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# A Relational Approach to International Education Through Homestay Programs

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## Abstract

*This paper identifies and analyzes intercultural problems through surveys of homestay programs with Japanese students and American host mothers. Given that participants need to go beyond their cognitive knowledge to interact effectively with people from other cultures, a relational approach may be more effective than traditional intercultural training models in international education. In terms of the relational approach, one incident of intercultural problems is composed of various interpretations and plural options for managing differences. By becoming familiar with this relational approach, participants can make more appropriate behavioral choices and make their global experience more meaningful. Also, instructors or faculty members can develop educational programs more effectively by applying the survey results to international education.*

**Keywords:** relational approach, international education, homestay programs, intercultural problems, Japanese and Americans, behavioral choices

With globalization, we have more opportunities to encounter people who have different cultural backgrounds. To cope with this reality, the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (2013) states that many educational programs for nurturing Japanese students who will become active in the global community have been offered: introducing foreign language activities from elementary school through high school, inviting assistant language teachers from foreign countries, and encouraging overseas school excursions. Also, Japan accepted 135,519 international students in 2013, and is expected to accept 300,000 international students per year by 2020.

In order to make homestay programs successful, both parties (the host and the guest) need to understand different notions of hospitality, which is considered an important element in successful homestay programs. While in general hospitality means to entertain guests graciously in both cultures, Japanese hospitality requires hosts and guests to acknowledge superior-inferior relationships and behave accordingly, recognizing their respective positions (Hattori, 2008; Takahata, 2005). The Western version of hospitality on the other hand, influenced by Judeo-

Christian traditions, was considered a sacred process of receiving outsiders and changing them from strangers to guests (Foster, 2013). As people settled in the United States, the spirit of helping others was retained but additional value was placed on self-reliance. As a result, culturally-based norms of hospitality were modified so that guests were given equal status and expected to help themselves as well as offer to help out with chores. Also, when grasping self, culture divides self into independent and interdependent construals (Triandis, 1989, 1995). In the American independent construal, the autonomy of the individual is paramount (Lusting & Koester, 2010; Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2001). In the Japanese interdependent construal, however, the self is connected to others, and restraint over the inner self is highly valued (Haga, 2013; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). This cultural difference may also affect the notion of good hospitality. Even though the definition of hospitality between Japanese and Americans is similar in the sense that hosts try to make their guests' sojourn comfortable, the differences in cultural expectations of how hosts and guests should behave are assumed to cause misunderstandings in homestay programs. What specific problems did people who engaged in homestay programs actually encounter? The purpose of this paper is to identify problems arising from differences in cultural expectations of hospitality, explore ways to manage the problems more effectively and apply them to international education. As part of international education, English ability should be improved. In English education it has been pointed out that the focus should be shifted from inputting information unilaterally from foreign countries to sharing information on Japan with non-Japanese people by outputting information on Japan overseas. However, specific plans for implementing such education have not been worked out (Watanabe, 2004; Yamada, 2005), and still remain unsettled. When we regard homestay programs as an opportunity to improve participants' English ability with the focus on outputting information on Japan, we can expect better results also in the development of English language ability.

**Literature Review**

To cope with intercultural problems, intercultural training models have been developed; for instance, the developmental model of intercultural sensitivity by Bennett (1993) and the intercultural development inventory by Hammer, Bennett, and Wiseman (2003). While intercultural training can enhance knowledge and satisfaction, it does not necessarily change behavior and attitudes (Mendenhall et al. 2004). This position was verified by the results of an independent assessment of high school students using the above models (Hammer, 2014). The results of a research study of students participating in an AFS study abroad experience indicated that the program has a significant impact on students who begin the program at the more ethnocentric stages of the Bennett model, but that it has less of an impact on those students who are at more interculturally-developed stages. Also, although these models assume that individuals will become more interculturally sensitive in a linear progression, this assumption has not yet been proven (Perry & Southwell, 2011).

A relational view to intercultural education offers an opportunity to mitigate these weaknesses since the approach makes it possible for participants to go beyond their cognitive knowledge of other cultural values and make appropriate behavioral choices (Arnett & Nakagawa, 1983; Broome, 1991; Stewart, 1983). It contrasts with a psychological view of understanding which focuses on the listener's reproducing the meaning as originally created by the speaker. The pre-eminent characteristic of the relational approach is that it is co-directional

because participants in interpersonal encounters seek to create common meaning for the purpose of moving toward understanding (Broome, 1991).

In this paper, we would like to demonstrate how it is possible to implement effective educational outcomes by using homestay programs as an example.

## Research Method

Two questionnaires were distributed to Japanese students and American host mothers. Respondents were asked three questions: to define good hospitality, to answer whether nor not they found their host family hospitable or they found their experience as a host family rewarding, and state intercultural problems they encountered that may have been caused by differences in expectations of hospitality.  Japanese students were asked to fill in the questionnaire because most Japanese are not so good at expressing themselves orally.  American host mothers had a choice of answering questions either in writing or verbally depending on the amount of time they had available.

### Participants

The surveys were collected from 64 Japanese university students who had experience staying with a native English-speaking family, and 24 American families who had experience hosting Japanese student(s) in the U.S.  Fifty two students (81.3%) stayed with American families, while 12 (18.7%) stayed with Canadian, Australian, New Zealander or British families. In all, there were 43 females (67.2%) and 21 males (32.8%) whose ages were between 18 to 21. All of them were university students who had either had a homestay experience in their high school days or had studied abroad during a university semester break or in a semester/year-abroad program. The period of stay ranged from 3 days to 2 years.

### Analyses of the Surveys

The surveys were qualitatively analyzed using Berry's acculturation framework (1980, 1995).  Berry categorized acculturation modes into four groups: assimilation, integration, separation and marginalization.  In the assimilation mode individuals attempt to be part of the host culture without maintaining their cultural identity.  In the integration mode, however, individuals try to adjust themselves to the host culture while maintaining their own cultural identity.  Separation is the mode where individuals hardly try to interact with people in the host culture and separate themselves from the host culture while marginalization represents the mode where individuals suffer from cultural loss arising from failure of assimilation and feel marginalized or excluded from the host culture.  While the participants in homestay programs are expected to aim at reaching the integration mode, in reality 45 participants (70.3%) unintentionally remained at the separation acculturation mode where they were not interacting effectively with their host family.  Two participants (3.1%) experienced marginalization.  The rest of 17 participants (26.6%) seemed to move toward the integration mode with the help of their host family or because of their attitude toward trying something new.

## Results

The surveys indicate that Japanese students and native English-speaking families had various problems. Japanese responses to a question on whether they found their host family hospitable,

and American responses to a question on whether they found the experience as a host family rewarding were frequently negative. Areas of discontent concerned meals, social hierarchy, communication patterns, and some other problems. Given that most of the students stayed with American families and the host family respondents were American, the main focus of this paper is on how Japanese and Americans understand the concept of hospitality and how differences in this understanding contribute to less than optimal homestay experiences for students and host families.

**Areas of Discontent**

*The Role of Meals in Japanese Hospitality*

Specific incidents reported by respondents reveal differences in cultural expectations of hospitality between Japanese and Americans. Japanese students often mentioned meals. This seems to be closely related to the definition of hospitality often found in Japanese dictionaries as entertaining guests by serving elaborate dishes. Japanese people expect hosts to serve their guests while Americans generally prefer a more casual approach to dining at home where typically food is put out on the table and guests are told to "help themselves" to the foods. A comment reflective of those made by several Japanese students was: "I was told by the host mother, 'You're a member of my family, so you can have anything you like in the refrigerator.' It was different from what I had expected; that is, serving me various American meals." Even if the American host mothers' intention was to respect the other person's freedom, a value highly regarded in American culture (Samovar & Porter, 2001; Stewart & Bennett, 1991), the host mothers' words may have sounded cold to those students who were used to being served. The Japanese students most likely hesitated to open the host family's refrigerator and select foods on their own because they were brought up in a culture where people are expected to know their position and behave modestly (Hattori, 2008; Ueda, 2011). This arises from a strong sense of *enryo* that most Japanese have; that is, holding back so as not to presume too much on the others' good will (Doi, 1971; Haga, 2013).

Another common complaint voiced by Japanese students was "The host family had just fast food like hamburgers every day." Whereas the Japanese students expected their host family to provide them with special dishes, the host families offered ordinary home cooking to the students.

*The Role of People with Equal vs. Vertical Relationships*

Consistent with a representative American cultural characteristic of conferring equal status on others (Samovar & Porter, 2001; Stewart & Bennett, 1991), some host families expected the Japanese students to help out with simple chores, such as dishwashing. A typical American response was: "I try to make the students feel welcome, but they have to make an effort, too. Just because they are guests doesn't mean they do not have responsibilities." This reflects a commonly held American belief that even guests are expected to offer to help out with chores so as to really display equal status.

The difference in expectations of equal relationships was pointed out also by Japanese students. "The host mother first asked me, 'Where do you want to go?' or 'What would you like to have for dinner?' I always answered out of Japanese reserve, 'Any place is fine' or 'Anything is fine' and agreed with any suggestions she made because I didn't want to cause her trouble. Then, she didn't ask for my opinions anymore." In Japanese culture where vertical relationships

are the norm, it would be desirable to accept suggestions from the host mothers as often as possible since the mother role is a higher status position in the family. In American culture where equal status is preferable, responses such as "Any place is fine" or "Anything is fine" are not appropriate because both parties should be involved in making a decision.

*The Role of Verbal Communication in American Hospitality*

Just as serving elaborate dishes plays an important role in Japanese hospitality, entertaining others through verbal communication plays a key role in the American version of hospitality. From ancient times, Westerners have tended to celebrate talk and rhetoric. Americans usually hold that expressing one's opinion as openly and forcefully as possible is an admirable trait (Giles et al., 1992; Samovar & Porter, 2001). On the other hand, in many East Asian cultures, the primary function of talk is the maintenance of social harmony (Kim, 2002; Markus & Kitayama, 2001). This reticence when sharing one's opinions is pointed out as one possible problem in interactions with Westerners (for instance, Lopez and Bui, 2014), and was also identified in this survey. The difference in expectations of verbal communication was expressed by several Japanese students. "At first the host family spoke to me actively, but I answered only with short words. Then, they spoke to me less;" and "The host mother showed me a picture of her son who lived away from their home, and said, 'I'm proud of my son.' However, I didn't ask any questions. She looked sad." These remarks coincided with common American responses: "Japanese students only gave us short answers, and they didn't try to initiate the conversation;" and "The students were lacking in English ability. One of the goals of the program is to exchange cultural information, and they should have been better able to talk about their own culture."

*Other Areas of Discontent*

There were several other incidents in which one party's actions or behavior fell short of the other's expectations and even displeased the other party to some extent. While people in such situations have to come up with solutions appropriate to the situation, some incidents included problems arising from cultural differences. A typical example was: "A student I hosted had two packages sent from Japan containing food. I thought that if students were coming to the United States to experience American culture, they should make an effort to get used to American food." Although another host mother might have reacted differently to the student's receiving packages of food from home, the student's actions after receiving the packages seemed to displease the host mother.

A second example illustrates that the way in which one introduces one's family members to others is greatly affected by culture. Japanese culture clearly distinguishes insiders from outsiders, referred to as *uchi* and *soto* (Doi, 1971; Lebra, 1976) and expects people to refrain from making statements in which one appears to be boasting about one's family members. In American culture where each family member should be respected as an independent being (Samovar & Porter, 2001; Stewart & Bennett, 1991), the host families couldn't understand the implications of the Japanese student's seemingly negative remarks about a family member. The specific incident was: "When introducing my younger brother, I said with a smile, 'My younger brother is always doing something stupid. He is a helpless fool.' Then, I was scolded by my host mother with the words: 'Why are you saying such a terrible thing? You don't like your brother?'"

A third example reflects the difference between Japanese culture where self-constraint and emotional control are nurtured (Doi, 1971; Haga, 2013) and American culture where self-assertiveness and emotional expression are encouraged (Samovar & Porter, 2001; Stewart & Bennett, 1991). The specific example was: "The host family loved a dog. Although I didn't like him, I didn't tell them. When the dog was beside me, the host mother interpreted it to mean that I was playing with the dog, and left home." Unless the student expressed her inner discontent, the host mother couldn't perceive it.

*Universal Problems related to the Content of the Homestay Program*

Common complaints regarding the content of the homestay program voiced by American host families were: "The students wanted to socialize with each other more than participate in planned events. I think the university should discourage this more;" and "Japanese students spent a lot of time playing volleyball. There was less of cultural exchange." An apparent expectation on the part of the host families was that the students would choose activities where they would be able to learn more about American culture and build their English proficiency skills. On the other hand, some Japanese students had a different expectation such as "I had a good time playing beach volleyball. That impressed me the most;" and "The host family took me to places I wanted to go to. The amusements parks impressed me the most."

## Discussion

**A Relational Approach to the above Problems**

Conflict is inevitable in any human relationship, and it has been discussed in many books and articles. In the U.S. culture it is frequently defined as an expressed struggle (Adler & Rodman, 1985), but in Asian cultures it is often covert (Ohbuchi & Takahashi, 1994; Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2001). The outcome of this survey indicates that while many Japanese students were inwardly dissatisfied or unhappy with some circumstances of their homestay experience, they didn't express their discontent to their host family.

Among five models conceptualized as conflict styles by researchers (competition, avoidance, accommodation, compromise and collaboration) (for instance, Thomas & Kilmann, 1974; Rahim, 1983) accommodation and avoidance styles were frequently employed by Japanese students because maintaining harmony is of prime importance in Japanese culture (Kim, 2002; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). However, these strategies were not considered effective by the host families because Americans tend to take a more confrontational approach to conflict and are more apt to express their discontent directly so as to "clear the air" (Samovar & Porter, 2001; Stewart & Bennett, 1991). On the other hand, American host families expressed their discontent, but they could not take effective action perhaps because of a limitation of sympathy. It has been pointed out that sympathy is based on one's own standard of appropriate behavior and is often misleading in intercultural encounters (Bennett, 1979; Howell, 1982), and the host mothers could not relate fully to the student's cultural perspective. In order to make homestay programs mutually beneficial, both parties need to adopt an integrative or collaborative approach to conflict.

The steps toward doing so would be to analyze the above problems using a relational approach, and then to have participants learn empathy which "relies on the ability to temporarily set aside one's own perception of the world and assume an alternative perspective" (Stewart &

Bennett, 1991, p.152). Given that an overseas sojourn can improve intercultural capabilities only if students actually interact with local people (Williams, 2005), it is considered especially important to acquire empathy which will lead to participants' deeper understanding of another culture and result in changes in their behavior or attitudes.

## Basic Preparation for Japanese Students

First, it is important for instructors to have Japanese students recognize that verbal communication plays a vital role in American hospitality and they need to improve their verbal communication skills. When asked, for instance, "How was school?" or "How was your day?" Japanese students often answered just "Good" or "Fine." The students need to be led to understand how the host family might interpret these responses as representing a lack of interest on the part of the students. Instructors can explain that the host families expect longer answers from the students. Following the explanation, instructors need to have Japanese students actually practice organizing their ideas by describing what was good or how something was especially enjoyable. If some students have difficulty coming up with answers right away, instructors can help the students by asking more specific questions like, "What class did you enjoy most?" or "What activity did you enjoy with your classmates?" However, instructors need to emphasize afterward that in American culture where self is expected to stand out and express its own unique characteristics (Triandis, 1989; 1995), students can feel free to give personal comments.

When asked about the typical daily life of young Japanese, many students answered that they were at a loss for how to answer because it was difficult to generalize. Silence is considered meaningful in Japanese culture but viewed negatively in American culture (Ishii & Bruneau, 1994; Samovar & Porter, 2001). It is necessary for instructors to state that Americans generally prefer an immediate and simple response to their questions, and that the students should respond as quickly as possible rather than pondering the question in order to give completely accurate information. Students interested in video games might say something like, "Many people in Japan are interested in video games. Are many Americans interested in video games, too?" After offering a specific example, instructors need to have Japanese students prepare their own responses based on their individual preferences and interests.

Also, when the host mothers praised their children by saying "I'm proud of my son/daughter," Japanese students kept silent. They were unsure about how to respond or what kind of comment would be appropriate since in Japan modesty dictates that one does not boast about oneself or members of one's family (Kim 2002; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Instructors can introduce how to show an interest in these kinds of comments by responding with a question such as, "Your son/daughter is an excellent student, isn't s/he? What is s/he going to do after graduating from university?" or "Your son/daughter has a talent for music or sports. How did he/she acquire those skills?" After giving some examples, instructors need to have Japanese students come up with their own comments.

Some students mentioned, "When I couldn't catch what the host family said, I looked down. They must be puzzled. They said, 'Look at me.'" It is important for instructors to explain that neither keeping silent nor making a vague request such as 'Would you say that again?" would be effective when they were unable to understand. The students need to clarify what they were and weren't able to understand; for instance, "Would you repeat the last part?" or "What does the last expression mean?" After the explanation, instructors need to have Japanese students practice how to ask specific questions while remembering to look the other person in the eye, an important means of nonverbal communication in American culture. When students face

problems, they can treat the problems as opportunities to explain their own culture. When told, "Look at me," students can explain that direct gaze is considered rude or disrespectful by Japanese although eye contact is regarded as a measure of trust and honesty by Americans (Lustig & Koester, 2010; Samovar & Porter, 2001).

When asked about their personal preferences, Japanese students frequently answered, "Any place is fine" or "Anything is fine." To Japanese students this response means that they don't want to cause their host mothers trouble. What do such responses mean to the host mothers? Instructors first need to lead students to recognize that one possible interpretation of this response by host mothers is that the students can't express their opinions clearly. Another interpretation might be that the students have no opinions. Instructors then can help the students to empathize with the host mothers' reaction by explaining that the host mothers may even have felt that their good intentions of offering the Japanese students choices were being ignored or dismissed. The next step would be to have Japanese students practice expressing personal preferences; for instance, "I'd like to go to an art gallery" or "I'd like to go shopping." Once the students are able to state their personal preferences clearly, instructors can proceed to a more advanced level by having the students express their interests and wishes while also making it clear that they don't want to cause their host mothers any trouble. Using the students' personal preferences, instructors can offer some examples such as: "I like art. If you're interested in art, and if you could take me to an art gallery, I would be grateful;" and "I like shopping. Next time you go shopping, if you could take me to a shopping mall, I would be happy."

At the same time, it is important for instructors to remind students that what is appropriate and effective depends on the context. For instance, when asked about their personal preferences in American culture, Japanese students need to express their own opinions at once without a long pause. However, if they were to adopt that way in a Japanese context, they would likely be labeled as impudent or self-centered. Individual horizons should be expanded, not abandoned. It is desirable that students acquire flexible approaches to dealing with other people, recognizing that they can be Japanese and global depending on the circumstances. In some situations they should continue to know their position as Japanese, keeping vertical relationships in mind, while in other contexts they should change the way they interact with others understanding that vertical relationships are not universal. Instructors need to emphasize that what is appropriate and effective is context-based.

**Preparation for the Unexpected**

In a relational approach, people are expected not only to be willing to open themselves up to new meanings but also to constantly respond to the demands emanating from a new situation (Broome, 1991). For instance, although some students expected their host mothers to serve them various American meals, they were told, "You can have any food in the refrigerator at any time." Even after understanding that the host mothers' intention is to respect individual freedom, students may still feel reluctant to open the refrigerator. In this case they need to express their aversion to doing so verbally. They could say, "I don't feel comfortable opening the refrigerator when you're out." After that, they could explain the underlying Japanese cultural value of self-restraint. The host mothers might then be able to provide an alternative that would be more comfortable for the students. Even if the host mothers adopt the attitude of "When in Rome, do as the Romans do," the students could take a middle position by informing the host mother of

their plan to make use of some ingredients in the refrigerator, thus alleviating some of their discomfort about doing so.

Similarly, regarding household chores, each family has different expectations. Japanese students need to ask in advance, "What can I do to help?" and then adapt to the situation by paying attention to the reaction of the host mother. For example, if the host mother asks the student to help with the dishes, the student can observe whether the host mother expects the student to communicate while washing the dishes together. This would be a good opportunity for the student to have a conversation with the host mother by showing an interest in American culture, such as, "I'd really like to learn to cook an American dish. Can I help you prepare dinner sometime?" or "I'm very interested in American education. What do you like best about American education?"

Some students reported that when they started to wash the dishes, their host mothers didn't look happy. In such a situation, a student might ask, "Is anything wrong?" The host mother has an opportunity to tell the student, for example, that he/she is using too much water for rinsing plates and cups or that he/she isn't washing dishes the way the host mother normally does. From such interactions students can acquire knowledge such as that because of drought situations in some parts of the world, people need to save as much water as possible or they can learn that there is more than one way to do something.

In situations where the host mothers seemed to misinterpret the students' remarks, for instance, "My younger brother is always doing something stupid. He is a helpless fool" with a smile to mean that he was making a disparaging remark about his brother, the student could rephrase the message in a more positive manner such as "He often says funny things. That makes other people happy." And he could add, "I really like my younger brother." Then, the host mother could gain some insight into Japanese communication styles; that is, people don't openly praise their family members, and nonverbal communication such as a smile plays an important role in Japanese culture. The host mother might become familiar with differing holistic views while paying more attention to nonverbal cues.

Also, if a student recognizes that the host mother is displeased with his/her receiving packages sent from Japan containing food, the student could suggest that the host family try the food, emphasizing that Japanese food is popular with people who like low-calorie and healthy foods. If the student could share Japanese food with the host family while giving a detailed explanation about the food, he/she could create an opportunity for them to get better acquainted with each other.

**Support from Other People around Students**

In order to make homestay programs successful, support from people around students is indispensable. Sullivan and Kashubeck-West (2015) point out that stress caused in the process of acculturation could be mitigated by developing more diverse social networks and developing ties with the local community.

*Recommendations for Host Families*

Needless to say, the role of host families is vital in productive homestay programs. How could host families play a more effective role in a relational approach? When Japanese students have language problems, the host families can offer to help the students with English. If the students have trouble communicating verbally, they can suggest that the students try communicating in writing, as some Americans pointed out.

When students don't express their personal preferences clearly by saying, "Any place is fine" or "Anything is fine," the host families can ask questions in a different way such as "When you're in Japan, how do you spend your free time?" or "What do you usually have for dinner in Japan?" so that the students can answer without feeling an emotional burden.

When students are unable to give an immediate reply to a question such as "What activities are popular among young Japanese?" the host families can help the students by describing the typical activities of young Americans, and then ask about popular trends among young Japanese. Another way might be to give some examples such as personal computers, cell phones, TV games, music and animations and let the students choose what they think are popular.

Regarding household chores, as the host mothers who found the experience as a host family rewarding pointed out, it would be better to "ask the students to help with simple family chores like washing the dishes so that they can feel a part of our family if they don't volunteer themselves" or "make a list of the housework on the wall."

*Recommendations for Japanese University Program Coordinators*

Ting-Toomey and Oetzel (2001) state that third-party help involving using an outsider to mediate the conflict is necessary in some conflict situations. They also point out that conflict competence has four criteria: appropriateness, effectiveness, satisfaction and productivity, and that productivity is closely related to outcome factors. Regarding the goals of the homestay program, the coordinators' assistance is essential. It is important for coordinators to let American host families, Japanese students and parents know beforehand the specific goals of the homestay program. Students may want to spend some free time with their Japanese friends, for example, playing beach volleyball or basketball, but those activities are not so appropriate and productive in terms of cultural exchange. The coordinators should make it clear to students that what matters most is to utilize the opportunity of staying with an American family to learn as much as possible about the host culture.

*Recommendations for Homestay Placement Coordinators*

It is important to gather as much information as possible about each student before the placement is made in order to maximize compatibility, especially as related to areas such as food preferences, activities, and likes and dislikes about such things as animals. If Japanese students like animals, pets might be a perfect way to help the student feel relaxed. If they don't like animals or haven't had much experience around animals in the home, however, pets might be considered a nuisance. One host mother stated: "I put my animals in another room so they aren't annoying unless I know the guests really like animals." This could be one solution if host mothers have a lot of space in their house. However, a more common solution would be to survey the students beforehand to ascertain if they have strong reactions toward some kinds of pets, and to assign those students to homes where there are no pets.

## Implications

One characteristic of positive outcomes was when participants showed an interest in the other culture. Likewise, American host families mentioned a similar positive response to students' demonstrating an interest in American culture. A second characteristic of constructive outcomes was when participants devised ways to bridge psychological and cultural distances. A third characteristic was that participants focused on the merits of the other culture. Stewart (1983)

states that in the relational view, understanding comes from a fusion of horizons, implying that individual horizons expand to include the horizon of the other. In intercultural encounters it is possible to accept the merits of another culture, and broaden our views. Although some aspects of cultural differences, such as showing emotional expressions openly or controlling them, are irreconcilable, it is still possible to accept these differences. Japanese students mentioned: "The host family held a welcome party for me. They welcomed me with rich facial expressions;" and "When I gave a present to the host mother, she was glad with a strong intonation, 'What a beautiful ornament it is!' When I talked about Japanese culture, she replied by saying, "That's interesting."" American host mothers wrote: "Japanese students are always so thankful. American students often take things for granted—you're going to do this for me, though;" and "Japanese students are polite. I have hosted students from other cultures. They came home very late without calling, monopolized the conversation or interrupted to express their view in the middle of another person's story. These kinds of behavior never happened with Japanese students."

**Conclusion**

This paper discusses how through homestay programs, participants can personally experience different points of view; for instance, serving elaborate dishes as a form of hospitality is important in one culture while verbal communication plays a vital role in another culture. What is considered appropriate differs depending on cultural values such as the difference in vertical as opposed to equal relationships. Also, this paper demonstrates that when we analyze problems using a relational approach, we can realize that one incident of intercultural problems is composed of various interpretations and that plural options are available for managing the problems. By becoming familiar with the relational approach, participants can go beyond their cognitive knowledge of other cultural values and make more appropriate behavioral choices from the various options available.

Future research should be conducted with students who have had a pre-departure preparation program and should identify how they were able to manage problems by utilizing the program even when unexpected things happened to them. Also, future research should be implemented with more Japanese students who have stayed in English-speaking communities other than the United States, and with other host families other than Americans in order to find out how the cultural expectations of those cultures are similar to or different from those of American culture.

While globalization has advanced, it is questionable whether most people have really acquired a deeper understanding of other cultures because they are often unable to go beyond their cognitive level of understanding. If instructors become familiar with the above relational approach, and develop educational programs by utilizing the results of homestay programs, they can expect their students to move forward to the next step; that is, to the behavioral level. Grass-roots interactions such as those experienced in homestay programs can contribute greatly to the promotion of true intercultural understanding.

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