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ABSTRACT
                This paper describes a technique for
English-as-a-Second-Language teaching that has students and teachers sharing
personal narratives, developed using ethnographic research techniques, as a
classroom exercise. The technique, used in a higher education institution in
Japan, is presented as a work-in-progress to those who are interested in
intercultural communication and multiculturalism issues and in how cultural
differences in communication and learning styles can be used to create new
practices of learning. Influenced by the sociohistorical psychology of Lev
Vygotsky and A. R. Luria, the liberation pedagogy of Paolo Freire, and the
critical pedagogy of Ira Shor, the approach assumes that learning can best
take place in group environments where students and teachers are encouraged
to work together to share their social histories and build their own programs
of learning. (Contains 20 references.) (MSE)

Teachers and Students as Ethnographers

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Key Words

EFL (English as a foreign language), TESOL (teaching English to speakers of other languages), IC (intercultural communication), ethnographies, sociohistorical, Vygotsky, scientific concepts, spontaneous concepts, ZPD (zone of proximal development).

Abstract

This paper describes an attempt to combine content-based intercultural communication and global issues with shared student and teacher ethnographies in the EFL classroom at SIT. It is a work in progress intended for those who are interested in issues of intercultural communication and multiculturalism as well as those who are interested in how cultural differences in communication and learning styles can be used to create new practices of learning. Influenced by the sociohistorical psychology of L.S. Vygotsky and A.R. Luria, the liberation pedagogy of Paulo Freire and the critical pedagogy of Ira Shor, it assumes that learning can best take place in group environments where students and teachers are encouraged to work together to share their social histories and build their own programs of learning.

Ethnographies and Ethno-Centers

Let me begin with a brief account of how shared ethnographies can help us explore the social context of ethnocentrism, stereotyping and prejudice. This also brings me to a story which, by the way, is from my childhood. I grew up in New York and when I was in third grade our class took a day trip across the George Washington Bridge to New Jersey. The next day in school our teacher asked us about the trip. Her first question was, "Yesterday we took a trip and crossed a big bridge. Does anybody remember the name of that bridge?"

Well, I remembered it was the George Washington Bridge, so in spite of the fact that I was generally a shy student, I raised my hand and Ms. Goldberg called on me. I answered "The George

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Washington Bridge," and Ms. Goldberg gave me a big smile. Actually, I think the reason she gave me such a warm smile was because my answers were usually wrong.

Anyway, her next question was, "When we crossed the George Washington Bridge, we entered another state. Can anybody name it?" Well, I thought I knew that too so I raised my hand again — and Ms. Goldberg called on me a second time. "Yes, David," she smiled. "Where were we?"

"The United States," I answered (Hough, 1997).

Now, given the fact that at the time the center of my world was New York, the answer is understandable — from a NY point of view, maybe even correct. Looked at from a more global and intercultural perspective, however, it would be considered ethnocentric and a good example of why intercultural awareness training is necessary — especially in second and foreign language courses.

Which brings me to another story. A few years ago — and I should probably preface this by saying that I've lived in Japan for nearly 25 years — I was speaking in Tokyo and a Japanese graduate student came up to me after my presentation and asked where I was from. I answered "Tokyo."

She smiled and very patiently explained, "No, we're *in* Tokyo. Where are you *from?*" Understanding the cultural implications that being Caucasian I couldn't possibly be *from* Tokyo, I corrected myself and said "New York."

She turned pensive for a second and then asked, "Is that near New Jersey?"

As it turned out she'd done a home stay in New Jersey. So she could relate to the world from two perspectives — or what I like to call two *ethno-centers* — Japan and New Jersey. It was her Japanese ethno-center that told her I couldn't be from Tokyo while her New Jersey ethno-center told her that New York was somehow proximate *to* and maybe even a suburb *of* New Jersey.

To me, personal ethnographic accounts such as these are extremely valuable. First they allow us to pierce the impersonal stereotypes of grammar drills that teach "Fumiko is from Japan, she's Japanese" or role plays that teach Anglo-American small talk greetings and introductions, or information gap activities that ask a lot of meaningless or culturally inappropriate — even taboo — personal questions (Hough, 1996; Senduk, A. and Inkiriwang, R., 1995).

Second, they allow us to discover the myriad of possible meanings associated with being able to say "I'm from Tokyo," or "...New York" or "...New Jersey." They do this by giving us the freedom to ask such ethnographic questions as: "In order to be able to say we're from a particular place, do our grandparents and parents have to be born there too?" "Do *we* have to be born there?" "...grow up

there?" "...be citizens?" "...have a particular name or set of physical features?" "...be native speakers?" "...speak the local dialect?" "...be long-term residents?" Or "...just happen to be living there and like it?" Or even "... be imprisoned there and hate it?"

Third, this type of classroom ethnography allows us to delve deeper into sociohistorical issues by asking what it means to be ethnically Korean and say we're from Japan, or Turkish and say we're from Germany, or Kurdish and say we're from Sweden, or Pakistani and say we're from England, or Hmong and say we're from Wisconsin.

And fourth, it allows us to go beyond marginalizing myths about cultural diversity by asking what it means to be African American in a society that still venerates its slaveholding founding fathers, or to be Native American or Hawaiian or Puerto Rican and have US passports, or to be from any group whose cultural heritage has been co-opted, minimalized and trivialized.

This, in part, is what I mean by shared ethnography. Influenced by the sociohistorical psychology of Lev Vygotsky (Vygotsky, 1978, 1986), the liberation pedagogy of Paulo Freire (Freire, 1986), and the critical pedagogy of Ira Shor (Shor 1980, 1992, 1996), it combines collaborative learning strategies with liberating social agendas. As such, it is a kind of critical developmental ethnography that allows us to move away from marginalizing stereotypes and myths about what we or others think we *are* or have been taught we *should be* to new and liberating stories, customs, beliefs and practices that help us develop into what we *can be*. In this sense I also see it as a contribution to the emerging discussion on critical approaches to TESOL in general.

Shared Ethnographies and Freire's Process of *Conscientização*

In his work with adult literacy in Brazil in the early 60s, Paulo Freire developed a concept which he called *conscientização* (often translated as "conscientization"). Brown (1974) writes that for Freire, this "is a process in which people are encouraged to analyze their reality, to become more aware of the constraints on their lives, and to take action to transform their situation. For Freire, education is either liberating or domesticating, teaching people either to be critical and free of constraints or to accept things as they are" (p. 29).

In applying Freire's process of *conscientização* to the EFL classroom in Japan, I believe it is necessary to start with where both we and our students are — that is, with our collective understandings and interests — and to work from there in building a social agenda. What follows is a brief description

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of an activity I have conducted with both students and teachers in order to gain some degree of insight as to what these collective understandings and interests in the area of culture are.

How I Started

I joined the faculty of the Center for Interdisciplinary Studies at Shonan Institute of Technology in Fujisawa, Japan, in April of this year. My work in shared ethnographies, however, goes back to the end of the first semester in 1997 when I asked students at two universities where I was teaching if they wanted to include some culture content in their classes beginning the following semester. All agreed. I then asked them to divide into small groups and make a list of five things they wanted to learn during the semester. Table 1 is a sample of some frequently asked questions:

Table 1 - Sample Student Responses
a) In some countries people live on rice. In other countries people live on bread. Why?
b) Why do Americans and Europeans wear shoes in the house?
c) Why do Japanese work hard and live long?
d) What do people pray for in church?
e) Why don't Americans take baths like Japanese?
f) Is there class system in India?
g) What do people in other countries do after work?
h) Why do they give tips to waitresses?
i) Do foreign husbands praise their wives in public?
j) Why is there competition in entrance examinations in Japan?
k) The value of getting married.
l) How middle class people live everyday?
m) We are attracted by the free image of American school life as shown on television.
n) How many gays in the world?
o) We want to know about foreign holidays and festivals. Are they similar to Japan's?

In a similar activity conducted at various teacher training workshops around Japan, I have asked teachers what things about culture they would like their students to learn. Here, a rather different set of responses emerges. Table 2 lists some of the more frequent teacher responses:

Table 2- Sample Teacher Responses
a) Cultural awareness.
b) Similarities and differences (local culture/target culture).
c) What is a stereotype? Is the definition of a stereotype different in different cultures? How?
d) Values and ethics.
e) How culture interacts with/is influenced by politics and economics.
f) Work ethic.
g) Gender issues, roles of men and women.
h) Life style of young people in different countries.
i) Family values.
j) Different motivational reasons for studying culture.
k) Thinking process, logic, decision making process.
l) Human rights.
m) What someone is really thinking who isn't fully committed to the universal culture-equality paradigm when presented with it in the classroom.
n) Classroom culture.
o) Communication styles & rhetoric.

The most notable difference between the two sets of responses was that students asked highly specific questions about life in different cultures. In addition, many of their questions reflected what some might consider to be rather ethnocentric or stereotypical views of culture and cultural difference. Teachers, on the other hand, had more general concerns which showed a higher degree of abstraction and suggested a potential for rule generation. Many teacher responses also came from the vocabulary of mainstream intercultural communication which, in turn, reflects certain implicit assumptions and prejudices common to Western social science.

Scientific and Spontaneous Concepts

According to Vygotsky, the concepts expressed by teachers are *scientific*. Generally, they are formally learned — often in school (Elbow, 1986), but "lack the rich content of personal experience" (Vygotsky, 1986, p. 193). The student questions, on the other hand, are less generalizable and concern specifics of everyday life. Such questions are *spontaneous* in that they derive from concrete experience but may be difficult to articulate without the development of scientific concepts.

Vygotsky (1986) claims that the "strength of *scientific concepts* lies in their conscious and deliberate character. *Spontaneous concepts*, on the contrary, are strong in what concerns the situational, empirical, and practical" (p. 94). Vygotsky asserts that two contrasting motions are necessary for the interpenetration of these two types of concepts. Spontaneous or experientially learned concepts are helped "upward," as it were, to self-conscious understanding by the path of the scientific or formally learned concepts "downward." But scientific concepts are only helped downward or fully experienced — and thus fully able to be applied to unfamiliar instances — to the extent that spontaneous concepts have worked their way up to actualize them. (pp. 18-19)

Taken in isolation, neither scientific nor spontaneous concepts will lead to Freire's *conscientização*. Taken together as a dialectical unity, however, they become a vehicle by which we as students and teachers can explore our collective social histories and realities. This produces awareness and deliberate control, in what Vygotsky terms the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD).

The Role of the ZPD

Simply stated, the ZPD is where all learning and development takes place. Viewed from a diagnostic perspective, it is actually a proficiency gap between what a student can accomplish by himself or herself, and what that same student can accomplish with the help of others. Learning always

begins at the stage where the student needs the help of others to accomplish a task. Gradually, and with the help of others, the student learns to accomplish the task alone.

For us as teachers, the most significant practical implication of the ZPD (and thus all learning and development) is its social nature. All activity within this zone appears twice: "first on the social level and later on the individual level... This applies equally to voluntary attention, to logical memory, and to the formation of concepts. All the higher functions originate as actual relations between human individuals" (Vygotsky, 1978, p.57). This means that the ZPD is not just a diagnostic measure of development, it is also the crucial variable to take into account in creating pedagogy (Newman & Holzman, 1993, p. 69).

The ZPD in Pedagogy

This understanding of a socially constructed ZPD frees us (indeed, it also requires us) to move beyond the psychology of the individual student (or individual teacher-student dyad) in our classrooms and develop a pedagogy which embodies our collective social histories as teachers, students, family members, members of communities, members of socioeconomic classes, members of exploitative neocolonialist societies, etc., etc.

Here, let me turn to a personal example to illustrate the point. I grew up working class in what was then an upper middle-class suburb of Manhattan. Class contradictions abounded: all of us knew who the college-track kids were and, when the Vietnam War came along, who would be going off to fight. This was something which was part of our spontaneous, everyday, real-life existence.

Yet, open and honest discussion of our collective class and social histories in school was taboo. Our teachers never used words like "class" except in the context of "American class mobility" (which was contrasted with "the caste system of India"). As a result, we were never able to connect "class" as a scientific concept to our spontaneous everyday reality in a way that could lead to self awareness and volitional activity as active agents in the process of positive social change.

Instead, unconscious class antagonisms would occasionally burst to the surface, often in the form of some destructive act where we — as the victims of an unjust class society — wound up being punished, dumbed out, criminalized, maybe sent off to reform school or to war, maybe even killed. Things along this continuum happened to me, to my friends, to others I barely knew — from people of color to the sons and daughters of working class European immigrants.

My argument (and I believe Vygotsky's as well) is that if we deny the reality of our collective social histories, or try to separate those histories from learning and development (which is what we do when we treat cognition and affect as separate — or separable — entities), we do untold injury to both ourselves and our students. Instead, we wind up becoming motivation junkies, constantly trying to find new games and rewards to inspire our students.

In support of this argument for a socially conscious ZPD are research findings (D. Newman, Griffin & Cole, 1989; Moll & Greenberg, 1990[1]) which indicate "that creating a classroom environment that allows the social nature of learning to be expressed leads to increased learning" (Newman & Holzman, 1993, pp. 70-71). This, in turn, fits with Vygotsky's (1986) claim that "scientific concepts develop under the conditions of systematic cooperation between the child and the teacher" (p. 148).

Here, although Vygotsky uses the expression "systematic cooperation between the child and the teacher," it may be worthwhile to point out that in creating a cooperative social pedagogy of learning (which is what the ZPD really is), the teacher doesn't always have to lead the students in the traditional sense. The ZPD also operates among peers or where somebody who is not a teacher plays that role. John Holt (1982) relates such an example where the ZPD might be at work:

> Years ago I read that one or more inner-city schools had tried the experiment of letting fifth graders teach first graders to read. They found, first, that the first graders learned faster than similar first graders taught by trained teachers, and secondly, that the fifth graders who were teaching them, many or most of whom had not been good readers themselves, also improved a great deal in their reading. (p. 36)

Along a similar vein, I have found that I am often better at teaching my eight-year-old son science than geography even though (or because) I know far less about the former than the latter. Because I know less about science, we tend to learn together in a cooperative setting where I am more of a resource person than the source of knowledge[2].

From Theory to Praxis — What I'm Doing Now

This year at Shonan, I began classes with a discussion of cooperative group learning and some ideas from Shor (1996), about sharing power and classroom democracy. Based on this, students

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[1] Moll and Greenberg (1990), for example, have turned to the working-class social networks, or *confianzas*, of their Mexican student community in Tucson, AZ., to teach literacy (pp. 319-348).

elected to work together in a bilingual setting to help each other access meaning and form, and to organize activities intended to further lead communication, learning and development. They also elected to work with the teacher in groups to evaluate their progress and decide grades.

On the second day of class I asked students to work in groups to make a list of culture questions. We then worked together to classify the questions (based largely on spontaneous concepts) into general topics (or scientific concepts), around which activities for the semester were built. This has allowed each class to create its own syllabus.

As we began to develop our ideas and activities in each class, new themes and concepts began to emerge which required us to rename some categories. Freire calls this process of naming and renaming scientific concepts, "the awakening of critical consciousness through the investigation of 'generative themes'" (1988). Out of this process have come a total of 28 generative themes to date. Since these themes take the form of shared stories and ethnographies, they are called "Stories about...: The generative themes are listed in Table 3.

Table 3 — Generative Themes
1. Stories about Learning
2. Stories about Culture
3. Stories about Food
4. Stories about Folklore and Cultural Myths
5. Stories about History
6. Stories about Religion
7. Stories about Festivals and Holidays
8. Stories about Manners, Etiquette and Communication Styles
9. Stories about Language
10. Stories about Cultural Differences and Similarities
11. Stories about Cultural Diversity
12. Stories about Music
13. Stories about Movies and Entertainment
14. Stories about Sports
15. Stories about Beauty, Art and Fashion
16. Stories about Love and Romance
17. Stories about Families
18. Stories about Psychology
19. Stories about Work, Leisure and the Use of Time
20. Stories about Health and Cleanliness
21. Stories about Property and the Use of Space
22. Stories about Money, Wealth and Power
23. Stories about Crime and Punishment
24. Stories about Government and Politics
25. Stories about the Mass Media
26. Stories about Education
27. Stories about Class, Power and Hierarchies
28. Stories about Happiness, Freedom and Democracy

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[2] This can actually be liberating for the ESOL teacher who is asked to teach a content-based course in an area which he/she lacks expertise.

I shall briefly review two of them here: education, and work, leisure and the use of time.

Education

Since it is in school that students and teachers most frequently interact, it is not surprising that this is a frequently selected topic. In one class, students asked the following questions:

⇒ Why is there competition in entrance examinations in Japan?

⇒ We are attracted by the free image of American school life as shown on television.

Here, students mixed concern about Japan's examination "hell" with Hollywood images of freedom among American students. This suggests a strong spontaneous awareness of their own situation. Comparable results appear in a survey of Japanese high school students and teachers conducted by Kiryu (1997), in which 768 students and 30 teachers from eight senior high schools selected the following primary objectives for learning/teaching English from a list of 25 items:

Student Perceptions:

1. Because there are English classes in high schools.
2. To prepare for entrance examinations of universities.
3. To be able to communicate with people from or in other countries.
4. Because English is necessary to study as general education.
5. To broaden students' own outlook by studying English as a foreign language.

Teachers' Perceptions:

1. To broaden students' outlooks by studying English as a foreign language.
2. To have students become aware of differences in ways of thinking between Japanese and people in other countries.
3. To have students acquire an ability to play an active part in the international world.
4. To have students know about the cultures or customs in other countries.
5. To have students prepare for entrance examinations of universities.

As with my New York childhood experiences, students seem more aware of the role of entrance examinations (or are at least more honest about it), than are their teachers who disassociate learning from its social context. This awareness was expressed openly in one class on differences between Japanese and (idealized) American education, where one group complained about Japanese teachers being insensitive to student needs. In another class, students organized panel discussions on whether the Japanese education system was changing, and if so, how. Comments included:

> ⇒ Only teaching contents is changing, not method. For example, if we say our opinions is bad thing but in the future we should express our opinions openly.
> ⇒ In junior high school boys have homemaking course. This will help make equality between men and women.
> ⇒ Learning style is changing little by little. For example, students not passive but talking positively.
> ⇒ We can select more subjects in school.
> ⇒ Some students must study more for exams [due to decrease in weekly number of English classes].
> ⇒ Style of study is one-way. Still, always teacher is speaking and student is listening.

Returning to the findings of Moll (1990) and others which indicate that learning will increase if classroom environments allow the social nature of learning to be expressed, one class examined different schemes for giving grades. The options included equity (grades based on performance as determined by the teacher), cooperation (students who helped the most in their groups to receive the highest grades as decided by group members), equality (all students to receive the same grade), need (students in danger of failing to receive the highest grade), biology (students with the same blood type as the teacher's receive the highest grades), family wealth (students from the richest families to get the highest grades), and chance (the game of "paper, scissors, stone"). In this case, the class decided that grades should be based on both cooperation and equity and decided by groups in consultation with the teacher.

Work, Leisure and the Use of Time

Student questions from three classes included the following items:

> ⇒ Why do Japanese work hard and live long?
> ⇒ How do American people spend their leisure? Is it important for American?
> ⇒ What do people in other countries do after work?
> ⇒ How middle class people live every day.

In keeping with what we have already noted, student questions tended to reflect spontaneous concepts. In classifying their questions, students began with work and leisure as separate topics. As they began discussing what they perceived as a generation gap between themselves and their parents regarding attitudes about work, however, a new combined category emerged. It should be noted here that few of the students I teach work their way through college. Nevertheless, many do take part-time jobs. Here, however, work is seen less as a necessity or an obligation and more as a means to buy consumer goods and enjoy leisure activities.

Extrapolating from this, we began exploring the history and development of the work ethic. In doing this — not just with work and leisure but with all of the themes we have developed — I have found Marvin Harris' *Cultural Anthropology* to be an excellent teacher reference. In addition, I have a

fair amount of ethnographic material of my own that I have collected over the years. This helps expand our understanding of many issues which underlie these themes and gives added focus as we share our own stories.

For example, we looked at hunters and gatherers, as well as people from pre-moneyed economies where the boundaries of work and play are less distinct. We also discovered that terms like "duty" and "obligation" are common to feudal economies while concepts such as "freedom" and "responsibility" are a product of capitalist economy.

Continuing the Conversation

As I noted at the beginning of this paper, this is still very much of a work in progress. For that reason, it might be worthwhile to conclude by touching on a few questions that have emerged in the process of developing this approach. I will offer a few ideas of my own and then maybe we can open the floor to discussion.

1. *How culturally appropriate is this approach?*

Recall the panel on Japanese education where students explicitly stated that they wanted to be able to express their opinions in class and that they were frustrated with teachers who spoke all the time and didn't listen. Maybe as teachers we should be a bit circumspect about being *culturally appropriate* if all it really means is adapting to idealized norms and values which perpetuate inequality. Furthermore, if our pedagogy is to be liberating we must of necessity be breaking new ground, experimenting with new ideas, creating new classroom cultures. And sometimes that might mean being downright subversive.

2. *Isn't the content level too difficult for Japanese students?*

If from a Vygotskian perspective learning is a collaborative social activity, then the minimal teaching/learning unit should be the group, not the individual. In my classes, for example, I interact with students as members of groups much more than I do with students as individuals. So when we talk about easy or difficult we should be asking whether the material is too difficult for every member of the group, or too easy and boring for every member. To these questions, I can answer that the material falls within the zone or range of the congregate abilities of the group.

3. *To what extend is cooperative group learning effective in an EFL classroom in Japan (e.g., where a more advanced speaker may be afraid to use English because she/he might "stick out" or embarrass other students, or where social hierarchies, gender differences, etc., may interfere?*

There has been a fair amount in the literature on how peer work does not work with Japanese students. I believe the underlying reason for this, to the extent that it is true, involves Japanese educational stress on individual competition in testing. In order to take advantage of the pedagogy of the ZPD, I believe it's necessary to raise the issue of cooperation and what it means. So this is an ideal opportunity to try to create new relationships and a new culture of learning in the classroom. I think the first step is to raise this issue to the level of consciousness on the part of both students and teachers.

4. *What kind of balance, if any, should be sought between student interest in potentially difficult material and linguistic proficiency levels?*

The degree to which grammar should be controlled is not an issue I wish to address here. I think it should be left to each class to decide how much grammar they want and when. Nevertheless, it is easy to work on grammar if you want to. For example, a pair work or group survey which asks the question "What is happiness"" lends itself to the use of gerunds. Likewise, grammatical patterns emerge when we begin a discussion on whether grades should be based on performance, cooperation, family wealth, blood type, etc. The same is true of discussions about the advantages and disadvantages of getting married, why there are rich and poor, the economic roots of prejudice, the sociohistorical causes of injustice and what we can do about it, etc., etc., etc. There is no limit to the potential for generating and practicing grammatical form if that is what you and your students wish to do. What is more, the grammar that your students will be practicing will not only be communicative, it will be far more relevant than what we find in most ELT coursebooks.

5. *What allowances should be made for code-switching and the use of Japanese as opposed to English in the classroom?*

The whole question of English-only is political, not pedagogical. It involves jobs for native speakers of English, many of whom are monolingual. Phillipson makes this point in his discussion of the Makerere Conference and Report[3] in *Linguistic Imperialism* (Phillipson, 1992, pp. 183-5). My question is why should we handicap our students? It is all too easy for EFL teachers — particularly monolingual ones — to dumb their students out by confusing limited English proficiency with lack of

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[3] The Commonwealth Conference on TESOL, held at the University College of Makerere, Uganda in 1961, and attended by delegates from 23 Commonwealth countries, set the stage for post-colonial ELT. Among the tenets formulated by the conference were that (1) English is best taught monolingually, and (2) the ideal teacher of English is a native speaker.

critical thinking skills and mental deficiencies. The result is to make learning materials even simpler and more bland, which only exacerbates the process. Again, just look at what is being published.

6. *How can you talk about a pedagogy of the oppressed with first world Japanese students?*

I see the building of critical social consciousness as part of an ongoing story about my students and myself. Simply knowing English, or possessing certain cultural artifacts about the dominant values of the privileged classes in English speaking societies may be enough to allow for the upward class mobility of the few, but it won't be enough to liberate the many. Whether we participate in the process or not, Japanese students are going to be communicating with people from a wide variety of cultures in a wide variety of languages (including English) in order to better understand how our world is changing and why. Through this process of communicating, they will also be engaged in creating new meanings, beliefs, understandings and practices about the world we live in.

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