

[Report]

Expectation and Realities: Report on a Two-Day Cross-cultural Event at Jin-ai University

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On July 31st and August 1st of 2003 seven American students, aged 15 to 17, visited Jin-ai University for an overnight, two-day stay around the middle of their 16-day stay in Fukui Prefecture. There were four males and three females. One male student spent only the afternoon of the second day at Jin-ai University and the others participated for the entire two days. Soon after flying into Nagoya, the students went directly to Kyoto and spent three days there before arriving in Fukui. The students were on a trip sponsored by a local chapter of a worldwide organization of business and professional leaders who provide humanitarian service to help build goodwill and promote peace. Jin-ai University was asked to participate in the program due to its relationship with the sponsoring organization through ties with the sister-city association of the city in which six of the students live.

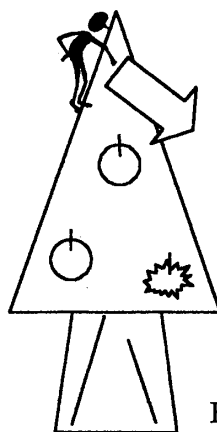
This report is written as a reflection on the activities held during the two-day program and the reactions of the Jin-ai University students who participated during the entire two days of the event. It is based on the results of a survey taken by the authors who were the main organizers of the program.

Keywords: cross-cultural communication, nonverbal communication, communication barrier

INTRODUCTION

Allow us to define cross-cultural communication through the use of an analogy. Cross-cultural communication can be considered similar to climbing a tree (Figure 1.). If a person climbs a tree, she/he will be able to see further out from her/his normal surroundings.

A Comparison of Cross-cultural Communication



Cross-cultural Communication is similar to climbing a tree. You can see from a different view. You may find fruit (new information). But, there is a possibility the tree will be slippery. And, sometimes the fruit is sour (communication barrier).

Figure 1.

Sometimes one will be able to find something new or unusual. Or, one may see an everyday thing from a different point of view. And, it is very possible to find fruit (new information) on the tree.

It may be easy for one to climb the tree because it has many branches. But, sometimes the tree is slippery and very high to climb. Also, the fruit may be sour and difficult to eat (communication barrier). Then, there is also the unexpected possibility of wind or rain, or other interferences. Wind and rain can be likened to language difficulties or differences in personalities. And, there may be other trees blocking your view.

Because of the program we had planned, we both envisioned that all of the Jin-ai University (JU) students would be able to easily climb the tree and naturally make friends with the visiting American students. We expected their values and worldview would be enlarged. We hoped that their friendship would lead to an exchange of e-mails and even perhaps promises of meeting each other again in their respective countries. The JU students were very much looking forward to the experience, too.

JU Students: "I suppose communicating with foreign people is a good chance to learn something new." "This will be useful to learn about myself." "I have always wanted to have the chance to talk with native speakers." "As a member of the English Communication Circle (ECC) at JU, I think it will be a good experience." "This will be good for my studies." Etc.,

Authors

It is said that it's hard to judge a book by its cover, so we'd like to introduce ourselves in relation to what kinds of cross-cultural communication activities in which we have been involved.

Nakamura is a third-year Jin-ai University student and is one of the founders of the ECC. He has planned several cross-cultural communication events with other members and has almost always acted as master of ceremonies. In 2001 the ECC members held a Christmas party with students from New Zealand; making a cake, playing music and singing songs, and enjoying games. Also, this year he and the ECC members held a Halloween party; inviting other students and some teachers to make a jack-o'-lantern and enjoy food and drinks.

Nakamura also belongs to the Sabae International Association (SIA), a non-profit organization formed to promote international understanding in the local community. In the summer of 2003, through the SIA, he was charged with guiding 23 Thai government officials from the fields of local administration, education, and law enforcement while they visited Fukui Prefecture. He accompanied the guests from Thailand as they dined

on several types of Japanese dishes, watched fireworks displays, and experienced a Japanese-style bath community bath (*sentou*), aside from escorting them as they participated in ceremonial events.

Nakamura visited China as a member of the Japan Youth Exchange Delegation for eight days in December of 2003.

Splichal is a teacher in the English section of the Department of Communication of Jin-ai University and has participated in many events sponsored by the ECC. He belongs to the Society for Intercultural Education, Training and Research, and The Communication Association of Japan, both organizations being involved with human communicative interaction.

During his 20-plus years in Japan, Splichal has entertained numerous overseas guests on a personal basis, as part of school-related duties, and as a committee member of the Fukui Sister City Association. He has also escorted groups of students to the United States and Australia for a total of 11 occasions.

1. Expectations

1.1. Participants

Nakamura: In regards to this two-day event, I was very excited to hear that seven American students would visit us at JU for two days and one night during the summer. This would be the very first experience for JU to organize such an event. The ECC members and I were given the opportunity to put this program together independently, but with much support from Splichal and the university. We subsequently recruited staff and about 20 members came forward from freshmen to juniors, including ECC volunteers.

I seriously worried whether the number of Jin-ai University students would overwhelm the American students. However, I wholeheartedly welcomed the many volunteers. We then held several brainstorming sessions on how to use this precious time limited to two days.

Splichal: One of the reasons the sponsoring organization asked the JU students to hold this two-day event for the American students was that all too often overseas guests in Japan are treated as just that. That is, guests. Home stay participants are often treated royally to lavish meals, graciously entertained, and generously showered with gifts. The sponsors hoped that the American students would have a chance to interact at the grassroots level with their counterparts here in Japan, away from the comforts of their home stays.

I wasn't as worried as Nakamura about the number of participants, though a number

too large on one side places the others in a minority and causes each side to gravitate towards others within their common group. I was confident that engaging activities would prevent that from happening. What concerned me was the schedule. From my experience I have found guests in Japan are often faced with tight schedules during their stays with Japanese hosts. So much so that some guests end up feeling that they are being herded around like cattle, or being treated as if they have no mind of their own. American hosts often wait to find out what their guests would like to do before making up schedules.

However, in this case the JU students and I had little opportunity to communicate with the American students beforehand.

1.2. Program

We understood that the American students were visiting Japan for a firsthand look at Japanese culture. On the basis of that purpose, we concentrated on Japanese (JPN) Culture Activities but included other activities as well. Please refer to Figure 2 and Table 1.

Firstly, JPN Culture Activities included tea ceremony, flower arrangement, calligraphy, and a Japanese lesson. The "JPN Toilet Presentation" was a tongue-in-cheek explanation on using a Japanese-style toilet. We included that when we heard that one of the American students had a problem with using such a toilet. Secondly, what we named as Open-air Activities are camping, morning exercises (*rajiu taisou*), Hiking Bingo (a Bingo game won by discovering selected items while hiking in the woods), Watermelon Smashing (*suikawari*), making cups from bamboo, *Yanshiki* Dance (traditional dance peculiar to Sabae), fireworks, meals and snack time (shaved ice snack, lunch in the JU cafeteria, a barbecue and breakfast at the campsite, and *nagashisoumen* in the courtyard at JU), and playing ball games in the JU courtyard.

Figure 2. Three Channels of Activity

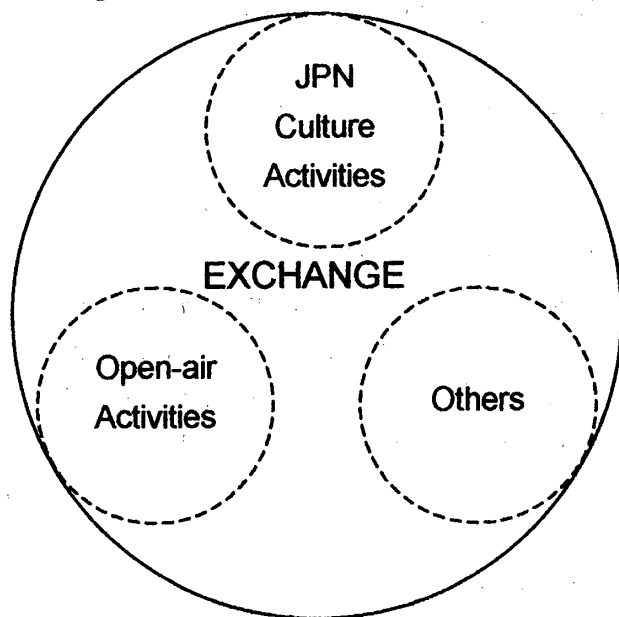


Table 1 . Classification of Activities

| JPN Culture Activities | Open-air Activities | Others |
|-------------------------|---------------------|-----------------|
| Tea Ceremony | Camping | University Tour |
| Flower Arrangement | Morning Exercises | Farewell Party |
| Calligraphy | Hiking Bingo | |
| JPN Toilet Presentation | Watermelon Smashing | |
| Japanese Lesson | Making Bamboo Cups | |
| | Yanshiki Dance | |
| | Fireworks | |
| | Meals & Snack Time | |
| | Sports | |

The university tour and farewell party belong to the "Others" category. Of course, some activities could be listed as both cultural and open-air. For example, morning exercises, watermelon smashing, and fireworks could all belong to both JPN Culture Activities and Open-air Activities.

To have the program run smoothly, we decided to limit the number of JU students for each activity and assign each one a specific role. This was done to evenly give each JU student a chance to personally communicate with her or his American counterparts. Also, it would prevent outnumbering the guests with hosts during each activity.

Nakamura: Through the above activities, I thought that the American students would be able to understand a lot about Japanese culture during their limited time with us. As for us JU students, I felt we could introduce Japanese culture objectively and make good friends with the American students through cross-cultural communication using English. It was no doubt an excellent opportunity to do so.

Splichal: Again, I was worried about the number of activities in such a short period of time, especially knowing the American students' schedule before visiting Jin-ai University. Also, I suspected that they had already participated elsewhere in some of the activities we had planned. However, I was confident that our program would have more of a personal touch and that all participants would freely interact with one another.

2. Realities

Table 2. Data of Respondents

| Year | Number | Male | Female |
|-------|--------|------|--------|
| 1st | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 2nd | 2 | 0 | 2 |
| 3rd | 4 | 2 | 2 |
| Total | 9 | 4 | 5 |

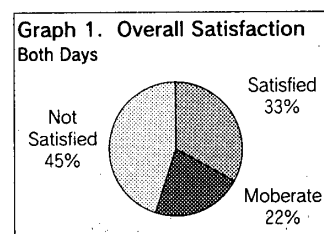
Could the JU students in fact climb the tree easily? And, what could they get from it? There was a wall of language and culture between them. There were those situations in which both groups were enjoying activities

together, and those in which only the Jin-ai University students or American students gathered separately and talked. Sometimes there were awkward silences.

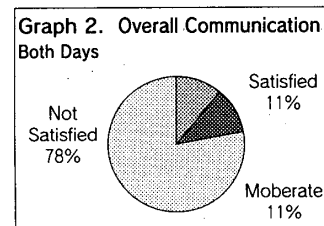
2.1. Levels of Satisfaction

We sent out questionnaires (Appendix) to examine how the Jin-ai University students felt about the program. We sent out 20 questionnaires and received nine responses (Table 2.).

First of all, what was the overall level of satisfaction of this program over the two days? We asked the JU students to judge their satisfaction in five levels; 1 being the least satisfied, and 5 being very satisfied. We divided their answers into three parts; 1 & 2 combined to mean not satisfied, 3 meaning to have moderate satisfaction, and 4 & 5 combined to mean satisfied (Graph 1.). We can see that only about half were satisfied or moderately satisfied with the two-day program.



Graph 2 shows us that an overwhelming majority of the Jin-ai University students were dissatisfied with their overall level of communication with the American students. Students who answered "Not Satisfied" numbered 78%! Only 22% were either satisfied or moderately satisfied with their levels of communication. Let's find out what made the participants not feel satisfied about their efforts at communication. There are surely some factors that reduced the degree of satisfaction.



2.2. Useful Tools and Communication Barriers

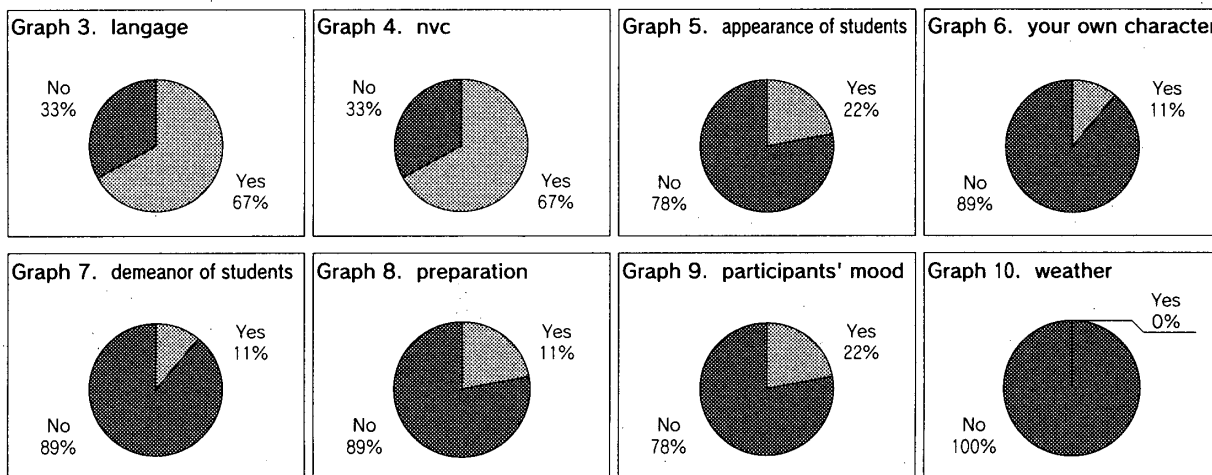
We discovered both useful communication tools and interference factors, or communication barriers, through our questionnaire.

The following is a list of tools we thought the Jin-ai University students would find useful in communicating. Language and nonverbal communication we think you will

find self-explanatory. We wondered if the physical appearance or character of the American students made it easy to communicate. Being well-prepared for the activities can make one comfortable. Also, the general mood of all of the participants is another consideration. Nakamura and Splichal were in disagreement with the inclusion of weather as a useful tool; Nakamura winning out in that good weather could facilitate the enjoyment of the activities planned, especially camping. Splichal was in total agreement with including it as a possible communication barrier as the summer of 2003 was wet and relatively cold. However, the weather was fair during the two-day event.

Their responses to # 5 of the questionnaire are listed in percentages in the graphs below:

- language Graph 3
- nonverbal communication; nvc (gestures & body language) Graph 4
- appearance of students Graph 5
- your own character Graph 6
- demeanor of students Graph 7
- preparation Graph 8
- participants' mood Graph 9
- weather Graph 10
- other (no responses)



So, what did become useful communication tools for the students? The results demonstrate that language and nonverbal communication are in the majority, according to Graphs 3 and 4. Some students said, "I could communicate with them using just vocabulary, not perfect sentences." or "Grasping the words that I could understand and using words I know, I could speak with them somehow."

Nonverbal communication became a hero for students whose conversation ability was

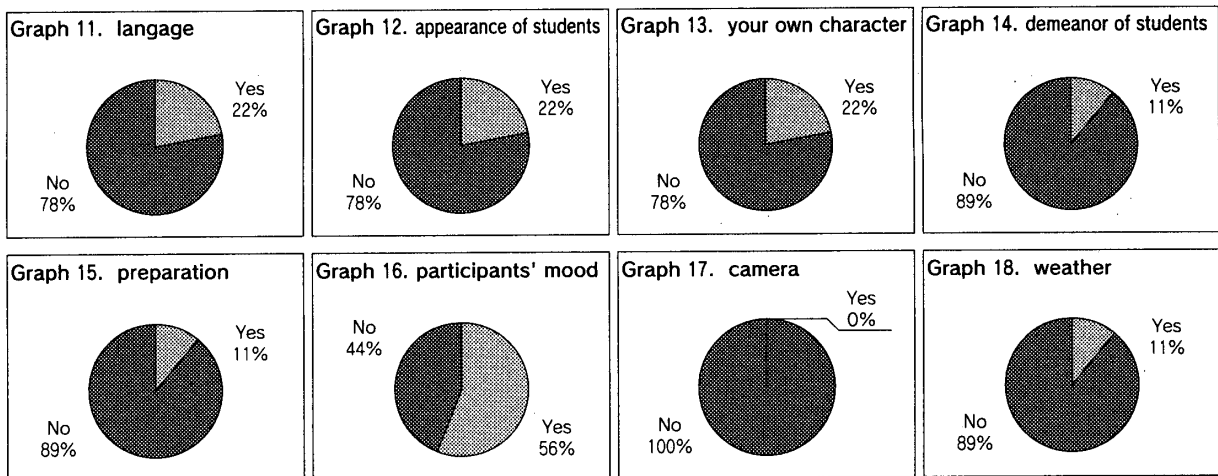
low. Thus, language and nonverbal communication became tools of choice. One example of their comments: "Suddenly I was spoken to by them, and I was sometimes unable to speak English well. There were many times that I understood them through gestures."

Thus, language and nonverbal communication became most necessary as useful tools for communication.

Few people replied affirmatively in Graphs 5 through 9: appearance of students, your own character, demeanor of students, preparation, and participants' mood. And, the weather (Graph 10) definitely wasn't deemed a useful tool for communication by any of the JU students.

How about interference, or the communication barriers? What factors we thought may interfere with the JU students' communication are listed below. The list is similar to that for useful tools above, with the exception of the exclusion of nonverbal communication and the inclusion of "camera."

- language..... Graph 11
- appearance of students..... Graph 12
- your own character..... Graph 13
- demeanor of students..... Graph 14
- preparation..... Graph 15
- participants' mood..... Graph 16
- camera..... Graph 17
- weather..... Graph 18
- other..... (no responses)



As for the question of one's character, we thought a person who, for example, was pessimistic or not outgoing or too considerate of others would find that to be a

communication barrier. Also, there was a camera crew following us around to film some of the two-day program for a documentary JU is making, and we thought that this may have affected communication.

So, what were the most noticeable communication barriers in two days? Graphs 13 and 16 show that the most prevalent were "your own character" and "participants' mood." Some of the students' comments were, "I just couldn't quite speak to them even though I had had some chance to talk with them." or "I felt that I couldn't speak with them well in English and it made me more passive." It seems that the students' language ability was affected by their character.

The question of "participants' mood" was meant to address the issue which Splichal brought up concerning the two cultural groups separating from one another. We mentioned earlier that the groups did sometimes indeed separate (2. Realities). Some who answered that the "participants' mood" was the biggest barrier wrote: "It looked like the American students were tired. It disturbed me. It was hard to talk to them in such a situation." and "Everyone seemed so tired. So, I could not speak to them." The American students did have a tight schedule in their home stays and sightseeing trips before this two-day program, and they were tired. So, it caused a communication barrier in that the JU students wanted to considerably give the American students some breathing room. One JU student said, "I just wanted them to take a rest."

We were very interested to find that language wasn't much of a communication barrier, but more of a useful tool.

However, when asking the JU students to respond freely to the question of what was the most troubling communication barrier overall, a majority wrote about their troubles with language! We can surmise that the respondents, having chosen language as the most useful tool, were reluctant to then choose "language" from the list of possible barriers. But, they still felt language was the most difficult to deal with. Paradoxical as it is, language was simultaneously their most useful communication tool and their biggest communication barrier.

3. Activities

As outlined in Table 1., Classification of Activities, we held activities in three categories: JPN Culture Activities, Open-air Activities, and Others. Of these activities, we'd like to briefly report on the success of eight of them in terms of the level of satisfaction as a means for promoting communication according to the respondents. All participants had an opportunity to interact through these activities.

Graphs 19 and 20 illustrate the percentage of satisfaction with the JPN Culture Activities of the presentation on the use of a Japanese-style toilet and the Japanese

language lesson. Graphs 21 and 22, and Graphs 23 through 26 below demonstrate the percentages for the Open-air Activities of shaved ice snack time, the lunch consisting of *nagashisoumen*, the Yanshiki Dance, fireworks, watermelon smashing, and sports.

The presentation on using a Japanese toilet and the Japanese lesson were by far the most successful

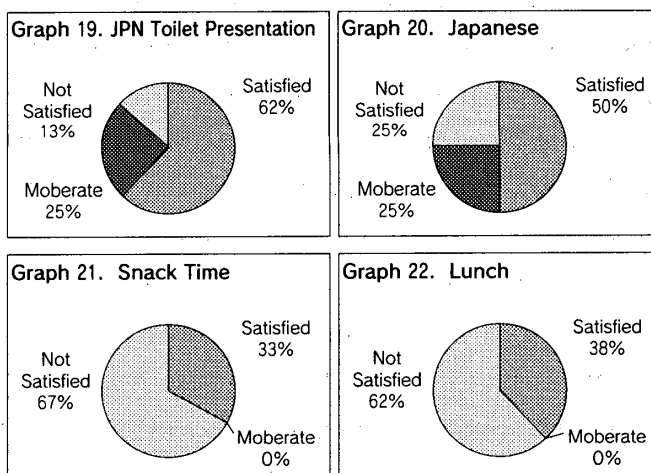
in promoting communication among the students. Combining the "Moderate" and "Satisfied" percentages shows us 87% were pleased with the presentation and 75% favored the lesson. We could hear both the American students and Japanese students laughing loudly at the presentation, making it quite an icebreaker. The visual aids were a great help in supporting communication. The Japanese lesson gave everyone a chance to speak out, again furthering communication.

A large majority of the JU students found little satisfaction in the Snack and Lunch activities. We observed the two groups separating during this time, giving no chance for any communication to take place. The lunch of *nagashisoumen* was right after our return to Jin-ai University from the campsite. Obviously, everyone was extremely tired. Again, combining the percentages as above, we can see a 50% or more satisfaction level with Dance, Fireworks, Watermelon Smashing, and Sports. To enjoy these activities, one does not have to be so conscious of the difference in languages, so most of the JU students felt as if they were actively communicating.

It would have been too passive for the American students to do nothing but the other JPN Culture Activities. When planning the program we thought it a good idea to include such Open-air Activities because, as we mentioned earlier, languages are not so important in order to participate. A proper balance of both kinds of activities is essential in creating a memorable cross-cultural experience.

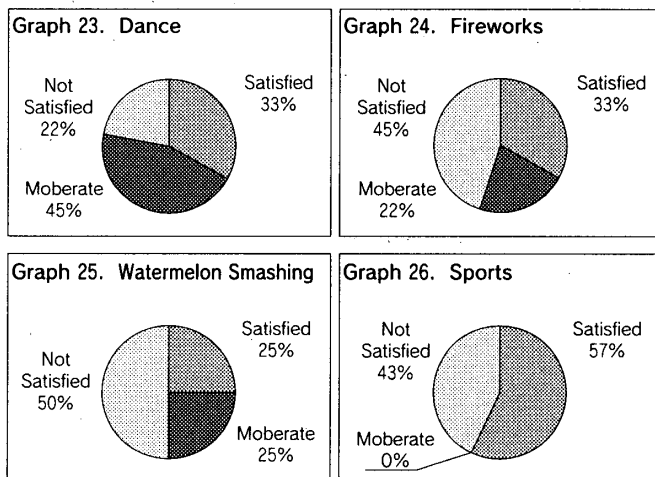
4. American Students' Reactions

We originally had hoped to include a comparison of the reactions of the JU students and the American students. Immediately after their departure from Nagoya to their hometowns we sent a questionnaire to each American student who participated in both days of the program. It was a translation of relevant questions on the Japanese questionnaire. Unfortunately, we received only one response. It was from a 16-year-



old male. Allow us to briefly report on his responses to the questions he answered.

He stated that he was "extremely satisfied" with the two-day program and that he found it very easy to communicate with the Japanese students. He responded that "gestures really helped me with understanding what they were trying to say." He evaluated the



communicative effectiveness of all but two of the activities as 5 or 4 on a scale of 5 to 1, with 5 being extremely effective and 4 being very effective. He evaluated only the tea ceremony and watermelon smashing as 3's, or effective. We are confident that all were rewarded with a rich cultural experience thanks to The Tea Ceremony Circle of JU. He probably evaluated it as a 3 because of the lack of active participation on his part during such a solemn activity.

The American student offers two other observations concerning the program. He said it was extremely easy to interact through sports which both cultural groups already know how to play. And, finally he suggests "that having the guests pick an activity to do for a couple of hours or so would be a good way of interacting." As Splichal stated earlier, it is quite common for American hosts to ask their guests what they are interested in doing before planning activities.

Lastly, the American student states, "I thought it (the program) was a great thing. It really helped us relate with the culture and the people. It also allowed us some time off from traveling and doing all the tourist things. It was definitely one of the more memorable experiences that I had."

5. Conclusion

Nakamura: Each of the Japanese participants had a role in order to facilitate each program. There were twenty Japanese students and seven American students that took part in this program. So, it may have been a good idea to have had three Japanese students act as escorts for each American student, thereby creating closer relationships. I would like to take note of this point and hopefully cultivate cross-cultural communication through other events in the future.

I think it was a great opportunity to hold this two-day program, not only for me but, for all of the JU participants. Here are a few of their quotes:

"The camp was really exciting. It was a good memory in spite of the cold summer. I was almost dying because of the cold. I want to join such a program again another time."

"I should have prepared more for this program, though it was exciting. I could communicate with them many times. I want to bring this experience with me to the next exchange program, I hope."

"I think it is important to increase my language knowledge. I found that I need the knowledge, if I'd like to communicate with them." "Studying hard, I want to give myself more confidence."

I could see that some of the participants had difficulty in communicating. But, they were able to have a positive experience and become motivated to study. They are highly motivated to use what they have learned from this experience in the future. I hope this experience will help the students when they go abroad or even when they travel domestically. Thank you for reading this report. I also hope that this report will be a good reference for you in some way.

Splichal: Though we see Japanese students lacking in their self-confidence and having trouble with language, we can also see the eye-opening experience it was for them. Spoken language became an equal to nonverbal communication as useful tools for them in communicating with people of another culture, yet for the most part they feel the need for much improvement in the language. This type of practical cross-cultural experience is the impetus for our students to become motivated to interact with other cultures. Their communication with other cultures will motivate them to learn more foreign languages, which in turn will cause them to understand their culture and themselves more.

There is an adage in English which says, "Behind every cloud there is a silver lining." In this case, though the JU students may have a cloud hanging over them as far as their communicative skills are concerned, they have come to an understanding that they must work harder at climbing that communication tree. Furthermore, we have decided to hold an overnight English seminar every summer after final exams with activities to improve our intercultural awareness and inter-cultural communication skills. The students and I would welcome the any future support from the university and faculty.

⑤+1 先ほどの選択肢の中で、コミュニケーションの最大の手助けとなったものは何でしょう。一つ選び理由を書いてください。

番号 _____

理由

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1. 言語 2. 相手の容姿 3. 自分の性格 4. 相手の性格 5. 準備 6. 周囲の雰囲気
7. カメラ・ビデオの撮影 8. 天気 9. その他 ()

⑥+1 上の選択肢の中で、最もコミュニケーションを阻害したものは何でしょう。一つ選んで、その理由を書いてください。

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理由

⑦ 自分が参加していた以下のスケジュールの中で、十分に交流できたかどうかを5段階で判断し、○を付けてください。

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|---------------------------|------|----|------|------|----|-----------------|------|------|----|------|---|
| | 十分満足 | 普通 | 大変不満 | 十分満足 | 普通 | | 大変不満 | 十分満足 | 普通 | 大変不満 | |
| 1. 茶道 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 6. 書道 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 2. 昼食 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 7. 休憩 (カキ氷) | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 3. プレゼン (Japanese Toilet) | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 8. パーベキュー | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 4. 日本語講座 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 9. 日本の踊り (やんしき) | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 5. 華道 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 10. 花火 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| | | | | | | 11. 深夜トーク | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 12. ラジオ体操 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 16. 竹のコップ作り | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 13. 朝食 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 17. スイカ割り | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 14. 自然体験活動 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 18. スポーツ | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 15. 昼食 (流しそうめん) | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 19. お別れ会 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

- ⑦+1 また、上の問いの5段階表示で、5に丸をつけた項目と1に丸をつけた項目があれば、その中から1つずつ選び、それぞれ理由を書いてください。

5段階表示で5だったものの番号は_____番です。

注) 一つだけ適当に選ぶ

理由

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理由

- ⑧ 自分が担当するプログラムで、アメリカ高校生を案内・説明・コミュニケーションする点において苦労したことは何でしょう。

- ⑨ アメリカ学生の行動を見て、驚いたことがありましたらお書きください。

- ⑩ 交流・コミュニケーションにおいて心に残っていることはありますか。お書きください。

- ⑪ 楽しかった、困った、教訓になったこと、その他、ご感想ありましたらお書きください。

お手数ですが、このアンケートを9月末日までにスプリチャル先生オフィスの前にあるBOXに投函してください。多忙の中、ご協力ありがとうございました。