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Efforts to promote a self-reflective and empathetic conception of cultural understanding at Morioka Junior College.

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Principle 10: Promoting inter-cultural dialogue and understanding, and the “unlearning” of intolerance, through education

While the elimination of intolerance and promotion of intercultural understanding is at the heart of many teachers’ efforts in their classes at Morioka Junior College this report will detail some aspects of two classes in particular. Both classes are the culmination of collaboration among teachers, and aim to provide the kind of meaningful learning experiences that aid students in developing a fertile mindset for cultural understanding.

Class Example 1: Seminar in Understanding Foreign Culture

Principle 10 of the Academic Impact played a major part in the learning experience of students in the class “Seminar in Understanding Foreign Culture”, students were given the task to investigate and introduce a state in the United States to their peers. Students looked at a number of state characteristics including basic descriptive information, surface cultural aspects such as local food and entertainment, as well as deeper elements such as sociocultural demographics, political ideals, and points of conflict, all with an emphasis on finding ways to discern residents’ values and attitudes from a diverse and sometimes novel array of resources and information. With teachers from America, Australia and Japan, the class offers chances for student to consider culture from both insider and outsider perspectives with ample opportunity for comparison, finding correlations, and the sharing of different viewpoints in general.



Alongside the uncovering of a multitude of diversity across different states that challenge any blanket conceptions of Americans and “Americanness” that the students may have had, the project



and resultant discussions provided a valuable forum for students to collaboratively explore the affective factors that shape culture and cultural identity in general. Far from being confined to discussions of the United States, the course provided a chance for students to build skills and critical thinking to apply in the future when confronted with an “other” culture and foster a mindset that approaches culture and cultural differences from a holistic, self-reflective, and empathetic perspective as protection from the potential manifestation of prejudice.



Class Example 2: Seminar in Understanding Foreign Culture

Another way in which Principle 10 becomes an integrated part of the students' studies at Morioka Junior College is in the class "Understanding the West" which is offered to first year students. The course introduces and applies a number of different perspectives or scopes through which to view cultural behaviors that may seem foreign, baffling or the more dismissive "strange" or "wrong".

Throughout the course, students are given opportunities to explore both "Western" and Japanese cultures through the lenses of "Tight" and "Loose" cultures, Hofstede's cultural dimensions, a number of socio-historical factors, different conceptions of politeness and social norms within different cultures, ideas of patriotism and nationalism, and the varying levels of identities that people adopt as cultural beings. As a major assignment within the course, students were encouraged to choose a cultural behavior that they had deemed as "strange" and endeavor to try to understand and empathize with it by investigating it through a selection of the above perspectives or, in the cases in which they were not applicable, to find their own perspective of analysis. These explorations formed the basis for student-produced video projects and plenary class discussions.

Alongside the rich and diverse array of classes at Morioka Junior College that aim to promote intercultural dialogue, these classes are intended to promote looking at cultural behaviors as not being inherently "right" or "wrong" or "normal" and "strange", but to develop a more nuanced and informed approach to differences in opinions and behavior and to develop empathy for others. This in turn will hopefully give students an experience that they can apply in intercultural settings in the future.

