined commonalities; and a compelling sense of group cohesion for Ken, Rika, and Ami) through the past socialisation processes within their objective reality. The students' experiences foregrounded that their drastic changes in self-concept were underpinned by the availability of an effective plausibility structure, namely, the social base and social processes emergent in their new surroundings (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). In other words, the students' resocialising processes in the American contexts provided the conditions to trigger their potential of enacting their negotiable and modifiable subjective realities. While Holliday (2011, 2013, 2016c) illustrates the autonomous agency of individuals who constantly construct and negotiate their realities within and across multiple cultural domains, it can be argued that such human activities vary in degree and scope, and are subject to the availability of contexts within which individuals demonstrate the autonomous self.

#### **4.3.2 Understanding and modifying the role of self in engaging with cultural diverse others**

Another significant aspect which emerged from the students' *small culture formations* was their increased awareness and understanding of their roles in communication and

relationship-building. From the social grouping processes comprising of a group of Japanese students and local students, the Japanese students began to recognise and evaluate their past attitudes and approaches to relationships with others. The following themes present their reconstructed views and approaches to engaging with, and understanding, culturally diverse others: enhanced motivation and self-efficacy in verbal communication; increased trust in communication and relationship-building; and stronger interests in understanding cultural diverse others.

*Enhanced motivation and self-efficacy in verbal communication.* The students' accounts indicated the increase in self-expressiveness, driven by stronger motivation and self-efficacy in communication with others. Two contexts emerged as influential in this regard: the small talk with local students and people; and the interactions with the instructors and Japanese peers in class.

First, the students' intercultural communication experiences in small talk enabled them to develop awareness of their agency in communication and socialisation as coconstructed human activities. They learned how they could initiate conversations and facilitate relationship-building by being more open and spontaneous with new acquaintances, which differed from their approach to socialisation in their *personal trajectories*. Many students illustrated their initial surprises as to how the local students and people acknowledged others in public space with casual greetings, and how they voluntarily told their own stories or backgrounds to others even at the first encounter. The small talk included topics that the Japanese students would have never imagined before they would share with random people before. The following account

of Mika highlights how she developed her efficacy in interacting with others and her awareness of agency from the experience of making small talk:

I think I became a person who are [sic] friendly and can do small talk. I noticed that the relationship to [sic] others is up to me. I mean my interaction and attitude influence establishing relationship. (Mika; reflection while abroad; original writing)

Instead of taking a reactive approach to communication and socialisation, the students' resocialising processes using small talk enabled Mika and other students to demonstrate stronger motivation in initiating communication and engaging with others more autonomously.

Second, the interactions and discussions between the instructors at the host university and the Japanese peer students was also influential in the development of students' self-expressiveness. Their *small culture* was coconstructed in such a way that students' interests and enthusiasm in sharing different opinions and perspectives appeared explicit to one another, which some students specifically described as meaningful. While the degree of difficulties in speaking up varied among the respective students, many students reported towards the end of the programme or after returning to Japan that it had become habitual and natural for them to speak up in front of others.

Takashi described as follows:

I thought that I cannot have a courage [sic] to say my opinion easily in the class, but I found that it was wrong. I just did not have strong passion to share my idea to [sic] everyone. (Takashi; reflection while abroad; original writing)

The accounts of Takashi and other students indicated the impact of their particular *small culture* formed throughout the sojourn. The social grouping process was more

intense in the foreign environment where the students were encouraged to be more expressive in English, more active, and cooperative and supportive to each other in order to make the most of their study abroad experiences. Thus, through the newly formed *small cultures* in the US context, the students began to: 1) be aware of the diversity within the group of Japanese students; 2) increase interests in finding and learning from others' perspectives; 3) construct a sense of respect and assurance that they are being heard; and 4) gain a better understanding of the value of speaking up. With all these factors at play, the students in the study coconstructed alternative approaches to express themselves and understand others as opposed to their past peer relationships in their *personal trajectories*. The socio-emotional context, namely, the peer support underpinned by their particular *small culture*, was highly influential on the students' development in self-expressiveness (Boud, Cohen, & Walker, 1993).

Lastly, the students modified their ways of expression: they began to use more verbal expressions as they realised their non-verbal cues carried little or lesser meaning when compared with their past experiences in their *personal trajectories*. They noticed that non-verbal or implicit expressions would not necessarily make sense in the American context, and understood the importance of verbalising their feelings and thoughts. At the same time, as they experienced how people would speak their mind, some students began to find the communication easier and comfortable. One student, Mai, drew on the most impactful comment she had received about her somewhat quiet reaction to a casual conversation: 'do you have a tongue [to say something]?' She wrote explicitly how the concept of self-expression changed from before:

自分の感情や思いをいかに相手に伝えることができるのかということだと思ふ。やはり私自身私のあらゆる感情というものを相手にさらけ出すこと

には抵抗があり、それは恥だとすら考えていたし、何よりも感情を出す人は幼稚・未熟だと考えていた。けれど、実際には反対で、お互いに円滑な関係を作るためにも自分の考えや感情を出すことは大切だと知った。(まい、事後授業ジャーナル)

[I gained a better understanding] how I can express my feelings and thoughts to others. I used to feel uncomfortable revealing any types of affection to others and even thought it was shameful to do so. On top of that, I thought it was immature of those people to express their feelings. But in fact, it is the opposite and I learned that it is important to express my thoughts and feelings in order to build a smooth relationship. (Mai; reflection after studying abroad)

Mai also explained in the interview that the change of environment (i.e. from Japan to the US) was a significant factor, enabling her to evaluate and modify her ways of expression. The resocialising process in the American context prompted her awareness that her previously held belief on self-expressiveness did not necessarily hold true. Furthermore, she recalled in the interview how she had changed the way she presented herself as she moved up schools and experienced different peer relationships through her *personal trajectories*. Mai's accounts illustrate the influence of her *personal trajectories* on the degree and ways of self-expressiveness, which had not been static, and had been subject to her socialising experiences in the respective contexts (Berger & Luckmann, 1966).

In sum, the students encountered different meanings and degrees of expressiveness through the interactions with their Japanese peers and the local people, and reconstructed their previous belief about their ways of communication. They learned how they could play a better role in relationship-building by being more open and expressive with others. Conversations shape and maintain individual realities, and the

students' intercultural communication experiences in the US objectified their taken-for-granted ways of communication internalised through their *personal trajectories* (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Based on the resocialising processes in the American context, the stronger sense of motivation and the experienced efficacy in verbal communication was impactful for the students in reconstructing a proactive role in engaging with cultural diverse others.

*Increased trust in communication and relationship-building.* Another key aspect underlying students' *small culture formation* was their increased sense of trust in communication as a foundation of relationship-building. There were students who had been inclined to feel insecure to a greater or lesser extent in relationship-building, deriving from the range of social grouping experiences and interpersonal relationships in their *personal trajectories*. Students' accounts illustrated how they had reconstructed their views and modified their approach to communication with others more positively. I highlight the cases of Ken and Aoi below.

First, Ken described how he had been nervous about the usage and influence of language in relationship-building, and how he had held back from engaging in further dialogue when misunderstanding or conflict arose in the past:

人間関係というのはふとした小さな言葉でも他人を傷つけてしまったり、相手を不信に思わせてしまう力があるからである。特に母語である日本語はとてもセンシティブな言葉ゆえにその使い方に少し戸惑っていた。それとは反対に、言葉は関係をより一層深めてくれる力もある。自分は、言葉によってできる人間関係のほころびを一度作ってしまったらその修復をあきらめてしまっていた節があったのではないかと感じた。しかし、それに気づけたとしてもそれを改善しようという考えはあったものの実行に移すことは難を極めた。(けん、事後授業ジャーナル)

Human relationships entail such phenomena where even a little casual word may hurt others or lead to mistrust from others. In particular, I have been somewhat perplexed by the usage of my native language, Japanese, given the nature of its sensitivity [such as implications of expressions]. By contrast, language also has an effect of deepening relationships. I realised that I used to give up recovering the relationship once it had been frayed by language. Even if I knew that I had to change such a tendency of mine, it was extremely hard for me to put that into action. (Ken; reflection after studying abroad)

Ken's struggle in relationship-building was distinctive in the socialising context with the Japanese as indicated earlier in section 5.3.1. His hesitancy in relationship recovery somewhat relates to Ami's reflection pertaining to her previous belief in seemingly unamendable relationships with others (see 5.1.1 concerning education). He imagined himself to be unable to share his reality with others within the group of Japanese students. However, through the interactions with his Japanese peers, he started to build awareness that he was not alone in his thoughts and feelings, and in fact, there was much more in common with others. The resocialising experience in the US allowed him to relativise his own position alternatively from his *personal trajectories*, and to embrace a sense of trust in dialogical engagement.

Another example concerns Aoi, who evaluated her past approach to communication and reconstructed her way of engaging in relationship-building. Her journal entries from the last two weeks of her sojourn indicated as follows:

Before coming here, I was struggling about how I can take comfortable distance with people. In the other word [sic], I did not have confidence to interact with people. Because I cared what they

think about me too much, like ‘Do they really like me?’ or ‘I assume he/she dislike me...’ Through spending the days in City Y, I realized that I was caring such a small thing. The importance of communicating with people is that whether I accept people or not. (Aoi; reflection while abroad; original writing).

Before coming here, I was the person who was not able to communicate people by saying my real feelings. I had used to make wall between myself and others. At the beginning of this program, I was struggling, because I did not have any people who I can trust. At the same time, I was trying to know others as talking to people. It was a huge change of my attitude. I am not the person who wait until others talk to me anymore. I tried to sit down randomly in the classes, therefore I had chance to talk to as many different students as I could. As spending time with the people who I really do not know, I got used to open my mind much easier. I do not have to pretend myself anymore in front of people. (Aoi; reflection while abroad; original writing).

Aoi’s account indicates how her emotional mistrust had been a major barrier in communication and relationship-building through her *personal trajectories*. As she reconstructed her perception about others by eliminating her own assumptions, she gained confidence in engaging in communication more straightforwardly. The increased sense of trust in communication as coconstructing human activities allowed Aoi to reinterpret her way of understanding the self and others.

In sum, through the socialising experiences within the group of Japanese students and across the groups of friends and people in the local community, many students started to construct a sense of trust in communicating their thoughts and feelings to others more honestly. It was important for some students to work on their emotional barriers,



such as fear or lack of trust, in order to increase their personal involvement and responsibility in engaging with others. In other words, they began to take on a more proactive role in understanding others as they realised the need to reduce their assumptions about others' meanings, and the efficacy of language in understanding face-to-face situations of individual realities in an alternative manner (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). This phenomenon links to the last keyword, the students' increased interests in understanding cultural diverse others, below.

*Stronger interests in understanding cultural diverse others.* From the social grouping processes within and across the diverse groups of students and people in the community, the students became more conscious of their role and agency in understanding cultural diverse others. Some students specifically highlighted the influential contextual backgrounds, such as the opportunity of taking up the role of discussion leader, or the process of negotiating and collaborating for the final group presentation. The students also worked with different expectations and goals for the study abroad programme, which required their openness to understand and support the respective students. Thus, I draw on the students' accounts which demonstrate their reconstructed roles and perceptions about others in understanding culturally diverse others below.

First, the students reconstructed their personal involvement and responsibility in engaging with others. The following accounts of Rika and Kazu highlight how they began to take an intentional approach to better understand others than before:

私自身グループ行動ではなく個人で活動するのが楽で好きだと感じていたが、（プログラム）のメンバーと生活を共にするにつれてメンバーに感謝

することが多々あった。自分の中で他者をもっと知り、理解しようと努力することができるようになったと感じている。(りか、事後授業ジャーナル)

I used to prefer individual activities to group activities because of the easiness, but as I spent longer time with my peers, there were many occasions where I appreciated them. [From this experience] I see myself to be more willing to make efforts to better know others and understand them now. (Rika; reflection after studying abroad)

他人の理解も深まったといえる。やはり他者のことを考えて初めて成立する異文化理解であり、それを強られる環境にあったため、その部分も相当鍛えられた。また、これまでなら理解できない人間は見ようとしなかったが、これらを通して、自分で積極的に人を見るようになった。これまでなら理解できない人間は見ようとしなかったが、これらを通して、自分で積極的に人を見るようになった。(かず、事後授業ジャーナル)

I think my understanding of others deepened as well. Intercultural understanding is made possible by taking others into account. Since I had been in such an environment which made me engage [with others inevitably and intensively], I learned considerably from the experience. In the past, I didn't pay any particular attention to those whom I wouldn't understand, but my attitude has changed and I am more proactive in this regard. (Kazu; reflection after studying abroad)

As mentioned earlier with regard to students' enhanced motivation and self-efficacy in verbal communication, their *small culture formation* was coconstructed in such a way that students' initiatives to purposefully engage with others increased.

Furthermore, many students began to understand the influence of their perceptions on understanding cultural diverse others: they shed light on their initial tendency to predefine or judge others, which had held them back from engaging with the person more personally and purposefully. Alternatively, they developed stronger interests and willingness to find the respective subjective realities with enhanced appreciation for face-to-face communication, underpinned by their raised awareness as to how their

assumptions about others could be wrong. In particular, Akari's statement as follows indicated how she values dialogical engagement:

人は外見やうわさで判断してはいけないということを改めて気づかされました。(中略)人それぞれ良いところがあるはずあって、それはうわさなどではわからず、自分が関わるしかありません。日本人だけでなく、現地の人との交流もとても大事で、深く関わることは大変だし、傷つくこともあるけれど、深く交流することによって、良いところを知ることができて、その人自身を受け入れられるようになったと思います。(あかり、事後授業ジャーナル)

I was reminded [through this programme] that I should not judge people by appearance and rumours. . . . People always have good points and you can find it out only by engaging with the person. It is not just with Japanese but the local people. Deep engagement is not an easy thing and you may be hurt [from the interactions], but that kind of engagement allowed me to find good things about the others and to accept them as they are. (Akari; reflection after studying abroad)

Akari's account as well as others' resonate with the findings presented in section 5.2.2 (i.e. Takashi's account with regard to national stereotypes) insofar as the students understood how people cannot, and should not, be predefined or categorised by particular descriptions. Such awareness helped the students to reevaluate the value of engaging with others.

The students' accounts highlighted the importance of developing awareness and approach to understanding culturally diverse others, emergent within and across groups of Japanese students and others. In particular, the small culture enabled the Japanese students to realise more explicitly how their initial perceptions about their peers and local friends would change, depending on the way they engage in, and interpret, their interactions and communication with others.

### **Summary of section 4.3**

The positive small cultures formed in the local community (through small talk), with local friends (through interactions and communication outside of class), and in-class and out-class activities with Japanese peers (through discussion and group meetings, eliciting candid exchange of opinions and thoughts) enhanced students' positive approaches to communication and relationship-building throughout their sojourn in the US. The students came to be more expressive based on the coconstructed contexts of resocialisation: many students acknowledged and appreciated their respective interests in sharing and listening to diverse opinions and perspectives of one another; some students reconstructed a sense of trust in their engagement in social grouping processes (Ken and Aoi); and students increased their willingness to express their emotions more openly (e.g., Mai). The findings illustrated students' stronger interests and genuine respect towards the diverse realities of one another, highlighting the salient and meaningful intercultural learning experiences for the students in the study.

### **Summary of Chapter 4**

This chapter illustrated what Japanese students had learned about the self and others throughout the study abroad programme, starting from the preparatory sessions, during abroad, and after-study abroad sessions. I drew on Holliday's (2011, 2013, 2016c) *grammar of culture* as an interpretative tool to understand how students talked about themselves and others, and on what bases they developed their interpretations about selves and others.

First, I highlighted key aspects centring on *particular social structure*, that is, education and career pathways. Encountering otherness through the experience of travelling across different environments and structures (i.e., regional, academic, and social transitions) prompted the students to reflect on, and understand, what they had taken for granted from their preceding secondary socialisation processes (Berger & Luckmann, 1966), and how alternative realities are shaped in other *social structures*. The findings also demonstrated that such experiences enabled the students to construct a stronger sense of agency, which had been subconscious until they came to realise alternative ways of perceiving and understanding the self in relation to *particular social structures*. Of importance for the students was to realise the potential for envisaging their own realities independent of the constraints of *social structures*.

Second, I drew on students' reflections surrounding *particular cultural products*, with foci on the sense of hospitality in different social contexts, and statements about culture and people. On the one hand, the students demonstrated increased understanding that individuals indeed share similar human nature, such as kindness and hospitality, which are only expressed in alternative manners. On the other hand, the students deconstructed stereotypically or ideologically constructed images of people and a culture (both about American and Japanese). Students began to be recognise, and some, have come to more critical, in that such descriptions or beliefs about a particular group of people do not necessarily represent why they are.

Lastly, students' *small culture formations* played a significant role in enhancing students' awareness and understanding of diverse individual subjective realities

beyond national and linguistic boundaries. Many students realised that they had not demonstrated strong motivations to express themselves to others, especially to unfamiliar others. Also, they learned how they had been inclined to project predefined or judgmental views on others, resulting from, and in, their hesitation in having closer engagement and dialogue with others. Through the resocialising processes in the US, the Japanese students began to develop stronger appreciation for face-to-face communication as a means to explore and understand unknown subjective realities. Of noteworthiness is the fact that such phenomena were meaningful not only for relationship-building in the US context but also in the Japanese context among their Japanese peers. Acknowledging the multiple and diverse cultural realities of respective individuals was key to their learning about selves and others.

## Chapter 5

### Understanding students' engagement in reflective writing

#### Introduction

The previous chapter centred on what the students had reflected on and understood about the self and others from their intercultural communication experiences. This chapter concerns the pedagogic effect of reflective writing to answer research question 2: *how does reflective writing as a pedagogic tool help the students to develop understanding of the self and others?* As explained in Chapter 3, the students were engaged in writing a weekly reflective journal before and during studying abroad, and monthly after studying abroad as part of the learning component of the programme. I analysed the contents of students' reflections and comments to elicit the influence of reflective writing on their intercultural learning. I aimed to understand how students engaged in reflective writing, what particular processes of writing had assisted them with their intercultural learning, and what challenges lie in relation to their experiences.

The first main theme (5.1) concerns the students' act of writing and reading written texts as a basis of secondary learning processes. Such secondary learning processes include: the process of recalling and writing down the detail of their intercultural communication experiences for objectification and stabilisation (5.1.1); the process of writing as assistance for organisation and clarification of understanding (5.1.2), and the process of further learning from reading their own written accounts (5.1.3). The second main theme (5.2) explores how reflective journals supported students'

conceptualisation and analysis of multiple frames of interpretation. More specifically, I highlight the integration of knowledge and experience (5.2.1) where the students' reflection was linked to their prior intercultural communication experiences, further inquiries, and conceptualisation. The following section (5.2.2) presents how the guiding questions of the journal writing task encouraged the students to take an analytical approach to deep reflection. The third main theme (5.3) centres on the students' learning experience from reading their Japanese peers' journal entries. I illustrate students' diverse interpretations of the realities of their Japanese peers (5.3.1); and the usefulness of peer support in providing insights for students' own reflective writing (5.3.2). Finally, I explore the role and influence of language on reflective writing in 5.4.

### **5.1 The role of writing and reading written texts as a secondary learning process**

This section illustrates how the act of writing and reading their own reflection linked to students' learning from their intercultural communication experiences. I connected the act of writing with the process of creating *representation of learning* (J. A. Moon, 2004). The students' reflective writing in this study can be associated with the creation of representation in that they drew on what they had noticed from their intercultural communication experiences, and put it forward in their own words. The students were encouraged to 'recapture, notice and reevaluate their experience, to work with their experience to turn it into learning' (Boud, Cohen, & Walker, 1993, p. 9). Furthermore, *representation of learning* involves a secondary learning process which possibly generates new perspectives in learning (J. A. Moon, 2004). Thus, I highlight the students' accounts which indicated such features, and categorise them by the two-



stage secondary learning process (J. A. Moon, 2004): the first stage is learning through the process of writing (5.1.1: Objectification and stabilisation, and 5.1.2: Organisation and clarification of understanding); and the second stage is learning from the representation (5.1.3: Reading one's own writing for better understanding of self).

### **5.1.1 Objectification and stabilisation**

Since arrival in the US, the students were exposed to a new environment with various stimuli experienced at different levels and varying stages physically, emotionally, and cognitively. Given the manifold of contextual factors to which the students had to adjust and familiarise themselves, it was evident that the students' attention and energy was focused on coping with everyday life. Looking back at the total flux of experience, some students stated that they could have forgotten certain incidents, or would have paid little attention to what had happened if they had not written them down in the reflective journal. One student particularly related the intensity and importance of experience to the likelihood of forgetting its details because of the energy infused with emotion into the context. Under such circumstances, the following accounts indicated that the act of writing had allowed the students to carefully recall their intercultural communication experiences, helping them to describe particular interactions or communication to reconsider consciously in written form:

□で出してたことを書くことで、もう一回再認識するというか。(中略)  
意外とどんなに重要なことを言ってて、友達とかが言ってても、それを書かなかつたらたぶん思い出せなかつたんだろうな。(けん、帰国後インタビュー)

By writing what was said, I could acknowledge it again. . . .  
Surprisingly, even if somebody said something important, I don't think I could have recalled it later if I hadn't written it down probably.  
(Ken; post return interview)

感じるじゃないですか。感じて、何もなかったら・・・すーっと終わっちゃうんですよ。でも、こう、一回感じて、また普通の生活して・・・あ書かなきゃいけないっていう場所にまた戻ったときに、もう一回思い出すじゃないですか。その思い出す力で、頭の中に残るっていう・・・のがやっぱりある・・・と。(ひろ、帰国後インタビュー)

You feel something. And if there was no follow-up to that, it would be gone. You feel something, then spend the rest of the time normally. But when you come back to the place where you have to write it down, you remember what happened once again. That power [process] of recalling episodes allows you to capture them in your mind. (Hiro; post return interview)

The accounts indicated that the opportunity and act of writing served as a stimulus for the students to focus on and highlight certain episodes which otherwise may not have been drawn on for further reflection. The process of recalling and reconstructing the interactional contexts in writing proved essential for the students as 'mentally revisiting and vividly portraying the experience in writing can be an important first step' (Boud, 2001, p. 14) to shift experience to knowledge. Moreover, the importance concerned its timeliness in capturing students' vivid reactions to their experiences.

Noriko and Takashi stated as follows:

文字に書き起すことによって、気持ち、思ってるだけだと絶対、後々忘れちゃうじゃな・・・、どんなに大事なことで後々忘れちゃうし。だけどそのときに、もっと深い言葉で、文字に書き起してあると、読んで、あああのときこうだったなあって思い出すこともできるし。(のりこ、帰国後インタビュー)

If it was just a feeling I had, I would definitely end up forgetting it afterwards... No matter how important it was, I would forget it later... But having it typed out with more profound words [because of its timeliness], I can read and remember what it was like [vividly later]. (Noriko; post return interview)

Many students realised how emotions and memories are not static and can easily diminish in the course of time. The process of writing allowed them to put forward

their immediate reactions in response to their intercultural communication experiences, which would not have been possible if left over time. Timeliness of writing can be critical in order for students to be able to apprehend why their reactions emerge as they do to the experience of otherness (Byram, 1998; Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013).

Learning does not occur automatically from simply having an experience even though it may be the foundation of learning (Andresen et al. as cited by J. A. Moon, 2004; Boud, Cohen, & Walker, 1993; Criticos, 1993). As the students pointed out, the act of writing had helped the students to return to experience and attend to feelings (Boud, Keogh, & Walker, 1985). In other words, the students captured and retrieved the situation and context in a form which they could easily revisit for further reflection and learning (Boud, 2001). An active and intentional engagement to work with experience is one of the keys to learning (Boud, Cohen, & Walker, 1993; J. A. Moon, 2004), and written texts, or linguistic objectification (Berger & Luckmann, 1966), served as an important means for the students to capture their intercultural communication experience as a first step to make meaning out of it.

On the other hand, pedagogical challenges remained insofar as there were students who could not keep the reflective journal regularly for several reasons. Makoto mentioned the challenge of securing time for reflection as he had juggled various course materials and requirements while being eager to experience as much as he could while in the US. He emphasised how actively he had spent his time away from his room as follows:

そのとき生きるのに精一杯（笑）（中略）そのときやりたいこと、たぶんアメリカ行く前にやりたいことっていうのがいっぱいあるんですよね。それを一個一個解消すると、毎日毎日がサバイバルというか。どう生きていこう、みたいな。やりたいこと（中略）外に出たいじゃないですか。（中略）寮にいてできることっていうのは日本にいてもできることなんですよ。なんでギリギリまで外にいたい。（中略）・・・でパソコンを開くっていう時間がなかったのかな。でそれが、サバイバルって感じ。（まこと、帰国後インタビュー）

I was trying hard to live my life to the fullest (laughter). . . . There were many things I wanted to do, including things which I had wanted to do before arriving in the US. Every day was about survival as I tried to achieve those things one by one. It was like, how can I deal with daily life while doing all of these things I want to do? You know, I really wanted to go outside. . . . Things I would do at the dorm were also things that I could do back in Japan. So I wanted to stay out as much as possible. . . . and I had no time to open my laptop. That's what I meant by survival [fighting with time] (Makoto; post return interview).

Another student, Takashi, also mentioned the difficulty in finding time due to the active socialising activities. To be able to sit and reflect, he needed to secure a quiet time; however, he could not ignore his friends' invitations, which resulted in some dissatisfaction on his part in his degree of engagement with reflective writing. Furthermore, Hikari reported a different challenge. She attributed the difficulty of writing to her personal trait insofar that she preferred oral narratives to writing. She explained how she had felt the pressure to write properly as some others did, and never enjoyed the task of writing. These students' challenges relate to the factors which are influential in determining the approach to learning or the framing of a learning task (J. A. Moon, 2004). The way in which these students perceived and enacted the learning process of writing was affected by: 1) the perceptions of the demands of the learning task as well as the emotional orientation in terms of self-

management and time constraint (Makoto); 2) the experience of the situated environment where socialising activities overwhelmed the student (Takashi); and 3) relevant learning habit as well as the emotional orientation to the task from the perspective of confidence in writing (Hikari) (J. A. Moon, 2004).

Nevertheless, during the post-study abroad phase and afterwards, those who put minimal efforts into their writing commonly regretted that they should have taken advantage of the reflective journal as an opportunity to capture their experience in a visible form. As mentioned earlier, many students realised how detailed experience could be lost in memory and time, and they valued the written source for further reflection after coming back to Japan. A relevant finding is also drawn on in section 5.1.3 (reading one's own writing for better understanding of self), and the pedagogical implications of this realisation will be discussed in the Conclusions chapter.

### **5.1.2 Organisation and clarification of understanding**

While the previous section illustrated the importance of capturing the students' intercultural communication experiences in objectified and stabilised forms as a first step of reflection and learning, this section focuses on another benefit observed in the process of writing. The writing process not only encouraged the students to recall and describe what came up to their minds. They were also engaged in exploring their intercultural communication experiences more consciously while articulating their thoughts in words. The following student, Yoko, demonstrated awareness as to how she reevaluated her intercultural communication experience from multiple frames of interpretation while writing:

他人の視点、というか第三者視点でもう一回見直すと、また考え方が、なんか、違ってくる・・・ときもあるし、そう考えたのはなぜだろう、みたいな、感じてまた考えて、じゃあこういうことなんじゃないかなあとか、いうのを日本語でもう一回まとめる、っていうのもできた（ようこ、帰国後インタビュー）

By reviewing [what was said and what I thought about] from the standpoint of another person, my thoughts sometimes changed [while writing]. Or I reflected on why I had thought that way. Then I came up with reasons that might have been behind my thinking, and I could summarise [clarify] that in Japanese, too. (Yoko; post return interview)

From the written entries and interview, Yoko's depth of reflection and metacognitive skills stood out from other students. The above account evidenced that she had been engaged in distancing herself from the contexts to understand her intercultural communication experiences from different perspectives, rather than simply giving her spontaneous reactions and interpretations through reflective writing. The depth of reflection requires flexibility and openness to change perspectives (J. A. Moon, 2004; Spalding & Wilson, 2002), and the writing process enhanced Yoko's reflective habit of framing and reframing the meaning of her subjective experience.

While Yoko specifically referred to 'the standpoint of another person' to explain her thought process while writing, some other students also mentioned how the process of putting ideas into a written form had helped them to learn more. The following students commented on the effect of noticing or thinking more deeply about the experienced context:

文字に書き出して初めて、あ、やっぱりこう思ってたわ、って自分の中で気づくみたいなこともある（のりこ、帰国後インタビュー）

When I started writing things down, I became aware that this was actually what I had thought. (Noriko; post return interview)

こうやって振り返ることでただ考えているだけではあまり気づかなかったことも書くときにかなり深く考えるので、とても意味のある振り返りになりました。(きょうこ、事後授業ジャーナル)

By writing in this way, I could also reflect quite deeply on things I hadn't really noticed if I had just been thinking, so it was a very useful process. (Kyoko; reflective journal after studying abroad)

Likewise, the following students found the process of writing helpful in organising and clarifying their understanding:

書くことで整理しやすいのかなあって思っ。 (けん、帰国後インタビュー)

I think writing things down helped me to organise my thoughts. (Ken; post return interview)

文章に自分の意見を書き起こすことで、自分の考えが明確になり、より深く考えることができた。(あみ、事後授業ジャーナル)

Writing my thoughts down clarified them for me and allowed me to consider them more deeply. (Ami; reflective journal after studying abroad)

The important phenomenon is that the students were engaged in another level of learning from experience, that which J. A. Moon (2004) calls a secondary learning process. They improved their understanding by forcing themselves to organise and clarify their thoughts in an orderly manner through writing (J. A. Moon, 1999a). It involved the process of a change in frames of interpretation (as in Yoko's case) and clarification of understanding (as in the other students' cases) as a new source of learning without altering the external experience itself. In other words, through the process of reflective writing they created another variation of learning as they captured new cues from experienced situations (J. A. Moon, 2004). As Usher (1993)

states, 'Understanding experience requires a point outside experience, a confrontation with experience's other' (p. 177) and the process of choosing words and creating texts functioned as this other. Just as the saying goes, 'Men must talk about themselves until they know themselves' (as cited by Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 53). It was in and through language that the students discovered and gave meaning to their subjective world, and made it more real to themselves (Usher, 1993).

### 5.1.3 Reading one's own writing for better understanding of self

The students' learning not only happened in the process of writing. Irrespective of whether they had appreciated the writing task or not, many students mentioned that they enjoyed or valued reading their own journal entries after a short or long time interval. It was relatively common for the students to read their past journal entries voluntarily. Some of the students said they had read their own reflective journals occasionally while abroad, whereas some others did so after coming back to Japan. As Takashi and Ami stated, the reflective journal served as a valuable resource for further reflection:

それをしてなかったら、終わりっぱなしになって、思い起こすこともちょっと、また難しくなっていたと思うし。後でなんか、またこうちょっと、やっぱりみんな、タイミングタイミング、ちょっと振り返ってみようとか、そういうタイミングがあると思うから、そういうときに、ジャーナルとか見るっていうのがよくて（照れ笑い）意義はなんか、そのときにより学びをもっと効果的にする意義もあるし、帰ってきた後に。（たかし、帰国後インタビュー）

If I hadn't done the reflective journal, that would have been the end of the experience. The experience would have been harder to recall, too. I think there are times when we feel inclined to reflect on our experiences, so reading the reflective journal will be useful for that. The significance [of writing a reflective journal] is to make the



learning more effective at the time as well as after returning home.

(Takashi; post return interview)

外国で生活していた時に自分の価値観や、ものの味方を、ジャーナルを読むことで感じることもできる。それが、今の自分を見つめなおすいいきっかけにつながっている。(あみ、事後授業ジャーナル)

Reading the journal also makes me aware what my values were when I was living abroad, and this provides me with a good basis for reflecting on my current self. (Ami; reflective journal after studying abroad)

These accounts highlighted how reflective journals had served as useful anecdotal resources for the students to engage in further reflection on a long time span. Experience does not necessarily have to be recent for learning to occur (Boud, Cohen, & Walker, 1993; J. A. Moon, 2004) as in the case of the students in the study insofar as they demonstrated their interests and willingness to relate to their past experiences as a process of constructing better understanding of the current self.

To further illustrate the abovementioned point, I draw on the two particular occasions when the students were required to read their own journal entries. One was during the fifth week of stay in the US (i.e., halfway through the study abroad programme), which guided the students as follows: *Please read your past entries, 'My Intercultural Learning Journal in City Y' from Week 1 to 4, and reflect on your intercultural experience up to now. What is the significant learning you see?* While many students highlighted the recognised changes without necessarily referring to particular entries, two students specifically explained their changes based on their written evidences. Manami noticed that she had become more attentive to details as a positive developmental learning experience:

I gradually focused on a specific thing. I can find small special things around me. (Manami; original writing; reflective journal during abroad)

Another student, Takashi, realised how his frame of interpretation shifted from comparing two nation countries to a more non-essentialised view of reciprocal learning and understanding of one another:

I always compared Japan to America from week 1 to 4 and I found out many similarities and differences, especially people, building, transportation. Actually, after passed (sic) about 2 weeks, I often was willing to look for new discoveries from American people and my Japanese peers. The significant learning is to spread our value and knowledge by communicating to not only different racial people but also same (sic) racial people. (Takashi; original writing; reflective journal during abroad)

Although Takashi's writing may not accurately convey his point, it was clear from his interview that he had developed a non-essentialised approach in communicating and understanding others through his time abroad (also see 4.2.2). He expressed in the interview how he feels uncomfortable differentiating people by nationalities now. Takashi's account indicated that reading his own entries had allowed him to recognise his particular change half way through the study abroad programme.

Likewise, the positive effect of reading past journal entries on the students' self-understanding was evidenced during the post-study abroad session. Tomomi and Akiko stated as follows:

自分が以前書いたものを読み起こしてみると、最初の考えることの少なさ、知識の少なさに驚いた。たった 2 か月だったけどその期間の自分の物事の

吸収は以前とは比べ物にならないほどであったと再確認できた。（ともみ、事後授業ジャーナル）

When I read my past entries again, I was surprised how little thought I had given things, and how little knowledge I had had at the time. It made me aware of how much I had learnt within only two months. I can't think of another occasion when I learnt so much in such a short space of time. (Tomomi; reflective journal after studying abroad)

もし、昔の自分がこれを読んだら、きれいごとを言っているし、それを人に言うなんてと思うと思う。しかし、今は本当にそう思えるし、そして、それをまなばにも書いている。昔の自分なら絶対にしないようなことをしている、という風に、自分の変化もおもしろいと思える。（あきこ、事後授業ジャーナル）

If my 'past self' has read my current entries, she would be [cynical] that I am just making things sound good, and even saying these things to other people. But I genuinely think this way now, and I am writing it in this reflective journal. I find it interesting that I now do things which I would have never done in the past. (Akiko; reflective journal after studying abroad)

The abovementioned accounts support the importance of reading individual reflective writing as a means of engaging in reflection on their prior reflections, or *metareflection* (Stevens & Cooper, 2009), based on which students recognised and better understood their own changes more explicitly and personally. In particular, the following student, Ken, drew on the specific words *encoding* (producing words) and *decoding* (interpreting his words), which he had learned in another disciplinary course at University A after studying abroad, to explain the importance of reading his own writing:

自分で、文字を生産して、その文字から読み、またその内容を自分でまた読み取るんですよね。そうすると自分で生産した内容と、読み取った内容がなんか違うんですよ、やっぱり読む時間が違うと。それを繰り返さないと、自分の考え、どう変わったかわからない（けん、帰国後インタビュー）

I produce written letters, read them, and interpret the content myself again. Then I realise that what I wrote at the time and how I interpreted it later are different. It's because of the lapse of time reading them. Unless I repeat that process, I won't be able to evaluate how I changed. (Ken; post return interview)

The interval of time allowed Ken to capture the initial meaning of the experience projected in his writing, and to reevaluate his own understanding differently through reading it. Of importance for Ken was to address himself to his experience in an open manner so that he could construct a clearer understanding of self from the objectified texts over time (Usher, 1993).

Likewise, students' need for having such personal anecdotes, or objectified texts, to reflect on was evident among other students who had not thoroughly and regularly engaged in reflective writing while abroad. Noriko expressed her regret as follows:

自分の、その、今になって、前の自分はじゃあどう思ってたんだろうとか、前の自分から今の自分どう成長してるんだろうって思ったときに、判断材料がまったくない、っていうか、書いてたとしてもすごい薄っぺらな内容、とかあるんですよ、もう全然。薄っぺらかったりとか、適当に書いてたりとか。それのときも、もしちゃんと、振り返って、まあ時間はかかると思うんだけど、振り返って書いて、その・・・深いところまで、その書いてわか・・・書いてたら、きっと、もうちょっと自分についてわかるところがあったりとか、気づきとか、絶対あったんだろうな、と思います。だから・・・空白が何個か、あるので。ああ書いてればよかったなあっていうのは、思いました。(のりこ、帰国後インタビュー)

When I think of how I would have thought in the past, or how I have changed, there is no material to base an evaluation on. Even though I wrote something, the content was not deep enough. Or I didn't take it seriously enough. If I had reflected more considerately and written at a deeper level, although it would have taken time, I would have been able to understand myself or noticed things about myself somewhat better for sure. I left some entries blank... So I thought I should have written [more]. (Noriko; post return interview)

Noriko's statement is one of the many evidences which indicated the students' strong interest and willingness to identify their own changes as a way of understanding the self through their intercultural experiences. The effect of reflective writing is not only confined to the time of experience, but serves as a useful anecdote for students to engage in further reflection after the experience through reading it (J. A. Moon, 2004).

Lastly, the particular effect of reading one's own reflective writing was to recall the associated feelings experienced at the time. Although the students commonly mentioned the fragility of emotional memories, the written accounts helped them to recall and retrieve emotions and feelings, which also became a source to better understand the self. The students' intercultural communication experiences involve cognitive and affective reactions and cannot be separated since learning is, and should be, experienced as a seamless whole (Boud, Cohen, & Walker, 1993). In fact, many students referred to their emotions or mental conditions when looking back and talking about their time abroad. Ken described the reflective process as follows:

一回寝ると結構考え変わってますしね（笑）。感情的になってると・・・結構・・・。なんでこんなこと考えてたんだろう。こんときはこう思ってたからかな、とか・・・。（けん、帰国後インタビュー）

My thoughts even changed overnight [laughter]. Especially, when I was emotional... [When I read it] I wondered why I had thought that way. [I reflected on my state] and evaluated the underlying reason.  
(Ken; post return interview)

Ken's statement resonates with J. A. Moon's (2004) statement that '(t)he influence of emotional state on reflective work is more obvious when the reflection is represented (e.g. in writing), and can be reconsidered' (p. 93). He explained that reading his own writing had allowed him to analyse his negative emotions by distancing himself

temporally and spatially. Thus, being able to identify and understand his own emotional reactions allowed Ken to perceive his subjective reactions from a different point of view.

To conclude, the reading process served as a secondary learning process for the students where they reflected and addressed themselves to their emotions for further awareness and interpretations of the self in relation to others. Boud, Koegh, and Walker (1985) emphasise the importance of awareness and purposeful reflection on feelings. It is important not to let negative emotions remain unexplored since it involves a possibility to reinforce preexisting ideas, or accelerate ethnocentric and stereotypical perceptions and interpretations, unless the individual is open and flexible to work with his/her preunderstanding (Boud, 2001; Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013; Matsumoto, Leroux, & Yoo, 2005). Previous studies conducted by Holmes and O'Neill (2012), and Holmes, Bavieri, and Ganassin (2015) also support the importance of reflecting and understanding one's own emotional states in relation to their intercultural encounters. For Ken, being able to recognise his emotional functioning helped him to develop a higher level of awareness of his thought processes (Brockbank & McGill, 1998; Kilianska-Przybylo, 2012; J. A. Moon, 2004; Postle, 1993; Pavlenko, 2002) based on his intercultural communication experiences.

### **Summary of section 5.1**

This section focused on the role of writing and reading written texts as a secondary learning process based on the students' intercultural communication experience. The act of writing served as a first step for the students to capture the flux of experience in

an objectified form, which may otherwise have been easily forgotten or given little attention as a source of further learning. Through the process of choosing words and writing up, the students decentred themselves from their perspectives and clarified their understanding. Furthermore, the subjective realities stabilised in written form allowed the students to identify how they had developed alternative interpretations of objective realities (e.g. in Holliday's [2011, 2013, 2016c] words, *particular social structures* and *particular cultural products*), how they had become more proactive and confident in interacting and communicating with others, and how they had begun to reconstruct perceptions about self and others with stronger interest in diverse subjective realities (see Chapter 4). Emotion is an important source of learning, and the reflective journal played a significant role in capturing cognitive and affective domains of students' intercultural learning.

The following section centres on the students' conceptualisation and analytical reflection of their intercultural communication experience with the support of guiding questions of the journal writing task.

## **5.2 Conceptualising, analysing, and developing multiple frames of interpretation**

This section focuses on reflective writing as a means of examining individuals' own assumptions and taken-for-granted knowledge, and exploring alternative interpretations and realities of others. I set up guiding questions in the reflective journals to: 1) draw the students' attention to look at real life situations as the base of students' intercultural learning; 2) guide them to examine relevant intercultural communication contexts and processes analytically; and 3) help them to construct and

(re)evaluate multiple meanings in given situations. The first section (5.2.1) explains how the students engaged in connecting their past and/or ongoing intercultural communication experiences with relevant concepts of intercultural communication (taught in the preparatory sessions), as well as knowledge on American society (taught in classes and through service learning at the host university) as a process of conceptualisation. In particular, I focused on the respective stages of the study abroad programme (i.e. before, during, and after) to illustrate: how reflective writing helped the students to be prepared for their anticipated intercultural experiences and reflective engagement while abroad (preparatory sessions); how the students framed their intercultural experiences into learning (during study abroad); and how the students reflected on and articulated their learning from abroad (post-study abroad session). The second section focuses on the effect of the guiding questions of the journal writing tasks: I present how they helped the students to explore multiple ways of interpreting their intercultural experiences purposefully and analytically to engage in deeper reflection (5.2.2).

### **5.2.1 Integration of experience and knowledge**

This section shows the findings in the order of before, during, and after studying abroad since the students' situations and purpose of reflection differed at the respective stages of the programme, as guided by Coulson and Harvey's (2013) framework for scaffolding reflection for learning through experience (see Figure 2.4). During the preparatory sessions, the students were introduced to the purpose and role of reflective writing (i.e. 'learning to reflect'), and to learn to contextualise the use of reflection while exploring possible assumptions and interpretations of self and others



based on relevant intercultural communication theories and concepts (i.e. 'reflection for action'). While abroad, the students reflected on their ongoing experiences and emotions in order to explore and construct multiple meanings and significance of their experiences, and to develop appropriate knowledge, skills, and attitudes to interact in given contexts (i.e. 'reflection in action'). Lastly, during the post-study abroad session, students reflected on their study abroad experience and associated with further learning from it (i.e. 'reflection on action'). I highlight in this section how the students integrated their experience with knowledge and understanding of the range of perspectives, practices, and realities emergent in intercultural contexts.

*Preparatory sessions before studying abroad.* As explained in the research framework (Chapter 3), the students had started to write the reflective journal at the preparatory stage based on the topics of the weekly class sessions (i.e. ways of understanding culture, difference of perceptions and interpretations, stereotypes, verbal and non-verbal communication). The guiding questions prompted the students to: 1) draw on episodes which involved confusion or uncertainty from their previous overseas experience (if they had one) or intercultural encounters on the diverse campus; and 2) understand the difference and process of objective descriptions and analytical interpretations so that they will learn the skills necessary for reflective engagement.

From the preparatory stage, the students' reflective writing demonstrated the effect of relating particular experiences to key topics and concepts learned from class, since they could contextualise and make sense of the knowledge in a personal way. The

following student, Hikari, pointed out how she had reframed her initial understanding of culture by comparing the concept with her intercultural encounters on campus:

文化についての授業を通して、文化というものは本当に広いもので国ごとだけでなく国の中でも、地域やその人が生活してきた環境ごとに異なるもので、一人一人文化をもっていることを知りました。（この大学）で生活していて、十人十色がすごく実感できます。授業中に学んで文化とは、に対する答えが勘違いしていたと思います。

今までは、文化を国単位で考えてたが、習慣や考え方など見える文化と見えない文化は人それぞれだと気付きました。だから、この国はこんな考え方だから～、ではなくこの人はこんな考え方だから～と、考えるようになり一人一人の意見を尊重すべきなんだと思いました。偏った偏見を持ってしまうことがなくなったかと思います。

（ひかり、事前授業ジャーナル）

From the class which dealt with the concept of culture, I learned that the concept is broad and not defined by nations only. It is diverse even within the given country, differing by regions and environments where individuals have spent their lives. Every single individual has his/her own culture. Being in this university, I can see that ten people have ten different colours [of cultures]. I learned from the class that I had misunderstood the concept. (Hikari; reflective journal after studying abroad)

Following the above statement which illustrated the development of knowledge from class, Hikari further reflected on how she perceived others and how that would reflect on her attitude now:

In the past, I saw culture in terms of national boundaries but I learnt how visible and invisible cultures, such as customs and ways of thinking, differ by individuals. So I no longer assume that certain mentalities belong to certain countries. I consider them based on the person, which has led me to think that I should respect the opinion of each individual [rather than in a collective manner]. I think I have developed less biased views. (Hikari; reflective journal before studying abroad)

While Hikari had already encountered diverse cultural identities of individuals on campus before participating in the preparatory session, it can be seen that she had not conceptualised such experience until she gave particular attention to it through and after the class. The reflective writing process allowed her to deconstruct and reconstruct the concept of culture in relation to her experience and to evaluate herself based on the revised ideas (J. A. Moon, 1999a).

The value of reflective writing at the preparatory stage was also evidenced in the way the students had connected their learning to the anticipated study abroad. Students documented what they considered important attitudinally and behaviourally in their reflective journals in preparation for their future intercultural encounters and intercultural communication experiences. Chisato reflected on herself based on the class activities as follows:

毎回の授業で必ずと言っていいほどディスカッションや意見をシェアする場があり、私はそこで感じたことがあります。それは〇〇人だからこうだ、〇〇国だからこうだ！ど先入観を少なからず自分が抱いていた部分があるということです。ですが、この授業に参加していたのは全て日本人。なのにみんなそれぞれ考え方も違えば価値観も違います。なのでディスカッションをしていて意見がぶつかることは当たり前のことであると改めて実感しました。（ちさと、事前授業ジャーナル）

There were always opportunities to discuss or share opinions in each class, and they were meaningful to me. I used to think that people from certain countries shared certain characteristics. But look, all the students in the class were Japanese. Nevertheless the ways of thinking and values varied. This made it clear that of course our opinions would clash even within the group. (Chisato; reflective journal before studying abroad)

Having gained such awareness, she took forward the learning and wrote as follows:

アメリカだからこう、〇〇生（ホスト大学の学生）だからこう、と勝手な先入観を持つとそうじゃなかった時に対処するのが大変になると思います。

なので人を大きな枠でとらえるのではなく、一人ひとりと向き合うことを大切にしていこうと思います。それは現地の人に対してでもあるし、（プログラム参加生）のみんなに対しても。（ちさと、事前授業ジャーナル）

If I approach with one-sided preconceptions about the Americans or about the students at [the host] university, it would be hard to cope with any situations which do not fit in with that. I therefore decided to talk to each person on an individual basis. That goes for both local residents as well as my peers in the programme. (Chisato; reflective journal before studying abroad)

Since the common images she had projected on the peers were deconstructed and changed into the respective unique realities at individual levels, Chisato developed awareness on the importance of taking a non-essentialised approach of communication. The reflective writing process allowed her to apply her prospective changes to the future context (Boud, 2001; Cowan, 1998) combined with imagination (J. A. Moon, 1999b) in anticipation of encountering diverse others and establishing positive relationships while abroad.

Lastly, understanding the role and influence of reflection was another key learning at the preparatory phase. Akane demonstrated her awareness towards the importance of purposeful reflection in that she made better sense of the gained knowledge based on the lens of her own intercultural communication experience. She commented on its meaningfulness as follows:

毎週授業で学んだことをジャーナルで自分の経験と照らし合わせて振り返ったことで、普通に授業をうけた以上に頭に定着していると感じます！学んだことは全て自分が体験したことがあるものだったので、毎回気づいたこと、感じたことをその場で終わらさずに、こうして深く考える機会をもつことも重要だと考えました。（あかね、事前授業ジャーナル）

By comparing the content learned in class with my own experience weekly by doing the reflective journal, I think [my understanding of the class content] was cemented in my head rather than simply

taking the class! What I learned was all relevant to what I had experienced. I thought it was important to have such an opportunity to reflect on what I had noticed or felt rather than just leaving it there. This made me reflect more deeply. (Akane; reflective journal before studying abroad)

Developing reflective habits needs to be part of the targeted learning as it does not naturally occur (Coulson & Harvey, 2013; Dewey, 1933; J. A. Moon, 2004). There is a need to prepare the students to be able to further engage in reflective practices during the anticipated time abroad (Boud, 2001; Coulson & Harvey, 2013; Cowan, 1998; Walker, 1985). Instructors can encourage students to be active learners rather than passive respondents to experience by facilitating the students to understand the role and influence of reflection (Boud, 2001), and create a deeper understanding of it.

As seen in these students' accounts, reflective writing at the preparatory stage helped the students to: 1) deconstruct and reconstruct what they had learned in class by relating their own intercultural communication experiences to relevant concepts and knowledge; 2) consider what attitudes, behaviours, and perspectives would be important for engaging in better intercultural communication experience while abroad; and 3) understand how reflection helps to contextualise and construct their knowledge based on their intercultural communication experiences. The reflective writing which was tied into the content of preparatory sessions allowed the students to highlight and connect the present and future learning in anticipation of their intercultural encounters abroad as proposed in the respective phases of 'learning to reflect' and 'reflection for action' (Coulson & Harvey, 2013).

*During study abroad.* Once the students arrived in the US, the reflective journals were led by the two instructors from the home campus with different frequency. The weekly reflective journals focusing on intercultural learning continued to run with guiding questions, based on which the students reflected on their reactions and interpretations of their intercultural (communication) experiences, and explained how they developed their awareness or interpretations of relevant contexts or individuals. While the ideal practice was to have the students demonstrate their reflexivity autonomously, the importance of guidance was evidenced from the students' comments. Hiro explained the effect of reflective writing as follows:

書く環境を、与えないと、まず考えようとも思わない、っていうのが、その、全員が、全員そういう興味を持ってるわけじゃないと思うんですよ。  
(中略) 強制ですけど (中略) 意外と書いてるときに、あ意外とこういうのあったなあ、みたいな、ふと思い出したときにパッとあって、その後また、同じこと、があると、あこれ異文化なんだ、みたいな、あって、あのとき書いたなあとか。(ひろ、帰国後インタビュー)

When you don't provide an environment for writing things down, you might not really think about your experience. Not all the students are interested. . . . Although writing was mandatory, I was surprised to find that it made me remember particular episodes while I was writing . . . and then if a similar thing happened again, I could identify it as the same culturally difference I had written about before. (Hiro; post return interview)

There are two points of importance about Hiro's statement. One is the influence of learners' intent on reflective engagement, and the other is how reflective writing helped him with his intercultural learning. As presented in the previous section (5.1.1), not all the students demonstrated willingness to engage in reflective writing, especially on a regular basis. It might have been the same with Hiro; however, the required condition guided him to stay committed to the task with benefits as a result of the process. That is, reflective writing helped him to identify certain cultural implications

of experiences over time, which may have remained unnoticed. As the situations and contexts were objectified and stabilised in written form, he became more aware of recurring patterns or phenomena emergent in the intercultural context. The process of reflective writing allowed him to notice the significance of particular aspects. In other words, the pedagogical practice supported the development of what Byram (1997) terms as *savoir apprendre* (i.e. knowledge of social groups and the process of individual and societal interactions) insofar as he could identify particular cultural practices as a way of establishing an understanding of the given social environment. The experience he initially captured in writing without much consciousness began to be shaped into knowledge with more awareness of the shared meanings.

Framing the experience into learning was a key process for students. Another student, Akiko, stated how reflective writing had helped her to focus on, and reinterpret everyday communication and interactions from the perspectives of intercultural learning:

それでさっきのカフェの話を書いて、なんか、なんだろ、自分が言わなきゃいけなかったというので、文化的な違い感じたっていうので、その一個の日常のことだったけど、それをなんか異文化理解みたいな、形で理解するっていう、なんか、同じことだけど視点変える（あきこ、帰国後インタビュー）

So I wrote about the incident in the café. I had to verbally communicate [with the shop assistant to tell that I was in a hurry, but I didn't even think about doing that]. I realised that there was a cultural difference in that context. Even though it was just one everyday incident, I could interpret the same incident from a different point of view in a way of intercultural understanding. (Akiko; post return interview)

Akiko's account indicated how reflective writing had enabled her to distance herself from the experience, and to engage in conceptualising the many different assumptions driving individual attitudes and behaviours. Of noteworthy is that, two years later at the stage of member checking in this study, Akiko further noticed the potential of conceptualisation through reflective writing, and associated it with her self-esteem: while the reflective writing process enabled her to identify alternative ways of behaviour so that she could modify her own behaviour constructively, it also prevented her from imposing a negative self-thought on herself as if she had done something wrong in the given situation. As a result of decentring and relating her experience to knowledge as to how people share different meanings, beliefs, and behaviours (as in Byram's [1997] *savoirs*), the development of knowledge allowed Akiko to maintain a positive sense of self through her intercultural communication experiences.

Another effect of reflective writing concerns the development of students' enquiries, which was tied into active knowledge construction. In her interview, Yoko described how she had come up with questions concerning the local people and social structures while writing the reflective journal, and how such enquiry processes guided her subsequent actions. She took advantage of the service learning opportunities where she could ask, share, and confirm ideas with the local people. She took mental notes from and for the reflective journal, and purposefully engaged in constructing and reconstructing understanding of the aspects in question. Yoko highlighted the positive effect of reflective writing as follows:

たぶん書かなかったら、ただただ、ああすごい、これ違うんだ～、へ～、  
で終わってたと思うんですね。なぜ、とか、じゃあ今度はどうなるんだ



ろう、とか、そういうことまで考えなかったと思うんですね。自分の体験で、終わりって感じで。それに基づく思考だったりとか、なんか、ね、why とか what とか、そういうこと、突き詰めなかったので、すごいジャーナルはそこを助けてくれたと思います。(ようこ、帰国後インタビュー)

If I hadn't written [the reflective journal], I would have simply passed [my experience] like, 'Oh wow, that's different. I see.' I don't think I would have taken it further to relate to other situations or contexts. I would have been satisfied with the experience alone. I wouldn't have developed my thinking into 'why' or 'what' based on my experience, so I think the reflective journal had helped me with that way of [cognitive] thinking. (Yoko; post return interview)

It can be seen that Yoko moved on from learning 'recipe' knowledge, which was limited to pragmatic competence in routine practices and performances typified by the local people (Berger & Luckmann, 1966), and took her interest to another level to explore whether the knowledge would apply to other contexts in the given social structures. More specifically, the writing process encouraged her to actively examine and analyse her intercultural encounters and experiences in relation to other factors and contexts, and to further understand the relationships of individuals and society.

On the other hand, a major challenge concerned the students' intent in learning, as in the case of Rika who had no interest in reflection and reflective writing throughout the programme. Rika had already had a range of intercultural experiences since her childhood, such as hosting international students at home and participating in short-term residence/homestay abroad programmes. Even though it was the first time for her to go to the US, overseas travel itself was not a novel experience as she had grown up with it. She reflected in the interview that she tended to perceive overseas experience as a chance of 'escapism from reality'. She felt relaxed when being away

from Japan because she could express a different self without worrying about others' perceptions. Likewise, she enjoyed experiencing different environments, especially from the perspective of exploring cultural products and artefacts. However, it was evident that she did not see the point in reflecting on her experience. Rika attributed it to the lack of novelty of overseas experience as she had not felt strong discomfort or dissonance while in the US. Although there were situations or conversations which did surprise her, they remained unexplored. She was open to experiencing otherness but not to the extent of exploring multiple frames of reference as an active form of learning (J. A. Moon, 2004). She expressed the difficulties in relating her intercultural communication experience to knowledge as follows:

一週間でその・・・起こった出来事を、またそういう、学習に絡めながら考えることも難しかったです。自分が体験したことが、そうやって授業で学んだことに本当につなが・・・、なんていうんですか、似たようなこと本当に体験しているのかって考えるのも・・・難しい。(りか、帰国後インタビュー)

It was hard to relate the incidents which had happened through the week to learning. It was also hard to think whether my experience was connected to what we had learned in class, like, if I had experienced anything similar. (Rika; post return interview)

It would seem that the prior overseas experiences had influenced the development of her readiness to possible cultural difference. Yet, she did not develop a reflective habit to go beyond the surface level of experiencing. As Boud, Cohen, and Walker (1993) put, '[a]n event can influence the learner, but only if the learner is predisposed to being influenced' (p. 11). Students have different perceptions based on past experience; therefore, what they select to learn from experience is subject to their perceptions (J. A. Moon, 1999b). Rika's case illustrated the influence of the learner's intention, which

determined her approach and depth of learning from experience (Boud, Keogh, & Walker, 1985; Boud, Cohen, & Walker, 1993; J. A. Moon, 2004; Usher, 1993).

To summarise, reflective writing during study abroad helped the students to recognise certain patterns of experience or particular interactions or communication, and to frame them into intercultural learning. Reflective writing also triggered students' enquiries to examine and understand knowledge in relation to other contexts as an active form of learning (J. A. Moon, 2004), which is one of the important qualities which reflective writing needs to demonstrate (J. A. Moon, 1999a). However, given the broad range of experience while studying abroad, the writing process occasionally involved uncertainty. Furthermore, the students' interest and intent, whether to take their experiences beyond surface level, affected their depth of reflection. The students recognised the benefit of making the reflective journals a required task; however, as discussed in Rika's case, the students' intent and approach to learning affects the degree of engagement (Boud, Cohen, & Walker, 1993; J. A. Moon, 1999b, 2004). It highlighted the importance of guidance and scaffolding in order to direct students' perceptions to the appropriate element of the experience in line with learning objectives (J. A. Moon, 1999b).

*After studying abroad.* Once the semester resumed, the post-study abroad sessions were held after an interval of a one to two month summer holiday. As opposed to the preparatory sessions which took place intensively on a weekly basis, the post-study abroad sessions were held on a monthly basis. The value of getting together and reflecting on the study abroad experience was evidenced positively in the reflective

journals as the students explored and articulated their changes in: the way they perceive and understand Japanese and American societies and the people; their newly developed interests; and self-concept in relation to others. Of importance at this stage was the opportunity to keep coconstructing ideas and knowledge through discussions with the peers, followed by putting them in writing. Ken reflected after the class as follows:

今日の授業を通して感じたこと。アメリカに行って学んだこととは何かということは何度も何度も繰り返しリフレクションしていくことでプログラムが終了した後もその価値を見いだせると感じたことです。自分の中ではたいてい終わったものに関してはその時に感じたことで頭の中では終わってしまうことが多いが、この振り返りの時間が持てることで、その時に見いだせなかった考えかたやアイデアが出てくるのがたくさんあった。  
(けん、事後授業ジャーナル)

What I felt after today's session: continuously reflecting on what I learned from my experience in the US. allows me to understand the value [of my experience] even after the programme ended. Often, I do not reflect [further on my experience] once it is over so my reaction [in terms of thoughts and feelings] just stays in my mind as it is. But by having been able to take time to reflect like this, this brought to light many perspectives and ideas which I hadn't been able to find at the time. (Ken; reflective journal after studying abroad)

Ken's account indicated how continued reflection enabled him to give different meanings to his experience and develop further knowledge over time and space. This resonated with the critique of Kolb's (1984) single loop experiential learning cycle in that individual reflective processes can be considered as an ever-expanding spiral of learning (Coulson & Harvey, 2013; Cowan, 1998; Rogers, 2001).

Furthermore, the development of conceptual thinking was documented in the reflective journals at the post-study abroad stage. For example, one of the post-study abroad sessions focused on the concept of freedom as to how it was understood, expressed, and acted out by individuals in different societies. The students actively discussed their thoughts and articulated them clearly in the reflective journals. Looking back at her own engagement in discussion, Aoi commented on her achievement as follows:

自由について語ることはすごく面白かった。グループは4人だったので、それぞれ違う価値観をぶつけ合えた。なによりも、自分の中の自由という概念が言葉にすることでまとまったのがうれしかった。(あおい、事後授業ジャーナル)

It was quite exciting to talk about the concept of freedom. We were a group of four and we could each express different values [and had a genuine discussion]. Above all, I was happy that I could clarify my own understanding of the concept in my own words. (Aoi; reflective journal after studying abroad)

Aoi's account highlighted the effect of engaging in discussion with her peers in that she could coconstruct her understanding of freedom by drawing on her experience in the US and challenging the ideas with others (Boud, 2001; Boud, Cohen, & Walker, 1993). Another student, Shoko, also wrote her thoughts based on the class discussion as follows:

日本とアメリカの社会、自由のあり方についての考えは人によって様々であり、その考えも常に同じというわけでは無く、人との交流や経験を重ね、時を経るにつれて変化していくものだということです。グループメンバーの話を聞いて皆アメリカに行く前と後で考えが広がったり変化したことがわかりました。自由のあり方や、自分の国と他の国を比較して、疑問に思うことや満足できない部分、もっとこうなればよいのといった理想など、一人ひとりいろいろと思うことがあると思います。大切なのは、それについて自分で考え、行動し続けることであり、それが自分の求める結果にたどり着く唯一の方法だだと思います。その求める結果も、人との交流や経験を通してより良い方向に、柔軟に変化していくのではないかと考えます。(しょうこ、事後授業ジャーナル)

Perceptions of Japanese and American societies and concepts of freedom are different from one another. Each person's view does not necessarily stay the same either, as it changes based on interactions and experiences. After listening to the peers' discussion, I found out that their thoughts had changed compared after going to the US. Each person has different thoughts about what freedom is, things they question, flaws they see, and things that could be done better/differently when they compare their own countries with others'. Or the same when you compare your country with another. What I think is important is to continue to develop your thinking and keep acting, which I think will guide you to the consequence you seek. (Shoko; reflection after studying abroad)

As Shoko illustrated, *personal trajectories* influence, and will continue to influence, individual perspectives and behaviours. Having gained awareness of the flux and constant process of human interactions, experiences, and knowledge construction, she linked such learning to her understanding of the concept of freedom. Learning takes place in a social context as a communicative engagement (Wildemeersch, 1989), and the reflective activities, based on face-to-face discussion followed by writing, during the post-study abroad sessions allowed the students to better articulate and conceptualise their understanding of their learning from abroad. Students' enthusiasm in integrating newly gained frames of interpretation based on their experience and knowledge was evidenced in their reflective journals.

To conclude, the students' accounts at the post-study abroad stage indicated the possibility of continued learning. The students presented their ideas comparatively and critically based on the multiple frames of interpretation they had developed from studying abroad. Especially, the combination of class discussions and reflective writing

allowed the students to examine and coconstruct knowledge from the shared intercultural experiences. As Berger and Luckmann (1966) state, '[i]n order to maintain subjective reality effectively, the conversational apparatus must be continual and consistent. . . . [T]he way to "refresh" these memories is to converse with those who share their relevance' (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 175). Thus, requiring the students to meet with peers after returning to Japan created an important context for students to recall their shared experience and learn from it. The importance of engaging the students in developing critical reflection consecutively from before, during and after studying abroad (Byram & Feng, 2006; Holmes, Bavieri, Ganassin & Murphy, 2016; Jackson, 2008; Savicki, 2008) will be further discussed as pedagogical implications in the Conclusions chapter.

### **5.2.2 Analytical approach to reflection through guiding questions**

This section centres on the role of guiding questions provided in the reflective journals. The students followed the guiding questions encompassing different topics to help their reflective thinking. Takashi, for example, mentioned the advantage of having the guiding questions and topics as follows:

特定のトピックを与えてくれるからこそ、僕たちもまた、体験談を元にそういう視点に立って、そういう視点で考えることができるんですよ。だから、やっぱりそのトピックがなかったら、僕が振り返る内容とか、たぶん、しょうもないというか、なんかその、そのときに何が起こって、何があった、何が楽しくて、こういうこと学んだとか、なんか単調になるというか・・・あんまり深い、どこまで掘り下げて考え・・・ようもしないと思うんですね。（たかし、帰国後インタビュー）

Because specific topics were given, we could draw on personal episodes and think on the basis of those topics. So if there were no topics, the content of my reflection would have been, probably, boring, like, describing what happened, what was fun, and what I

learned... It would have been somewhat tedious. I don't think I would have thought at a deeper level. (Takashi; post return interview)

The drawback of freewriting relates to its descriptive nature insofar that Takashi might not have been able to explore and examine other ways of understanding through reflective writing (Hatton & Smith, 1995; J. A. Moon, 2004). As he expressed in his interview, the guiding questions encouraged him to 'use his brain'. More specifically, the guiding questions helped him to make further meanings out of the everyday experience in the intercultural context. Similarly, Yoko mentioned the positive aspect of her thinking process in response to the guiding questions:

共通の点はありますか、とか違いありますか、って聞かれたときに、確かにあるんだけど、どう言えばいいんだろう、みたいな、何があったかなあとか。そういうことはすごい考えましたね。でもそっちの方が、私は助けられました。なんか、悩む、ことで、なんかわか・・・自分の考え、わかる、というか。深堀りしていく、じゃないですか、深い、自分の考えをこう、深く考えてみる、っていうことができた（ようこ、帰国後インタビュー）

When asked if there were any common features, I knew that there were certainly some things. But I had to think very hard how to explain or identify them. But [the reflective process] helped me. Thinking hard really made me aware what my thoughts are. As I delved into the topic, I reflected on my thoughts more deeply. (Yoko; interview)

Both Takashi's and Yoko's accounts indicated that the guiding questions were not necessarily easy to answer all the time. However, the challenge which entailed the writing task triggered the students' deep reflection (J. A. Moon, 2004), through which they examined and clarified the meanings they had (re)constructed from their intercultural communication experience.



Another effect of the guiding questions pertains to the external stimuli for reflection. Ken admitted in his interview that it would have been hard to critically reflect on his intercultural communication experiences on his own. In particular, he commented on the varying patterns of questions as having been helpful for deep reflection:

（異文化理解に関するリフレクションは）考えさせられる機会を作ってくれた・・・。言われなきゃ考えなかったってことが多かったかなって。考えるっていう行動自体が、なんか気づかされないと考えないんで。外から刺激をくれるっていうのはすごく重要なことだなあ、と思って。（中略）やっぱり質問切り替えてくれないと。パターン化しちゃうと意味ないと思うんですよね。ただ単にその前と今の違いをわかるっていうだけで。いろんな質問の切り口でいろんなことを、積み重ねながら考えていかないとだめだなと、思うんで。（けん、帰国後インタビュー）

[The reflective journal on intercultural learning] gave me a chance to think [deeply]. There were many aspects that I wouldn't have thought about unless they were pointed out. I think you need to be prompted to think properly. So I thought external stimuli were important. . . . It was necessary to have the guiding questions change [each time]. There is no point developing a certain pattern [of questions] because [the entries] would only show differences between then and now. What was important was to develop and accumulate a variety of thinking [processes] from multiple approaches. (Ken; post return interview)

Ken's account resonated with the importance of mediated learning experience (J. A. Moon, 2004). The guiding questions triggered Ken's awareness to critically reflect on his intercultural communication experiences and to recognise different details from his experience in the US. In other words, the guiding questions encouraged the creation of *variation* (J. A. Moon, 2004), through which Ken changed and adopted multiple frames of interpretation to further learn from the same ground of learning. Understanding the subjective and constructive nature of knowledge characterises the depth of reflection (J. A. Moon, 2004), and the guiding questions encouraged him to explore the range of

issues, emotions, and contexts underpinning the variety of interpretations of individuals. As Ken used the word 'external stimuli', the students' accounts confirmed the importance of providing careful guidance to mediate deep reflection (Brennan & Cleary, 2007; Hatton & Smith, 1995; J. A. Moon, 2004), and the guiding questions served as a means to facilitate students' deeper reflective engagement on their intercultural communication experiences.

On the other hand, regardless of the benefit of the guiding questions, challenges remained for students in drawing on relevant experience. Shoko, expressed her uncertainty as to what precisely 'intercultural' meant, given that every experience was considered as 'intercultural' while abroad. She explained the difficulties in identifying her focus:

Yeah, it was a little bit difficult to think about what is my intercultural experience because I think all of my experience is of course intercultural experience so I'm not sure if it's really called intercultural experience or just... Umm, just or not intercultural experience... (Filler) It's kind of difficult to output my feeling and my thought in the word but it was also good opportunity to think about what I, umm, what I learned from... from the communication, from the... lecture and something. (Shoko; interview in English)

Another student, Toshi, pointed out the difficulty in deep reflection since his attention had been drawn to obvious differences between the two countries. He attributed the limited focus to his attitude to the extent that he had been too cautious and hesitant to venture out in the new environment. The little variation in his intercultural communication experience restricted the level of reflection; therefore, he expressed his regret in having been inactive and not having exposed himself to more unfamiliar

contexts. Nevertheless, his metareflection after studying abroad was meaningful from the perspective of self-understanding and self-analysis of his learning:

全体を通して似たようなことを書いているといった様子でした。それは、自分が日本との違いに本当に驚いたこと、印象に残ったことを繰り返し書いていたんだなと思います。初めての海外で目に見えるような、または感じることもできるような日本との明らかな違いが目がいきがちで、小さなことについては書いていない印象でした。一日、または一週間を終えた後に記憶に残っているものは、本当にわかりやすいものしかなかったため、このような形になったのだと思います。(とし、事後授業ジャーナル)

On the whole, it looked like I was writing [the reflective journal] based on the same kind of topics. I think I kept writing about the differences from Japan - something that really surprised me, or something that stood out in my memory. Because it was my first time abroad, my attention had been likely to be drawn to visible or perceptible differences from Japan, and I didn't get the impression that I had been writing about [subtle] things. At the end of the day, or at the end of the week, what had remained in my memory was something really noticeable. I think that's why my reflective journal turned out to be like that [in terms of the similarity of topics]. (Toshi; reflection after studying abroad)

It can be said that the absence of prior overseas experience as well as his language proficiency affected his attitude and degree of engagement in the intercultural contexts, resulting in limited development of reflection. However, it is noteworthy to mention his change in frames of interpretation upon return. While he had not been able to reflect in depth and breadth while abroad, his perspective change was demonstrated in the way he critically reflected on the people's behaviours from the perspective of Japanese hospitality (see 4.2.1).

In fact, the challenge was not only determined by the presence or absence of prior overseas experience. The following student, Yoshiko, explained the challenges of engaging in reflection as the everyday life began to normalise and become predictable to greater or less extent:

毎回、その・・・バディ、の人たちとご飯に行ったりするのがもう、なんか結構ルーティンになってて、すごいその中で、また新しいことを発見してないなって、思うときだったりとか。なんだろ、家族の家にご飯食べに行くっていうプログラムでは、その家族の、なんだろ、ルールだったりとか、そういうのはあるけど、もしそういう学校の、オフィシャルのプログラムとか、その行ったこともないところに行かない限りは、ちょっと・・・難しかったかな、って思います。(よしこ、帰国後インタビュー)

[As my daily life such as] eating out with buddies turned into a routine, there were times when nothing particularly new really struck me. When there was an activity to meet a local family for a meal, I could observe their family life, such as their rules etc. But unless there were opportunities to attend something officially arranged by the host university, or unless I went to a new place, it was a bit hard [to think of particular episodes]. (Yoshiko; post return interview)

Yoshiko's account indicated the challenge in maintaining and developing reflective habits as her familiarity with the daily routines and patterns of socialisation had increased through the course of time. In other words, a small culture was formed in a way that Yoshiko had developed and internalised common assumptions and behaviours with others in the given environment (Holliday, 2013). In order for reflection to take place, experiencing otherness, entailing problems, confusion, discomfort, or dissonance play an important role (Alfred, Byram, & Fleming, 2003; Boud, Keogh, & Walker, 1985; Dewey, 1933; J. A. Moon, 2004; Rogers, 2001; Schön, 1983). However, the development of small cultures needs to be taken into account as it challenged the student's reflexivity and criticality as a result of the process of

normalisation. With the nature and influence of small culture formation in mind, Yoshiko's account informs the importance of providing continuous guidance in order to increase the depth and complexity of reflection. This links to Coulson and Harvey's (2013) 'learning to reflect' phase as an iterative and ongoing process of developing students' reflective skills over time. Literature suggests a variety of means to help students to engage in effective and deep reflection, which can be employed according to the environment and resources available in given contexts (Brockbank & McGill, 1998; Coulson & Harvey, 2013; Cowan, 1998; J. A. Moon, 1999b, 2004; Rogers, 2001; Stevens & Cooper, 2009).

### **Summary of section 5.2**

The process of reflective writing encompassed two aspects. First, the integration of experience and knowledge was highlighted in the first sub section (5.2.1), illustrating how the students framed and conceptualised their intercultural communication experiences for further understanding at the different stages of the programme. At the preparatory stage, the students related relevant concepts from class to their prior intercultural communication experiences. Through such processes, the students built attitudinal readiness for their anticipated intercultural encounters abroad, and also contextualised the use of reflection in relation to learning (Coulson & Harvey, 2013). While abroad, the students were able to recognise and examine certain patterns or particular incidents of interaction or communication from the perspective of experiential learning (Boud, Keogh, & Walker, 1985; Boud, Cohen, & Walker, 1993; Cowan, 1998; J. A. Moon, 1999a, 2004). Reflective writing also created an enquiry process, which encouraged students to explore other contexts to develop their

knowledge. During the post-study abroad sessions, the students were able to practice further reflection by adopting multiple frames of interpretation, which had developed over the course of time abroad. Reflective writing benefited from class discussions in that the communicative engagement allowed them to confirm, challenge, and modify their understanding of what they had learned from their intercultural experiences while abroad (Boud, 2001; Boud, Cohen, & Walker, 1993). The reflective engagement at this stage also evidenced how students could develop understanding of the same experience over time and space. The findings implied the limitation of Kolb's (1984) single loop experiential learning cycle in depicting the potential of students' subjective and constructive learning processes based on experience and reflection.

Secondly, the guiding questions were crucial insofar as they provided students with a cognitive stimulus for reflecting on their intercultural communication experiences more analytically and deeply. Having somewhat challenging questions as well as a variation of questions encouraged the students to think more flexibly and openly about their assumptions, taken-for-granted knowledge, and alternative interpretations to engage in deeper reflection (J. A. Moon, 2004). Nevertheless, students' engagement in reflective writing also revealed some challenges underpinned by: the learner's intention; prior intercultural learning experience; and students' ability to be reflexive and critical as students' everyday life began to normalise in the new environment. These findings point to the importance of careful pedagogic and teacher mediation, which will be discussed as pedagogical implications in the Conclusions chapter.

Up to this point, the findings have centred on individual students' writing. The following section focuses on the effects of peers' reflective journals on students' learning.

### **5.3 The benefits of sharing and reading peers' reflective writing**

As indicated in Chapter 3, the reflective journals in the target study abroad programme were made viewable to all instructors and Japanese peer students involved in the programme. Based on the setting where the students could read and share their reflective journals, further benefits of reflective writing were found from the perspective of developing awareness of individual diversity as well as peer support in learning. The findings in this section show that the reflective journals served as a tool for the students to discover and understand how individual interpretations are constructed differently, shaping multiple realities of culturally diverse others (5.3.1). Furthermore, the students' reflective writing provided insights into others with different perspectives and assisted their peers with their intercultural learning (5.3.2).

#### **5.3.1 Discovering and learning about culturally diverse others**

The previous chapter (Chapter 4) showed that the students had gained awareness of the diverse subjective realities of individuals through their intercultural communication experiences. Having realised how individual perspectives and subjective realities varied regardless of nationalities, many students pointed out the inappropriateness of predefining others based on preconceptions and stereotypes. Such awareness developed from the experience of modifying their initial impressions or perceptions of others through the intense and dynamic social grouping processes. While the face-to-

face social grouping processes played an important role in their perspective changes, the Japanese peers' reflective journals also created a meaningful learning condition in this regard. The following accounts highlighted the effects of reading the Japanese peers' reflective journals in finding the diverse frames of interpretation which shape a range of subjective realities:

同じテーマで書いているはずなのに、みんな意見が違って、多角的視野という面でも、様々なことを得られた（あかり、事後授業ジャーナル）

Although we were writing based on the same topic, everyone's opinions were different and helped me to gain multiple perspectives. (Akari; reflective journal after studying abroad)

同じ経験でも、人によって感じ方は全然違うということを知るきっかけになりました。（ちえ、事後授業ジャーナル）

Even though the experience is the same, [reading my peers' reflective journals] gave me an opportunity to know that individual interpretations are completely different. (Chie; reflective journal after studying abroad)

For similar reasons, some students also mentioned that they had enjoyed reading the others' reflective journals more than writing their own. One key factor driving their interests in reading their peers' reflective journals was about encountering unexpected otherness. For those students who had initially assumed commonalities among their Japanese peers, their peers' reflective journals provided insights as to how individuals constructed diverse perspectives and meanings to their respective experiences regardless of the shared situations in the study abroad programme. The students' interests resonated with what Boud, Cohen, and Walker (1993) state:

The meaning of experience is not a given, it is subject to interpretation. It may not be what at first sight it appears to be. When different learners are involved in the same event, their



experience of it will vary and they will construct and reconstruct it differently. (p. 11)

As the students discovered from reading their peers' reflective journals, the students' subjective experiences varied from one another because of the unique *personal trajectories* and individual perceptions, and the students visually read and recognised them anew (Boud, Cohen, & Walker, 1993). Sharing the reflective journals with their peers enabled the students to appreciate how interpretations were subject to each individual and how different realities are shaped from various points of views (Boud, Cohen, & Walker, 1993; J. A. Moon, 2004; Walker, 1985). In other words, it allowed the students to shift their initial essentialised views of others to the multiplicity of individual meaning making processes and alternative interpretations.

The process of reading peers' diverse interpretations also involved comparative thinking between the self and others. Another student, Shoko, stated how reading her peers' reflective journals had helped her to understand herself in the mirror of others:

Yeah, [the reflective journal] helped me to understand myself. [Filler] I usually, I often check other's reflection. And even though we have same experience in [City Y], we have same things in the lecture or in the local life [filler] their way of thinking and their perspectives are different. What they learn from one same experience is very different each other [filler] so I could realise, this person is thinking about like this, or so it's different from me [filler] so it makes me realise what is my way of thinking and what is other's thinking about it. (Shoko; interview in English)

The influence of reading peers' reflective journals on Shoko's self-understanding resonates with what Kramsch (2009) states about the development of sense of self,

namely, subjectivity. Individuals give meaning to the self through interactions with others as Kramsch (2009) highlights: '[w]e only learn who we are through the mirror of others, and, in turn, we only understand others by understanding ourselves as Other' (p. 18).

The reflective journals also provided a platform for the students to find a more personal level of emotions and thoughts of others. Some students stated how the reflective journals allowed them to explore their peers' deeper thoughts through reading their peers' writing:

相手との会話でも気づけることもありますが、ジャーナルで書いていることを読むことで、ほかのメンバーがどういうふうに考えているのかなど、相手のことをより深く知れたような気がしました。(きょうこ、事後授業ジャーナル)

Having conversations with others makes you aware of certain things but reading the reflective journals gave me a deeper understanding of how others had thought. (Kyoko; reflective journal after studying abroad)

ああみんなこう思ってるんだなあって、結構単純に、ちょっと知りたかった。(中略)人の考えを知る機会ってあんまりないじゃないですか。そんな深い話とか普段しないから。だけどそのときに、ジャーナルでは結構深いことを、そこついて書いている人もいたので。(のりこ、インタビュー)

I was simply curious to know what others had thought. . . . There are not many occasions where you can observe others' deep thoughts in everyday life. But in the reflective journal, some peers articulated their thoughts at a deeper level straightforwardly. (Noriko; post return interview)

Another student, Mai, explained her enthusiasm in reading her peers' reflective writing as follows:

みんなの见えない部分が、见えてる気がして。それで、あ、こういうこと  
考えてるんだなあってったり、とか。結構おもしろいこと書くんで、みんな。  
それに気づかされたりとか。(まい、帰国後インタビュー)

I felt like I was shown somewhat invisible sides of the others. It  
enabled me to know their thoughts. They were writing quite  
interesting things, and by reading them, I learned new things. (Mai;  
post return interview)

These accounts signified the students' interests in finding deeper thoughts of others, while everyday communication and interactions did not necessarily lead to such opportunities. As presented in the previous sections (5.1 and 5.2), the act of writing allowed the students to retrieve and highlight meaningful episodes from their intercultural communication experiences, which otherwise could have been forgotten or drawn little attention. They were able to clarify and (re)evaluate the meanings given to the respective contexts, and also took an analytical approach in framing and reframing multiple perspectives through the writing process. Furthermore, the content were personal and local to the respective students instead of being irrelevant and distant, allowing their peers to find more subjective realities of one another through symbolic forms (Kramsch, 2009).

In addition, the shared reflective journals assisted the social grouping process from the perspective of understanding the Japanese peers. Shoko, for example, stated the challenge surrounding the language in use among the peers. Even though the entire group had initially agreed to use English consistently while abroad, the actual communication did not necessarily happen in that manner. Some students ended up using Japanese with their peers, regardless of some others' efforts to keep it to English. Therefore, their communication and relationship-building involved a lot of

negotiations of expectations and intentions at different levels and times, requiring further engagement in understanding one another. Shoko mentioned in the interview that her peers' reflective journals had helped her to understand them to create better communication:

I was struggling about English, and I was struggling about the way of communication between Japanese member [filler] for me, it was more [filler] meaningful to see others' reflective journals and others' way of thinking, because [filler] on the others' [reflective journals], there's the things they don't, they don't express by their speaking so I can see through their reflective journal. So it helps me to understand their personality or the way of thinking and perspectives.

(Shoko; post return interview)

Although Shoko did not specifically indicate how her peer communication changed as a result of reading the others' reflective journals, its positive influence on understanding and building relationship with the others is worth mentioning. Walker (1985) points out the advantage of sharing reflective writing in a group setting because it can facilitate more open communication and willingness to interact. This resonates with the findings of this study in that students' personal views written in their reflective journals allowed the students to understand their peers better, besides the everyday interactions and communication, and facilitated the social grouping processes within the group of students.

In summary, the reflective journals allowed the students to realise the multiplicity of subjective realities shaping the diversity within the group of peers. Through reading their peers' reflective writing, the students recognised how interpretations differed from one another in response to the same guiding question, despite the fact that they

had been involved in similar activities in the host environment. The episodes and thoughts captured in the reflective journals provided the students with opportunities to discover and deconstruct the essentialised images projected on their Japanese peers, if any, and to understand the complexity of individual realities beyond the everyday contexts. Furthermore, the students perceived and constructed a better sense of self through reading their peers' diverse interpretations in a way that individuals see themselves in the mirror of others (Kramsch, 2009).

### **5.3.2 Learning support from peers' reflective writing**

I focus in this section how the reflective writing of students' peers served as a source of learning support for the students. First, reading their peers' reflective writing helped the students to relativise their views so that they could identify particular contexts and aspects of their own experience and use it to frame their learning. The other benefit pertains to the socio-emotional context of learning, based on which students' motivation was maintained and developed to learn from one another.

First, the Japanese peers' reflective writing was helpful for the students who occasionally came across difficulties in reflecting and writing about their own intercultural communication experiences. Some students pointed out the insights their peers had given to them:

たまたま、他の子は何書いてるんだらうって、私が、考えに詰まったときとか、ああ何て言いたいんだっけ～とか思ったときは、他の人はどういう体験したんだらう、とか。（ようこ、帰国後インタビュー）

I sometimes [looked at] the other's writing when I got stuck with ideas. When I wasn't sure what I wanted to say, I looked at the

others' experiences [to help with my ideas]. (Yoko; post return interview)

質問を見て、理解できなくて、自分の中のエピソードもなくて、他の人を見て、あ、これがこうつながるんだ。じゃあ俺もこういうのしてるわ、っていうのはありました。あ、じゃあこの質問の経験を自分はしてるんだ。してたんだ、って感じで気づかされることはありました。(まこと、帰国後インタビュー)

There were occasions when I looked at the question and didn't get it. [I thought] I didn't have any relevant episodes to write about. But through reading the others' reflective writing, I could find how things were connected. Then I could think of a relevant experience of my own. There were occasions [when the others' writing had helped me] like that. [Makoto; post return interview]

Even though the guiding questions were set up to navigate the students' reflective thinking processes, the students' accounts indicated the possible challenges in such practices. Within the flux and flow of intercultural communication experience, it was not always easy for the students to distance themselves from the contexts, or relativise themselves to identify and evaluate particular experience critically based on the given topics. It suggests the challenge of students' subjective nature of reflection and learning from experience. One student, Akiko, further explained as follows:

自分が、考えたことあるようなことだったら、何にも思わずばーっと書いてたと思うんですけど、なんだっけ、何を書いたらいいんだろう、っていうのとかも、何かあった気がします。(中略)それまで自分で考えたことあるかないかで、それがわかりやすいかどうかは違ったかな。(あきこ、帰国後インタビュー)

If it was something that I had thought of before, I went straight into writing without deliberating, but there were times when I wasn't sure what to write about. . . . The degree of clarity of my answers depended on whether I had thought of it or not before. (Akiko; post return interview)

As given in the previous section (5.2.2), Akiko's account points to the challenge of changing frames of interpretation or to perceive different details from experienced situations. While the guiding questions encouraged the students to engage in deconstructing and analysing the intercultural contexts, their peers' reflective journals provided some insights, and played a supportive role in facilitating the students' reflective thinking and writing processes. Students' reflective processes required the skills of discovery, or *savoir apprendre* (Byram, 1997), to identify similar or dissimilar cultural practices, such as verbal and non-verbal processes of interaction, and to establish an understanding of a new cultural environment. The students' accounts suggest that the development of such skills is not necessarily limited to, or achieved only as, an individual activity but could be enhanced by involving peers in the reflective processes.

Finally, reflective writing enabled students to form positive socio-emotional associations. Takashi explained that his peers' experience had attracted his interest more than his own since he had looked up to them and been keen on learning from them:

もともとあんまり自分に自信持つ人じゃなくて、他の人には、なんかいいものというか（中略）自分が学ぶべき点が絶対あるっていうか。もうそういう風に思ってるから（中略）自分の発見より他の人の発見、の方に興味があって。だから、すごい読んで、あすごいなあみたいな。毎回思ったりとか。（たかし、帰国後インタビュー）

I am not naturally a very confident person. I always think that there are definitely good things that I can learn from other people. So I was more interested in discovering about the others rather than in my own observations. So I always admired [them] as I read their writing.  
(Takashi; interview)

For Takashi, his peers' reflective writing served as an encouraging source of learning in that he could find favourable aspects of others as well as gain motivation from them. His accounts and some others' statements informed the formation and influence of peer support, which had been tied into the students' personal development. Due to the scope of this study, I will not illustrate further details with this regard; however, it is worthwhile to highlight the effect of such peer support. It was through the process of discovering different perspectives and individual realities that the group of students developed further interests and willingness to learn from one another (also see 4.3.2).

### **Summary of section 5.3**

The benefit of reading peers' reflective journals was evidenced in the way it had helped the students to realise the breadth and depth of individual perspectives and emotions. The students discovered and learned how different realities were shaped respectively even in the same study abroad context. In particular, the time and space spent on writing allowed them to reveal more aspects beyond their everyday conversations, and thus, developed further understanding of self and others. Peers' writing also helped some students to interpret their intercultural communication experiences in relation to the given topics. The students come with various ways of seeing things; therefore, the contributions they made to creating new ideas, and sharing and developing reflections with others, enabled them to benefit beyond individual engagement only in reflection (Boud, Cohen, & Walker, 1993; J. A. Moon, 1999a, 2004; Walker, 1985).



Finally, in the following last section, I explore the role and influence of language on students' reflective engagement based on their perspectives about their language choice.

#### **5.4 The role and influence of language on reflective writing**

This section presents the key factors which influenced the students' language and preference for reflective writing to understand the role and influence of language on their reflective engagement. The first section (5.4.1) focuses on the environment and contexts where students positioned themselves as English language learners and foreign speakers. The next section (5.4.2) illustrates the respective advantages and effects of Japanese and English.

##### **5.4.1 The environment and contexts as language learners and foreign speakers**

One of the major factors underpinning the students' decision to write in English pertained to the environment and contexts in which they positioned themselves as language learners and foreign speakers. More specifically, the following two aspects shaped their language choice: the students' desire in language as foreign language speakers; and the relevance of contexts and language in use.

*Preference for using English as foreign language learners.* One of the significant factors which encouraged the students to write their reflective journals in English was their desire and goals to improve their English. Although the main objectives of the reflective journals in this study was not intended to be language skills development, those students who wanted to, and made efforts to, immerse themselves in the

English-speaking environment naturally opted for English. Some students admitted that the depth or breadth of writing would have been enhanced if they had written in Japanese. Nor was it easy for all students to write in English, either; however, the motivated students were willing to challenge themselves with the task. For example, Manami, one of the many students who favoured writing in English, metaphorically indicated the importance of immersion in the language:

日本語の頭使っちゃうと、なんかもったいない（まなみ、帰国後インタビュー）

I think it would have been a waste of time if I had used my Japanese brain [if I did the thinking in Japanese]. (Manami; post return interview)

Another student, Shoko, was somewhat unsure of her language preference as Japanese was certainly easier for her write in detail; however, she drew on the positive aspect of reflective writing in English in that she made efforts to explore and learn new ways of expression to be more expressive in the target language:

But . . . it was . . . meaningful for me . . . to learn like . . . how can I say my feeling in English. Yeah, I could, um, I could gain my new vocabulary or expression in English. (Shoko; post return interview in English)

In addition, the Japanese peers' writing played a further role in encouraging the students' language learning. As presented in the previous section (5.3.2), Takashi had a strong interest and willingness to learn from his peers. His attention was drawn to his peers' English skills:

僕の英語の文と、他の人の英語の文と僕比べてて（中略）だからなんか、読みながら、あこれなんか、どういう風に使うんだろうとか、なんでこんなのできるのかなみたいなの考えたりしました。（たかし、帰国後インタビュー）

I read other's English and compared it with my English. As I read their writing, I tried to understand [their wording and grammatical structures as part of learning]. (Takashi; post return interview)

While there were individual differences in the degree of efforts, the students' preference to write in English indicated their desire and intentions to better express themselves in the language. Regardless of the depth and breadth of reflection, the students' choice of language signified their commitment to and process of expanding their expression via English. Scholars discuss how language is at play in constructing and presenting individual identities (Kramsch, 2009; Pellegrino Aveni, 2005), and the students' desire in expanding their abilities and range of expression in English implies their positive engagement in developing an alternative way of presenting the self.

*Relevance of contexts and language in use.* Another key factor underpinning the use of English was the environment: English functioned as the common and primary language in students' everyday life. They stated how they had become accustomed to speaking and writing in English through the experience of taking classes at the host university, and having conversations with the local friends and people in the community in English. The following account of Akari represented many students' reactions to their language choice:

日本にいる今、英語で記入と言われると少し抵抗がありますが、アメリカにいたときは、英語で書くことに抵抗はありませんでした。(あかり、事後授業ジャーナル)

Being in Japan now, I would be a bit hesitant if I were asked to write in English, but it wasn't the case when I was in the US. (Akari; reflective journal after studying abroad)

On the other hand, Makoto and Yoko gave two different perspectives. For Makoto, if something was experienced in English, it needed to be illustrated in English as it influenced the details he could write about:

脳が違う。(中略) 英語の脳で見たものを日本語で書くのも難しいですし、日本語の脳で見たものを英語で書くのも難しいです。(まこと、帰国後インタビュー)

My brain [works] differently. . . . It is hard to write in Japanese about something observed when I was thinking in the English language, and vice versa. (Makoto; post return interview)

Makoto's account points to research on linguistic phenomena encompassing the interaction between language and human cognition. Although it goes beyond the scope of this study, Makoto's perspective provides insights into how individual students may perceive and react differently to language in relation to given contexts.

The second perspective concerned the role and influence of language on interpretations. Yoko critically reflected on the importance of projecting the authenticity of others' realities, and explained why she had drawn on others' accounts and conversations in the same utterance:

生の声をそのまま、私も、そこに記録する、ことができたのはやっぱり英語じゃないとできない。日本語だと私のなんか、なんだろう、通訳じゃないけど、ね、なんか、まとめた私の考えがどうしても入っちゃうので、解釈というか。英語で、聞いたことを、そのまま、英語で書く、っていう・・・ことで、なんか・・・現地の人のお考えだったりとか、生活をより理解する、とか。それを通してもう一回自分で考えると。そういうことは、できたなあと思ってます。(ようこ、帰国後インタビュー)

It had to be English to capture [the local people's] accounts [as accurately as possible]. If I had translated it into Japanese, I [was afraid] that my thoughts and interpretations would have intervened. I wrote what I had heard in English in the same language. By doing that, I could better understand the local people's thoughts or life.

Then I could think [about the topic] once again, based on the content [written in English for further understanding]. (Yoko; post return interview)

As pointed out earlier in this chapter, Yoko had frequently demonstrated critical awareness and reflexivity on her intercultural communication experiences, and the above account also represented such aspects. Being aware of her subjectivity as an individual as well as a foreign language speaker in the US, Yoko was cautious of the possible gap of interpretations across the two languages. Her attentiveness points to what Kramersch (2009) calls intersubjectivity as the sharing of interpretative systems, that is, the engagement in linking 'meaning, context, culture, and society through specific linguistic features' (Gumperz, as cited by Kramersch, 2009, p. 19). Drawing students' attention to the relationship of language and subjective interpretations has the potential of enhancing the depth of students' reflection. At the same time, it can be tied into the essential objective of intercultural education, that is, to develop a greater sensitivity and responsibility in the use of words in communication (Kramersch, as cited in Borghetti & Beaven, 2018).

This section focused on the environment as the key contextual factor for the students' language choice, English. The following section centres on two different views in favour of Japanese and English. I present the advantages of the respective languages in reflective writing.

#### 5.4.2 The respective advantages of Japanese and English

The students identified different advantages of writing in Japanese and English respectively. Two aspects emerged: the degree of expressiveness in students' native language; and the advantage and effect of using English as a foreign language.

*The degree of expressiveness in students' native language.* Given the potential challenge of describing key feelings and emotions accurately and thoroughly in English, students commented how they could express themselves better in Japanese. Akane and Noriko wrote:

何か重大な出来事や、それにより学んだことが大きかったり、感情的なものになるほど、英語では表しにくくもどかしい気持ちになりました。ですので個人的には、言語にこだわるよりも、時々に応じて気持ちがそのまま書きとめられる方を選択することがよいと考えました。（あかね、事後授業ジャーナル）

It was frustrating when I couldn't express properly in English [depending on the topic]. It was harder to write when the experience was critical to me, when I learned something significant from it, or when the experience was more emotional. So personally, I wouldn't worry about the language choice. Instead, I think it is better to choose the language that works the best to express my feelings as they are, depending on the occasions. (Akane; reflective journal after studying abroad)

書くときは日本語を選択する（中略）自分の気持ちを振り返るっていう面では、あまり、適してはないのかなとは、思います。（中略）深いところまでは英語で考えられるけど、それを、こう、expression にする、語彙力とか、その、文とか、まだその知識が、日本語とは桁違いじゃないですか。だからたぶん日本語で書いちゃう、と思うんですね、そっちの方が、深く、リフレクションできると思い、ます、自分では。（のりこ、帰国後インタビュー）

I would choose Japanese to write. . . . I don't think [English] is suitable to reflect on my feelings. . . . I can reflect at a deep level in English, but there is no comparison with Japanese when it comes to

writing my feelings out, in terms of the levels of language knowledge, such as variation of expressions, vocabulary, and sentence structures. So probably I would write in Japanese. I think I can reflect more deeply in Japanese. (Noriko; post return interview)

Of importance is that both students drew on the role of emotions, which represents and characterises the nature of reflection distinctive from traditional academic learning and writing (Boud, Keogh, & Walker, 1985; Boud, 2001; Mlynarczyk, 1998; J. A. Moon, 1999a, 2004). In particular, Noriko's statement signified the difficulties entailing the process of creating *representation of learning* (J. A. Moon, 2004), that is, the process of representing her understanding of particular experiences through writing. In order for her to engage in deeper reflection, she needed a range of expressiveness, available to her in her first language only, Japanese, to lend more complexity and flexibility to writing.

Moreover, the particular linguistic features of Japanese were also influential in students' reflective writing. Tomomi, stated as follows:

日本にしかないニュアンスって絶対ある。擬音語もだし。(ともみ、帰国後インタビュー)

There are nuances that can only be expressed in Japanese, such as onomatopoeia. (Tomomi; post return interview)

Japanese vocabulary includes a large number of sound-symbolic words, which are indispensable to everyday communication in both spoken and written forms (Kakehi, Tamori, & Schourup, 1996). Onomatopoeias (i.e. *giseigo* for imitating human and animal sounds, and *giongo* for describing inanimate objects and nature) are one of those kinds, whereas other mimetic words include phenomimes (*gitaigo* and *giyogo* for describing non-auditory states, conditions, or actions), and psychomimes (*gijogo*

for depicting psychological states or physical feelings). She needed different varieties of onomatopoeias, which are not exactly translatable in English, to better describe her contexts, situations, or states and feelings with subtle nuances embedded in the language. Tomomi's account signifies how symbols are associated with individual subjective realities, including one's perceptions and emotions (Kramersch, 2009), informing the multiple meanings attached to the language concerned.

*The advantage of using English as a foreign language.* Instead of using Japanese, some other students explained the advantages of writing in English. They concerned: the informality in writing; the positive sense of self, detached from the negative memories embedded in the native language; and the engagement in intentional reflection.

First, with regard to the style of writing, English allowed some students to write in a more informal manner. The following student, Mai, commented as follows:

なんか堅苦しい文章になってそう、日本語で書くと。そう、なんか、英語で書くと、軽い感じで書けるイメージがあるから）、その日本語だと、なんか・・・レポートみたいな、そんな内容になりそう。（まい、帰国後インタビュー）

If I had written in Japanese, my writing would have been stiff. Yeah, when I write in English, I can write more casually. If in Japanese, the content would have been like a report. (Mai; post return interview)

Mai's account pointed to the nature of reflective writing in that the language should be more personal to the self rather than usual academic language as in formal essays or reports (Boud, 2001; Mlynarczyk, 1998; J. A. Moon, 1999a). As opposed to the advantage of students' fluency in their native language, Mai's perspective showed how



English offered a sense of spontaneity or freedom to write more personally and reflectively without adhering to a conscious goal of formality (Mlynarczyk, 1998).

Second, the following student, Ken, brought up the impact of his memories and perceptions of self, which had been embedded in his native language and emergent in his reflective process:

日本語で書くと、思い返さなくていいことまで思い返しちゃったりとかして、ネガティブになる節があるんですよ、日本語だと。表現力が豊かすぎて、なんか読み取らなくていいところまで読み取っちゃったりしちゃう。で、自分、すべて思い返しちゃって。ネガティブになっちゃうんですよ、結構。英語だと、なんか、なんかそういうことなくって。(けん、帰国後インタビュー)

I tend to be negative when I write in Japanese because I end up recalling things that might not be worth looking back on. In Japanese, I can be too expressive [because it is my native language], and I would read too much into people's reactions. I tend to reflect on everything and become negative. But that doesn't happen in English.  
(Ken; interview)

Ken's account resonates with Alred's (2003) study, which draws on the relationship of language and 'emotional baggage' (p. 23) embedded in it. As illustrated in section 4.3.2, Ken's struggle in socialisation in Japanese language, and with the people, had been significant. Alternatively, the socialising experience in English allowed Ken to express the self more openly and comfortably, and to reconstruct his self-concept more positively. In light of these aspects, the alternative language, English, liberated Ken from unnecessary worries which had been internalised through his *personal trajectories* with his native language, and helped him to be a more independent individual (Alred, 2003). Language learning allows the creation of a new identity (Evans as cited in Alred, 2003; Kramsch, 2009; Pellegrino Aveni, 2005). Individuals may realise

their 'urge to escape from a state of tedious conformity with one's present environment to a state of plenitude and enhanced power' (Kramersch, 2009, p. 14). From these perspectives, Ken's preference of using English supported his desire to construct the sense of self in a positive manner through an alternative language other than his native language, Japanese.

Lastly, Takashi highlighted the degree of intentional reflection. He explained how he had been able to engage in reflection more intensely in English:

日本語で・・・だったら逆にあんまりそこまで振り返らない、具体的にはなんか。日本語だと、なんか・・・うーんなんか、もう簡潔に、頭の中でパパッとなんか考えれる・・・けど、そこを英語で考えるとやっぱりなんかよりなんかこう、頭使うから。なんかやっぱたぶんそこ・・・だと思います。（たかし、帰国後インタビュー）

I wouldn't reflect to the same extent in Japanese, not as concretely as [in English]. If I write in Japanese, umm, I can think concisely and quickly, but in English, I use my brain more. So that's the difference [that encouraged me to commit myself to reflecting on my experience]. (Takashi; post return interview)

As opposed to the fluency and easiness in reflecting in Japanese, English required more effort and patience as Takashi looked for appropriate wording and expressions to better describe his thoughts in the reflective process. The more challenging it was to write in English, the more attention he gave to the thinking and writing process. Takashi's perspective echoed the findings presented in the previous section (5.2.2) to the extent that the depth of reflection increased as the level of the task involved more challenges (J. A. Moon, 2004).

#### **Summary of section 5.4**

I presented in this section the students' perspectives on their language choice and preference for reflective writing. I first drew on the environmental context where the students aimed to immerse themselves in English as influential in their language choice. Many students opted to write in English as they began to identify themselves with the English-speaking community through everyday communication, as well as their desire in language to express themselves better in a foreign language as an engagement in constructing a further sense of self (Kramsch, 2009; Pellegrino Aveni, 2005). On the other hand, different perspectives centred on the relevance of language and the contexts in which the language was used. For elaborating the contexts, situations, and interactions concretely, students expressed a preference for writing in the language of the experience. Furthermore, in order to interpret the local contexts as accurately as possible, the contexts and meanings needed to be drawn on in the given language so as not to have the interlocutors' realities altered through translation in the writing process.

Second, I highlighted the respective advantages of writing in Japanese and English. Those students who preferred Japanese regarded their fluency and the linguistic characteristics as essential in order to depict their thoughts and feelings more accurately and thoroughly. In particular, emotion was as a key domain, which would not have been elaborated easily in English. On the other hand, English allowed students to write informally and casually, through which students could be more expressive than in Japanese. Japanese might have involved limitation in this regard because it could be tied into academic/formal writing. English also allowed students to

express the self more freely in the reflective process by putting aside unnecessary thoughts and emotions interwoven in the native language through students' *personal trajectories*. Finally, the challenge of reflective thinking and writing in students' foreign language triggered their efforts in such a way that they engaged in reflection more purposefully and intensely.

### **Summary of Chapter 5**

I discussed in this chapter how reflective writing as a pedagogic tool had helped the students to learn from their intercultural (communication) experiences with regard to self and others before, during, and after studying abroad. Coulson and Harvey's (2013) framework for scaffolding reflection for learning through experience was used to interpret the emerging themes at the respective stages of the study abroad programme, i.e. 'learning to reflect' and 'reflection for action' for the preparatory phase; 'reflection in action' while abroad; and 'reflection on action' for the post-return phase (section 5.2.1). While the findings included many positive aspects in relation to the theories of reflection and experiential learning, students' challenges in engaging in reflective writing foregrounded the subjective nature of learning, such as learner's intention, perceptions based on past experience, and the degree of reflexivity and criticality. The socially constructed nature of students' learning from experience was also evident over time and space, confirming the potential of subsequent learning through reflection.

The findings also demonstrated the benefit of reflective engagement with others (section 5.3). During the post-study abroad sessions and by reading the Japanese peers'

reflective journals, students relativised their views with others, and coconstructed further understanding of their experiences. It also enhanced students' awareness and understanding of the diverse subjective realities of their peers. Being aware of, and understanding, how individuals may perceive, and interpret, things differently not only allowed students to engage in deeper reflection (J. A. Moon, 2004), but also to increase students' interests in, and understanding of, culturally diverse others. It implied the potential of their developing a non-essentialised approach to one another, and to other non-Japanese people.

Lastly, the role and influence of language on reflective writing emerged as multifaceted (section 5.4). I highlighted: the environmental context; the degree of expressiveness (Boud, Keogh, & Walker, 1985; Boud, 2001; Mlynarczyk, 1998; J. A. Moon, 1999a, 2004) of the language concerned; and students' desire in a language in relation to a sense of self (Kramersch, 2009; Pellegrino Aveni, 2005). The students' preferences and rationales for their language choice demonstrated how language shaped their reflective thinking and writing processes with multiple factors at play.

The next and final chapter, 'Conclusions', provides the summary of the findings, implications from theoretical, methodological, and pedagogical perspectives, limitations of the study, directions for future research, and lastly, final remarks.

## Chapter 6

### Conclusions

#### Introduction

This qualitative study aimed to understand what Japanese study abroad students had learned about self and others through their intercultural communication experiences, and how their intercultural learning was supported pedagogically through the use of reflective writing, conducted before, during, and after studying abroad. I identified in the literature review the importance of, and the gap in, incorporating a non-essentialised approach into intercultural teaching and research in Japanese contexts (2.1). I also discussed the need to further develop pedagogical understanding of reflection in relation to experiential learning theories in study abroad contexts (2.2). On this basis, I focused on a so-called ‘hybrid study abroad’ (Norris & Dwyer, 2005) context, in which a group of 28 Japanese students studied together before, during, and after a two-month study abroad programme in the US. My research framework is detailed in Chapter 3. I begin this final chapter by summarising the findings (Chapters 4 and 5) addressing the following two research questions (in section 6.1):

1. What do students learn about self and others from their intercultural communication experiences through reflection, guided before, during, and after a study abroad programme?
2. How does reflective writing as a pedagogic tool help the students to develop understanding of the self and others?

Following my answers to these two questions are: implications of research theoretically, methodologically, and pedagogically (6.2), limitations of the study (6.3), directions for future research (6.4), and final remarks to the study (6.5).

## **6.1 Answering the research questions**

This section presents the summary of the findings addressing the two research questions in the study. The first illustrates the Japanese students' intercultural learning experiences about self and others based on Holliday's grammar of culture (6.1.1); and the second explores key elements of students' reflective writing as a pedagogic tool for understanding self and others (6.1.2).

### **6.1.1 Understanding students' intercultural learning about self and others**

Underpinned by the social constructionist perspective (Berger & Luckmann, 1966), I drew on Holliday's (2011, 2013, 2016c) *grammar of culture* as a theoretical lens to explore how the Japanese students had interpreted and talked about self and others through their intercultural learning experiences. The findings indicated that the dynamic context of *small cultures*, formed within the group of Japanese students and across other groups in the local setting, offered a range of reflective opportunities to the students. The students' subsequent accounts encompassed multiple cultural domains as illustrated in Holliday's work (i.e., *particular social structures; personal trajectories; particular cultural products; and small culture formations driven by underlying universal cultural processes*) to explain what they had learned from their intercultural communication experiences and intercultural socialising processes. The breadth of their reflections signified the dialogical nature of students' cultural realities,

being influenced by and influencing those cultural domains. I highlight the specific aspects of the students' intercultural learning about self and others below.

First, the students' reflection on their intercultural communication experiences and intercultural socialising processes prompted the students to understand how their taken-for-granted knowledge, beliefs, or behaviours had been internalised through *particular social structures* (e.g., education, job hunting system and career pathways). The students looked back at their transitions of academic and geographical environments and social structures experienced in both domestic and international contexts, and reflected on the 'system of ideas which drive behavioural choices' (Holliday, 2010, p. 261). What they believed to be absolute did not in fact necessarily apply in alternative contexts (e.g., learning and discussion styles, views on career pathways). Such awareness led to an increase in the students' sense of autonomy insofar as they began to reinterpret, negotiate, or modify their perceptions, attitudes, and behaviours in light of the social structures. While every individual has the potential to engage in dialogue or negotiation with their social structures (Holliday, 2016c), the students' learning experiences showed that the transition to a new environment was significant for the Japanese students in enabling them to realise and demonstrate their agency more explicitly.

Second, the students began to recognise and construct alternative interpretations of individual realities in contrast with *particular cultural products* (i.e., statements about the culture, cultural practices, and acts of people) which would have otherwise remained unquestioned, or reified as objective realities (Berger & Luckmann, 1966;



Holliday, 2013). The students compared and reinterpreted particular behaviours (e.g., hospitality) as to how such behaviours are, in fact, shared, but expressed and acted out differently, depending on the social and cultural contexts. Some students also questioned the use of cultural artefacts, and shed light on the problem of drawing on general statements about the culture and people in understanding individuals. More specifically, the students began to differentiate individual realities from traditions, artefacts, and cultural practices, such as *yukata* and Japanese festivals, or stereotypical images of the Japanese and Americans, with awareness, and some resistance also for some students, that such *cultural products* do not necessarily represent who they are. The students recognised how such cultural descriptions and associated judgements about individuals may not align with, but indeed conflict with, the respective diverse subjective realities. Their intercultural communication experiences and intercultural socialising processes prompted the students to reconstruct their understanding of how individuals tend to refer to *particular cultural products* when perceiving and interacting with others.

Lastly, the students learned how they had shaped their self-perceptions and own behaviours through their socialisation experiences (*personal trajectories*). Many students realised that they tended to conform to what they themselves had projected to their interlocutors about the Japanese, and that they had been overconcerned about others' perceptions and judgements on themselves. The findings signified that the ideologically constructed image of the Japanese people had prevented the students from acknowledging the diverse self and others more openly before joining the study abroad programme. Alternatively, the *small cultures* formed throughout the

sojourn in the US enabled the students to reconstruct a positive self-concept and sense of agency in expressing themselves more willingly and confidently. The students began to explore, recognise, and appreciate the respective uniqueness of themselves and their peers as they coconstructed their *small cultures* in the new surroundings outside of Japan. The students' *small cultures* also elicited their awareness against stereotyping and in presuming individual characteristics of others they had interacted with. This awareness emerged as they had reflected upon how various individuals were similar or different from the initial impressions or images they had of such people, regardless of their nationalities. Many students recognised and articulated their increased interests and willingness to engage with others more purposefully than before, shaped by their stronger appreciation for communication as a means to understand, and relate to, culturally diverse others.

In conclusion, the findings presented the potential of Japanese students' intercultural learning opportunities, underpinned by the non-essentialist approach to understanding self and others. For the Japanese students in the study, recognising and deconstructing both their stereotyping of others and the ideologically constructed image of Japanese was critical for them to appreciate and explore the diverse realities of their peers more openly. The students' intercultural learning opportunities were not necessarily confined to the intercultural encounters and interactions with non-Japanese, but also appeared possible and meaningful within the group of Japanese students through their *small culture* formed in a new and unfamiliar environment while outside of Japan. This provides an alternative insight into current study abroad research, particularly that which centres on Japanese students' intercultural learning

experiences in the context of a 'hybrid study abroad' (Norris & Dwyer, 2005) type of programme.

In addition to the potential of incorporating a non-essentialist approach into Japanese students' intercultural learning processes, the important findings concerned the students' reflective processes conducted before, during, and after the study abroad programme. In particular, the findings at the preparatory stage demonstrated the possibility and significance of guiding and preparing the students to reflect on, and understand, how individual students coconstruct and reconstruct their understanding through their *personal trajectories* (Holliday, 2011, 2013, 2016c) as they experience different socialisation processes. As indicated in the students' accounts of Hiro and Ami (4.1.1), they had reflected on their secondary education (Berger & Luckmann, 1966) and tertiary education (Alred & Byram, 2002), or their regional and academic transitions, to conclude how their taken-for-granted knowledge was challenged. Some other students, such as Chisato and Hikari (5.2.1), also developed their awareness at the preparatory stage as to how individual students have different interpretations even within the same group of Japanese students. Thus, underpinned by the non-essentialist approach to understanding self and others, it is noteworthy to highlight that students' intercultural learning can be enhanced by sequential guidance of reflection, before, during, and after studying abroad, within the group of Japanese peers as well as others encountered in overseas contexts. In particular, students' intercultural learning can occur at varying levels of socialisations and timings, even before arriving or after returning to Japan. The study fills the gap in research by demonstrating how the non-essentialist approach to understanding self and others can

prompt and challenge Japanese students to transcend national boundaries in exploring more cultural diverse self and others through *small culture formations* (Holliday, 2011, 2013, 2016c).

### **6.1.2 Exploring key elements of students' reflective writing as a pedagogic tool**

The findings indicated both positive and challenging aspects of reflective writing incorporated into the target study abroad programme. Four key themes emerged: the role of writing and reading the written texts as a secondary learning process; students' conceptualisation, analysis, and development of multiple frames of interpretation; students' learning through their peers' reflective writing; and students' perceptions on the role and influence of language on reflective writing. Particular challenges are highlighted at the end of this section.

*The role of writing and reading their reflection as a secondary learning process.* The findings demonstrated that the act of writing and reading one's own journal entries had linked reflection to students' learning from experience. As a first step, the process of recalling and objectifying their experiences in writing was important for the students to 'return to experience' and 'attend to feelings' (Boud, Keogh, & Walker, 1985) (5.1.1). The students' accounts foregrounded how easy it was for them to forget what was experienced and felt at the time. Thus, the timeliness of capturing the detailed interactional contexts was a key factor for the students to engage in further reflection.

Second, the students improved their understanding by forcing themselves by organising and clarifying their thoughts in an orderly manner through writing (J. A.

Moon, 1999a) (5.1.2). In particular, the writing process prompted the students to explore their experience from another person's standpoint, to discover new thoughts, or delve into deeper analysis and reflective thoughts. In other words, the writing process added a further dimension or new source of learning without altering the external experience itself (J. A. Moon, 2004).

Finally, the students gained a better understanding of the self through reading their own writing (5.1.3). The students reflected on their reflection as *metareflection* (Stevens & Cooper, 2009), and identified particular aspects of the self. Especially, the students' written entries served as an important source to reflect on over time and space as their emotional states appeared more obvious in writing (J. A. Moon, 2004). They addressed themselves to their emotions to develop further awareness and interpretations of the self in relation to others. This supports the importance of recognising and understanding one's own emotional states as discussed in experiential learning and intercultural learning research (e.g., Boud, Koegh, & Walker, 1985; Brockbank & McGill, 1998; Holmes, Bavieri, & Ganassin, 2015; Holmes & O'Neill, 2012; Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013; J. A. Moon, 2004). In sum, the students' act of writing and reading their own reflection resonated with what J. A. Moon (2004) calls a secondary learning process: they created another variation of learning by capturing new cues from the experienced situations through writing and reading their own written entries.

*Students' conceptualisation, analysis, and development of multiple frames of interpretation.* The findings in this theme foregrounded the importance of scaffolding and guidance through the students' reflective processes: the students purposefully

engaged in conceptualising and analysing what they had experienced and learned at the respective stages of the programme. In particular, the students' approaches to reflection supported the progression of Coulson and Harvey's (2013) framework for scaffolding reflection for learning through experience at each stage. First, the students increased their readiness for their anticipated intercultural encounters and intercultural communication experiences during the preparatory sessions (i.e., integrating relevant concepts of intercultural communication with their personal experience, and contextualising the purpose and use of reflection). Second, while abroad, the students identified particular interactions or cultural practices in real contexts, and incorporated them into their understanding more explicitly, or developed further questions to explore. Lastly, the students confirmed and continued to construct their understanding of learning from abroad over time and space, and with their peers. In addition, the guiding questions in the journal tasks prompted the students to be more analytical in exploring their intercultural communication experiences. Having somewhat challenging questions as well as different focus of questions including perceptions and communication encouraged them to think more flexibly and openly so that they could engage in deeper reflection about their assumptions, taken-for-granted knowledge, and alternative interpretations (J. A. Moon, 2004).

*Students' learning through their peers' reflective writing.* Although it was not mandatory to read peers' journal entries while abroad, the findings demonstrated two positive aspects about reading students' reflective writing with their peers. First, the students who voluntarily read their peers' entries discovered how individuals could see

and interpret the same experience or event in different ways. In other words, the students began to understand how the meaning of experience is subject to individual interpretations, which are constructed and reconstructed differently (Boud, Cohen, & Walker, 1993). Their peers' reflective writing also allowed the students to recognise their own ways of thinking in the mirror of others (Kramsch, 2009). The learning was particularly impactful for the students insofar as the diverse interpretations emerged within the group of Japanese students. Thus, the various interpretations and emotions objectified in writing not only enabled the students to understand the self and their peers better. They also prompted the students to modify their initial essentialised views about other Japanese as an important approach to intercultural learning (Holliday, 2013).

Second, the students could relativise their views through their peers' reflective writing as a means to develop the skills of discovery (as Byram [1997] terms as *savoir apprendre*). Based on the flux and flow of their experiences, the breadth of contexts, and the degree of unfamiliarity with the given topics of the journal task, it was not always easy for the students to capture and frame particular contexts and aspects of their intercultural communication experiences into learning. Alternatively, peers' reflective writing provided some insights, and prompted students' reflective thinking and writing processes. Thus, the findings supported the view that reflection is not only effective as an individual activity but can be enhanced with the support of peers (Boud, Cohen, & Walker, 1993; J. A. Moon, 1999a, 2004; Walker, 1985).

*Students' perceptions on the role and influence of language on reflective writing.* The findings illustrated the respective advantages of the use of languages (either English or Japanese) in reflective writing. First, writing in English met the students' desire in language (Kramersch, 2009) as foreign language speakers. Although the depth and breadth of reflection could have been hindered by using English, their expectations to expand their capacity to express themselves in a language other than their native language signified their positive engagement in developing an alternative way of presenting the self. Language is always at play in constructing and presenting individual identities (Kramersch, 2009; Pellegrino Aveni, 2005). As illustrated in the findings (Chapter 4), the students' communicative engagement in English through their *small cultures* within and across the groups of Japanese and local friends/people allowed them to recognise, reconstruct, or express the culturally diverse self openly and confidently, which would not have happened in their native language. Thus, their immersion in, and their endeavour to write, in English was part of the important process in realising the potential of self-fulfillment.

Second, an important aspect concerned intersubjectivity (Kramersch, 2009) in students' reflective writing. The students' reflective writing pertains to the sharing of interpretative systems, in other words, the engagement in linking 'meaning, context, culture, and society through specific linguistic features' (Gumperz, as cited by Kramersch, 2009, p. 19). As one student (Yoko) particularly highlighted, the students' language choice can influence the possible gap of interpretations across the two languages in use. The finding suggested the importance of the relationship between language and



subjective interpretations in students' reflective engagement. I further discuss this aspect as a theoretical implication (6.2.1).

Lastly, the respective languages (English and Japanese) enabled degrees of expressiveness. As discussed in the literature review, expressive language supports the exploratory nature of reflective writing. On the one hand, English allowed the students to write more informally (unlike in Japanese). On the other hand, in order to engage in deeper reflection, the students' native language was important in enabling them to demonstrate complexity and flexibility in writing. In particular, the role of emotion characterises the nature of reflection distinctive from traditional academic learning and writing (Boud, Keogh, & Walker, 1985; Boud, 2001; Mlynarczyk, 1998; J. A. Moon, 1999a, 2004). Thus, the degree of easiness in writing expressively, including the availability of particular linguistic expressions, was a key indicator of the students' preferred language.

*The identified challenges of reflective writing.* While the findings showed that reflective writing served as a positive means to enhance the students' intercultural learning, particular challenges also emerged. First, students' expectations of the experience and their perceptions from their past experiences (e.g., students' priority in giving time for experience itself; the lack of novelty of an overseas experience; little discomfort in the overseas environment; stronger interests in cultural artefacts) hindered proactive engagement in reflective writing. In particular, the students' openness and willingness to explore varying frames of interpretations was critical to shape an active form of learning from reflection and experience (J. A. Moon, 2004). The difficulty in engaging in

reflective writing also concerned students' learning habits (e.g., preference to verbal sharing) and time constraints. Furthermore, the variations of students' experiences also affected the breadth, depth, and focus of their reflective writing (i.e., limited exposure to new experiences due to students' hesitation; increase in familiarity with the environment and routinised life through the course of time; difficulties in focusing on and reflecting on a particular incident or episode due to a vast array of intercultural experiences in everyday life). While the purpose and use of reflection was explained and contextualised during the preparatory sessions, the findings foregrounded the subject nature of learner's intention and perceptions, which determined what they selected to learn from experience and how they approached learning from reflection and experience (Boud, Keogh, & Walker, 1985; Boud, Cohen, & Walker, 1993; J. A. Moon, 2004; Usher, 1993).

To conclude, the reflective writing task prompted the students to (re)construct their understanding of self and others to a greater or lesser extent, while entailing a degree of difference in students' approaches to the task. Multiple elements were key for their intercultural learning about self and others through reflective writing: 1) intentional and timely engagement in reflection as a fundamental step of learning from experience (e.g., Boud, Keogh, & Walker, 1985); 2) recognition of affective, cognitive, and behavioural reactions emergent in the situation and interaction in writing (e.g., Boud, 2001); 3) students' openness and willingness (with guidance and assistance of others) to explore alternative interpretations and realities (e.g., J. A. Moon, 1999a, 2004); and 4) reading one's own and peers' writing to reconstruct and coconstruct an

understanding of their respective realities over time and space (Berger & Luckmann, 1966).

## **6.2 Implications of the study**

This study aimed to provide insights into study abroad research and practice within the context of a so-called 'hybrid study abroad programme' (Norris & Dwyer, 2005) with a particular focus on Japanese students' intercultural learning through reflective writing as a pedagogic tool. Based on the research process and the key findings of the study, I provide in this section implications of my study from theoretical (6.2.1), methodological (6.2.2), and pedagogical (6.2.3) perspectives.

### **6.2.1 Theoretical perspectives**

In this section, I discuss how Holliday's (2011, 2013, 2016c) *grammar of culture* helped me in exploring and interpreting Japanese students' intercultural learning about self and others in the study. I also highlight particular limitations of his work as an interpretative tool in study abroad research.

First, Holliday's (2011, 2013, 2016c) *grammar of culture* contributes to expand the notion of, and approach to, intercultural understanding (*ibunka rikai* –異文化理解) and intercultural learning in Japanese contexts. Holliday's work allowed me to explore and interpret students' cultural realities, intercultural communication experiences, and social grouping processes more dynamically, transcending national and linguistic boundaries. In the literature review (Chapter 2), I discussed and critiqued the dichotomous (essentialist) approach of categorising and understanding culture

between Japanese and Others in the areas of internationalisation, language education, and concepts and practices surrounding intercultural awareness and understanding. As the findings of the study indicated, recognising and deconstructing the ideologically or stereotypically constructed images of the Japanese and others encouraged the students to be more open and willing to acknowledge the culturally diverse self and others positively and confidently. The findings also demonstrated an increase in students' interest and willingness to engage in dialogue with others as they had become aware of, and had begun to value, alternative interpretations and realities of individuals, regardless of their nationalities. Such intercultural learning processes took place within the group of peers and across the groups of others. Thus, in contrast to the dominant approach to understanding culture (i.e., the dichotomous views of Japanese versus others), Holliday's *grammar of culture* permits a broader and more intercultural interpretation of Japanese students' intercultural learning: it can enhance students' sense of agency in expressing their respective subjective realities and perceiving others more openly, without dwelling on the seemingly true realities objectified through *particular social structures* and *particular cultural products* (i.e., shared beliefs and knowledge which are institutionalised in society and represented via the media, that is, what is said about the culture and people). From this perspective, I highlight that Holliday's theoretical approach to understanding multiple cultural realities can bring about emancipatory change for Japanese students in relation to others.

Holliday's (2011, 2013, 2016c) *grammar of culture* also contributes to serve as an interpretative tool as to how students draw on particular cultural aspects when talking

about self and others, and how they deconstruct stereotyping as part of their intercultural learning processes. As discussed in the literature review (in section 2.2.1), it is not sufficient to simply caution students against stereotyping others. Alternatively, students need to further understand how stereotypes are formed and coconstructed, and recognise how they perceive and react to stereotypical approaches among one another in pursuit of developing interculturality (Abdallah-Preteille, 2006; Derwin, 2012). Holliday's *grammar of culture* enabled me to explore the dialogical nature of students' understanding of realities (both subjective and objective) by interpreting the contexts of cultural domains drawn on by the students, and understanding where the students resorted to, and/or raised awareness against, stereotyping self and others through their intercultural communication experiences in the study.

On the other hand, I found limitations in Holliday's (2011, 2013, 2016c) *grammar of culture* for my study in contextualising students' emotions, and motivations and approaches to communication through language, which were key to the students' *small culture formation*. The findings of the study illustrated the meaningfulness of students' *small culture* in order for them to coconstruct better understanding of culturally diverse selves and others; however, it did not necessarily mean that such *small cultures* were coconstructed in a positive and straightforward manner. As shown in the findings chapter (Chapters 4 and 5), some Japanese students reflected on their struggles with their negative feelings about self in relation to others (e.g., Manami, Ken). It had not been easy for them to actively engage with others until they came to reconstruct their perceptions about self and others. Another student (Shoko) drew on the challenges she had felt about the language choice (English-only policy versus the

spontaneous use of Japanese language among her peers) and the need for a degree of expressiveness in the social grouping processes. Some students also mentioned the influence of language in shaping individual meanings, contexts, and understandings of given situations (Makoto and Yoko). As exemplified in these cases, multifaceted factors underpin the phenomena of *small culture formation*. Although they appear to be present in some of Holliday's earlier writings (e.g., Holliday, 2010a), these aspects can be further addressed in his *grammar of culture*. Furthermore, in his discussion on intercultural learning, Holliday (2016b) states how individuals have the potential to be able to engage with other realities and the people positively, creatively, and critically by developing 'a cultural thread [fluid and multiple roles and backgrounds at play] mode of thinking and talking about cultural difference' (p. 329). While his discussion supports the non-essentialised approach to understanding self and others, the complex dimensions of intercultural learning (affective, cognitive, and behavioural) entailing students' *small culture formation* need to be further addressed in his work.

The above discussion alludes to the limitation of Holliday's (2011, 2013, 2016c) *grammar of culture* in providing a theoretical underpinning for research on students' interculturality. As discussed in the literature review (Chapter 2), students do not automatically become intercultural from simply being abroad or encountering unfamiliarity. On the contrary, scholars caution the possibility of developing negative feelings (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013) or being content with a surface level of cultural experience (Passarelli & Kolb, 2012), depending on the way students engage in their intercultural learning processes. Students' reflective attitude and approach is both a strategy as well as a goal of intercultural learning (Blasco, 2012), based on which they

engage in forming small cultures and interacting with others in these small cultures, more openly, flexibly, and respectfully. Thus, to understand these intercultural interactions and communication processes, additional theoretical lenses may provide further insights as well as enrich Holliday's *grammar of culture* in exploring and understanding the process of students' small culture formation as to how they work with language, communication, and emotions in study abroad contexts.

### **6.2.2 Methodological perspectives**

In this section, I discuss the following methodological implications of the study: 1) understanding data in the context of students' holistic and multifaceted learning experiences; 2) the nature of the relationship between students' awareness and action; 3) member checking in relation to the socially constructed nature of realities; and 4) reflexivity and researching multilingually.

*Understanding data in the context of students' holistic and multifaceted learning experiences.* Through the data collection, I recognised that the students' perceptions about reflective writing included multiple learning elements incorporated into the study abroad programme. As mentioned in Chapter 3 where I discussed the research framework, the reflective journals had been led by two instructors concurrently, including myself, before, during, and after studying abroad. In light of the purpose of this study, I chose not to explore the reflective journal tasks led by the other instructor (Instructor X) due to the difference of their objectives. Instructor X focused on reflection and self-assessment of individual goals as well as development of academic English skills, whereas I guided students' reflection on their intercultural

communication experiences, which explored various assumptions, interpretations, and behaviours shaping individual interactions and realities. However, some of the students' comments on reflective writing signified that they did not necessarily differentiate the objectives of the two tracks when they looked back at their experience, and implicitly referred to the other journal writing tasks, regardless of my reminder for clarification during data collection. Boud, Cohen, and Walker (1993) discuss the nature of learning from experience:

One feature of learning may be prominent at any particular time, but all learning involves the feelings and emotions (affective), the intellectual (cognitive) and action (conative). While it is convenient to pretend that only one of these aspects is in play, this is one of the greatest errors in considering learning from experience. It is one we often make as teachers when we are unable to identify fully with the experience of our students. In recalling almost any experience, different features appear connected; to learners it is experienced as a whole (p. 13).

The above statement foregrounds the intertwined dimensions of learning from experience, which also links to the students' perceptions about the reflective writing tasks in the study. Given the breadth and depth of experiences drawn on by the students across the two tracks of reflective journals, it is possible that they perceived the writing processes and their engagement in the writing tasks holistically. Therefore, I included any accounts which addressed my two research questions within the collected data. The students' perceptions about the reflective writing tasks signify the nature of study abroad as a holistic and multifaceted learning experience. This points to Kudo's (2011) discussion of how educational effects surrounding students' study abroad experience should be understood within, and as processes of, dynamic and



multifaceted learning elements interwoven with one another. Thus, I suggest the necessity to acknowledge the multiplicity of learning elements and contexts underpinning students' study abroad experiences, and to draw on, and interpret, relevant data openly and flexibly.

*The nature of the relationship between students' awareness and action.* As Dervin (2009) discusses in his study centring on mobility students' engagement in deconstructing diverse identities of self and others, the narratives drawn from the students' reflective writing and interviews may not necessarily indicate the direct relationships between their awareness/understanding and action. The findings demonstrated that the students had begun to recognise the diverse cultural realities of individuals, and learned to be less stereotypical about others; however, in real life contexts 'there are too many elements that intervene during interaction for an individual to be able to act as they wish' (Dervin, 2009, p. 137). Holliday (2016) also highlights that individuals can easily switch to talk on the basis of cultural blocks, that is, a more essentialist approach to describing cultures, even within the same short statement. Therefore, the students' intercultural learning documented in their accounts should not be misinterpreted as a fixed competence in action but needs to be understood as a process of their endeavours in constructing and reconstructing their awareness and responsibility for action. good.

*Member checking in relation to socially constructed nature of realities.* I conducted member checking two years after the data collection via email. In addition to ensuring trustworthiness and authenticity of my interpretations and translations of students'

accounts surrounding their experiences (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), the process prompted additional benefits both from the students' and researcher's perspectives.

For the students, the process of member checking brought further encouragement and motivation by recalling their study abroad experience anew. Their positive reactions resonate with what Berger and Luckmann (1966) call *reality-generating potency*: in order for individuals to maintain their subjective realities, they require a certain degree of frequency of conversation with given people, and specific social bases and social processes in realising their subjective realities. This illustrates how the students' 'realities' at the time of study abroad had become shaped into alternative realities in their respective contexts due to the interval of time, and separation from the environment and people (including their Japanese peers, since some of them had already graduated from the university). Thus, the students' experience of member checking suggests that rereading their own excerpts enabled them to 'revitalise' their realities in written form as a base for reconnecting with the people and contexts of their study abroad experience, vital in reinvigorating their *personal trajectories*.

Moreover, the two year interval of time between the data collection and member checking enabled a particular student (Akiko) to give further meanings to her initial interpretation provided in the interview (see 5.2.1). It was meaningful for her to develop her understanding of her learning experience through reflective writing at the point of member checking. Likewise, it was insightful for me as a researcher since she enhanced the richness of my own understanding of the data. Although member checking entails specific drawbacks, such as a loss of context and precise memories

where the story was told (as in the case of another student, Mai), or giving 'good and cooperative' responses (Reilly, 2013), the process of member checking made me realise, and appreciate, the socially constructed nature of realities from the researcher's perspective. I, as a researcher, am involved in coconstructing knowledge with the respective students surrounding their intercultural communication experiences (Burr, 2003; Finlay, 2003).

*Reflexivity and researching multilingually.* As an instructor-researcher, I was constantly in dialogue between the two roles throughout the research process. I found the personal relationship with the students in and outside class as an instructor highly beneficial insofar as I could relate to students' various backgrounds in the process of interpreting the data. Analysing the data primarily in Japanese (see 3.3) was also important in facilitating my interpretative process, and in increasing the authenticity of my interpretations (as in credibility [Lincoln & Guba, 1985]) insofar as I understand the students' experienced realities as closely as I can. However, I found the tasks of translating key codes and themes into English and the subsequent presentation of the findings challenging. I felt limitations in depicting their respective personal stories, both from the perspectives of meeting the scope of the study and the difference of language used between the data collection and writing up processes (from Japanese into English). Especially, the translation process of their accounts prompted me to go back and read the raw data to ensure that my translations had appropriately aligned with their 'vivid' descriptions of contexts and stories. Nevertheless, some particular wording or expressions needed to be paraphrased to make better sense in English. Being a Japanese native speaker bridging two languages, and an instructor-researcher

engaging with the breadth and depth of students' realities, the entire research process was not straightforward, entailing my own mixed feelings of enthusiasm in students' growth, some uncertainty and doubt (from the perspectives of trustworthiness of the study), but also a wish to contribute to their learning.

### 6.2.3 Pedagogical perspectives

As discussed in the theoretical implications (section 6.2.1), a non-essentialised approach to understanding self and others, underpinned by the notion of the socially constructed nature of realities, can bring about positive intercultural learning experiences for Japanese students. Inviting students to explore and understand the multiplicity of individual cultural realities can encourage students to relate to others in a more open manner. To help students to realise this, in addition to intercultural experience (so much the hallmark of non-essentialist approaches to study abroad) (Beavan & Borghetti, 2014; Holmes, Bavieri, & Ganassin, 2015), reflective writing can serve as a meaningful tool.

For example, guiding questions can invite students to focus on, and explore, **multiple** socialising contexts and processes from their respective *personal trajectories* within *particular social structures* (Holliday, 2011, 2013, 2016c), based on which students analyse their taken-for-granted knowledge, assumptions, and behaviours coconstructed and reconstructed with others. In my teaching, I typically used the term, 'others (*tasha* - 他者)' or 'culturally different others (*bunkateki haikai no kotonaru hitotachi* - 文化的背景の異なる人たち)' when inviting students to reflect on their intercultural encounters, and intercultural communication and socialising experiences

so as not to limit their thinking to categorised groups of nationalities. Although students may have had similar opportunities to think about 'others (*tasha* - 他者)' through their primary and secondary education in Japanese contexts, or about culturally different others on home campuses (e.g., interactions with international students), a study abroad setting (i.e., a transition across broader *social structures*) will allow students to expand the scope of reflection, including more dynamic interactions of individuals in given situations. The findings illustrated that the use of such key words lent more flexibility to students' foci of contexts for reflection, involving both Japanese and non-Japanese. The key of guiding questions is that they address the multiplicity of individual cultural realities, especially from the perspectives of cultural threads (i.e., fluid and multiple roles and backgrounds at play) versus cultural blocks (i.e., predefined and fixed descriptions of self and others) (Holliday, 2016b) so that students are encouraged to relate to others in a more open and flexible manner.

In addition to encouraging students to reflect on and understand different cultural realities, the findings supported the meaningfulness of guiding the students to critically evaluate their perceptions and understanding of *particular cultural products* (Holliday, 2011, 2013, 2016c) as representations of a culture. As mentioned in Yoko's account (4.2.2), it is possible that students are inclined to draw on cultural artefacts, such as traditional clothes and festivals, when talking about a particular culture. This resonates with Holliday's (2013) argument that cultural artefacts are underpinned and reinforced by discourses which are likely to be associated with 'our culture'. Such discourses confirm the ideological power of social structures (Holliday, 2011, 2013) insofar as the image of Japan as a nation state is reproduced through cultural artefacts as an

outward expression of cultural identity. Presenting and sharing cultural artefacts can be a convenient way for students to talk about a particular culture; however, as Yoko questioned, cultural artefacts do not necessarily reflect what individual realities are. Thus, instructors can encourage students to question how such typical representations of a culture may drive an essentialist approach, or the conceptualisation of cultural blocks (Holliday, 2016b), as opposed to exploring individual cultural threads which consist of multiple realities coconstructed and reconstructed through different socialisation processes (Holliday, 2016b). Instructors can incorporate cultural artefacts as a source of topic for students to reflect on and reevaluate how culture is expressed outward. Likewise, instructors need to demonstrate criticality and reflexivity so as not to be part of the ideological discourses of reproducing and reinforcing predefined and fixed descriptions of culture.

The findings of the study also presented the importance of mediation in students' reflective writing. Certain factors prevented the students from engaging in reflection thoroughly, deeply, or analytically. They were: students' willingness and intention (e.g., focus of interest, and the degree of priority of a task); influence of students' prior intercultural learning experience (e.g., the degree of unfamiliarity or discomfort in the new environment); and students' ability to be reflexive and critical, especially in the course of everyday life where particular habits and behaviours get routinised in the new setting (in other words, reconstructed in the newly formed *small culture*). These factors, which are significantly associated with students' intrinsic motivation to engage in reflection, are not fully represented in Kolb's (1984) experiential learning cycle, as discussed in the literature review (in section 2.2.2). Therefore, students need to

continue to 'learn to reflect' in order to increase the depth and complexity of reflection. Thus, I emphasise the importance for instructors to invite students to return to the 'learn to reflect' phase at any point of time (Coulson & Harvey, 2013).

Furthermore, I highlight a particular benefit of students' reflective journal tasks among the many elements discussed in the findings of the study: the importance of encouraging students to read their own reflective writing entries and those of others at any phase of the programme. Reading students' own writing and others' will help them to revitalise their realities (involving their affective, cognitive, and behavioural reactions), captured and objectified in writing, over time and space (Berger & Luckmann). This can be also done face-to-face with peers, leading to a benefit of having shared intercultural experiences in a 'hybrid programme' setting (Norris & Dwyer, 2005) while abroad. Moreover, peers' writing will help the students to: learn the multiplicity of individual interpretations; perceive the self in the mirror of others; relativise their experiences; and coconstruct meanings over time and space, especially during the post-study abroad phase. Although specific support is requisite to prompt students' motivation to engage in reflective writing (e.g., in the form of guiding questions), students' interest in identifying their changes, and for some, changes of others, from their study abroad experience was salient in the study. Underpinned by the theoretical perspective of the socially constructed nature of realities (Berger & Luckmann, 1966), instructors can invite students to consider how their realities are constantly reconstructed in relation to others, and link to the purpose and process of intercultural learning about self and others.

Finally, the role and benefit of being an instructor-researcher lies in the reflective process of contextualisation of students' understanding of culture. Given the multiplicity and complexity of students' previous experiences through their *personal trajectories* (Holliday, 2011, 2013, 2016c), expectations, and peer relationships in the study abroad programme, the instructor-researcher position provided me with an insider perspective to better understand the students' realities in addressing their learning needs and processes. I engaged in reflective teaching while exploring the students' perceptions towards self and others so that my questions would prompt their intercultural learning according to given contexts. Thus, the instructor-researcher's close observation on students' group dynamics, familiarity and knowledge of the programme context, and strengthened reflexivity in understanding culturally diverse students will play an important role in guiding students' intercultural learning processes.

### **6.3 Limitations of the study**

I present in this section three limitations of the study concerning: 1) students' experience as subjective, coconstructed, and time bound; 2) transferability of the study; and 3) availability of interview data.

First, students' interpretations are subjective and coconstructed: emergent interpretations deriving from students' experiences are coproduced with the interlocutors, depending on whom they talked to in given situations. This includes myself as an interviewer who was intrinsically and explicitly involved in the dialogical engagement of the interview in the process of data collection (Burr, 2003; Finlay,



2003), and in giving structure to the students' reflective journal writing. The data drawn on from the interviews (conducted two months after the after-study abroad sessions finished) and the additional comments made by some students at the stage of member checking (see 5.2.1) signify how their interpretations are subject to time and space of reflection (Boud, Cohen, & Walker, 1993; J. A. Moon, 2004): the students have come to perceive and interpret their experiences documented in their accounts in a different manner (e.g., further understanding of the experience; less vivid memories of the experience). Thus, the findings of the study, especially concerning the first research question (i.e., understanding of self and others), are time bound, based on the students' interpretations at the point of reflection and should not be considered to be static.

The second limitation pertains to transferability of the study. There is a wide range of study abroad programmes and a growing number of research centring on students' intercultural learning. In particular, Paige and Vande Berg (2012) conducted an extensive research review of empirical based studies, focusing on the impact of intercultural interventions<sup>5</sup> on students' intercultural learning in the US context. While they seek to illustrate the generalisability of studies based on measurable evidence (i.e., Intercultural Developmental Inventory<sup>6</sup> [IDI], Hammer, 2007), I engaged in my study to pursue transferability, alternatively, in light of the multiple elements, shaping the types of programmes and experiences of individual participants (Engle & Engle, 2003). I also detailed the rationale for employing a qualitative case study in the

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<sup>5</sup> Defined as 'intentional and deliberate pedagogical approaches, activated throughout the study abroad cycle (before, during, and after), that are designed to enhance students' intercultural competence' (Paige & Vande Berg, 2012, p. 29-30).

<sup>6</sup> A research-based online instrument which measures individual intercultural competence.

'research framework' chapter (section 3.1.3), underpinned by a social constructionist perspective (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Thus, in the endeavour of increasing transferability, especially within the broad context of a so-called 'hybrid programme' (Norris & Dwyer, 2005), I provided as many details as possible on the target study abroad programme. In particular, my role as an instructor-researcher allowed me to understand the contexts from an insider perspective in this regard. It also helped me with the relationship-building process with the students in the study, which is an important aspect of enhancing the trustworthiness of the research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). In sum, the findings of this study are to be understood within the scope of the particular contexts and participants of the target study abroad programme, based on which relevant elements and theories can be analysed and drawn on to develop knowledge contextually.

The last limitation concerns the interview data. As discussed in Section 3.1.4.3, the interview data complemented the students' written entries in enabling me to understand the students' underlying assumptions, expectations, contexts, and processes of students' intercultural experiences, and thus minimise the gap between their meanings and my own inferred interpretations. In some cases, students' reflective writing in their second (foreign) language, English, did not always provide sufficiency of detail or specificity in order for me to fully capture the focus or topic of their accounts. Thus, interview data added to my understanding of the students' intercultural communication experiences. However, due to the students' availability within the given timeline, I could not interview all students (I interviewed 18 out of 26 students). The process of member checking allowed me to ensure the trustworthiness

of my interpretations; however, the availability of more interview data may have elicited a broader range of themes and illustrations, and thus enhanced the findings in the study.

#### **6.4 Directions for future research**

The emergent findings and outcomes of this study suggest several directions for future research. First, further research might explore how students continue to construct and reconstruct their understanding of self and others, and act upon their understanding after studying abroad. As discussed in the preceding section (6.2.2), the relationship between students' awareness and action is not spontaneous and straightforward (Dervin, 2009). Although the students have developed stronger, and for some, critical awareness that individuals cannot be, and should not be, framed into particular cultural descriptions of a group of people, it is possible that they may draw on such categorisations or assumptions of others, depending on the situations and contexts, at different levels of consciousness. Developing interculturality is indeed an ongoing process. Thus, a longitudinal study (e.g., research focusing on the remaining undergraduate years after return), and possibly, an ethnographic approach (e.g., research exploring student's engagement in a range of interactive activities on campus), will provide further insights into how students will act upon their intercultural awareness after studying abroad. Given the breadth and depth of the respective students' experiences, focusing on a particular student or a fewer number of students in the study may be appropriate in this regard: it will allow researchers to unfold and elaborate students' respective stories more thoroughly and contextually.

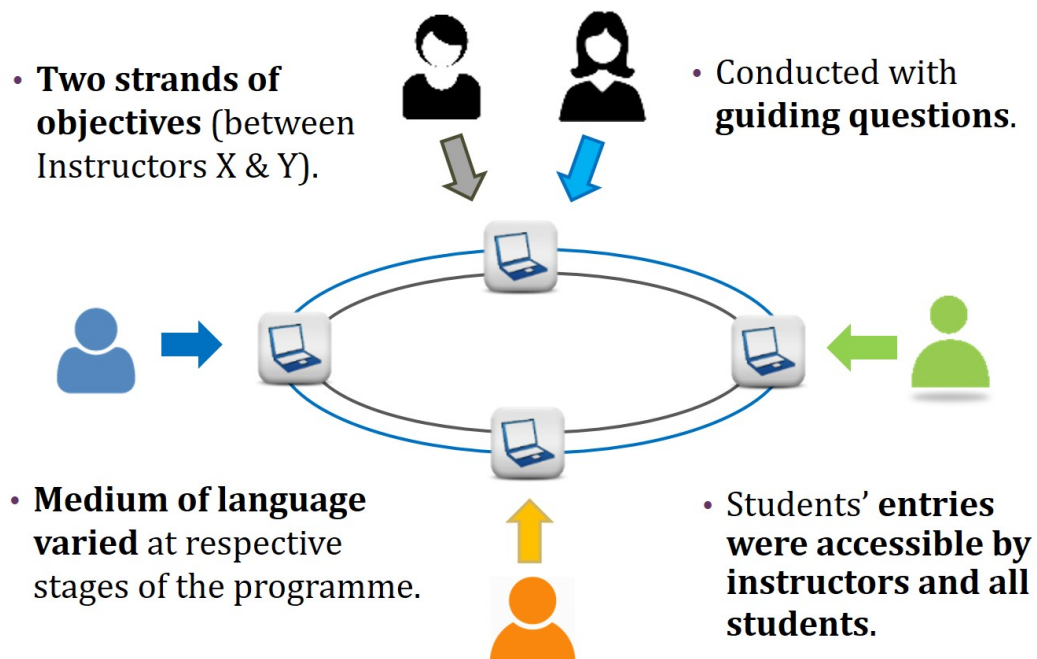
Second, from the pedagogical perspective, further studies focusing on the use of feedback is meaningful. In this study, I did not explore the influence of feedback on students' reflective writing. This was due to the operational limitations of the study abroad programme in giving consistent and frequent feedback at the respective stages of the programme. While the instructor (myself), the students, and senior students who had participated in the same study abroad programme in the previous year were involved in providing feedback (see 3.1.4.2), I judged that the inconsistency and (in)frequency of giving feedback would not be appropriate as a source of data and should be put outside of the scope of the study. Nevertheless, the positive influence of feedback is drawn on in literature (Brockbank & McGill, 1998; Coulson & Harvey, 2013; Cowan, 1998; J. A. Moon, 1999b, 2004; Rogers, 2001; Stevens & Cooper, 2009). In addition, the findings of the study indicated the benefits of peer involvement in the reflective writing tasks. These aspects suggest a possible focus for future research as to how peer feedback can further enhance students' intercultural learning about self and others.

## **6.5 Final remarks**

This study aimed to contribute to knowledge on pedagogical approaches to students' intercultural learning about self and others, with a focus on the use of reflective writing, conducted before, during, and after a study abroad programme. I highlighted the positive learning experience of students, incorporating a non-essentialised approach to understanding self and others drawing on social constructionism (Berger & Luckmann, 1966) and Holliday's (2011, 2013, 2016c) *grammar of culture* in Japanese contexts. Encouraging students to recognise and deconstruct ideologically and stereotypically constructed images of self and others, and acknowledge the multiplicity

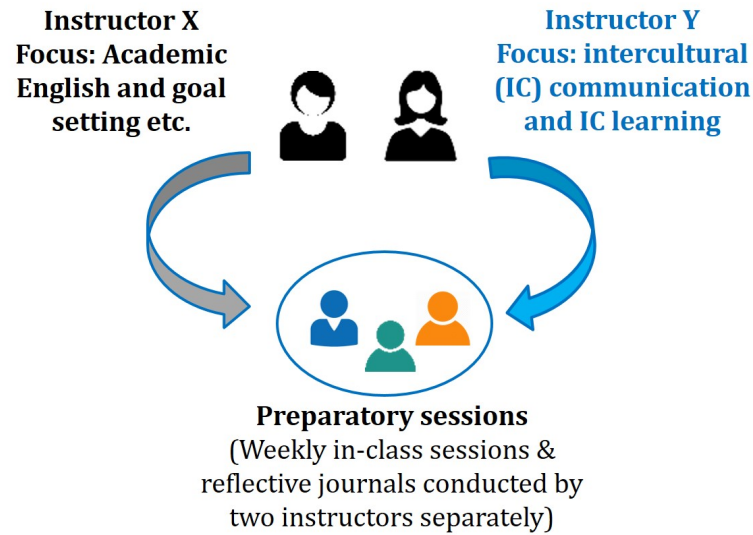
of individual cultural realities, both within and across the groups of Japanese peers and others, was an important intercultural learning process for them. Reflective writing served as a meaningful tool in this regard. Capturing and objectifying students' affective, cognitive, and behavioural reactions in writing in a timely manner, intentionally examining alternative interpretations of realities of self and others, and revisiting, sharing, and revitalising their realities surrounding their intercultural communication experiences through (re)reading their written entries, individually and collaboratively with others, proved significant over time and space. While this qualitative case study is located within a particular context of a study abroad programme, the theories, methodology, and key findings of the study may be transferred to other contexts surrounding the endeavour of internationalisation and promotion of 'global jinzai' in Japan, in order to enhance an emancipatory intercultural learning experience in understanding culturally diverse selves and others.

## Appendix A: Functions of reflective journals via ePortfolio

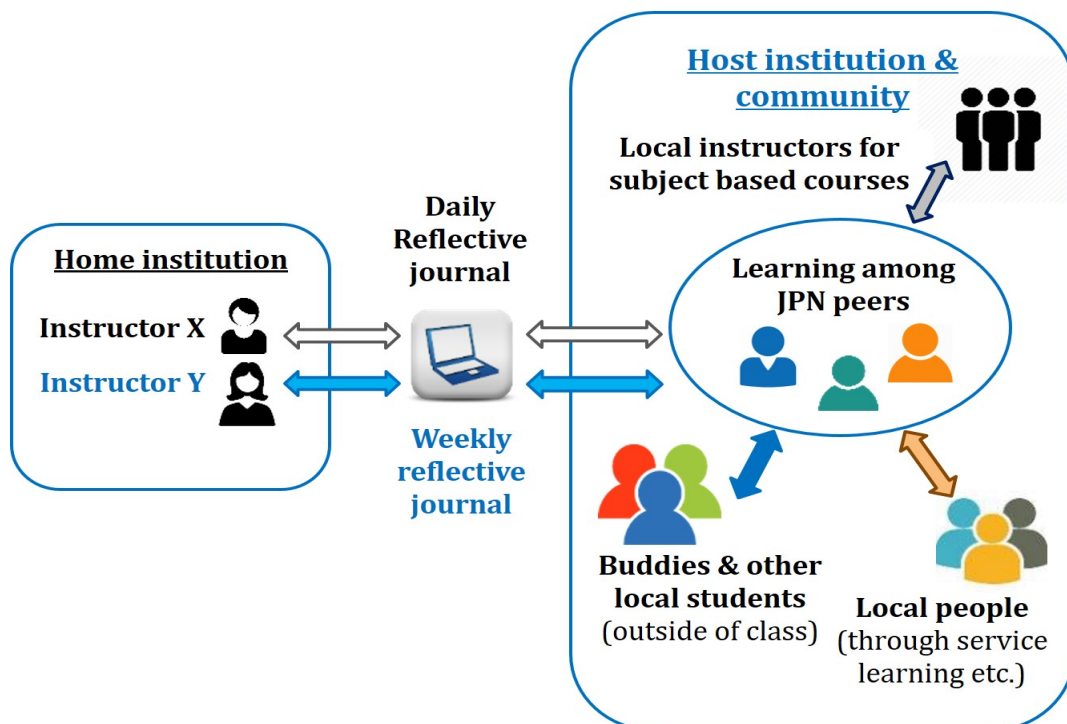


## Appendix B: Overview of the target study abroad programme

### Preparatory sessions

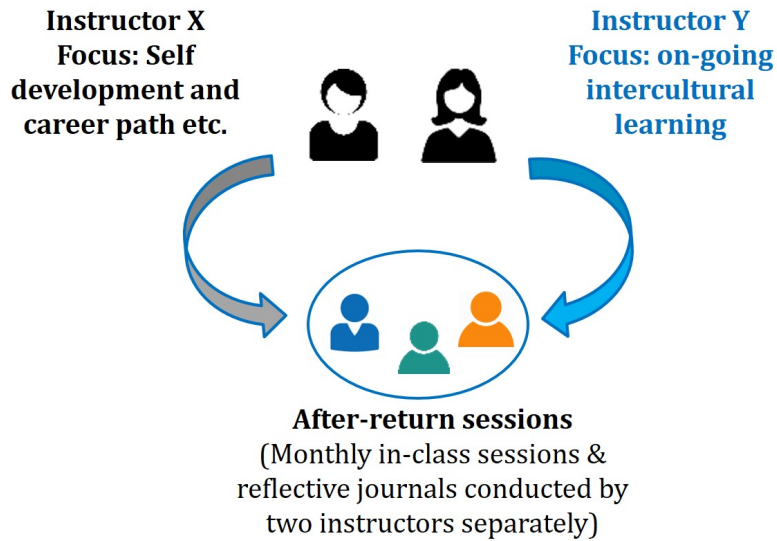


### During study abroad



## Appendix B: Overview of the target study abroad programme (cont'd)

### After return sessions





## Appendix C: Prompt questions for reflective journals

### Preparatory session (Week 1):

1. A 大学での体験を振り返り、自分と他者の違いに触れたエピソード（体験、出来事、誰かとの会話など）はありませんか？それはどんなことだったか（何が起きたのか）、客観的に描写してください。

Looking back at your experience at University A, is there any episode (e.g. incident or communication) where you encountered differences between you and others? Please describe what happened objectively.

2. そのエピソードを通して、自分自身または他者について気づいたこと、知ったことはありますか？（例えば自分がそれまで当然と思っていたこと、自分/相手が無意識のうちに想定していたこと、自分/相手に期待していたこと、自分/相手が大切に思っていることなど。）自由に書いてください。

Based on that episode, is there anything that you noticed or learned about yourself or others? (For example, anything that you had taken for granted, any potential assumptions or expectations of yours and/or others, or anything you/others value, etc.) Please write freely.

### Preparatory session (Week 2):

1. 非言語によるコミュニケーションについて、これまでの経験を思い出してみてください。そのコミュニケーションにおいて、「非言語」のインパクトが大きかったんだな、と思われる出来事、経験はありますか？（例えば戸惑ったり、混乱したり、誤解した出来事などありますか？）それはどんなことだったか（何が起きたのか）、客観的に描写してください。

Think of your past experience with regard to non-verbal communication. Is there any incident or experience on which non-verbal communication had a significant impact (for example, puzzling, confusing, or misleading incidents)? What was it about, or what happened? Please give objective descriptions.

2. その出来事を通して、自分自身または他者について気づいたこと、知ったことは何ですか？（例えば自分がそれまで当然と思っていた非言語パターン、ルール、自分/相手が無意識のうちに想定していた非言語パターン・ルールなど。）自由に書いてください。

Through that experience, what did you notice or learn about yourself or others (for example, any non-verbal patterns/rules which you had taken for granted, or any non-verbal patterns/rules which you had assumed)? Please write freely.

### Preparatory session (Week 3):

1. 言語によるコミュニケーションについて、これまでの経験を振り返ってみてください。双方で意思や意見、気持ちなどの伝え方（表現の仕方）が違ったため、戸惑ったり、違和感を感じたり、誤解を生んだような出来事はありませんでしたか？そのときにどんな会話が交わされたのか（何が起きたのか）、客観的に描写してください。

Think of your past experience with regard to verbal communication. Is there any incident or experience where you felt puzzled, uncomfortable, or misleading because of the differences in the way respective intentions, opinions, or feelings were expressed/conveyed? Please describe what communication took place (what happened) objectively.

2. その出来事を通して、自分と相手のコミュニケーションスタイルについてどんなことに気づきましたか？自分はどんなコミュニケーションスタイルを取る（好む）と思いますか？また相手のコミュニケーションスタイルはどんな特徴があったと思いますか？分析してください。

What did you notice from the given incident/experience about the communication styles of yours and others? What do you think your preferred communication styles are? What was characteristic of others? Please analyse.

3. 自分が好むコミュニケーションスタイルは、どんな経験や環境から育まれたと思いますか？自分のコミュニケーションスタイルに影響していると思われる要因や体験例を具体的に挙げながら分析してください。

What kind of experience and/or environment do you think your preferred communication styles have developed from? Please analyse by giving influential factors or experiences you have had with communication.

#### **Preparatory session (Week 4):**

1. 授業や個別アドバイジングを通して気づいたこと、考えたこと、より理解したことはありますか？それはどんなことですか？

Is there anything that you noticed, thought, and understood from the in-class sessions and individual advising session? What is it?

2. 上記①で書いた気づき、知識や考え方を、現場でどう活かしたいですか？（もしくは、どんな行動や姿勢を大事にしたいですか？）できるだけ具体的に書いてください。

How do you want to make use of the learning, knowledge, and perspectives mentioned above in the real-life (study abroad) contexts? (Or what kind of actions or attitudes do you want to begin working on?) Please elaborate as much as possible.

3. もっと知りたいこと、もしくはまだ十分にわかっていないこと、もやもやしていることなどありますか？自由に書いてください。

Is there anything that you want to learn more, or anything that is insufficient or still unclear? Please write freely.

4. この他に授業やアドバイジングについての感想、要望、自分の目標宣言などありましたら、自由にどうぞ！

Please provide any comments, requests, or goals you have from the in-class sessions and individual advising session(s).

### **Preparatory session (Week 5):**

1. これまでの体験を振り返り、誰かの考え方や行動について戸惑ったことや困惑したこと、納得がいかなかったことなどありませんか？そのときに自分と相手の中で何が起きたのか、客観的に描写してください。  
Think of your past experience. Is there any episode where you were confused, puzzled, or not completely in agreement about other's perspectives or actions? Please describe objectively what happened between you and the person(s).
2. 自分と相手の違いについて分析してみましょう。自分はどんなことを考え、なぜそのような行動を取ったのか、説明してください。  
Please analyse the difference between you and the person(s). Please explain what thoughts/intentions you had in mind when you behaved/acted that way.
3. 相手はどのようなことを考えて、その行動を取ったと思いますか？相手が大切にしていたことは何だと思いますか？  
Why do you think the person(s) behaved/acted that way? What do you think was underlying as his/her value?
4. その体験を通して、今どう思いますか？気づいたこと、あらためて考え直したことなどありますか？自由に書いてください。  
How do you evaluate that experience? Is there anything that you learned or re-considered from the experience? Please write freely.

### **During study abroad (Week 1):**

1. My first week in City Y: Describe your emotions, thoughts, and experience.)

### **During study abroad (Week 2):**

1. What are the differences you felt/experienced/discovered in City Y?
2. What are the similarities you felt/experienced/discovered in City Y?
3. Free column: Write anything that you noticed or learned from your experience in City Y.

### **During study abroad (Week 3):**

1. Think of any significant interactions you have had on campus or outside of campus that made you realise the difference of communication styles/patterns (either non-verbal or verbal). Describe what happened.
2. What about this incident highlighted the difference in the communication styles/patterns between you and the other(s)?
3. Free column: Write anything that you noticed or learned from your experience or any conversation you had with somebody in City Y.

#### **During study abroad (Week 4):**

1. Think of any significant communication or experience that made you discover or learn about culturally different other(s). Describe what happened.
2. What did you learn about him/her/them from the communication or experience? Give your explanation or interpretation.

#### **During study abroad (Week 5):**

1. Please read your past entries, "My Intercultural Learning Journal in City Y" from Week 1 to 4, and reflect on your intercultural experience up to now. What is the significant learning you see?
2. What do you want to know more about the culture/people? What do you think will help you gain a better and/or deeper understanding?

#### **During study abroad (Week 6):**

1. Think of somebody you are in frequent contact with. What was your first impression of that person? (You do NOT have to mention that person's name. Keep it anonymous as you wish.)
2. How has that first impression changed now? What have you learned about that person?
3. What have you learned about yourself through the relationship with that person?

#### **During study abroad (Week 7):**

1. What changes have you seen in yourself (in terms of how you perceive yourself or others, how you behave towards others, or what your expectations toward yourself or others are)?

#### **During abroad (Week 8):**

1. Reflect on your two months. Please explain how you perceive America (City Y) or the people now. If it has changed compared to the beginning of the program, please explain why it has changed so. Try to give concrete stories/experiences what have influenced the change.
2. What values, beliefs, and behaviors have you learned from the experience in City Y?

#### **After-return session (1):**

1. 留学に行く前と後を比べて、アメリカという国・社会や人々に対する見方や理解に何か変化はありましたか？もしくは深まったことはありましたか？具体的に説明してください。  
When comparing before and after studying abroad, is there any change in the way you perceive or understand the country/society/people in the United States? Please elaborate.
2. アメリカという国・社会や人々についてもっと知りたいことはありますか？あれば、それはどんなことですか？

Is there anything that you want to learn more about the country/society/people?  
What is it about, if any?

3. 留学に行く前と後を比べて、日本という国・社会や人々に対する見方や理解に何か変化はありましたか？もしくは深まったことはありますか？具体的に説明してください。  
When comparing before and after studying abroad, is there any change in the way you perceive or understand the country/society/people in the Japan? Please elaborate.
4. 上記以外で、自分自身の変化など気づいたことがあれば自由に書いてください。  
Please write freely if there are any other changes you are aware about yourself.

### **After-return session (2):**

1. 今日の授業を通して感じたこと、考えたことを書いてください。できるだけ具体的な体験談や例を書き添えるといいですよ。  
Please write what you thought and felt in today's session. Including detailed episodes and examples are recommended.

### **After-return session (3):**

1. 事前授業、留学、事後授業を通して、自分自身もしくは他者について理解が深まったことはありますか？あれば、それはどんなことか具体的に書いてください。  
Is there anything that you have learned better/deeper about yourself or others from the preparatory sessions, study abroad, and post-study abroad sessions? What is it, if any. Please elaborate.
2. リフレクションジャーナルでの振り返りについて自由に書いてください。特に気づきや学びにつながったことがあれば、どんな気づきや学びだったか具体的に書いてください。  
Please comment on the reflections in the reflective journal. If there is anything particular that helped you learn more/better, what was it? Please elaborate.
3. 現地にいる間、振り返りは主に英語を使って書きました。自分の考えや思いを書き留め、気づきや理解を深めるために、使用言語についてどのように思いましたか。以下の中から回答を選択し、自由記述欄にはその理由や考えを書いてください。  
While abroad, you wrote your reflective journal primarily in English. What did you think about the medium of language for the purpose of noting down your thoughts and perspectives, and developing your intercultural learning? Please choose your answer and provide reasons or comments in the free column.  
A. 英語で書くことに問題なかった。

I did not have any problem in writing in English.

B. 日本語で書く方がよいと思った。

I preferred to write in Japanese.

C. その時々によって言語を変えればよいと思った。

I thought it should depend on the situation and be used interchangeably.

D. 自由記述

Feel free to add any other comments.

## Appendix D: Ethical approval letter



Shaped by the past, creating the future

19 October 2015

Misa Furuta  
Education

[misa.furuta@durham.ac.uk](mailto:misa.furuta@durham.ac.uk)

Dear Misa

**A study of Japanese undergraduate students' intercultural learning supported by reflective writing in a study abroad programme.**

I am pleased to inform you that your application for ethical approval for the above research has been approved by the School of Education Ethics Committee. May we take this opportunity to wish you good luck with your research.



Dr. P. Holmes  
Chair of School of Education Ethics Committee

Leazes Road  
Durham, DH1 1TA  
Telephone +44 (0)191 334 2000 Fax +44 (0)191 334 8311  
[www.durham.ac.uk/education](http://www.durham.ac.uk/education)

## Appendix E: Participant information sheet



Shaped by the past, creating the future

2<sup>nd</sup> December, 2015

### Participant Information Sheet (For Students)

Title: A study of Japanese students' intercultural learning supported by reflective writing in a study abroad programme.

You are invited to take part in a research study of "A study of Japanese students' intercultural learning supported by reflective writing in a study abroad programme". Please read this form carefully and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

The study is conducted by Misa Furuta (née Fudeuchi) as part of her postgraduate studies at Durham University. This research project is supervised by Dr. Prue Holmes (Email: [p.m.holmes@durham.ac.uk](mailto:p.m.holmes@durham.ac.uk)) and Dr. Sophie Ward ([s.c.ward@durham.ac.uk](mailto:s.c.ward@durham.ac.uk)) from the School of Education at Durham University.

The purpose of this study is to understand whether and how Japanese undergraduate students develop awareness and understanding of the self and others through reflective writing in a study abroad programme.

If you agree to be in this study, you will allow the researcher to: 1) analyse your written reflective journals kept in your ePortfolio (i.e., your entries under the titles of "Reflection on Your Intercultural Journey", "My Intercultural Learning Journal in Austin", and "Post Return Reflection" on [your reflective journal]); **and/or** 2) conduct an individual interview with you. The interview will take approximately 60 minutes. There are two different consent forms for each of the respective options. Please sign **either or both consent form(s)** if you agree to participate in either or both aspects of this study.

You are free to decide whether or not to participate. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without any negative consequences for you.

All responses you give or other data collected will be kept confidential. The records of this study will be kept secure and private. All files containing any information you give are password protected. In any research report that may be published, no information will be included that will make it possible to identify you individually. There will be no way to connect your name to your responses at any time during or after the study.

If you have any questions, requests or concerns regarding this research, please contact me via email at: [Misa.Furuta@durham.ac.uk](mailto:Misa.Furuta@durham.ac.uk), or [my professional email account].

This study has been reviewed and approved by the School of Education Ethics Sub-Committee at Durham University (date of approval: 19/10/2015).

Misa Furuta (née Fudeuchi)

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Durham University is the trading name of the University of Durham



## Appendix F: Declaration of informed consent (Re: reflective journal)

### Declaration of Informed Consent (RE: Reflection Journal)

- I agree to participate in this study, the purpose of which is to understand whether and how students' awareness and understanding of the self and others can be enhanced through reflective writing in a study abroad programme.
- I have read the participant information sheet and understand the information provided.
- I have been informed that I may decline to answer any questions or withdraw from the study without penalty of any kind.
- I have been informed that all of my responses will be kept confidential and secure, and that I will not be identified in any report or other publication resulting from this research.
- I have been informed that the researcher will answer any questions regarding the study and its procedures. Misa Furuta (née Fudeuchi), School of Education, Durham University can be contacted via email at: Misa.Furuta@durham.ac.uk, or [her professional email account].
- I will be provided with a copy of this form for my records.

Any concerns about this study should be addressed to the Ethics Sub-Committee of the School of Education, Durham University via email (Sheena Smith, School of Education, tel. +44-191-334 8403, e-mail: Sheena.Smith@Durham.ac.uk).

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Date	Participant Name (please print)	Participant Signature
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I certify that I have presented the above information to the participant and secured his or her consent.

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Date	Signature of Investigator
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## Appendix G: Declaration of informed consent (Re: individual interview)

### Declaration of Informed Consent (RE: Individual Interview)

- I agree to participate in this study, the purpose of which is to understand whether and how students' awareness and understanding of the self and others is enhanced with a support of reflective writing in a study abroad programme.
- I have read the participant information sheet and understand the information provided.
- I have been informed that I may decline to answer any questions or withdraw from the study without penalty of any kind.
- I have been informed that all of my responses will be kept confidential and secure, and that I will not be identified in any report or other publication resulting from this research.
- I have been informed that the researcher will answer any questions regarding the study and its procedures. Misa Furuta (née Fudeuchi), School of Education, Durham University can be contacted via email at: Misa.Furuta@durham.ac.uk, or [her professional email account].
- I will be provided with a copy of this form for my records.

Any concerns about this study should be addressed to the Ethics Sub-Committee of the School of Education, Durham University via email (Sheena Smith, School of Education, tel. +44-191-334 8403, e-mail: Sheena.Smith@Durham.ac.uk).

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Date	Participant Name (please print)	Participant Signature
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I certify that I have presented the above information to the participant and secured his or her consent.

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Date	Signature of Investigator
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## Appendix H: Interview questions for students

The questions below guided the interview; however, the researcher changed or adapted some questions according to the interviewees' responses in order for them to freely express themselves based on their experiences.

### Background questions:

1. Is this the first time you have gone abroad? If not, please explain the types of overseas sojourns (i.e., purpose of travel, length, accommodation, etc.) you have experienced before participating in this study abroad programme.

この留学が初めての海外体験でしたか？もしそうでなければ、この留学プログラム以前にどのような海外体験をしたか、期間や目的など簡単に教えてください。

2. What kind of intercultural experiences have you had before participating in this study abroad programme?

この留学プログラム前に、文化的背景が異なる人たちと接する機会があったとしたら、どのような経験をしていましたか？

3. What was the purpose of your participation in this study abroad programme?

この留学プログラムの参加の目的を教えてください。

4. Please describe your study abroad environment and daily routine in City Y.

現地（Y市）での日常生活を教えてください。

5. In what situations did you interact and communicate with the local people (including the students and instructors at the host university) while in City Y?

Y市に滞在中、どのような状況で地元の学生や人々と接したり、コミュニケーションを取りましたか？

### Questions on their intercultural experience and communication:

1. Were there any significant interactions or communication that made you think about your ways of thinking, attitudes, or behaviours compared with the local people?

1-a. Please describe the contexts and explain what you thought or felt.

1-b. What did you learn from that experience?

自分自身の考え方や姿勢、行動の仕方について、地元の人たちと比べて考えさせられた出来事やコミュニケーションはありましたか？

1-a. あったとしたら、その状況と何を感じたのかを教えてください。

1-b. またその体験から何を学びましたか？

2. Were there any significant interactions or communication that made you think about the ways of thinking, attitudes, or behaviours of the local people?

2-a. Please describe the contexts and explain what you thought or felt.

2-b. What did you learn from that experience?

地元の人たちの考え方や姿勢、行動の仕方について考えさせられた出来事やコミュニケーションはありましたか？

2-a. あったとしたら、その状況と何を感じたのかを教えてください。

2-b. またその体験から何を学びましたか？

3. How do you perceive your own culture now?

自分自身の文化をどのように見えていますか？

4. What other cultural backgrounds have you found out about by communicating with others?

現地の人たちとコミュニケーションを取る中で、彼らの文化的背景について何か発見したり、より理解したことはありますか？

5. Did you have any stereotypes?

現地の人たちに対して何かしら思い込みやステレオタイプを持っていましたか？

5-a. How were they challenged?

相手の人たちに対してステレオタイプを持っていたことで、相手とのコミュニケーション、交流や関係構築の過程において難しかったことはありますか？

5-b. What made them challenged?

なぜ難しかったのですか？

6. Comparing who you are before and after the programme, what changes do you see in the way you understand yourself?

このプログラム参加前後を比べ、自分自身に対する理解にどんな変化がありましたか？

7. What changes do you see in the way you understand culturally different others?

文化的背景が異なる人たちを理解することについて、自分自身の中で何か変化はありますか？

8. What brought about the change(s) in perceptions/attitudes/behaviours?

何が変化のきっかけになったと思いますか？

9. Is there anything that you want to talk about from your reflective journal?

リフレクションジャーナルで書いたことについて、何か特に触れておきたいことはありますか？

### **Questions on Reflective Journal:**

1. What was your experience of writing a reflective journal before, during, and after the programme?

リフレクションジャーナルを、事前、プログラム期間中、そして事後と書いてみてどうでしたか？考えを自由に教えてください。

2. What was your experience writing a reflective journal in Japanese?

リフレクションジャーナルを日本語で書いてみてどうでしたか？

3. What was your experience writing a reflective journal in English?

リフレクションジャーナルを英語で書いてみてどうでしたか？

4. What, if anything, did you learn about yourself/others from the process of writing a reflective journal? Each in English or Japanese

リフレクションジャーナルを書くことで自分自身、または他者について何か学んだり、気づいたことはありましたか？

5. How did the language influence that learning/experience?

書く際に使用した言語は、その学びや気づきに何かしら影響を与えていますか？

6. How do you evaluate the experience of writing a reflective journal as a process of intercultural learning?

異文化理解を促すためにリフレクションジャーナルを書くことについて、その意義や効果についてどのように思いますか？

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