

Viewing Japan from the INSIDE and OUTSIDE

-Understanding our own and other countries' cultures

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Curriculum vitae

Graduated from Graduate School of International Cooperation Studies at KOBE University. Proceeded to Ph.D. in March 2004.

Worked as a teacher at Fukiai Junior High School in Kobe City, Middle Lab School Hyogo University of Teacher Education, and Hojo Junior High School in Kasai.

Visited to research science education at University of Philippines Institute of Science & Mathematics Education Development in August 1995 and August 1996. Worked as an advisor to science teachers training at the Ministry of Education in Kenya from August 1998 to August 2000. Visited Pullman, USA, with 14 students for an exchange program in March 2004.



Summary

I experienced investigation and work in places such as the Philippines and Kenya. After returning home I had classes of English conversation in a junior high school and participated in the activity of an international exchange program. In addition, I gave presentations to students, teachers and citizens on Kenyan education. Based on these experiences, I will discuss the understanding of our own and other countries' cultures.

1. The experience in the Philippines & Kenya

I investigated 'the International Cooperation in Education' at the STTC (Science Teacher Training Center) at the University of the Philippines in August 1995 and August 1996.

I was dispatched from the Hyogo prefecture board of education to the ministry of education in Kenya, August 1998 to August 2000. I was a technical advisor, Biology Education, of the JICA SMASSE (Strengthening of Mathematics and Science in Secondary Education) Project. In Kenya, many people having interest in Japan, I was frequently asked about Japanese culture. Not being able to answer many questions, I realized that I did not know enough about Japanese culture myself.

2. To give lectures in Japan

I gave presentations to students, teachers, and citizens on culture, education and the environment in Kenya after returning home. From the reactions of the audience in my presentations, I thought that many Japanese were interested in my speech. However, I don't think that they could truly understand my experiences. Only if one actually experiences it for himself, one can understand.

3. Our English Classes in Japan

After returning home, I had English conversation classes with ALTs (Assistant Language Teacher) in junior high school. We drew up teaching materials after discussing our lessons. It is necessary that English teachers in Japan should cooperate with ALTs in their school. Students are shy to express their own opinion in their classes, or it is difficult to express their own opinion. Many students have not been accustomed to discussion in their classes.

4. To lead a group of students to Kasai's sister city in the USA

I led 14 students to Pullman city in Washington which is Kasai sister city. We participated in an international exchange in the USA. We had some experiences in this trip.

There was some trouble at the Seattle Airport in the USA. When we went to the check-in counter of the domestic line in order to fly to Pullman from Seattle, I was told to pay an excess fee, because the harmony kite was too large. The harmony kite was the gift to Pullman city. I strongly insisted not to pay. I used to experience similar problems at the hotels and the airports in foreign countries. It is important to express our own insistence, and be able to debate the situation. In the end I still had to pay the excess fee. I thought that it was right to debate, because I could express my point view. The students saw me argue with the staff. They could learn about a different way to deal with a situation.

When students parted from their host families, their eyes were full of tears. It probably was difficult for the students to fully understand the English used during their stay. However, I was convinced that the students and the host families could have an interchange from their hearts. Even if someone is fluent in a language, it does not guarantee an interchange with the other person. It is important to care about others from your heart. It is necessary to share opinions and recognize the other's point of view.

5. How is Japan seen by foreigners?

If we travel overseas for a short term only, we do not become aware of foreigners' opinion about Japan. Only if we reside in foreign countries over a long term, and we get in touch with the local people, we can realize how Japanese culture is viewed by them. Things that may seem natural for us in Japan are not natural in a foreign country. Furthermore, when we become intimate with foreign people, we understand how they look at Japan. Some Japanese, living abroad for a long time, still cannot realize how foreigners view Japan. That is because they, even though living abroad, live just in a Japanese community within that foreign country. We often only understand if we mix with the local people.

6. The viewpoint of understanding other countries

People often mistake international understanding for learning English only. International understanding is not limited to English only. We should try to immerse ourselves in their culture. It is difficult to convey my experiences in foreign countries to the students for me. They can only understand them, if they experienced it for themselves. However, we should teach them about it.

The following points are important.

- The attitude and capability to accept people with foreign cultures or different cultures, and to live together
It is important that we understand people with difficult cultures, accept them, and live together.

- Establishment of oneself which is rooted in the traditional culture of one's country
It is necessary to understand our own traditional culture and history for understanding different cultures. And then we should establish one. In order to keep living together, we should keep the relationship with the person through conversation.

- The attitude and the ability to express and compare opinions, and to act concretely
We should express our own opinion. Furthermore it becomes necessary to be able to act concretely. This last point is difficult to achieve according to my experience in Japan, because many students are not good at arguments in classes.