

Making the PYP Unit of Inquiry happen

Osaka International School Grade 4

International Mindedness and Collaboration

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1. Introduction

“The aim of IB programmes is to develop internationally minded people who, recognizing their common humanity and shared guardianship of the planet, help create a better and more peaceful world.” This is stated in the beginning of the IB learner profile. This reflects the mission statement of IBO⁽ⁱ⁾ directly. We consider the school to be a community of learners, and so we teachers also strive to be active, compassionate and lifelong learners who understand that other people, with their differences, can be right (*IBO mission statement 2002*).

The purpose of this paper is to report how the PYP transdisciplinary Unit of Inquiry happened through collaboration between a class teacher and an additional language teacher, and to examine the meaning of the relationship between international-mindedness and collaboration.

In the Japanese version, I looked at the “Overview of IB Programmes” in chapter two and the “Overview of PYP” in chapter three to clarify the meaning of “International-mindedness”, and in chapter four I explained how the Japanese program had made a positive change for implementing PYP. However, those parts were written for an audience not familiar with IB, hence in this English version, I omitted chapters two, three and four.

5. Definition and Process of “Collaboration”

Unlike the MYP/DP, PYP does not separate language study by first language and second language. It approaches any language study with the same goals, teaching methods, and assessment, whatever that language may be. This approach is appropriate because the process of language development in young children is fundamentally the same in any language. PYP emphasizes the importance of cooperation and collaboration between the student’s homeroom teacher and language teachers. Often the language teacher (ESL or Japanese) can help reinforce, enhance, and give support to the class.

The homeroom teacher creates a curriculum bearing in mind what good education practice is. Below are several factors that they must think about when developing the curriculum:

- Incorporating support from ESL (English as a Second Language) and Japanese.
- Use of technology (ICT). In recent years, the available websites for children have rapidly increased.
- Making use of any available resources in the local community.
- Connecting and creating a link between previous and current study.
- Making sure each unit is related to the host country.

Collaboration among the kindergarten teachers is easier, because sharing the same classroom, we are able to communicate daily and are also able to meet after the children have gone home. The collaborated approach in language development in particular is very advantageous and helpful. With the kindergarteners, the needs of the children can be met immediately and the importance and effectiveness of collaboration can be felt on a daily basis. However, for grades 1 to 5, it is hard to get a chance to talk to the homeroom teachers and therefore one must try to make time to go and see them.

The advice given during the PYP workshop was very helpful. As I mentioned earlier, I felt that collaboration in the 4th grade class went particularly well. I started to work with the 4th graders two years ago in 2004, but did not start teaching them directly until last year. I began to try to incorporate “collaboration” last year, and continued to do so this year, while improving on things that I had tried last year. This year, the fourth grade homeroom teacher, Mr. Powell wanted to make full use of any available local resources in the community. If we could collaborate effectively, then it would surely enhance the Japanese class as well, and would be very advantageous for us both.

Let us first take a look at the process of “collaboration”.

First, arrange times to hold meetings. At first glance, the term “collaboration” may be interpreted as something similar to team-teaching. However, these two things are different. Collaboration does not mean simply dividing up roles and teaching content. It is also different from putting in sync the pace and progress of classwork among different classes of the same grade. What, then, needs to be discussed in these meetings? The meetings should be held to create a curriculum, such as the one I have introduced in Chapter 3, PYP. Following is a step-by-step outline of the process taken in creating a curriculum.

“Unit of Inquiry” Creating a Curriculum

- What do we want students to learn? What is the concept-driven, big idea that we want the students to understand? (Understand by Design)
- What do students need to learn in order to understand the big idea?
- What strategies will lead to understanding?
- How will we assess what they have learned?

Once a curriculum has been made, the same curriculum can be revised and used the following year. This year we used the same unit from last year, so the content of our meetings went as follows:

Pre-Unit

- Sit down and plan together
- Facilitating resources and references
- Brainstorm assessment tasks
- Create a Macro-scaffolding (workbook)
- Use of technology

During the Unit

- Adjust according to various changes/happenings.

Post-Unit

- Review the unit
- Recommend changes for the future

Here is a summary of factors needed for a successful “Collaboration”.

- Both teachers must have an understanding of the PYP’s aims.
- Both teachers must be committed.
- Teachers should moderate their own ambitions, and balance with the other.
- Teachers should be flexible to any changes in plans that may occur.
- Teachers should be aware of each others progress, and adjust accordingly.
- Teachers should be tolerant, and be able to problem-solve.
- Teachers should be respectful of each other and be sensitive to each others needs.

In the 4th grade class this year, the homeroom class and Japanese class had different topics during the first unit. The second unit was “Living on the Edge” (an inquiry about natural disasters), and although the Japanese class did not touch on the scientific aspects such as the structure of the earth, we learned about the effects, human preparedness and responses to natural disasters along with the homeroom class. The third unit, which will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter, was “Let’s Celebrate”, an inquiry of rituals and celebrations. The homeroom and Japanese class worked together throughout this unit. The next unit “Japan, then and now” was also done together and the students studied the history of Japan from the Edo period up until present day, and learned how cultural changes can occur over time due to various reasons. We achieved a lot in each unit, but there were also things that we can improve.

Now, I would like to write about the unit that I felt I personally gained the most from.

6. PYP “Unit of Inquiry” A Report

Unit of Inquiry “Let’s Celebrate”

Central Idea: Beliefs and values of cultures are conveyed through rituals, celebrations and the way people live their lives.

An Inquiry into:

- the role of rituals and celebrations in society
- how rituals are used by cultures to mark beliefs and important events
- the significance of symbols used in society

6.1 Pre-Unit

On the first day back from break in January, the forth grade homeroom teacher, Mr. Andrew Powell (who will be addressed as Andrew from here on) and I met to plan the unit. This was the second time we were to collaborate on this unit, so we mainly discussed any changes and improvements we could make on the previous curriculum.

We decided that the students would research in their homeroom class how birthdays, New Years, significant milestone, and other events are celebrated in the world and look at the symbolic meaning of the items used in the events.

The students were first given the “Let’s Celebrate” PYP Unit of Inquiry workbook. The workbook gave the students a sense of the general flow of the unit, and also outlined in a chart the main concepts of the unit, giving the students an idea of what they should focus on. The workbook also served as a portfolio. At the end of the unit, the students divided up into pairs and each pair researched one specific Japanese ritual, looking at the significance and role of each ritual.

During this unit, the entire forth grade class took Japanese class together. Since the unit was to take place from mid-January to mid-February, we decided that for Japanese class we would focus on the “Oni” (demon) of the *Setsubun* festival and look at its symbolic significance.

Our time frame was just over four weeks, but because of various school events, we were only able

to use eight class times towards the unit. Out of the eight, two were spent at the library.

During our initial planning meeting, Andrew had asked if it would be possible for us to use any resources in the local community. If we could visit a shrine or temple, it would be a great opportunity to learn about the role shrines and temples have in the community. Furthermore, the students would be able to ask first-hand about all of the rituals that take place in the temples and learn about their meaning. I thought it was a wonderful idea but had no idea whom I could contact to plan such a trip at the time, so I replied that I would look into it. As it turned out, we were able to find a temple about 25minutes walking-distance away from the school through the referral of the IB Japanese History teacher.

6.2 Unit Content in Japanese Class

We first brainstormed various impressions students had of an *Oni*. Almost everyone knew of various *Oni*'s that exist in stories or for the *Setsubun* holiday. The idea that anything bad or scary is an *Oni* was discussed. But when the expression "Mother's become *Oni*" came up, a lot of students seemed to be confused. In Japanese custom, people sometimes use their fingers to make horns on their head in imitation of an *Oni* when they are describing someone's anger, but a lot of students were unfamiliar with this concept.

Next, we read The *Oni* Tales. It consisted of three different events in which an *Oni* appears. The goal was to show the different roles each of the *Oni* had in each event. This time I gave guided questions for reading comprehension verbally, but feel it would be better to have a written guide or worksheet ready for next time.

In order to fully understand the content, the students divided up into groups and created graphs, diagrams, and charts (Graphic Organizer), that summarized the main points. Through this activity, the students checked each other's understanding of the material by using different words and ways to express things, and summarized using their own words. Next, they were assigned to prepare a presentation where they would each present verbally. The quality of the presentations varied largely between the groups, but a lot of the students whose group did not do very well seemed satisfied, or received high feedback from the other students. For next year, a discussion on how to give feedback should be given prior to the presentations.

Perhaps because the children had already explored how people mark milestones and changes in life during their homeroom class, it seemed to click in their mind and make sense to them that rituals such as *Setsubun* are used to mark the changes in season. They also learned that a lot of the festivals and rituals in Japan are closely connected to the harvest, and that the community as a whole take part in the disciplining of children. It was clear that the students had grasped the concept of rituals having meaning when they started to explore further and wonder about the significance other rituals have on their own.

At the library, a picture-story show of The *Oni* who sank into the Ocean was given. The *Oni* in this story has a son and is a loving father-*Oni*. In saving human beings on the shore, the *Oni* ends up becoming a large rock in the ocean, along with his son. The students learned of a new and different "Guardian Angel" type *Oni*. They were also introduced to the *Youkai* Picture book and discovered that there are many other *youkai* other than *Oni*'s that exist, each symbolizing various things. They realized that although both *Oni* and *youkai* are imagined creatures, they have existed alongside people throughout time, carrying with them the hopes and prayers of the people who believed in them.

We also heard about the origin of the *Hina-Matsuri* festival at the library. The festival was started in the hope of protecting children from disease. They also learned that the traditional Japanese festivals take place on odd-numbered months on the same day of that month, because an

odd-number cannot be divided and hence considered good luck. In learning this, the students went through the various festivals, checking the numbers and exclaiming wonderment. They understood that by continuing to celebrate each festival yearly, it succeeds the culture and deepens the community bond among the people of that culture.

6.3 Changes made during the Unit (Field Trip)

It was around the end of January when we were about half-way through our unit. The temple we were planning to visit is on my way to work, and one morning I noticed a sign posted outside the temple. It read “February 2nd (Fri), 10:30 AM *Setsubun* Event”. I had heard about the “Fire-walking Ceremony” that they do for *Setsubun* at this temple about 15 years ago, but had never actually been.

When I saw Andrew that day, I told him about the event, telling him that I would’ve liked to have gone since it was open to the public, but it was on a Friday (3 days away). Andrew said instantly, “Let’s take the students and go on Friday!” I thought to myself, *Andrew... are you serious??* But I immediately called the temple and asked about the details of the event. The main event would take place at ten-thirty, and at around noon they would start to light the holy fire. The actual fire-walking ceremony would take place around one-thirty. I relayed the details to Andrew, and he quickly got permission from the school to make a school trip and distributed letters to the parents.

At around 12:30 on Friday, the 4th graders left the school. The IB History class (11th and 12th graders) ended up joining us. I was involved with the bean-throwing event with the kindergartners in the afternoon, so drove separately to the temple and joined the rest of the group at around one-thirty.

According to a newspaper article I read afterwards, roughly 3,000 people from the community attended the *Setsubun* Event, and about 170 participated in the fire-walking ceremony that is meant to drive away evil spirits and bring good health. A holy fire is lit in the temple grounds and once the fire dies down, people walk barefoot over the remaining burning ember. By the time I arrived at the temple, the ceremony had already begun and there was a line of people waiting their turn. I had not realized that the ceremony was actually something that anyone could participate in, and not solely for watching. Andrew and two high school IB students also attempted the challenge. I wanted to try myself, but was unable to remove the pantyhose that I was wearing underneath my pants... I guess I’ll have to wait till next year. Several of the 4th graders also wanted to try, but children were not permitted to walk. A father walked, carrying his child. Another older woman walked carrying her pet dog. When a physically disabled person took on the challenge, the kids cheered and voiced their support.

The teachers took photos and posted a slideshow on the school website later that day, so I was able to see the parts of the event that I had missed. Several mountain priests stood giving prayers, and a path approximately five meters in length was prepared to put on top of the fire. The fire looked incredibly hot. The mountain priests and priests then crossed the fire while chanting, with hands clasped in prayer.

6.4 Field Trip, Second Visit (Talk, Q&A, Meditation)

On the second trip to the temple, the students would have an opportunity to ask questions. They prepared their questions in a notebook, and then memorized and practiced asking the questions so they would be able to ask while looking at the other person.

Ten AM on February 13, the resident priest was waiting for us in the gardens. First, he taught us how to cleanse our hands and mouth at the *chouzuya*. The amount of water used must be only one ladle-full and one must also never forget to cleanse the handle for the next person. The perfection of the process of cleansing without being wasteful of the water was beautiful.

We removed our shoes and climbed the steps into the main building. The priest taught us the proper greeting for entering the main temple and told us we were not to step on the edge of the tatami mats when walking. After we were seated, the resident priest placed a fan in front of his knees. The folded fan looked like a stick. He explained that the fan has a variety of uses, but in this case, the fan placed in front of him was meant to create a “kekkaï” (boundary) between him and everyone else. This boundary was there to remind him that he did not yet know everyone well. Later when the children had a Q&A session, the priest explained the purpose of the “boundary” in more detail.

The priest began by telling us about the temple. Here is his story:

“It is said that this temple was built by Shoutoku Taishi in the year 613 AD. Shoutoku Taishi is the man who first brought Buddhism into Japan. At the time, this area was full of very large trees, and Shoutoku Taishi planned to use some of these big trees to build the Shitennouji Temple. One night, he was visited by God in a dream and was told, ‘Do not cut down the trees. Build a temple instead. Then, I will protect Buddhism for you.’ So, Taishi built this temple here and named it *Taishakuji*.

“In every temple, there is a primary object of worship called a *gohonzon* that protects the temple. For example, the *gohonzon* at Kiyomizu Temple is Senjukannon, the Thousand Armed Avalokiteshwara, and the *gohonzon* at the Yakushi Temple is Yakushinyorai, the Healing Buddha. Here, at Taishakuji, the *gohonzon* is Taishakuten, a protector of the Buddha. Taishakuten is a god from ancient India. It is said that upon meeting the Buddha, he became a protector of Buddhist law and teachings. This deity was thought to bring wealth and fortune, and considered a god of fertility. It was believed that he controlled the sun and made rain fall to help crops grow, making him also a god of weather. People believed that when angered, Taishakuten would throw thunderbolts from the sky.

“During the Edo period, there was a day called ‘Koushin-san’. Every 60 days, a day of Koushin would come. During this time, people believed that a worm called ‘Sanshi’ lived inside their body, and this worm could not be seen with the naked eye. Sanshi had the ability to know if you were an honest person. It watched closely to see if you behaved badly and the night before Koushin, it would leave the person’s body while they were sleeping, to tattle to the god in the heavens. Upon hearing of all the good and bad deeds of the person, the god would then shorten or lengthen that person’s life. People would try to avoid this from happening by not sleeping the night before Koushin, so that the worm would not be able to leave their body. This act of staying up all night is called ‘Koushin Machi’ (waiting for Koushin), and because it is hard to stay up all night, the villagers would all get together to keep each other awake. Even now, the little ‘Koushin zuka’ monuments marking places where people gathered to ‘Wait for Koushin’ remain in various locations.

“The god that decided whether he would shorten or lengthen a person’s life was Taishakuten. Whether you do a good deed or bad, the gods and Buddha are always watching.”

After the priest’s story, it was time for the students to ask the questions they had practiced. The children had been waiting in anticipation, and hands flew into the air. The Q&A session follows.

Questions about the fire-walking ceremony.

Q: Isn’t it hot walking across the fire?

A: Four years ago, I “fire-walked” for the first time. I acquired some terrible burns, and my feet blistered. It was very hard to walk for a few days. (The children look at each other in surprise) However, after that year I have not gotten burned and was fine this year as well. (Children look relieved).

Q: Why do you do the “fire-walk”?

A: Fire has the ability to drive out evil. By entering into the fire by your own will, you are able to drive away the bad things and evil that is within you. In Buddhism, it is believed that there are three poisons within the human soul: Greed, hatred, and delusion. The fire-walking is meant to drive out these poisons from the soul.

Q: Why was a sword used at the beginning of the fire-walking ceremony?

A: The sword is used to create the presence of the deity who holds a sword. This deity is called *Fudou Myouou* and is located in the meditation hall. We use the sword to help still our souls that may waver in the face of the fire before us. The fire-walking ceremony was started at this temple about 35 years ago by my grandfather.

Q: Why were the monks who fire-walked wearing fur on their bottoms?

A: The monks that were wearing fur are called *Yamabushi*, (Mountain priests) and are priests that are training up in the mountains. The fur around their bottoms is called *shirihiki*. The Mountain priests are not supposed to kill, but the fur was needed when sitting on the wet ground during training. They receive the fur from the animal, after praying for it.

Questions concerning the Temple.

Q: What other events, aside from *Setsubun*, do you do at the temple?

A: (The resident priest seems a little troubled in answering because there are so many) There are many different events, but every first Saturday of the month we have gatherings for local people to hand-copy sutras, and every third Sunday of each month, we have *Zazen* (meditation) sessions.

Q: Why are you not allowed to step on the threshold of the Temple Gate?

A: This is similar to the fan, but the threshold of the gate creates a boundary or “kekkaï” between the outside world and the inside of the temple. The temple is a place for religious training, so in respect of this space within the temple walls, one is not to step on the threshold. In Japan, “kekkaï” or boundaries represents drawing a line within one’s soul. By drawing a line inside yourself, you are differentiating one thing from another. For example, when meeting someone for the first time, or when showing respect to a superior, the use of the fan helps make that distinction in your mind. It is the same concept with the gate. When entering, you prepare your mind and soul to enter into this sacred space, and respecting the gate boundary helps you do so.

Q: What is a Torii?

A: Actually, temples do not have Toriis. The Torii is for shrines what the Sanmon (gate) is for temples, and creates a “kekkaï” for the inside and outside of a shrine.

Q: What is the difference between a temple and a shrine?

A: I believe a temple is a place for Buddhist practices, and a shrine is where the gods from ancient Japan are.

Q: Is the salt used to drive away bad spirits?

A: (The priest seems a little unsure of the question,) I do not really use the word “bad spirits” so I’m not quite sure what you mean. By “drive away”, are you asking about the avoidance of things that may be a bad influence? (The priest in turn asked the student, but the student was also unable to answer so we moved on to the next question. The priest was very attentive and considerate of the children. He answered every question honestly and his answers about religion and faith were carefully thought out. I had great admiration for his kindness and benevolence.

I wonder what “salt” the student had been referring to. Was it the “purifying salt” that is given after a funeral, or the little plates of salt that are often placed outside shops. If she was referring to the “purifying salt” it may be a good topic to study in exploring different perspectives and values because of the ongoing debate about the use of this salt. But this would be hard to do without some background knowledge. The significance of “salt” may be a good topic for the 4th graders – its use in Buddhism, its use in Shinto, etc. I thought this would be something worth discussing with Andrew.)

Questions about Priests.

Q: Can priests get married?

A: Up until the Meiji period, priests could not get married. But now a lot of temples think it is fine for priests to be married. In the old days, priests were not allowed to eat meat, or have a wife.

Q: Why do priests shave their heads?

A: Some priests actually don't. However, the reason we do is because a priest's goal is to reach enlightenment and truth. A priest devotes himself to seeking truth, and in this quest, hair can become a distraction, which is why we shave it off.

Q: When you first shaved your hair off, weren't you cold?

A: Within a week of shaving my head, I caught a cold!

Q: Has anything strange or mysterious happened to you since becoming a priest?

A: (After some thought) Before I became a priest, I was terribly ill. My father suggested to me that I become a priest, and since I have become one, I have stopped becoming sick. That is a thing of wonder.

Q: Do priests do things that regular people do, like shopping?

A: Yes, when we need to, we go shopping. We also wear regular clothing.

Q: What were you doing before you became a priest?

A: Just like anybody else, I went to school, played with friends, read books, listened to music, and lived a normal life.

Q: What do priests do?

A: People become *hotoke-sama* (venerable buddhas) after they die. We are often asked by families to come and give prayers for the deceased.

Q: Is it difficult to become a priest?

A: In the olden days, it was very difficult to become a priest, but it has become a lot easier now.

Q: What is a day in the life of a priest like?

A: (recalling a specific day) I clean, worship Buddha, eat, go to work, and just repeat that cycle. For meals we eat rice, miso soup, and *takuwan*. When eating, we are receiving the "life" of the plant, so when eating rice, we give thanks for the "life" of the rice that we are about to receive.

The students also asked whether the priest believed in *Oni's*. The priest took some time in making sure he understood the meaning of the question, then replied, "I don't personally believe in the existence of *Oni*, but I believe that in Japan the *Oni* is and has been an important representation of things that symbolize bad or evil things in our lives."

The students kept asking questions one after the other but we started to get short on time, so after having tea and *setsubun* beans, we moved to the meditation hall located down in the basement.

In the first room was the deity *Fudou myouou*. The priest explained, "The *Fudou myouou* holds a sword and with fangs, has a face like an *oni*. He is a deity that protects anyone who has come to train and worship. He is the deity whom I mentioned earlier when talking about the fire-walking ceremony. This *myouou* cautions the wavering soul before we enter the fire."

We entered the meditation room next to the first and sat. He told us that once a year, about 30 elementary school students come and spend the night there to do *zazen*.

"The *honzon* for meditation is the first syllable of the Sanskrit alphabet, 'A' and represents the *Dainichi nyorai* Buddha. *Dainichi nyorai* is the center of the universe, the cosmic Buddha. By opening yourself to *Dainichi nyorai*, you are able to reflect upon the cosmic universe and your place in it. Sit facing *Dainichi nyorai*, fix your posture, regulate your breathing, and breathe from your abdomen with your eyes half closed. Continue the deep breathing as you feel that you are a part of the universe. Everyone around you is a buddha, worthy of respect. You yourself are a buddha,

capable of love. The world and I are one, therefore I love all that is around me.... This is the lesson *Dainichi nyorai* teaches us.”

We only had about five minutes, but we were able to actually experience meditation. We all scattered around the room, facing the *Dainichi nyorai*. The priest taught us the correct way to sit and breath. “Focus your awareness. Expand the ‘A’ inside your mind, bigger and bigger.” It was only for a very brief time, but I felt my consciousness expand endlessly. We clasped our hands, and ended the session.

At around 11:30, we took a group picture in front of the main hall and left the temple. The one and a half hours had really flown by!

6.5 Post-Unit

6.5.1 Reflecting on the Field Trip

During this second visit, over two-thirds of the 21 students actually asked questions. Everyone had prepared questions, and although a lot of students could boldly ask questions without any hesitation, some of the students were more shy and a little hesitant to ask in front of everyone, and especially in front of people they didn’t know. Some of the children were not able to ask their questions because somebody else had already asked the same question. I had told the students to be careful about asking the same question twice because it would appear as if they had not been listening before. I’m afraid this may have made some of them a little nervous. The questions all came directly from the students, and it helped indicate how much the students had understood the central idea.

I’m sure that what and how much the students were able to understand from the talks at the temple were varied among the children. Reading the thank you notes the children wrote, it appears that there were many different things that left an impression on their minds, but one common thread was that each and every child learned something new and made a new discovery. But perhaps even this obtainment of new knowledge is nothing compared to the encounter with someone like the resident priest. The priest had a peacefulness and gentleness that could only be inherent if one could perceive the world with a broad perspective. His compassion and the love and peace that he clearly embraced were apparent in every word, in every motion that he took. Coming into contact with someone so serene and kind was an invaluable experience that will surely have a positive impact in the children’s development.

One thing I regret is that I was unable to hear the children’s responses immediately after the trip. I was also unable to tell Andrew about the details of the talks the priest gave us, and the exchange between him and the children. I truly wish I had been able to, but I had my hands full and was simply not able to find the time.

Now, I’d like to discuss the significance of our trip, which included the cultural event, the interview session, and the meditation experience, and look at how the three things tied together.

It does not need to be said how valuable the experience of watching the fire-walking ceremony was. No educational material beats actually being there and having a live experience. The students weren’t seeing pictures or a film through the lens of a camera, but were seeing everything with their own eyes, feeling the energy of all the people that were there. Actually hearing the sound of the fire crackling and the buzz of the people talking, with smoke stinging their eyes and making them choke. Then and there, they were becoming a part of the experience. Watching the people crossing the fire, bearing the heat and chanting, you could see the curiosity and questions bubbling up inside the children’s heads, one after another, deepening their inquiry.

The students knew on their first trip that they would be visiting the temple a second time. They knew that they would later have an opportunity to ask any questions they may have directly at the

temple. What sort of affect did this have on their learning?

If we had only had a field trip to the fire-walking event, that trip would have still been a worthwhile experience. The students would still have learned a lot. The fact, however, that the students also had an opportunity to ask the questions that were born out of this first experience was truly meaningful. They were able to go one step further and pursue clarification of their questions.

What if we had only taken the second visit to the temple as our field trip study? How would it have been different? One possibility is that the number of questions from the students would have been quite different. The questions concerning the fire-walking ceremony would most certainly not have arisen if we had not actually seen the ceremony.

I believe the quality of the inquiry would also have been quite different. For example, the students saw the fire and sword being used in the ceremony, thus becoming curious about those items. If we had visited the temple without knowing of the fire-walking ceremony, nobody would have thought to ask about the symbolic meaning of “fire”. Likewise, when we were told that the sword carried by the *Fudou myouou* had the symbolic meaning of protection, we were able to connect it to the use of the sword in the ceremony. If we had nothing to connect it to, the sword held by the *myouou* may have seemed less meaningful, like a simple decoration. By seeing the actual ceremony, connections could be made about the symbols of fire, *Fudou myouou*, and the sword.

Another thing that the two trips created was a common thread between the priest and the students. After seeing the ceremony, the students now shared knowledge about fire-walking with the priest. If the students had had no prior knowledge about fire-walking, the priest may not have talked to us about “the evil things within our soul”, and we may not have learned about “the three poisons”. The students were able to find meaning in the priest’s talks because they had a shared, common experience.

The final meditation experience was also extremely valuable. After listening to the priest’s talk in the meditation hall, the students all showed a lot of interest in what meditation is, and in the actual act of meditating. Every student really committed to the meditation session.

Beginning with the observation of the event, followed by a visit to talk to the priest and trying meditation, the entire field trip was an ideal experience.

This field trip that included two visits to the temple came about because Mr. Powell, the homeroom teacher, understands well the aim of PYP’s curriculum and was fully aware of what the students need. He also understands well where and how a successful collaboration can be made with the “Additional Language teacher”. He knew also how useful community resources could be. Furthermore, the first visit to the temple was something that transpired only because of his ability to be flexible, make snap decisions, and take action.

6.5.2 Things learned through Reflection

To be perfectly honest, when Andrew first asked about visiting a temple or a shrine, my immediate response in my mind was “it’s not possible”. Listening to Andrew explain why he thought it would be useful, I agreed that it was a very good idea. However, I did not think that any shrine or temple would be open or willing to have an elementary school field trip. In Japan, it is easy to find shrines and temples in any city or town. A lot of the Japanese population attend shrines and temples for *omiya mairi*, or make *hatsumode* trips when in need of luck or for various other times when they are in trouble. Many wish to have a Buddhist priest recite a sutra for them after they have died, so it is no surprise that shrines and temples are easily come by. But to request a field trip seemed like a wild idea to me. There was another reason for my thought that this was not possible. I didn’t think that the school could allow the students to be involved in something religion-related.

I contemplated why I had thought these things. I realized that my belief that temples and

shrines would reject elementary school field trips was simply my own presumption. I was basing my thoughts on preconceived notions that I had. I actually had it in my head somewhere that even calling a shrine/temple to ask about a school trip would somehow be rude. I'm not sure why I thought so. I can only think that even though Japan no longer has the class systems of ancient times, there is something culturally that has been subconsciously passed down to me.

I also had the notion that Japanese society would not accept students getting involved with religion. I believed that by taking students to listen to monks and priests talk, it would be as if the students were being preached to, and that would not be allowed. I know that school trips are often taken to famous shrines and temples, but the purpose of these trips are usually to sightsee the cultural treasures, not to hear a priest speak. I didn't think these two things would be taken the same way.

I also hesitated when we were thinking about taking the students to see the *Setsubun* fire-walking event. We had already had a set date to go and visit the temple, and although I realized that attending the event would probably enhance the second visit, I also questioned whether it would be socially acceptable for the students to visit such an event. The event was open to the public and people from the general public would attend. Perhaps people would think we were being disrespectful by bringing a bunch of children to the event. I worried that they may be bothered or annoyed by us.

I'm not sure if my hesitation and the preconceived notions I had are a typical way of thinking in Japanese society. But I do wonder whether a typical Japanese teacher would have thought to take students to a shrine/temple in order to learn about religion and cultural values.

I am glad that I paused to think on this. The more I thought about it, the more the importance and meaning behind visiting a temple or shrine became clearer to me. The reasoning behind my hesitation, (or shall we say in this case my prejudice) started to seem ridiculous. I spent close to two weeks agonizing in my head, and as I spent time thinking, I realized that I was holding myself back by my own preconceived notions.

On the trip itself, I was also taken aback by my ignorance and the amount of preconceptions and prejudices I found I had unknowingly had. Despite the fact that the sign said the fire-walking ceremony was open to the public, for some reason I had thought that it was something only certain people and priests could partake in. Also, I had only seen mountain priests in movies and television dramas, and had thought that they were people from ancient times that didn't exist anymore.

Knowing I should have some general educational knowledge about Buddhism and Confucianism, I had studied about them and read a lot. However, I had never wanted to get directly involved and never felt the need to fully absorb and comprehend either. Listening to the resident priest, I realized for the first time that I had been prejudice perhaps towards religion itself. I have relatives who are priests in temples, and have also lived for a short while in one so it was definitely not something I was unfamiliar with, but I had never tried to fully understand the mentality or philosophy before.

I was astounded by Andrew's open-minded and sagacity. He was always seriously thinking about how we could make use of the local community to the best of our advantage. Andrew taught me,

- to trust your colleagues
- the way a successful collaboration can be achieved
- the way to approach and pursue a connection with the local community
- the way to make full use of the local community as a resource
- to believe in the students strengths and abilities

and much more. I think by taking this kind of approach and fostering this way of thinking as a teacher, you are able to set an effective example of international-mindedness for the students.

In order to collaborate successfully, one must be willing to learn from each other. I think that by not ignoring Andrew's ideas and by being open with each other, we were able to have a very fruitful and rewarding field trip.

7. Conclusion

This past unit of inquiry made me reflect anew what it is to understand a different culture. There are several levels of comprehension when learning about a different culture. There is the indirect study of the culture through books, television, and other various forms of multimedia. Then, there is the understanding through direct experiences. Up to this point, the level of understanding can be categorized as the attainment of new information and experiences. Next is the deeper level at which one starts to break down the new knowledge and experiences, organizing, analyzing, and digesting the new information using metacognition. Finally, when the learner is able to correctly interpret the meaning of everything that is embodied by the culture, they have reached full understanding of that culture. Once a learner experiences this process of understanding a number of times, they then develop an ability to be able to apply this to any situation, without a need for the direct experience.

However, this process of understanding another culture is not easy. It is difficult trying to correctly and accurately understand the deeply embedded meaning that is rooted in each culture.

A learner, as a person, already has within them a certain set of values and interprets the world basing their judgment on these values. This set of values is made up through the past experiences of the learner and is therefore largely influenced by the society in which the learner belongs. A culture reflects the values held by that society, so when a learner enters into a different culture and tries to understand that culture through the lens of their own values, there is often a clash of values between the person and the culture. In some cases, the two may conflict so much that they are never able to get on the same wavelength and reach any sort of understanding.

How then are we to accept such differences between values? How do we deal with the clashing of cultures and find a common wavelength? What exactly is meant by "differences" in cultures?

A set of values is an anchor – the foundation for thought for any person. A culture develops out of a society and reflects the values of the people of that society. In turn, this established culture also continues to affect and influence the people of that society. To respect a certain culture means you respect the values reflected in that culture and the values held by the people of that culture. It is easy to say that one must respect other cultures, but when faced with the challenge of actually having to accept a different set of values, it can be very difficult.

Let us first think about how we develop our individual set of values.

In the course of human development, a person naturally acquires a set of values. It is important for a child to understand their own culture (whether they are monocultural or bicultural) because the values held by the culture around them becomes a foundation for thought, leading to character building and an establishment of identity. A child acquires skills needed in their social life, slowly learning through interactions with others. They first learn to be able to distinguish between self and others. As they get older, they begin to understand how to relate to other people's positions and stand in someone else's shoes. Through this development of self-awareness, a child also begins to hold a certain set of values.

A set of values is not something you can take off and on like clothing. Each value held within a person has a history, and it is directly linked to a person's identity.

In today's world where new information and news is abundant, we may have gotten more accustomed to seeing a different set of values at work. It is a fact that the number of people who stress the importance of having new cultural experiences is increasing. However, when actually faced with conflicting values, how does one respond? Nobody likes to have ones own set of values

rejected. People do not like to have their values crumble or break as it brings insecurity in their beliefs and sense of self. Hence, when faced with a foreign set of values, people often have an adverse reaction and reject, avoid or deny the different values.

What would happen if one were to accept a different set of values? Would they lose their own set of values?

It is not that there have never been instances of cultural acceptance. Historically speaking, there have been a number of situations where one culture accepted and took in a new and different set of values. There have been cases in which a country and its people have been forced to accept another culture, but there have also been cases in which a democratic country has chosen to accept another culture's values, basing their decision on whether it would be beneficial or advantageous for them to do so. The Meiji enlightenment and the Americanization of Japan after the war are both examples of such cases.

Today, in a world where globalization is steadily increasing, we cannot ignore the existence of foreign cultures or reject their values. There will always be things that conflict, but it is becoming increasingly important that we learn to be able to coexist with each other.

It may appear as though the affirmation and acceptance of a different set of values is a rejection of your own. It may even feel like you are even rejecting your own identity. However, one must keep in mind that it is possible for both views to be correct, and for both to exist simultaneously.

I believe that being "international-minded" is to be able to have the ability to accept your own personal values together with the values of others.

"International-mindedness" begins with students being able to understand and relate to their fellow classmates, and with teachers understanding, connecting, and working together their colleagues and the parents. IBO in general, and not PYP exclusively, encourages "collaboration" across all of its programs. They stress the importance of collaboration and among students, teachers and administrators, and within the school community as a whole.

Collaboration is not easy. It takes time and effort, and one must constantly overcome differences in values. But the reason IB continues to encourage collaboration is because it is the essence of education in the twenty-first century.

There are also various ways of thinking concerning the approach to education itself. There have been a lot of studies done about the conflicting methods of education between the east and the west⁽ⁱ⁾. These studies are done not so we can simply determine the relative merits of each, but to help us deepen our understanding. Both methods are good; neither one is better than the other. It is just a matter of being able to understand both. If we are able to collaborate the two ways of thinking and innovate a new method, it will hopefully help lead the children to international-mindedness a lot faster than us adults.

If the adults are able to step outside the circle of their own set values, and through collaboration, learn to understand, accept, and respect cultures outside of their own, the children seeing this will together also learn to be international-minded. In time, perhaps the children will grow to perceive the world as a single community, and through their international-minded way of thinking create a new, universal set of values common to the whole human race. I'd like to believe that this might someday come to pass.

NB:

(i) The mission statement of the International Baccalaureate Organization is:

The International Baccalaureate Organization aims to develop inquiring, knowledgeable and caring young people who help to create a better and more peaceful world through intercultural understanding and respect.

To this end the IBO works with schools, governments and international organizations to develop challenging programme of international education and rigorous assessment.

These programmes encourage students across the world to become active, compassionate and lifelong learners who understand that other people, with their differences, can also be right.

- (ii) For example, Thomas Kasulis (2002) argued that different cultural perspectives are not the result of different thinking but of different 'orientations' or 'takes' on reality. He has identified two orientations: intimacy (traditionally Asian) and integrity (traditionally Western). (*cited by Webster 2005*) Another example is that Van Oord (2005) identified two distinct learning configurations: conceptual thinking (the West) and performative learning (Asia), the first derived from religious orthodoxy ('true belief') and the latter from religious orthopraxy 'right practice'. (*cited by Walker 2005*)

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