How Stereotypes Can Link to Intercultural Awareness: Classroom Experience of the Influence of Culture on Stereotypes

SENNECK Andrew (Received August 2, 2018)

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Introduction

The Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) published a set of revised curriculum guidelines for elementary school education in Japan in March 2017, and the stated objectives for both Foreign Language Instruction and Foreign Language Activities within the revised guidelines includes the expression "to deepen understanding of the culture that forms the background to language" (MEXT, 2017: 156 and 173)⁽¹⁾. This paper will examine how occupational stereotypes can be used to demonstrate to university students that the majority of stereotypes are typically influenced by culture and that people from one cultural background will often hold significantly different stereotypes to someone from a different cultural background. First, the paper will briefly describe the objectives of the Cross-cultural Experience Practicum course taken by first year students taking the major in Intercultural Awareness offered by the Faculty of Education at Yamaguchi University, and will show how the Cross-cultural Experience Practicum course contributes to students being able to teach classes in accordance with the requirements of the 2017 revised guidelines for elementary school education. The paper will then examine the influence that culture has on stereotypes, and will describe how stereotypes are typically used within education and within intercultural communication textbooks as a topic for study and discussion. Finally, the paper will describe a lesson taught as part of the Cross-cultural Experience Practicum course, in which students learn that stereotypes are culturally dependent and therefore that a consensus regarding a stereotype in Japan may be viewed quite differently by people from another country.

1. Cross-cultural Experience Practicum

The Cross-cultural Experience Practicum is a course taken by first year students in the Faculty of Education at Yamaguchi University majoring in Intercultural Awareness. The major in Intercultural Awareness was established in 1996 with the primary objective of training teachers who are globally aware and who have an understanding of other cultures. Another objective of the major is to develop the students' communication skills to the high level which facilitates communication between people who speak different languages and come from different cultural backgrounds. Students who graduate from the major in intercultural awareness typically become elementary school teachers with special responsibility for teaching classes in Foreign Language Instruction and Foreign Language Activities which focus on English and an understanding of other cultures.

1-1 2017 Revised Elementary School Curriculum Guidelines

The Revised Elementary School Curriculum Guidelines issued by MEXT in 2017, contain guidance relating to the need for schoolchildren to study a foreign language and specifically highlight the necessity for children to develop an awareness of the culture which lies behind language. The relevant sections of the guidelines are to be found in the sections relating to Foreign Language Instruction and Foreign Language Activities. Under the title of "Objectives", the connection between language and culture is explicitly referenced in relation to both Foreign Language Instruction and

Foreign Language Activities.

Foreign Language Instruction (Objectives)

(3) To deepen understanding of the culture that forms the background to foreign languages, and to nurture in students an attitude of actively trying to communicate using a foreign language while respecting other people.

(MEXT, 2017: 156)⁽¹⁾

Foreign Language Activities (Objectives)

(3) Through contact with a foreign language, to deepen understanding of the culture that forms the background to language, and to nurture in students an attitude of actively trying to communicate using a foreign language while respecting other people. (MEXT, 2017: 173)⁽¹⁾

In both cases the third objective stated for Foreign Language Instruction and Foreign Language Activities can therefore be seen to be only marginally different in terms of phrasing. What is clearly stated in each case however, is the importance of understanding the culture behind a foreign language and the significance of actively trying to use language for mutually respectful communication.

Although the guidelines refer somewhat ambiguously to Foreign Language Instruction and Foreign Language Activities, at the level of elementary school education in Japan, this will mean learning about the English language or starting to use English at a basic level. Following the objectives, the guidelines for Foreign Language Activities outline the content of the curriculum, and within a section entitled "knowledge and skills", clause ii states the requirement for teaching, "(ii) knowledge of differences in lifestyle, traditions, and behaviour between Japan and other countries, and awareness of different ways of thinking" while clause iii mentions, "(iii) experience of communication with people from a different cultural background and deeper understanding in regard to culture" (MEXT, 2017: 174) ⁽¹⁾. The implication of clause ii is that schoolchildren need to become aware of the less easily observable aspects of culture, and it is therefore necessary that students taking the major in Intercultural Awareness should be made explicitly aware of such cultural differences during their period of study in the faculty of education.

An additional direct link between the curriculum guidelines and the syllabus of the Cross-cultural Experience Practicum can be found in the section called "preparing instruction plans and applying content" under which the guidelines state, "topics handled in Foreign Language Activities should increase curiosity about culture, both Japanese culture and the culture of English-speaking countries, and they should play a role in nurturing an attitude of wanting to understand more" (MEXT, 2017: 177)⁽¹⁾.

The curriculum guidelines also state that the teaching materials used in Foreign Language Instruction classes should relate to "the daily life, customs, stories, geography, history, traditional culture, and natural environment, of people around the world, with a focus on people who use English and Japanese", and that these teaching materials should be used "to deepen understanding of a variety of ways of thinking, foster the ability to make fair judgments, and encourage a rich mentality", and also to "increase interest in the culture of Japan and of English-speaking cultures and foster an attitude of desire for greater understanding" (MEXT, 2017: 163)⁽¹⁾. The curriculum for Foreign Language Instruction is therefore specifically aimed at developing cultural awareness in addition to language learning.

In the first semester of their first year of study, students taking the major in Intercultural Awareness take a course called English Communication, in which they experiment with strategies for better communication using a foreign language. In the second semester, the first year students take a course called Cross-cultural Experience Practicum for which the focus is to develop an understanding of how their cultural upbringing affects their whole life and how people from a different cultural background may perceive the world in a completely different way. The Cross-cultural Experience Practicum course covers many aspects of cultural differences, for example, how different cultures respond to colour, how conventions relating to the naming of children are influenced by culture, and how perception of time can be connected to culture; a further topic for discussion used in the course is the influence that culture has on the formation of stereotypes.

2. Influence of Culture on Stereotypes

This chapter will argue that stereotypes held by an individual are more likely to be the result of cultural influences rather than direct experience of people belonging to other groups, occupations, or cultures. In just the same way that the circumstances of being born into a particular environment influence an individual's cultural outlook relating to values, customs and traditions, so too, will stereotypes be influenced by the culture in which a person is raised. It should be remembered that this discussion is about the influence of culture on stereotypes and that it is not limited to a discussion about the subset of stereotypes known as cultural stereotypes. Cultural stereotypes are the stereotypes held by people in one culture about people from another culture. An example of a cultural stereotype is the observation heard regularly in Great Britain, and as reported on the BBC Travel website^[1], that "German people don't have a sense of humour".

Psychologists have proposed that stereotypes are a coping mechanism by which the human brain attempts to deal with the impossibility of knowing every single person as an individual. Neuliep^[2] argues that "our culture is the standard by which we evaluate other cultures and the people from those cultures" and that stereotypes are an example of "categorization for the purpose of mental efficiency". Stereotypes therefore do not develop as the result of individual first-hand contact with people from different groups, but instead, stereotypes are absorbed as part of the process of being raised as a member of a social and cultural group. Further support for this idea comes from Lippmann^[3], the first person believed to have coined the term stereotype from the printing industry, who suggested, "we tend to perceive that which has been picked out in the form stereotyped for us by our culture." This paper will propose an innovative method for using occupational stereotypes to make students aware of the influence that their culture has on their view of the world.

3. Use of Stereotypes in Education

Stereotypes are typically used as a topic for discussion within education with the intention of demonstrating how stereotypes can become a seed which develops into prejudice and discrimination against people from a different background. One example of such a course is the Stereotypes, Prejudice, and Discrimination online workshop offered by Pennsylvania State University^[4]. The goal of the workshop is to make people aware of the stereotypes they hold and how stereotypes are connected to prejudice and discrimination. The solution proposed by the workshop to the dangers of holding stereotypes is to seek friendships with people from different groups. Kanobana^[5] has described a workshop offered by the Diversity and Gender Unit at Ghent University in Belgium which has the goal of helping participants recognize their mechanisms for interpreting cultures. Kanobana states that "knowing your own culture is the only way to understand your own perspectives and thus understand other cultures". Furthermore, Lehtonen^[6] suggests that "believing that the other party sees things in the same way as we do, may be one of the greatest obstacles to successful intercultural interactions". This paper does not wish to downplay the danger inherent in the holding of stereotypes which may result in prejudicial or discriminatory attitudes. However, the general focus on the dangers of holding stereotypes means that the influence that culture has on stereotypes is frequently overlooked, as is a recognition that people from a different culture may take a different view concerning the subject of a stereotype.

From a sample of textbooks dealing with intercultural communication currently available in Japan, it would appear that the majority have a chapter or unit covering the topic of stereotypes. However, as suggested above, without exception, all these textbooks highlight the danger of stereotypes leading to prejudice and discrimination rather than using stereotypes as an example of how people from a different cultural background can look at the same subject matter in an entirely different way.

The textbook "Speaking of Intercultural Communication" by Vincent^[7] devotes eight pages to a unit on stereotypes. The unit covers the theories which try to explain the existence of stereotypes and includes an activity aimed at helping students change stereotypes about Japanese people into more acceptable and accurate generalizations. The unit ends with a presentation task in which students either consider how parents of small children can help their children to have fewer negative stereotypes, or how a teacher of a class of mixed elementary students can encourage openness and tolerance. "Culture in Action: Classroom Activities for Cultural Awareness" by Abe et al.^[8] has three chapters covering

stereotypes and deals with superficial appearances, stereotypes about Japan, and stereotypes about people from other countries. The main thrust being a consideration of where stereotypes are acquired and the problems they can cause in human relations.

"Intercultural Communication for English Language Learners in Japan" by McConachy et al.^[9] provides a reading covering the origin of stereotypes and a discussion of construal level theory from social psychology. The chapter is called "Stereotypes and Intercultural Communication" and is essentially using stereotypes as the basis for a CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) language lesson. The unit does finish with a discussion section about students' personal experiences of non-conformity to stereotypes and the lesson deals with problems that stereotypes can cause in the context of intercultural communication, but there is no discussion of the influence of culture on the stereotypes held by people from any particular country. Chapter 3 of "This is Culture" by Kajiura and Goodmacher^[10] is called "Stereotyping" and mentions in passing that "to be culturally sensitive, we must become aware of the stereotypes that our cultures have transmitted to us". The influence of culture on stereotypes that people from other countries may hold relating to Japanese people. Finally, in this sample of five textbooks focusing on intercultural communication, "Different Realities ~Adventures in Intercultural Communication~" by Shaules and Abe^[11] has a chapter devoted to stereotypes and does mention that stereotypes "include judgments about cultural others based on one's own culture", but the activities relating to stereotypes do not mention culture at all. Instead, the activities focus on making a distinction between stereotypes and generalizations and becoming aware of negative stereotypes held by individuals.

In summary, it should be noted that although some textbooks do refer to the connection between culture and stereotypes, the main focus of all the activities outlined above in which stereotypes form the topic for a class, or for a project of study, is on acknowledging the existence of stereotypes and learning about them. Frequently this means in practice an understanding of the distinction between a generalization and a stereotype and how generalizations are more acceptable in intercultural discourse.

4. Study of Stereotypes within the Intercultural Experience Practicum

This chapter proposes that stereotypes can be used to teach students about the influence that their culture has on their view of the world. By reaching a consensus regarding occupational stereotypes typically held by Japanese people, and then comparing that consensus with potential different viewpoints from other cultural traditions, Japanese students gain a deeper appreciation of how people from other cultures may view the same reality.

The focus for the stereotypes used in the class and for the better development of students' understanding of intercultural awareness is not cultural stereotypes, meaning ideas commonly held by the people of one country about the people of another country. After all, students may consider it obvious that the inhabitants of one country may historically have ridiculed the different language and values of the population of a neighbouring country, when any interaction between people from the two different nations would have been fraught with difficulty until one party from either side learned how to communicate in the other party's language. The stereotypes class in the Cross-cultural Experience Practicum focuses on occupational stereotypes and is an attempt to make students recognize the strength of the influence that their own culture has in producing the standpoint from which they view the world, and to help them realize that people in another country may regard the same subject matter in a very different way.

Anyone spending more than the briefest of stays in another culture and making the effort to enter into conversation with local people will quickly experience the realization that people from different cultures often have surprising stereotypes about each other's nationality. As a Briton who has lived in Japan for over twenty years, the author regularly experiences being either congratulated or criticized for either living up to, or failing to live up to, the expectations of Japanese people regarding someone who comes from the United Kingdom. According to data from the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs^[12], as of June 2016, the number of British nationals living in Japan was only 15,652, compared to a Japanese population in excess of 126 million^[13]. Although a large number of Japanese people have visited the United Kingdom it is still the case that for many Japanese people in general, and for the majority of first year university students in particular, upon making first acquaintanceship, the author is the first Briton with whom

they have had significant or prolonged contact. Outside of the classroom and in a variety of social settings, it invariably does not take long before one, or a combination, of the following stereotypes regarding people from, or aspects of life in, the United Kingdom are referenced by new acquaintances; Britons like to drink tea, Britons carry an umbrella everywhere, and London has a problem with fog.

The lesson that can be learned from such intercultural exchanges is that every individual you meet should be treated as an individual and that because every individual is unique, individuals naturally either conform to or do not conform to preconceived stereotypes regarding that individual's nationality, religion, occupation, or culture. Japanese first year university students often have only had a shallow experience of intercultural exchange and have typically not had a conscious experience of being expected to conform, or otherwise, to a stereotypical image.

At the start of the stereotypes class in the Cross-cultural Experience Practicum, the teacher shows the students page 43 of The Blue Lotus^[14], volume five in the Adventures of Tintin series, written by Belgian cartoonist Hergé. For the purpose of understanding what has happened in the story prior to page 43, it is necessary for the teacher to provide the students with a certain amount of detail relating to the background to the story.

The Blue Lotus was first published in 1934. The story is set in China in 1931, and, among other episodes, illustrates the life of Westerners in the International Settlement in Shanghai at that time. Farr^[15] writes that Hergé had been criticized for his portrayal of Soviets, Africans, and Americans, respectively in Tintin in the Land of the Soviets, Tintin in the Congo, and Tintin in America, but on page 43 of The Blue Lotus Hergé gives his readers a lesson in the foolishness of believing that everyone you meet will conform to the cultural stereotype for their nationality.

As the story is told on page 43, Tintin displays great courage and humanity by rescuing a Chinese boy from drowning in a flooded river. Tintin is amazed when the boy (Chang) asks why Tintin rescued him and had not simply walked on by. Chang explains that he has been brought up to believe that all white men are "devils" like those who had killed his grandparents during the Boxer Rebellion. Tintin tells Chang that all white men are not evil and proceeds to illustrate the absurdity of stereotypes and racial prejudice by explaining the beliefs which some of his contemporaries in Europe hold about Chinese people. Hergé carefully makes the misinformed stereotypes progressively more extreme. Tintin starts by describing general ideas held by Europeans about Chinese people such as that Chinese are "cunning and cruel" and that they are always "eating rotten eggs". Next, Tintin mentions Europeans who believe that the practice of foot binding for girls is still common, and finally Tintin says, "the same stupid Europeans…are even convinced that Chinese rivers are full of unwanted babies, thrown in when they are born".

All of these examples of negative stereotypes contrast strongly with the kindness actually shown to Tintin by Chinese people throughout the adventure. Tintin tells Chang, "You see, Chang, people from different countries do not know enough about each other," and that is surely the message which Hergé wishes to impress upon his readers. Chang quickly seems to understand this message, because in response to Tintin's increasingly outlandish examples of European stereotypes of Chinese people, Chang says, "They must be crazy people in your country!" After hearing the stereotypes which people in Europe hold about the reality of modern China known to Chang he is starting to realize how mistaken he was to hold prejudices against Europeans.

Having started the class with this example of how ridiculous stereotypes can be when based entirely on ignorance, the focus of the class shifts towards how stereotypes can differ depending on cultural background. The topics used for discussion deliberately avoid racial or cultural stereotypes and instead concentrate on stereotypes regarding common occupations for which the media frequently presents stereotypical depictions. For each category, students are initially requested to complete the sentences shown in the worksheet used in class (Appendix 1), individually in silence, before sharing their ideas through discussion with a group of three or four others. After discussion, the students in the group choose what they consider to be the most appropriate sentence ending from all the ideas collected, and the group then shares these ideas with the rest of the class.

It is usually the case that in cases where the class consists of a homogenous ethnicity, there is a significant duplication of the ideas suggested by the groups. Even with as few as four or five groups it is not unusual for two-thirds or even three-quarters of the groups to choose the same or very similar ideas, thereby reflecting the homogeneity of the class. It is also common for the ideas proposed by one group to be wholeheartedly accepted by the other groups and a feeling of consensus within the class is reached, which, once again, is evidence of cultural homogeneity.

At this point, after all the ideas have been harvested from the groups and a consensus agreed, the teacher intervenes to demonstrate that people from a different cultural background could conceivably have profoundly different stereotypical ideas relating to the occupations in question. For example, whereas Japanese students usually have a stereotype of accountants as being "clever", "financially secure", or "enjoying mathematics", the teacher shows the class the results of research by Kaplan^[16], a tax and accountancy training provider in the United Kingdom, indicating that the common stereotype for accountants in the UK is that "all accountants are boring". For the next category, policemen, Japanese students routinely produce a number of positive stereotypes relating to police officers such as all police officers "have a strong sense of justice", or all police officers "help people in need". However, the teacher proceeds to show the students an article on the CBS News website^[17] from 2014 which reported that 64% of black people in a US survey had "only some, very little, or no confidence" in the police.

For each of the occupations on the worksheet the teacher presents the students with examples of how the same occupation could be viewed by people from a different culture. To explore one more example from the worksheet, the stereotypes regarding nurses as held by Japanese university students will usually tend towards a consensus involving such ideas as all nurses "wear a uniform", "are angels", and all nurses "want to marry a doctor" is also a commonly produced idea. However, students are often surprised to be shown evidence from a US website called "the truth about nursing"^[18] which lists stereotypes of how nurses are portrayed in the media in North America. Far from being generally positive, the stereotypes listed on the website include nurses being bossy, intimidating, and oversexed.

In this way learning proceeds in two stages. In the first stage, students gain an awareness that many of the ideas that they unconsciously hold about the world are shared with other people from the same culture as themselves, and that the consensus reached is a result of the influence of culture on stereotypes and the students' shared cultural background with other Japanese students. In the second stage of learning, students realize that the stereotypes which they hold about certain occupations may not be shared by people from a different cultural background and that people from a different culture can look at the world from a completely different viewpoint. This second stage of learning is particularly valuable for students of the intercultural awareness major because it teaches them to be more open to cultural differences and therefore enhances their intercultural awareness.

5. Conclusion

It has been argued that stereotypes owe their existence to the fact that the world is too complicated, and human brain capacity too limited, for an individual to know every other member of the human race as an individual. However, the general truth of Tintin's statement that "people do not know enough about each other", and the potential for stereotypes to become a foundation for prejudice and discrimination show that it is important to at least try to treat every other member of the human race as an individual. Studying stereotypes is useful for students wishing to develop intercultural awareness because a significant cause of cultural misunderstanding comes from a failure to remember that people from a different culture may have a world view that is at variance to their own. Stereotypes are suitable in this regard because stereotypes develop less as a result of personal experience and more as a result of cultural upbringing.

In advance of, or in addition to, first-hand experience of cross-cultural interaction, the activities outlined in this paper can assist students to become more aware of the influence which the less obvious aspects of culture have on a variety of aspects of their lives. Students learn that the stereotypes they hold are influenced by their cultural upbringing and that people from another culture will sometimes hold completely opposing ideas to their own. Students are often unaware of the connection between culture and stereotypes or how stereotypes can differ according to cultural background. This is possibly due to the fact that when the topic of stereotypes is used in an educational context the focus is typically on the dangers of stereotypes and how stereotypes link to prejudice and discrimination. For this reason, a class, such as has been described in this paper is useful for students because it specifically draws their attention to the influence of culture on stereotypes. This knowledge means that students are better prepared to teach elementary schoolchildren about language, culture, and communication, and to teach them how people around the world may look at things in a way that is different to the consensus in Japan.

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概要

ステレオタイプと国際理解の関係--教室で体験するステレオタイプ形成における文化の影響

Senneck Andrew

本稿では、小学校の新学習指導要領の外国語活動および外国語の目標に示されている、言語や外国語の背 景にある文化に対する理解を深めるという点に着目し、言語と文化の関係に対する意識を高めるための教員 養成課程の授業の可能性を探る。はじめに平成29年度に告示された小学校学習指導要領の外国語活動および 外国語において、言語と文化に関する記述を概観する。次に、ステレオタイプ形成における文化的影響と、 国際コミュニケーション教育においてステレオタイプがどのように教育課題として取り組まれているかを述 べる。最後に、外国語活動および外国語科担当教員を養成するため山口大学教育学部国際理解教育選修の授 業である「異文化体験実習」内容を事例として、ステレオタイプが課題としてどのように取り扱われること が出来うるかを考察する。

キーワード:小学校、文化的展望、教育、国際理解、ステレオタイプ、教員養成

Appendix 1: Worksheet for class on stereotypes in the Cross-cultural Experience Practicum.

Stereotypes

For each statement choose one of the following verbs:

	are	like	have	don't like
Then complete the statement with a suitable adjective or noun. You can use a different verb if you wish.				
1. All accountants are/like/have/don't like				
2. All police officers are/like/have/don't like				
3. All firefighters are/like/have/don't like				
4. All taxi drivers are/like/have/don't like				
5. All professional baseball players are/like/have/don't like				
6. All nur	ses are/like/ha	ve/don't like		
7. All PE teachers are/like/have/don't like				
8. All university students are/like/have/don't like				