

ABSTRACT

Title: Intercultural Experiences of Japanese Teachers:

Intercultural Adaptation, Personal Growth and Professional Growth as Teachers

Kyoko Suzuki

This thesis aimed to elucidate the process of personal growth and professional growth of overseas sojourners through their intercultural experiences by investigating the cases of 26 incumbent Japanese teachers. The subjects of this research were dispatched by the Japanese Government on its REX(Regional and Educational Exchanges for Mutual Understanding) Program for approximately 18 months to 24 months to teach Japanese as a foreign language at secondary schools in the United States, China, the United Kingdom, Australia, Russia, New Zealand and Korea. This research employed a qualitative research method and used Modified Grounded Theory Approach to analyze how the Japanese teachers recognized, appraised and felt in intercultural situations and how their changes led or did not lead to their personal growth and professional growth as teachers. In much of the past research, it was thought that people showed overall changes through intercultural experiences, but this research takes the position that one person has aspects that change and others that do not change by following the two most recent works of research. According to this position, it is thought that the more changes a person goes through, the more personal growth s/he exhibits.

The results of the analyses showed that there were two kinds of guests' adaptations to recognized differences, namely the guests' change based on their positive appraisal and feelings to hosts' cultural norms and cultural practices and the guests' enforced changes based on their negative appraisal and feelings. From this, the conclusion was reached that in the definition of the word "adaptation", pleasantness should be excluded. The common factors that promoted guests' various changes were guests' active engagement, and interpersonal relationships. Even if the guests initially had negative appraisal and feelings toward hosts' cultural norms and cultural practices, in some cases, they eventually started to accept their hosts and such an acceptance was formed by the guests' active engagement, habituation, their will to learn from differences, "That is another way" attitudes, and clear-cut attitudes. Moreover, the results showed that at the time of intercultural contacts, not only the guests but also their hosts went through a change, the latter of which made the guests' pleasant sojourner period of stay possible. In order to invite hosts' change, guests should actively engage in the communication with their hosts and such an active engagement was found to be the key element common to guests' change, guests' acceptance of differences and also hosts' change.

In the case where guests changed according to their positive appraisal and feelings toward hosts' cultural norms and practices, guests' understanding of themselves and others deepened and this led to the beginning of the formation of biculturalism, which then led to the setting of new goals. These altogether contributed to guests' personal growth. On the other hand, enforced guests' adaptation, which was based on negative appraisal and feelings, did not contribute to guests' personal growth except in the case where guests learned from the negative examples and worked out their own way to improve similar situations. In addition, when hosts changed, guests did not have to change. Therefore, such change did not contribute to guests' personal growth even if they had a pleasant stay. Thus, positive appraisal and feelings were the key to guests' personal growth. This was done through the reflection of guests' own cultural norms and practices by using hosts' norms and practices as a mirror.

From the above-mentioned findings, it can be claimed that having positive appraisal and feelings toward hosts' cultural norms and practices is the core category of personal growth through intercultural experiences.

Furthermore, due to the guests' personal growth, guests showed professional growth as teachers with respect to the improvement in their teaching techniques, their student guidance techniques and their feelings of self-acceptance.

This research elucidated the following four points. Firstly, it showed that guests' positive appraisal and feelings are the key to guests' personal growth and their professional growth as teachers. Secondly, it pointed out that there is a need to distinguish three different changes, namely guests' change, guests' enforced change and hosts' changes. It also indicated the factors that contribute to such changes. Thirdly, it reached the conclusion that guests' change together with the reflection on their own culture lead to personal growth, which consists of the process of the deepening of human understanding, the beginning of the formation of biculturalism, and the setting of new goals. Fourthly, it showed the process where guests' personal growth, which is mainly cognitive, enables guests' professional growth as teachers, which is behavioral and emotional.

From these, the contribution of this thesis to the intercultural communication theory is summarized as follows:

Firstly, it clearly distinguished between guests' change, which is based on positive appraisal and feelings, and guests' enforced change, which is based on negative appraisal and feelings and it is the guests' change that leads to personal growth. Thus, it refined the often-stated assertion that intercultural adaptation brings about personal growth.

Secondly, by introducing such concepts as self-reflection and the beginning of the formation of biculturalism, it made clear that in intercultural learning, the guests become more conscious of the cultural frameworks of themselves and others.

Thirdly, the concept of habituation suggested the possibility that guests might want to learn from hosts who they think are superior to them but feel they need to get used to unpleasant matters offered by hosts who they think are inferior to them. However, this may need further elaboration.

Fourthly, it combined the psychological mechanisms to such meta-level naming as 'resistance', 'acceptance', 'adaptation', 'reversal' and 'tolerance' and made it easier for people with overseas sojourner experience to explain about what happened to them.

It also made a contribution to the fields of education and teacher education by pointing out the importance of the concept of 'fostering the feeling of self-acceptance' in teacher education.