A Cross-cultural Psycho-educational Program for Cross-cultural Social Skills Learning to International Students in Japan:

Focusing on the AUC-GS Learning Model

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We developed and conducted a psycho-educational program for international students in Japan based on the AUC-GS leaning model. The program included an experimental group social skills learning session. This skills learning session was the final stage of the program and was based on small group social skills training in clinical psychology. However, this program was based on an educational, rather than a medical, model. The program provided cognitive and behavioral learning of culture-specific behaviors pertaining to the formation of interpersonal relationships. Responses from twelve participants were collected during, immediately after, and one year after the program. In the program, participants achieved culture awareness, realized cultural differences, understood psychological responses to cross-cultural situations, expanded their behavior repertories, and become motivated to engage in culture learning and interpersonal contact with their hosts. After the program, participants actually used the learned skills and recognized the usefulness of the program. Overall, the participants learned how to learn about cultures. (155 words)

Key words: AUC-GS learning model, cross-cultural social skills learning, cross-cultural education, psycho-education, international students in Japan

AIM

A cross-cultural psychoeducational program for international students in Japan was conducted with the goal of enhancing cross-cultural contact. Such contact is an important way for international students to gain support that facilitates their psychological and socio-cultural cross-cultural adjustment.

The AUC-GS Learning Model (Tanaka & Nakashima, 2006), which we developed for cross-cultural education, was used as the conceptual framework for this program. There are three steps in the AUC-GS learning model: 1) acquiring culture awareness, 2) understanding responses to cross-cultural encounters and 3) learning coping strategies for cross-cultural situations. These educational steps occur at two levels: 1) the culture-general level, which focuses on general and abstract principles, and 2) the culture specific level, which focuses on details of specific cultures. The combinations of steps and levels create the six cells shown in Table 1.

Educational sessions corresponding to each cell were combined by any order to compose the psychoeducational program. The purpose of the AG session was to stimulate psychological awareness of cultural influences. The AS session focused on the influence of a specific culture, in this case the Japanese culture. The goal of the UG session was to reveal the general psychological principles involved when people encounter cross-cultural situations. The US session focused attention on the actual content of the conflict between specific cul-

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Table 1. The AUG-GS learning model (Tanaka & Nakashima, 2006)

		2 Levels	
		Culture-general	Culture-specific
3 Steps	Awareness	AG awareness of other cultures	AS awareness of a specific culture
	Understanding	UG general understanding of cross-cultural encounters	US understanding of an encounter with a specific culture
	Coping	CG coping with cross-cultural encounters in general	GS coping with a specific culture

tures, in this case conflicts between Japanese and American cultures. The CG session taught general principles that are required in any cross-cultural situation. Finally, the last CS session provided training on how to act in a specific cultural environment.

The educational content of the sessions was organized by applying original or existing exercises and lectures. Previous cross-cultural trainings have mainly focused on learning at the cognitive level, but not teaching behaviors. The outcome is that individuals are promoted to consider what is desirable in cross-cultural situation, but how to act in order to achieve this end is left up to them. However there is a large gap between understanding and being able to act. Therefore, training actual behaviors is indispensable for cross-cultural education according to this model.

For the CS session, we developed a behavioral culture learning method. To foster behavioral learning, the cross-cultural social skills learning used techniques from cognitive and behavioral therapy (Lieberman, DeRisi, & Mueser, 1989). Thus, cross-cultural education is a new application for existing psychology methods. Learning at the level of behavior is considered to be quite useful in cross-cultural education for sojourners because it provides practical ways for them to

change a situation. Behavioral differences between cultures often lead to problems and misunderstandings. However, if sojourners learn new cultural behavior patterns, their ability to form interpersonal relationships and gain social support may improve, which in turn might enhance cross-cultural adaptation. This idea is called the skills-support hypothesis for cross-cultural adjustment (Tanaka, 2000).

If visitors are only aware of their own cultural behavior, they will have no choice but to engage in that behavior. However, if sojourners know both their own culture and the behaviors of the new culture, they have behavioral options, and can choose behaviors depending on the social context. Additionally, if guests have a good understanding of their hosts' behavior patterns and ways of thinking, they can avoid misunderstanding their hosts' behaviors and understand the hosts' reactions to their own behavior within the new cultural context. As Furnham & Bochner (1982) suggested, adequate social skills could reduce culture shock.

Cross-cultural social skills learning is supposed to make unfamiliar cultural behavior understandable and usable. However, such culture learning does not mean forcing behaviors. Sojourners also have the right to use their own behavior patterns, even after they learn new behaviors. Culture learning is not based on the therapeutic medical model, but rather is based on an educational model whose purpose is to develop abilities and encourage growth in individuals (Tanaka, 2010).

The program presented here was developed based on the AUC-GS learning model. However it is necessary to determine what students actually learned, and whether the aim of the program was achieved. To investigate the effect of the program, this study assessed the following: 1) changes in participants' cognition, for example interpretation, attitudes, images and motivations in the cross-cultural situations described in each cell, and 2) their knowledge about what they learned in each session. Since this study was conducted with a small group, we look at both numerical evaluations and verbal descriptions. Based on the structure of learning in this program, we hypo-

thesized that education in the AG to CG sessions that is, learning prior to the CS stage might play a role in cognitive preparation for behavior learning in CS.

In addition, in order to determine the learned social skills were used and the influence of cross-cultural learning on daily life, a follow-up survey was conducted one year after the learning sessions. Both the short- but long-term effects of the program are discussed.

METHOD

1. Participants and outline of the program schedule

Twelve international graduate students in Japan who were interested in learning about Japanese culture joined a cross-cultural adjustment class in January, 2010, for four days: One and a half days of the program were dedicated to social skills learning. The facilitator was the author of this article, and four Japanese graduate and undergraduate students served as helpers.

2. Demographic traits of the participants

There were eight female and four male participants, with an average age of 26.8 years ($SD=$ 2.89). Their regions of origin were East Asia ($n=$ 6), Central Asia ($n=3$), Africa ($n=2$) and North America ($N=1$). Two participants had been in Japan for less than one year, eight participants had been in Japan for between one and two years, and two participants had been in Japan for more than three years. The Japanese language proficiency regarded from beginner ($n=3$) to intermediate ($n=4$) to advanced ($n=5$). Both English and Japanese were used in the program.

3. Program contents

The content of each session of the program is described below. Asterisks denote were original exercises. The AG and AS exercises took place on Day 1, the UG and US exercises took place on Day 2, the CG exercise took place on Day 3, and the final CS exercise took place on Day 3 and 4.

1) AG: In the AG session, participants were required to draw a world map individually and then discuss the features of their maps in groups (cognition map exercise*). The aim of this exercise was to realize that they were each only familiar with a limited area of the world, and therefore there must be many cultures with which they are unfamiliar.

2) AS: The AS session started with the words classification exercise*, where participants were required to give examples and classify words which contained "culture" or "cultural", for example "youth culture" or "cultural medal". Then they heard lectures about the "culture 1 & 2" (Hofstede, 1986) which mentioned cultural activities as culture 1 and kind of mind program as culture 2, and lectures about classification of the world's cultures (Hofstede, 1991). Finally, participants analyzed the animated film, "Antz" (1998)*, which deals with the concepts of individualism and collectivism. Individualism and collectivism are regarded as one of the axes for assessing cultures. These exercises were meant to provide a definition of culture and sketches of various cultures from a psychological point of view.

3) UG: The UG sections involved a simulation game "Barnga" (Steinwaches, 1990) to experience difficulty of communication through a card game without talking, and lecture about psychological responses to cross-cultural contact and cross-cultural adaptation. Explanations of culture shock, cross-cultural adjustment, and culture conflict were also provided.

4) US: In the US session, the movie "Gung Ho" (1986), which was based on a true story, was used as a case study of cultural conflict and mutual understanding between people of Japanese and American cultures*. After the movie, participants were required to create their own story by responding to the question, "If a Japanese company comes to your home town, what will happen and how can the cultural conflicts overcome? Take a bridging role."

5) CG: The CG exercises included a lecture about cross-cultural education and "culture assimilator" for hosts (Ohashi, Shin, Yokota, Kondo, & Horie, 1992) and role playing using the assimilator situation*. We gave the following situation; an international student was shocked about indirect ex-

Table 2. Pre-post change in each session

		M (SD)		t-Value
		Pre	Post	
AG	A person whom I would meet in future might have different culture from me	1.66 (0.42)	1.33 (0.24)	2.34*
AS	My familiar culture has some features in common with other culture	2.17 (1.06)	1.58 (0.27)	2.55*
UG	I understand our tendencies when we interpret different cultures	2.83 (1.42)	2.33 (1.15)	1.91*
	I understand our tendencies when we interpret different cultures	2.42 (0.81)	2.08 (0.63)	2.35*
CG	I can identify the troublescome behavior in cross-cultural contact in general	2.67 (0.79)	1.92 (0.45)	2.46**
	I master the way for making better contact with persons who have different cultures	3.25 (0.57)	2.50 (1.36)	2.14*
	I have learned what should we do in cross-cultural contact situation in general	2.83 (0.88)	2.17 (0.52)	2.00*
CS	I understand realistic ways to cope with Japanese cultural features	2.58 (0.45)	1.75 (0.20)	3.07**
	I understand Japanese cultural ways and I myself can properly follow these ways	2.50 (0.64)	1.83 (0.52)	2.00*
	I have mastered the ways of coping with Japanese cultural features	3.06 (0.81)	2.41 (0.99)	1.88*
	I have enough self-confidence to communicate with Japanese people	2.75 (1.30)	2.00 (0.36)	2.02*

$df=11$, $*p<.05$, $**p<.01$

pression of Japanese because he received advice about his inadequate way of dry laundry from university office through landlord of his apartment, who responded to complain of other residents. Clearer assertion than usual was recommended for Japanese hosts in role-play to avoid misunderstandings with international students.

6) CS: Social skills learning as part of the CS exercises involved the following four task situations: 1) Asking directions with a language handicap, 2) Display an acceptable and socially graceful attitude toward a superior when visiting a professor and asking a request, 3) Communication in a drinking party that respects the cultural norms, and 4) Indirect refusals, and avoiding saying "no" directly to show sincere consideration of others. The target skills were selected depending on the participant's needs, and learned by repeating role-plays.

4. Measurement

1) Measurement in the session: For each of the six sessions, participants responded to evaluation items reflecting the aim of each cell on a five-point scale. Pre-post program change was evaluated with paired t-tests. After each session, participants answered the question "What did you learn from this part?" At the end of the whole program, participants rated the usefulness of each session on a five-point scale and commented on the whole learning experience.

2) Measurement in the follow-up: One year after the program, a follow-up survey was conducted. Participants were asked whether they actually used the skills in daily life, to describe the results of using the skills, and to evaluate their recognized change after learning by answering 13 items that reflected the expected effects of the program on a five point scale. Finally, they required were asked to write any comments about the program.

RESULT

1. Pre-post change in participants' cognition for each session

There were significant increases in responses to the statement between pre and post session as Table 2 (see Note 1).

The summation of number of items which showed increasing between pre/post scores from

AG to CG were calculated and divided by the median which was 5. Six participants in higher group did not show significant differences compared to six participants in lower group about number of items increased between pre and post scores in CS. Both participants described that they got more cultural understanding and useful behaviors when they asked what they learned in the whole sessions.

2.　Descriptions about learning in the program

The followings are example descriptions from the AG through CG sessions. "I have learned that there are different kinds of people from different countries that each have their own culture," "Individualistic societies and collectivistic societies have different features," "I have learned that people think and behave in the framework of their culture. And it is very difficult to change someone so that he or she behaves in the framework of your culture," and "I realize that we need to have an adequate method for avoiding misunderstandings when we come into have contact with people from a different culture."

The followings were the descriptions of the CS session. "We tried and laughed together then learned skills for Japanese culture naturally," "It is a very nice way to explain a new culture by letting people try it themselves," "Now, I believe I can cope when I encounter such situations," and "I have a better understanding of special Japanese interpersonal behaviors and unique ways of thinking."

The followings were the descriptions of the whole program. "I have learned that there are so many cultures around the world, how I can understand a certain culture by using these techniques and how I can cope with a different culture," "When I am in a different country, I should use these skills so that I adapt easily to the cultures," and "My attitude toward different cultures has changed."

3.　Follow-up

Nine participants who stayed in Japan responded one year after the program. Seven reported using the learned skills for asking for directions, nine used skills for visiting professors, five used skills for communication while drinking, and five used skills for indirect refusal.

Descriptions of the skills included the following. "I found that after I used it, people would be very friendly and help me," "The response was good and she/he was willing to help. I felt good because I got what I wanted," "I felt good because I could see how good he felt," "I was successful and delighted. I would like to fully use this skill in the future, too," "I felt he trusted me," "I succeeded in resolving some trouble. Distance between people was decreased, and I feel happy and cheer-

Table 3　The participants change after the session

	Strongly agree	A little agree	Unsure	A little disagree	Strongly disagree
I tried to observe Japanese behaviors and to investigate the pattern	2	4	3	0	0
I tried to investigate the reason for Japanese behaviors, even if they looked strange	4	4	1	0	0
I often asked Japanese people about Japanese thinking and behaviors	4	1	3	1	0
I felt safer than before I understood Japanese behaviors	3	4	2	0	0
I paid attention to my original cultural behavior which might be misunderstood by Japanese people	3	6	0	0	0
I consciously chose Japanese-style behaviors or my original cultural behaviors depending on the situation or the person	2	4	2	1	0
In cases where I behave in the way of my original culture, I considered the inmpact of my behavior on Japanese people	3	4	2	0	0

ful," and "It was really wonderful. Because I could talk the same way as the rest, I really enjoyed myself."

Some reasons for not using the skills were the following: "I didn't have a chance to ask for directions," "We didn't hold a drinking party," "I tried, but I get nervous with strangers," "It's not that I don't mean I don't accept it as part of the culture. I respect superiors, but I dislike behavior of serving liquor even to superiors" and "I have the kind of personality to say Sumimasen directly when I want to reject something."

Self-evaluation about their change after the program is partially shown in Table 3.

Descriptions about the whole program wincluded the following: "The class was very useful. I gained a lot of useful skills that I apply each day," "I advised newcomers to take this class as an intensive course," "After the class, I tried to understand something from the other perspective," "I would like to learn the way to interact with the Japanese in more situations if I have the chance to take this class in future," "When I communicate with friends using my familiar way there were misunderstandings and correction. Without understanding cross-cultural adjustment, we couldn't feel relaxed," and "I started trying to understand others in cross-cultural situations. Others must have their own reasons for their behavior. I try to spend time understanding others and feel I have a big heart."

DISCUSSION

1. Implication about the short effect in the session

During the sessions before the CS session, participants seemed to become aware of cultural differences and understand the responses to these differences. Since they developed an image about what they should do in such situations and were motivated to cope in such situations, they were ready to learn behaviors. Cognitive learning before the behavior practice in the CS session is recommended. Participants enjoyed learning in the CS session and reported gaining a deeper understanding of the host culture and self-confidence in their coping ability. Since all participants would

get enough impact through cognitive stages, significant differences by the slight differences about cognitive change might not be remarkable.

Participants suggested that program as a whole enhanced their behavior repertoires with cultural knowledge, helped them understand cultural conflicts, provided motivation to cope, and improved their self-efficacy and positive feelings. The impact of the session covered cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions. In short, participants learned how to learn cultures. They realized that different cultures are interesting and understandable, and culture learning that includes a behavioral component is important. Participants became motivated to be directed to understand and follow cultural behaviors depending on their needs and interests in daily life.

2. Implication about the long-term effect after the session

One year after the session, participants had used some learned skills and confirmed the positive influences of the program on interpersonal contacts. In some cases, they did not have opportunity to use them or consciously choose their previous behaviors. One of them did not use them because of nervousness but wanted to try. Basically, the participants seemed to be interested in using the learned behaviors. They knew the cultural reasons behind the behaviors and paid attention to cultural misunderstandings. They then selected behaviors on the basis of their understanding of the background. Therefore, they applied the way to learn cultures that was taught in the program. Since habituation was not much clear by this survey, more investigation would be required to make clear about possibility of occurrence of habituation.

3. Considering the effect of this psychoeducational program

This psychoeducational program could enhance cross-cultural adjustment for international students in Japan. Using the learned social skills could lead to better relations with hosts, and could enhance sociocultural adjustment. Psychological adjustment could be improved by avoiding

misunderstandings with hosts, feeling comfortable in the unfamiliar environment, and recognizing their own growth.

Shimoda & Tanaka (2005) suggested that the difference in communication style creates more difficulty for sojourners than differences in values. Culture learning at a behavioral level that supports smooth relations with hosts should be given more attention because it is useful for problem solving and providing support. Okunishi and Tanaka (2011) suggested that there were some types of sojourners who made good use of support for adjustment. Skills learning based on cognitive understanding would be more beneficial for guests who come from areas that are distant culturally or who have a greater need for cultural support. In conclusion, the results from this study show the positive effects of the culture learning program. Table 2 implied participants became more positive to observe and try Japanese cultural behaviors. According to Simic and Tanaka (2011), some international students like to follow Japanese behaviors and some were not. Such session might increase the first half of the category of sojourners.

This program is in its initial stage, and more practices and analyses concerning individual traits are desirable in the next stage. Alternative tasks should be examined; for example using movie with Asians as US would be more suitable for Asian participants. Then, if universities would provide such session as class of cross-cultural education, more international students could have chances to join it.

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NOTES

1. The examples of other non-significant changed items (M (SD) of pre/post scores) were the followings; AG: I aware that there are various kinds of cultures in the world (1.33(0.79)/1.08(0.08)), AS: I myself think and behave in framework of my own culture (2.08(1.17)/2.00(1.27)), UG: I understand why who have different cultures often make troubles (1.83(0.87)/1.67(0.24)).

2.