

Creating a Context for Spiritual Formation through Interview Reports at Hokusei Gakuen Women's Junior College

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INTRODUCTION

Japan is frequently pictured as unfertile ground for the Christian Gospel. In general terms, this has been true in life in the nation as a whole, in Christian educational ministry, and (as a microcosm of both Japan and Christian educational institutions in Japan) at Hokusei Gakuen Women's Junior College (HGWJC). In order to address this reality and respond to what Christian faith terms the continuing call of Christ for believers to proclaim His message, the author has structured an interview report project which focuses on the conversion and subsequent Christian life of a local church member interviewee.⁽¹⁾⁽²⁾

In this project, HGWJC students personally interview someone within the Japanese cultural context who has embraced Christian faith. The discussion thus begins where the Japanese Christian was at one point in her life's journey, one often similar to where the student interviewer is. IERs then have opportunities to participate in a series of dialogues designed to build relationships of friendship and provide a context for students to encounter Christ and respond to Him personally in faith.⁽³⁾

THE INTERVIEW PROJECT

Purposes

The first purpose of the interview project involves primarily IEEs. It is equipping lay Christians for ministry, rather than depending on a small number of professional clergy to do the work of the church. The

design is to help churches recover their identity as evangelizing bodies in the local community, as disciples who respond in loving obedience to Christ's command to go into the world and proclaim the Gospel. A full recovery of this missionary identity by local churches, for example by those of their congregations who meet with HGWJC students in the interview context, would have as its outgrowth genuine educational experiences which address the students' spiritual needs along with the intellectual. Creating an environment in which this type of learning can occur is the interview project's second key purpose.

Goals

The interview project is conducted with several goals in mind. The first is to guide student IERs from a vague understanding of Christ to a clearer one. The second is the transformation of their negative attitudes toward religion into a more accepting view of faith in Christ. Third is moving IERs past encountering the Christian faith merely cerebrally (in abstract form) and into knowing it experientially (in a more concrete form) through discussions with people whose lives have been transformed by faith. Fourth is to help IERs go beyond conceiving of the Bible's teachings as relevant only on a universal level and move to understanding Scripture as God speaking personally to them and others in their life context. Fifth is to give IEEs practical experience in telling the Gospel through their own life experiences and witnessing to God's work in their lives.

Strategy

The key strategy is matching IERs with IEEs who are for the most part in the same demographic groups. Age is one factor. Of the total of seventeen IEEs, twelve were under age thirty; two between thirty and forty; one between forty and fifty; and two between fifty and sixty. In this year's group of fifty-six IERs, all but two were twenty or twenty-one, and only one was older than twenty-three. Forty of them talked with IEEs who are in their late teens or twenties, ten with IEEs in their 30s, three with IEE in her 40s, and three with a partner in her 50s. Gender and ethnic identity are also considerations. All IEEs included in the report and survey analysis were female Japanese.

Methodology

Coordinators

In order to carry out this strategy, AU began by securing commitments from church members to serve as coordinators and IEEs. In mid-April five church members were contacted who (after prayer, reflection, and consultation) AU considered would serve well as coordinators. All were already familiar with the interview project.

When they agreed to serve in this capacity, each received a letter containing the following materials: a list

of the roles they would be expected to play, letters written for people who had never served as IEEs, letters written for people who had, lists of questions students had asked IEEs in the past, guidelines for giving testimonies, and a form for agreeing to be IEE.

Coordinators were contacted again during the second week of classes after it became possible to count roughly how many IEEs would be necessary. Coordinators received the number of IEEs which AU expected to be needed from their church. The number was one per church. The coordinators then passed on to IEEs the relevant materials they had received. In addition, three HGWJC staff members were asked to serve as IEEs, receiving interviews at school if necessary. They all agreed.

Criteria for Selecting Potential Interviewees

In addition to the demographic criteria discussed above, AU allowed three primary factors to guide selection of people to ask to serve as IEEs. The first was geographical. Believers from churches spread fairly evenly over the Sapporo area were sought out, so that IERs (who often do the interviews at church after Sunday worship) would not have to travel especially long distances to meet their partners. Hopefully, this would later make it easier for IERs to keep contact with IEEs and become involved in church life.

The second factor was institutional: a HGWJC connection. That is, many IEEs chosen were or had been staff members or students at school. Three were current students, five recent HGWJC graduates, three current Hokusei Gakuen staff members (two of these also alumni), and one the wife of the Religious Affairs Director of HGWJC. Forty-nine of the fifty-six total IERs (all but those who requested their own partners) spoke with IEEs who had some direct link with HGWJC. Particularly because so many students had in the past expressed aversion to going to an unfamiliar place such as a Christian church, it appeared an asset to have at least one HGWJC staff member or graduate in the church who could welcome visiting students and help them feel at home.

The third factor was theological. Churches with strong evangelical elements in their tradition were chosen, including Baptist, United Church of Christ in Japan (*Nihon Kirisuto Kyodan*, in this case Methodist-affiliated), Church of Christ in Japan (the Presbyterian-affiliated *Nihon Kirisuto Kyokai*), Christian Evangelical Church Association, and one independent church (clearly evangelical in character). These were chosen largely because Hokusei Gakuen has historically been part of the evangelical tradition, the interviews themselves are designed for evangelism, and it happens (not surprisingly) to be these churches of which those at HGWJC who do come to faith most often become members.

Preparing for the First Term Interviews

Introducing the Project to Interviewers

AU explained the interview report system to all second year students on first day of class (April 11-16) and

told them to read about it in their syllabus materials before the next class. Students were asked to request an interview partner the following week if they chose this report.

When the time came to do so (April 18-23), only five signed up. AU elected not to enforce the sign-up deadline strictly but made no guarantees of avoiding scheduling problems or resulting late submissions, which would be the responsibility of the student. Extensions of the sign-up deadline in the third class (April 25-27, May 7) and again in the fourth (May 9-14) were given, particularly in light of the way students in past years had tended to delay before deciding about whether to participate in the project. Enough potential IEEs had already informally agreed to take part so that there was room for considerable expansion of the number of IERs without overloading IEEs. Eventually, seventeen second year students out of 183 students taking English Bible classes that term expressed a desire to participate in the interview project.

Introducing the Project to Interviewees

By April 20, a Friday, AU had sent letters to coordinators requesting specific numbers of IEEs. This allowed enough time for coordinators to contact potential IEEs that weekend (most at church on Sunday, April 22), which would give IEEs six days to consider and agree to being partners in this project. In one case, AU waited until Sunday and met the coordinator directly at church, then received at that time her agreement to be IEE herself and arrange for another IEE to participate in the second term.

Matching Interviewers and Interviewees

Whenever possible, two IERs from the same class were matched with one IEE, rather than requiring one-on-one interviews. The intent was to lower the anxiety which some students had expressed in the past about going alone to meet a stranger. In this year's first term, only two IERs were matched so that they could not go together with another student to meet their IEE partner (one IER requested a one-on-one interview, and one lived in a more distant area where no other students lived). The locations of the meeting places were all also, with these two exceptions, at a church near IER's home.

The student who commuted from a long distance to HGWJC, as in past similar cases, was matched with IEE at school and allowed to hold the interview there. Though this did not allow her to experience going to a church to meet a partner as many other interview project students did, it did contribute to school life by creating an occasion for Christian witness to help form the school environment. Also, although this variation in methods of matching partners created a somewhat different environment and learning process for this student than the others, this exception was allowed for the reasons that practicality demanded it and that the church attendance was, while highly desirable, a secondary rather than primary objective of the interview project.

Students were also given a chance to request on the sign-up sheet that they receive the same partner as they had the previous term, or to write that any partner would be fine. Only one requested a repeat interview, and

she was matched with the partner she requested. In giving their names, student numbers, and addresses, students signed up for the project under the following terms: "I choose to do the interview report this year. (I also agree to answer survey questions which will be used in [AU]'s writings on this project [without my name being written].)"

Only one IEE had returned her project participation agreement form by the requested April 27 deadline. However, five had already given verbal consent, which was enough so that those students who in the second class had requested IEE partners could be given them. An ample number (eight) of IEE project participation agreement forms did arrive later, and no problems emerged in obtaining sufficient numbers of IEEs.

In the third class (April 25-27, May 7) students received their partner matches, contact information, lists of questions students had used in the past, and a reminder to tell and/or write their names clearly for their partners. Anyone who signed up for the project late or who had been absent from the previous class received the partner contact information and instructions by the fourth class (May 9-14). AU posted a notice on the school bulletin board calling to his office those students who had not yet received all the information on their partner in order to allow for the most possible time for scheduling and conducting the interview. Only one came before the next class and received the information.

Exceptions

The most common exception to the normal pattern of interview partners' participation in the project was in cases of late sign-ups by IERs. In one case, two students made late requests (in the third class) to participate in the interview project. They also requested that they be able to do the interview very quickly, not waiting until the Golden Week holidays were finished (ten days from that day) in view of the mounting time pressure as the report submission deadline approached.

In order to avoid delaying the process further and possibly decreasing motivation, AU suggested that they come to his church the next Sunday. Several ladies who had been IEEs in the past were there, and it was very likely that one of them would be able to serve as a partner. The first one asked did, in fact, agree to participate in the project that day, though without the benefit of reading this year's updated version of the introductory materials. She and her student partner performed the interview without any apparent problems.

One student failed to sign up but decided without informing AU beforehand to come along with her friends (the same two just mentioned) to her interview. This made three students for one IEE, which went beyond the limit set for the project in the syllabus instructions. It happened to be AU's church which these students visited, so in response to this problem, he briefly explained the project on the spot to a church member and asked her if she would serve as a partner. She graciously agreed, and the two interviews were held rather than one.

Another student, when she noticed her friend preparing for the interview, made a late request (on May 7, the third class) that she be allowed to do the report, also. Without further delay, she was matched with her

friend's partner.

Two more students made late requests (on May 9, the fourth class, or two weeks before the due date). One requested a friend as IEE. AU mailed information and project participation agreement forms to that prospective IEE the same day, then gave the student permission to do the interview when the authorization from IEE arrived. Permission was given to the second student also to interview IEE who happened to be available to take one more partner.

Even in the fifth class (May 16, or one week before the report deadline), one student brought the name of a Christian she knew and requested her as a partner. AU chose to allow this, provided the student take responsibility for scheduling and any grade deduction for late submissions. The next day, IEE was contacted by telephone and sent explanatory materials, then given authorization in time for the student to schedule an interview and submit the report on time.

Two students who had studied overseas requested native English speakers as their partners. AU explained that one key purpose of this project was to eliminate many of the cultural barriers which make understanding the Bible and Christian faith difficult. There happened to be a Japanese woman who had been IEE in the past and who had requested that she be allowed to do her interview in English. AU suggested her as a partner and sent her (by way of her church's coordinator) the written information on the interview project.

Although she agreed initially, she later wrote a letter declining. In light of these circumstances, rather than delay the process, AU decided to match them with a foreign partner, a man whom one of them happened to know through a Bible study group of which she was a member. It would then be determined later whether or not to include or exclude the data from the work of these IERs in the project.

Another case of changes soon before the due date appeared when two prospective IEEs (who had given verbal consent to being partners but not yet mailed authorization papers) contacted AU (on May 8) to say that they could not participate in the project this year after all, due to changes in their work schedules. Because the report deadline was approaching rapidly, in rematching the students who were scheduled for interviewing one of these two, AU paired these IERs with school staff members who had given consent to doing interviews, rather than taking further time to seek out new partners.

Several prospective IEEs were late in returning their project participation agreement forms (five had not yet sent formal agreement as of May 17, the day the first reports were due, or in other words, partners for eight of seventeen students). Each of these had given verbal agreement to participating in the project (or their church's coordinator, or the student who requested the friend as IEE had given it for them), and the lack of formal authorization presented no specific problems. Nevertheless, AU did remind the appropriate person (the local church coordinator, student who requested IEE, or IEE herself) to send the form, though four of these never arrived.

One student stated one week before the report due date that she had not been able to contact her prospective

partner, despite several attempts to phone her. AU instructed her simply to keep trying but, if she was unable to schedule an interview in time for the deadline, to say so, and the deadline would be extended in this case. She in fact did this (three days before her report deadline) and was instructed to continue working to set the schedule and report as soon as she was able. She did so (along with the other student assigned to this IEE) without any grade penalty.

Conducting the First Term Interviews

Virtually all students indicated in their reports that the interviews were planned and conducted on schedule. The only exceptions were the two just noted.

On the day reports were due, IERs were reminded that they had the option of continuing to interview and using part of their class time for this work. AU decided also to give the option of doing a first-time interview either to students who had not participated in the project so far, or to students who wanted a different interview partner from the one they had finished interviewing for the report. This meant amending one line in the course syllabus, which AU read through again in class and explained the minor change in both English and Japanese.

The first week this option was available, one student said she would like to continue a conversation with her interview partner. The second week, two more expressed interest in doing an interview for their first time. They received the contact information for a staff member so that they could choose this form of study in the following class. However, they failed to follow through with this plan, and no others signed up for this type of interview work in any of the remaining classes. So no students actually continued or began new interviews in the first term.

Preparing for the Second Term Interviews

Introducing Interview Reports

Second term interview work was conducted essentially the same as in the first term. All the coordinators and IEEs had already been procured at the beginning of the first term, except for one alumnus who agreed before the second term to participate if needed. In the first week of classes (September 7-12), the interview reports were introduced to all first year English Bible I students and the twenty-two second year students taking English Bible III. After the second week of classes (September 18-21), AU began contacting IEEs who had already agreed to participate in the project for the second school term. In a letter, they were thanked for their willingness to be a partner and reminded that a call from one or more students would be coming soon. IEEs not needed in the second term received a "thank you" letter. AU requested all IERs to complete a survey regarding the interviews.

Matching Partners

The same essential criteria for matching partners was utilized as in the first term, except that for first year students it was not possible to request a partner they had interviewed before in this class. Also, in the second term, five students who signed up for the project lived in relatively distant areas where there was no church of which any of IEEs was a member. These students were matched with IEEs at HGWJC and allowed to do the interviews at school.

All but one of those who chose to do the report were first year students. The second year student requested that she receive a partner from a different church than in the first term, which she did.

Exceptions

Twenty-one students signed up for the interview report on time (in the second week of classes). In addition, in the following weeks, nineteen others indicated a desire to participate in the project. This brought the total to forty students (out of 165 taking Bible classes this term) who signed up for the project and were matched with IEEs. Students continued signing up for the project until two days before their class's due date.

Two IERs requested a friend as their IEE. After sending explanatory materials and receiving consent, AU matched them with her.

Two others located an older Christian former teacher of theirs and conducted an interview with him without consulting AU. This was disallowed as part of the interview project and another IEE was given, but these students did receive bonus points for the report which they had already completed on their own.

Matching with IEEs those who signed up late presented three problems. First, some of these IERs lived in distant areas, making an IEE match with someone in a church near IER (the basic arrangement for the interviews) extremely difficult. Second, when students continued to request interview partners, they exceeded the numbers which IEEs had said they would be available to receive. Third, time remaining before the deadline was insufficient for contacting new potential IEEs. In light of this situation, when no IEEs were available otherwise, AU recruited four additional IEEs from among the current students, so that late-coming IERs were matched with IEEs and allowed to hold their interviews at school. A total of fourteen IERs who signed up late for the project did so, in addition to the four originally scheduled to interview at school.

Two students were unable to arrange an interview time because of their IEE's busy schedule. In view of these circumstances, AU gave an extra week for completing the work, which they did without any grade reduction.

Conducting the Second Term Interviews

Interviewer Reflection Reports indicate that all of those who signed up for the project did actually perform the interviews.

Continued Dialogue between Partners

Although two students expressed interest in continuing interview work during class time, they asked to do it a week from that day. When that time actually came, they had changed their minds so that, as in the first term, no students in fact opted to use class time to do interview work.

THE INTERVIEWER REFLECTION SURVEY

Purpose

In addition to the more freestyle Interviewer Reflection Reports, Interviewer Reflection Surveys were conducted as a means of shedding light on the interview process through a more structured examination. Having finished the interviews, students answered survey questions, which were an attempt to move beyond the more subjective Interviewer Reflection Reports and document as objectively as possible what more enduring effects (if any) these interviews have had on those who participated in them. The survey's purpose was to measure the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the interview experience in a way both more circumspect and precise than the reports (which had been written in English and with IERs' names on them).

Goals

The central hope for the survey results was that they would indicate whether or not, and to what extent, IERs believe the interview process is an effective means of education (including both intellectual and spiritual formation) for themselves. Specifically, the survey's goals were (1) to indicate what changes the interviews have helped bring about in the interviewers' impressions of Jesus Christ (and related impressions of Christian faith, the God of the Bible, IEEs, Christian people in general, church, and the Bible), as well as (2) to reveal through what processes this change has occurred.

Hopefully, this information would be instructive in planning how to introduce Hokusei Gakuen students and cultural insider local Japanese Christians to each other in the future through interview reports and other means, as well as nourish the development of strong relationships between them. The survey is also aimed at providing information useful for preaching and teaching, especially training local Christians in how to share their testimonies relevantly and effectively.

Strategy

The means of achieving these goals was asking for feedback from those IERs who had participated in the project. The survey's design was to focus their attention especially on prior expectations, changed perspectives, how change occurred, any problematic areas, and an overall evaluation of the interview process.

Methodology

First Term Survey

Conducting the Survey

On May 24-30, one week after IERs submitted their interview reports, AU asked them to complete the follow-up surveys in class. In addition to the written instructions, AU briefly introduced the surveys orally in both English and Japanese. As IERs were all in AU's field of view nearly all the class time, AU was able to monitor them as they completed the surveys to ensure that no one consulted with another while completing them.

A logistical problem emerged as AU administered the survey to the first class's IERs. The fact that the number of IERs in each class was quite small made it difficult to safeguard their anonymity. It would be relatively simple to guess which IER had written what if AU had simply collected the surveys after class. In order to ensure privacy as much as possible, AU instructed IERs in the first two classes to bring the completed surveys to his office, unsigned, anytime during the week before the next class and put them under the door. (For this same purpose, AU asked IERs in the first class to wait until the following afternoon, until after another class of IERs had met, so that their forms would be randomly mixed with those of another class.)

IERs had approximately one hour of class time to complete the surveys, and most did so, well before the end of class time; however, several IERs took even longer and so were not finished when the end of class arrived. In these cases, AU had IERs put their forms in an envelope containing other completed forms (so that theirs would not be easily identifiable) and asked them to put their surveys in it until the next class, when they would receive more time to complete the surveys. AU then sealed the envelope and opened it during the following week's classes (May 31-June 6) to return the survey forms to IERs for completion. Several students who had been absent the previous week also took the survey this day. Some IERs completed the forms at that time, with no apparent trouble. A few did not finish in this class period, either, after having (including the previous class) nearly two hours' time for this activity. AU collected these forms in the same fashion as the first week and had IERs in the following class locate their forms from the envelope and continue completing them.

AU repeated this process in class each week until almost all IERs had completed the survey. Of seventeen total IERs, all except four had finished the survey by June 5 (two weeks after the report due date). One (who had been absent the first time the survey was administered) completed it on June 18, four weeks after the report deadline. Another IER had answered parts of several questions but did not complete them until the July 4 class (seven weeks after the first day on which surveys were given). Two IERs never submitted a survey.

Continuing Dialogue with Interviewees

After completing the first interview, two IERs said they would like to interview another partner, and another IER expressed interest in continuing her interview work with the same IEE. AU arranged for these interviews

to be held; however, the students changed their minds and selected other types of work during class time instead.

Second Term Survey

Wording of the Survey

The survey designed for second term students choosing to do the interview was identical to the one given in the first term, with two exceptions. AU inserted the phrase "in Japanese" in the preliminary instructions in order to make it clear that the questions were to be answered in Japanese rather than English. (One first term IER, whose survey was eliminated from the study for this and other reasons, had written her responses to the survey in English.) The second alteration was the deletion of the phrase "whether it was last year or this year" from the instructions for first year students, which would have been irrelevant for them.

Conducting the Survey

The second term surveys were introduced and administered in essentially the same way as those in the first term. The week of classes after the report due dates (October 19-24), AU administered the survey in class to the students who had taken part in the project.

In the first class to receive the survey, AU mistakenly gave IERs the first term's version of the survey. To ensure that the modifications had no effect on IERs' responses, AU brought the correct version of the survey to class the following week (October 26), gave it to IERs with the differences in the points of phrasing highlighted. IERs were then asked to retrieve their surveys from the envelope containing all those collected to date, look over the correct version of the survey, and make any changes or additions they felt were needed. They did so and returned the forms to the envelope.

Another practical problem emerged when, despite AU's instructions in Japanese and English to the contrary, one IER took the survey form with her and finished it after class, bringing it about two hours later to AU's office to turn in. AU had her put the form in an envelope together with the others submitted to that point so that it would be mixed with them and not distinguishable. This decision, made without the benefit of time for forethought, created the possibility that data from this survey (one of twenty-six total) were included in appendix 2 below, despite its being completed without full supervision.

Content and Analysis of Interviewer Reflection Survey Results

The following discussion deals with IERs' answers to the survey questions (appendix 1). Refer to appendix 2, where question two data are grouped and broken down for analysis, as well as appendices in later editions of this paper. These will include appendices of responses as IERs originally wrote them in one case and, in another, a more detailed overview of the survey results question by question.

Apparent Misunderstandings by IERs

On occasion, IERs' comments reveal that changes in their impressions of Christian faith-related matters have come about through apparent misunderstandings of Christian teachings or practice. However, AU has made no attempt to strain out these misperceptions from the survey data for several reasons. First, one key intent of the study is to measure IER perceptions, whatever they may be. Second, making judgments on whether growth is positive or negative is extremely prone to subjectivity. Third, positive growth in some cases may only become possible after the individual engages in the process of internal debate (including resistance and questioning in order to work through areas of misunderstanding). Fourth, even a permanent misunderstanding of a particular teaching could lead to an open general attitude toward Christian-related matters in general, which could open the door for later encounters with faith to have their impact on IER. In light of these factors, apparent misperceptions have been included in the totals for positive change if the wording makes it apparent that IER considers the change positive. Relevant sections of appendix 2 note the number of IERs whose comments appear to reflect misunderstandings.

Question by Question Summary⁽⁶⁾

1A."Before doing this report, had you ever talked with a Christian person directly about her or his faith? Yes 10 No 16" Responses reveal that the majority of those performing the interviews this term are taking their first direct look at Christian faith through the lens of personal conversation. Of the ten IERs who had this previous experience, three had participated in the interview in their first year of English Bible.

1B." Before doing this report, had you ever written a report of this type? Yes 5 No 21" Answers show that this type of learning experience is clearly a new one for the vast majority of students. A relatively small number of IERs had written this type of report before, and many students had never or rarely been asked to write (even in Japanese, much less in a second language) reports before entering college. Writing the interview report is a considerable challenge academically for many students, especially those in their first year. The difficulty of the process in terms of language proficiency undoubtedly affects IERs' ability to express themselves in the English reflection report and, in the case of at least some, the Japanese language survey, as well.

1 C."Do you consider yourself to be a Christian? Yes 0 No 26" Responses indicate that all IERs are non-Christian. The examination of the surveys is limited to non-believers.

2 A."Before doing your first interview for English Bible, what were the impressions you had of Christian faith?" Almost all IERs indicate that they had previous impressions of Christian faith; no one states clearly that she came into this experience without preconceptions. Only one IER notes that these previous impressions of Christian faith were positive. The others are roughly evenly divided between negative and ambiguous/mixed impressions. The largest group is those with clearly negative views. Among the key specific previous

impressions are seeing Christian faith as the following: rigid; negative in a general sense; unbelievable, unreliable, and/or unrealistic; difficult to understand; and not interesting.

2 B. "Did these impressions change (between the time before your first interview and now)? If so, what impressions of Christian faith did you have after finishing this project?" Almost all IERs indicate increasingly positive impressions of Christian faith as compared to before the interview process began. Over half of IERs answering this question relevantly indicate increasing understanding of Christian faith, and half show greater affirmation. Only a few reveal emerging impressions or extensions of formerly held ones. However, approximately two in three reveal reversals in their impressions, most of these clearly moving in a positive direction. Among key specific changes in impressions are the following: from "different from me" to "like me;" from "negative in a general sense" to "more positive;" from "not interesting" to "interesting;" and from "far" to "near."

2 C. "If your impressions changed, describe as best you can this process of change. What led you to receive a different impression?" IERs' answers reveal that half or just over half of those responding relevantly have impressions which have changed through seeing each of the following: personal character of IEE, life experiences of IEE, concepts with which IER became familiar during the interview, IER's own experiences which the interview brought to light, and IER's identifying with IEE. Key among IEEs' life experiences which IERs note as impressive are the times of adversity in which faith helped IEEs cope.

CONCLUSIONS

There is nothing to indicate that any IERs have already made commitments of their lives to following Christ through the interviews, though this may happen at some point in the future. No IERs elected to continue dialogue with IEE as part of English Bible classes, though twenty-three of forty first year IERs later chose to continue through the interview report in the following year's class.

Nevertheless, results of IER surveys, IER reports, and parts of IEE surveys support each other in indicating that students in many cases have gained greater intellectual understanding of Christian faith, which will then allow a more informed personal choice about accepting it or not. Many express more accepting attitudes toward Christian faith. Some IERs indicate that the interview experience has aided them in the process of seeking a solid base of beliefs on which they can construct their lives. In this sense, the project has found a degree of success in achieving its original goals.

IERs make it evident that educationally, learning has taken place which is in line with the spiritual and evangelical institutional goals of HGWJC and the principles of Christian education and ministry which the Bible lays down. The interviews have to an extent succeeded in moving student IERs past encountering the Christian faith merely cerebrally and into knowing it experientially, in more concrete forms through the lives

of IEEs. The interview process has also helped IERs go beyond conceiving of the Bible's teachings as irrelevant to their lives or meaningful only on a universal level, moving toward understanding Scripture as God speaking personally to them in their life context. Students have progressed from a vague understanding of Christ to a clearer one.

In terms of cross-cultural communication of the Gospel, the interviews have made a contribution toward students' hearing the Gospel in a more culturally congruent way. Opportunities for Christian witness primarily from young Japanese woman to young Japanese woman have grown out of the "soil" of the local cultural context rather than being artificially introduced from outside sources.

Put in Christian terms, God is using this process to foster a degree of spiritual renewal of life in both HGWJC and local churches. He is doing so by bringing the Gospel in a culturally relevant and understandable way to Japanese who have not yet encountered Christ and giving them a clear opportunity to respond to Christ in faith and loving obedience. This project has also given IEEs practical experience in telling the Gospel through their own experiences and witnessing to God's work in their lives. This ministry has, in turn, enriched their own spiritual lives, they note.

APPENDIX 1

ENGLISH BIBLE INTERVIEW REPORT SURVEY

Second Term, 2001

This survey's purpose is to give the English Bible teacher a deeper understanding of the students' learning process, while also allowing those who participated in the project to continue learning through reflection on their experience. Hopefully, it will result in more relevant and effective learning in future classes. It will also be used as a part of a research project which Allison is conducting.

Please do not write your name on this paper. Answer (in Japanese) as honestly as you can. If these pages do not allow enough space to write a complete answer, please use the blank page which is included with this one. Be sure to note which question you are answering.

1. Background

A. Before doing this report, had you ever talked with a Christian person directly about her or his faith?

Yes ____ No ____

B. Before doing this report, had you ever written a report of this type?

Yes ____ No ____

C. Do you consider yourself to be a Christian?

Yes ____ No ____

[Questions 2 through 6 ask you to compare your impressions before your first interview and now--first about Christian faith, then about Christ and the Bible's God, then about your Christian partner, next about the church, and finally about the Bible. In this case, "impressions" includes your ideas, feelings, and opinions. "

(First" means the first interview you did after coming to this junior college.]

2. Regarding Christian Faith

- A. Before doing your first interview for English Bible, what were the impressions you had of Christian faith?
- B. Did these impressions change (between the time before your first interview and now) ? If so, what impressions of Christian faith did you have after finishing this project?
- C. If your impressions changed, describe as best you can this process of change. What led you to receive a different impression?

3. Regarding Jesus Christ or the Bible's God

- A. Before doing your first interview for English Bible, what were the impressions you had of Jesus Christ or the Bible's God?
- B. Did these impressions change (between the time before your first interview and now) ? If so, what impressions of Jesus Christ or the Bible's God did you have after finishing this project ?
- C. If your impressions changed, describe as best you can this process of change. What led you to receive a different impression?

4. Regarding Your Interview Partner

- A. Before doing your first interview for English Bible, did you have any impressions of your partner or Christian people ? Yes ____ No ____
- B. If yes, what impressions did you have ?
- C. If yes, are those impressions different now? If so, how ?
- D. If no, what impressions of your partner or Christian people do you now have ?
- E. If your impressions of your partner or Christian people before and after the interview(s) were different, describe as best you can this process of change. What led you to receive a different impression ?

5. Regarding the Church

- A. Before doing your first interview for English Bible, what were the impressions you had of the church?
- B. Did these impressions change (between the time before your first interview and now)? If so, what impressions of the church did you have after finishing this project ?
- C. If your impressions changed, describe as best you can this process of change. What led you to receive a different impression?

6. Regarding the Bible

- A. Before doing your first interview for English Bible, what were the impressions you had of the Bible?
- B. Did these impressions change (between the time before your first interview and now)? If so, what impressions of the Bible did you have after finishing this project?
- C. If your impressions changed, describe as best you can this process of change. What led you to receive a different impression?

7. What other comments do you have about the project? Please feel free to write what you see as good points or areas which need improvement.

APPENDIX 2

INTERVIEWER REFLECTION SURVEY RESULTS (TOTALS DISPLAYED BY CONTENT CATEGORY)⁽⁸⁾

Table 1. Numbers of IERs Responding Relevantly and Irrelevantly

question	IERs responding in the space allotted for the question	IERs not responding in the space allotted but giving relevant responses in other sections of the survey	IERs giving responses in the space allotted with no apparent relevance to the question	IERs indicating no previous ⁽⁹⁾ impressions	total number of IERs responding relevantly
1 A	26	0	0	--	26
1 B	26	0	0	--	26
1 C	26	0	0	--	26
2 A	25	0	1	0	25
2 B	25	1	0	--	26
2 C	23	2	1	--	24
3 A	25	0	0	4	21
3 B	25	0	2	--	23
3 C	15	1	5	--	11
4 A	26	0	0	3	26
4 B	19	4	0	--	23
4 C	19	3	0	--	22
4 D	7	0	3	--	4
4 E	20	4	0	--	24
5 A	25	0	4	0	21
5 B	23	0	2	--	21
5 C	11	2	1	--	12
6 A	26	0	4	2	22
6 B	24	2	3	--	23
6 C	16	4	6	--	14
7	21	0	1	--	20

Table 2.1. General Positive-Negative Breakdown of Previous Impressions

question	positive impressions	negative impressions	ambiguous or unclear impressions
2 A	1	13	10
3 A	3	13	5
4 B	2	9	12
5 A	0	13	8
6 A	2	13	5

Table 2.2. General Positive-Negative Breakdown of Changes in Impressions

question	positive change	negative change	change but neither positive nor negative	no significant change
2 B	25	0	0	1
3 B	12	0	0	11
4 C	20	0	2	0
4 D	4	0	0	0
5 B	11	0	3	7
6 B	16	0	0	7

Table 3. Breakdown of Increasingly Positive Impressions

question	IERs who indicate increasing understanding	IERs who indicate increasing openness	IERs who indicate increasing affirmation
2 B	17	8	13
3 B	9	1	8
4 C	18	1	15
4 D	4	1	2
5 B	13	2	7
6 B	14	4	10

Table 4.1. Numbers of IERs Holding Specific Impressions Before the Interviews ⁽¹⁰⁾

category	previous impression	2 A	3 A	4 B	5 A	6 A
negative						
	difficult to approach	2	0	4	9	0
	difficult to understand	6	5	4	1	8
	negative (generally)	8	1	2	2	2
	not interesting/relevant	6	2	0	2	2
	rigid	10	3	12	7	1
	scary/dangerous	5	2	4	1	0
	unbelievable, unreliable, and/or unrealistic	7	8	2	0	5
	doubting God's existence	2	7	0	0	2
	doubt about miracles	2	2	0	0	2
neutral						
	different from and/or not matching IER	3	0	3	1	0
	far away	7	2	1	0	0
	like other faiths ⁽¹¹⁾	3	0	3	2	0
	monolithic, all the same ⁽¹²⁾	5	0	3	1	0

Table 4.2. Numbers of IERs Indicating Specific Changes in Impression

category	change from	change to	2 B	3 B	4 C	4 D	5 B	6 B
positive change								
	different from me	like me	9	0	7	0	0	0
	difficult to approach	easier to approach	1	0	6	0	6	0
	difficult to understand	easier to understand	4	0	4	0	0	6
	negative (generally)	more positive	9	1	7	0	2	1
	not interesting/relevant	more interesting/relevant	7	0	3	0	1	3
	rigid	flexible	9	2	12	0	3	1
	scary/dangerous	less or not scary/ dangerous	5	2	5	0	1	0
	unbelievable/unreliable/ unrealistic	more believable/ reliable/realistic	4	6	2	0	0	3
	doubting God's existence	to or toward affirmation	1	6	0	0	0	0
	doubt about miracles	to or toward affirmation	0	0	0	0	0	0
"neutral" change								
	far	near	7	1	1	0	0	0
	monolithic	varied	3	0	4	0	1	0
	like other (faiths) ⁽¹¹⁾	unique	1	0	3	0	2	0
	questionable understandings		4	2	4	0	0	1

Table 4.3. Numbers of IERs Showing Processes through Which Changes in Impressions Occurred

influences on changing impressions	2 C	3 C	4 E	5 C	6 C
the Bible	12	3	9		12
concepts with which IER became familiar during the interview	11	8	20	3	12
God/Christ	8	7	11		3
IER's identifying with IEE	5	4	9		4
IER's own experiences	8	2	4	0	5
the interview itself	12	6	17		1
the atmosphere or mood of the interview	2	3	11		0
life experiences of IEE	12	8	12	1	2
times of adversity	9	6	8	1	1
the personal character of IEE	14	7	14		0
the relationship between IER and IEE	3	2	2		1
questionable understandings	4	0	4	0	1

NOTES

- (1) This term is referred to hereafter as "AU." The interview project began through a lesson evaluation and planning discussion session involving AU and another HGWJC Bible teacher, Southern Baptist Convention missionary Carlton Walker. He suggested that reports currently being based on church attendance could be expanded to include interviews with local church members.
- (2) This term is referred to hereafter as "IEE" (and read "interviewee," "an interviewee," or "the interviewee")

as appropriate to the context). This interview report system is based on the theoretical framework and principles outlined in the HGWJC Kiyo, vol. 37, article "Mission, Ministry, and Theological Foundations for Christian Education," 67-88.

- (3) This term is referred to hereafter as "IER" (and read "interviewer," "an interviewer," or "the interviewer" as appropriate to the context.
- (4) Although the option of continuing the interviews meant that IERs could conclude their learning later than others, AU elected to give the survey to all IERs one week after the reports were submitted, then allow them to add any further comments later if they elected to continue.
- (5) Only one second year student (from the elective English Bible III class) chose to participate in the interview project again in the second term. Because giving the survey to only one student would almost eliminate the possibility of her answering in anonymity, AU did not give her the survey a second time. She did complete her report for this term, however, which allowed her impressions of the second interview to have a degree of influence on project as a whole.
- (6) Results of the remaining questions of the survey and more detailed presentations of each question's results will appear in the next edition of this paper. They require more space than is presently available.
- (7) Specific key impressions which appear in this discussion are the five impressions noted by the greatest number of IERs, unless the total number is below five IERs, in which case the impression is excluded. Comments are indicated according to the number of IERs giving these impressions, from greatest to least. Within categories of the top five which are particularly general in nature ("IEEs' life experiences," for example), responses typically vary widely. Only those specific responses which comprise half or more of the total are noted as "key."
- (8) This appendix provides a streamlined overview of the parts of the results which appear in many or all sections of the survey. For details of the data and the questions to which they correspond, refer to the appendix dealing with this survey's results which will appear in a succeeding edition of this paper.
- (9) This column applies to 2 A, 3 A, 4 A, 5 A, and 6 A only. The number of IERs who did have previous impressions, ordered 2A through 6 A respectively, is 24, 21, 23, 21, and 20.
- (10) Tables 4.1, 4.2, and 4.3 include a given category when a minimum of three IERs indicate a specific response in the survey.
- (11) This reads differently question by question, according to the context, including "other gods" in the case of 3 A; "people of other faiths" in 4 B, 4 C, and 4 D; "other places" in 5 B; and "other books" in 6 B.
- (12) This category reads differently case by case, according to the question's content, for example "meaning the same thing to all believers" in the case of 2 A and "the same as each other" in 4 B, 4 C, 4 D, and 5 B.

[Abstract]

Creating a Context for Spiritual Formation through Interview Reports at Hokusei Gakuen Women's Junior College

James E. ALLISON

This paper presents an implementation strategy and evaluation criteria of a class report project, as well as results of a survey based on it. In this learning process, Hokusei Gakuen Women's Junior College (HGWJC) students in the 2001 school year interviewed local Japanese Christians regarding their faith. Interviewers then had opportunities to participate in a series of dialogues designed to build relationships of friendship and provide a context for students to encounter Christ as they discover and develop their own way of believing and living.

The project was designed to deal with intercultural, age, and gender barriers which tend to impede the communication of the message of Jesus Christ. The key strategy was to create a context in which interviewers could speak Japanese-to-Japanese, woman-to-woman, and young-person-to-young-person.

This paper lays out a strategy and plan for introducing the interview project to participants, orienting the partners, and conducting the interviews. It then details the process of receiving feedback from students through "before-and-after" surveys, as well as the first section of the results. Later editions of this study will report the remaining results, as well as those of a survey of the interviewees. Those editions will also detail the contents of the interview reports.

Reports and survey results demonstrate that this cultural-insider-based, personal approach to Christian witness provides an influence toward the transformation of interviewers' negative attitudes regarding religion into more informed and often more accepting views of Christian faith. It reinforces interviewees' faith, providing a context for living out their calling to be Christ's witnesses. Finally, it instructs Christians seeking to minister to students in this institution by indicating interviewers' specific pre-conceptions, how impressions can change through the interviews, and what barriers remain to authentic, widespread acceptance of Christ's Gospel.