Lana and Jade’s Sojourn and Reentry

Of the four case participants, Lana and Jade acquired the highest levels of intercultural sensitivity according to the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI), although their trajectories were quite different. Following 14 weeks of presojourn preparation, Lana scored 98.91 in Minimization, indicating that she was still in a transitional phase of development. After the five-week sojourn in England, her Developmental Score (DS) barely changed (98.81). Even her perception of her intercultural sensitivity remained constant (122.54 presojourn and 122.26 postsojourn; both were in the Acceptance/Adaptation, AA range). By contrast, just before traveling to England, Jade scored 118.50 in AA, an ethnorelative stage of development. After spending five weeks in the host culture, she gained 7.07 points, advancing to 125.57 in the same range. She perceived her intercultural sensitivity to be 134.69 just before the sojourn and 137.73 afterwards; both were in the high end of the AA range.

As in Nora and Mimi’s cases, I wondered if Lana and Jade’s oral and written narratives (weekly sojourn surveys, sojourn diary, postsojourn interview) and my field notes would support their actual and perceived IDI scores. In particular, would Lana’s narratives offer some clues as to why her intercultural sensitivity remained stalled in Minimization? Would Jade’s storied experiences provide evidence that she had developed a higher level of intercultural competence than the other case participants?

Similar to the previous chapter, I track the sojourn and reentry experiences of each woman, beginning with Lana. When relevant, I interpose an etic (outsider’s) perspective, drawing on my field notes, to further contextualize each woman’s narratives. I also draw comparisons and contrasts between their experiences to better understand the factors impacting on their developmental trajectories.

What follows are the unique stories of Lana and Jade.

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Lana

Predeparture aims and concerns

Prior to departure, Lana set language and cultural learning objectives for her stay in England: “I want to improve my ability, confidence, and proficiency in interacting with people from different cultures in English. And I want to master the vocabulary and expressions commonly used in everyday situations” (interview). After witnessing “the benefits of intercultural relationships,” she was “looking forward to making friends from other cultures” (intercultural reflections journal). By encountering cultural differences firsthand, she hoped to become more self-aware.

As the departure date approached, she refined her language learning objectives, setting the following targets: “improved conversational skills, better pronunciation, and enhanced spoken English” (language learning strategies survey). She aimed to “speak English fluently and learn more about British culture” (interview). Aspiring to become “more independent and mature,” Lana was keen to experience the world outside Hong Kong: “I’m really excited about the trip abroad, new environment, new friends, new culture, new scenes. ... I believe this trip will be one of my most valuable memories in my life.”

Similar to Nora, Lana conceded that she had many anxieties about what lay ahead: “I’m really worrying about a lot of things. For example, what will the host family be like, what kind of life will we have there, how much will I spend, what we will do each day, and what will happen” (interview). Just prior to departure she divulged more fears in the predeparture survey: “As this is the first time for me to leave my family for so long, I may suffer from homesickness. I hope that I could learn to tolerate the ambiguities and have a fruitful trip there.” While supportive of her trip to England, her family, like Nora’s, was anxious about her safety: “They worry about what might happen to me over there” (interview). To cope, Lana planned to e-mail her family “constantly” (survey).

The language policy for the sojourn

When Lana first learned about the English language policy she deemed it “a good idea.” In her interview she explained: “When you go to a place in which only English is used, it’ll be more natural to use the language so I think we’ll be less reluctant to use it there. We won’t want to stand out.” Nonetheless, similar to Nora, she believed that their group might experience “a certain degree of difficulty” in trying to follow the policy: “Because we’re brought up in Cantonese, there are many ideas...