

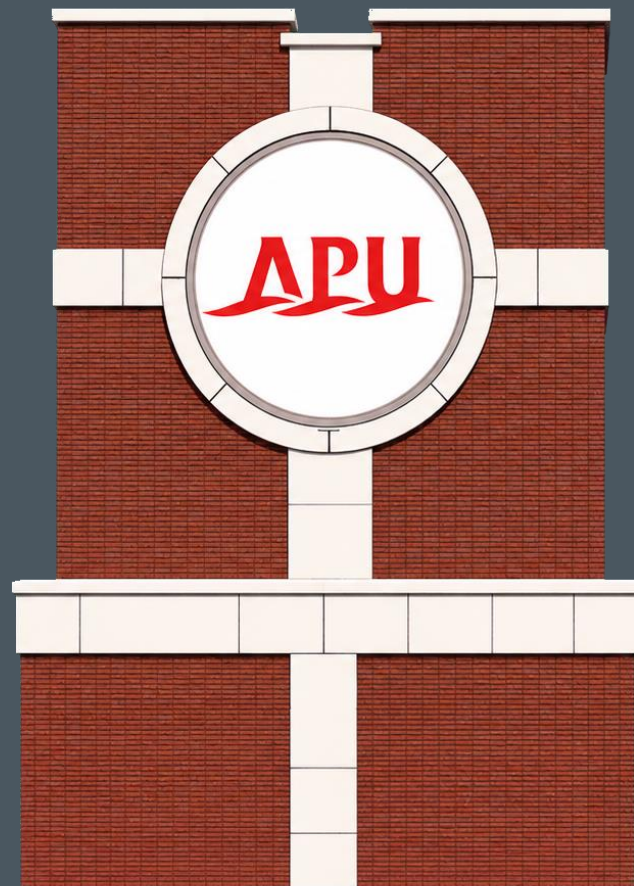
From Contact to Conscious Practice

Designing Intercultural Learning Spaces at APU

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Educational Spaces: Embodied Learning and the Reconstruction of Cultural Ethos
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“Where are you from?” isn’t really a good question. I have multiple identities — it’s difficult to pinpoint just one place as my hometown.

— a first-year student, end of semester

Why is Contact not Enough?

- **Contact hypothesis (Allport, 1954):** putting people from different groups in contact reduces prejudice
- But only under specific conditions — equal status, common goals, cooperation, institutional support

What 70 years of testing found

- **Pettigrew & Tropp (2006)**: meta-analysis of 515 studies, 713 samples, 250,000+ participants
 - contact does reduce prejudice, but Allport's four conditions turn out to help, not be strictly required
- **Paluck, Green & Green (2019), Behavioural Public Policy**: more recent, more critical — questions how much of the effect survives outside controlled conditions

THEORY: CONTACT $\neq$ CHANGE

Contact creates an opportunity.

It is not sufficient.

**Learning depends on how that opportunity is
designed.**

WHAT APU IS IN FOUR NUMBERS

The APU Context by the Numbers

- **Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University:** a Japanese university built in 2000 specifically around a 50/50 domestic-international student ratio
- **As of 2026:** 6,699 students, 48.9% international, from 122 countries and regions, classes offered in both English and Japanese

6,699

students

48.9%

international

122

countries & regions

2

teaching languages



Shape your world
Ritsumeikan
Asia Pacific University

The MCW Program: TRANSFORMING CONTACT INTO ENGAGEMENT

- Multicultural Cooperative Workshop (MCW) — APU's required first-year program for every incoming student
- Built around **three named core practices**, moving from individual identity work toward group-project collaboration
- Across the program, active engagement was associated with larger self-reported global-competence gains
- **Sample:** 1,543 first-year students; 1,112 included in the linked analysis

WONDER

LOOK FOR CURIOSITY AND
COMPLEXITY.

INVITE & LISTEN

BUILD RELATIONSHIPS,
SEEK UNDERSTANDING.

NOTICE & REFLECT

CONNECT EXPERIENCE TO
SHARED VALUES.

So, what does the same principle look like inside my own classroom?

Classroom Demographics & Context

Introduction to Intercultural Communication (Spring 2026)

164

TOTAL STUDENTS

Balanced gender split

29

NATIONALITIES

In one classroom

64%

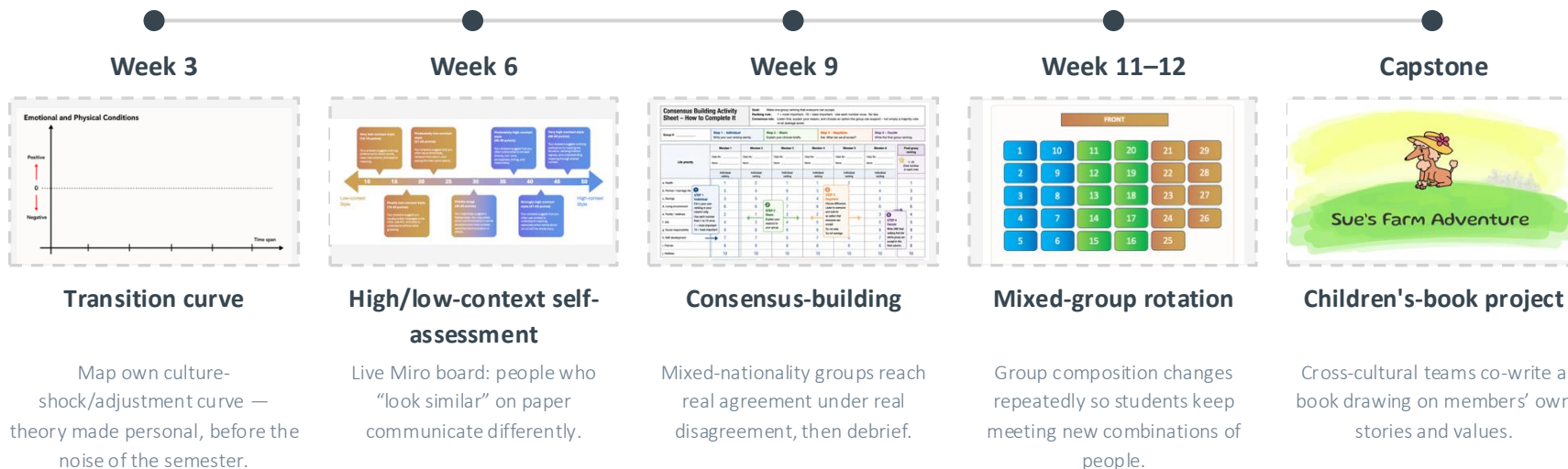
ENGLISH TRACK

36% Japanese Track

GOAL: Building perspective-taking and reflective capacity

Not just teaching about other cultures, but navigating difference in practice.

From Theory to Classroom Activities



Design Moves for Turning Contact into Learning

Equal-status framing

No activity privileges “native” fluency or a particular nationality (the high/low-context board: domestic students discover they don’t fit their own stereotype either).

A shared task with real stakes

A genuine goal that needs everyone’s input to succeed (consensus-building; the capstone book).

Deliberate re-grouping

Who sits with whom keeps changing, so contact doesn’t stall inside one friendship (Week 11–12 rotation).

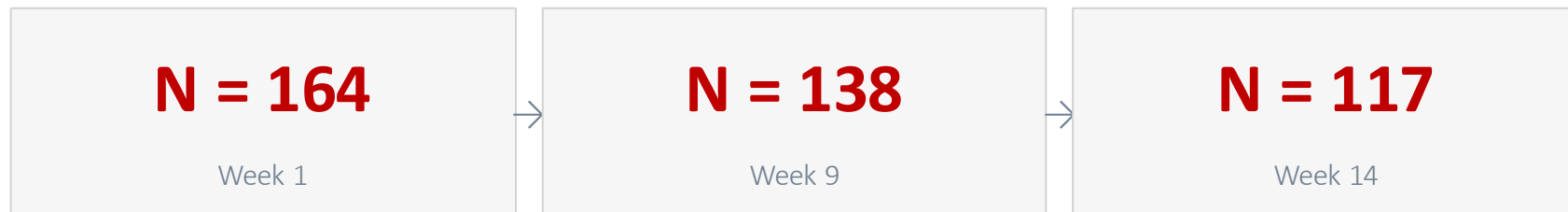
Built-in reflection

A named moment to process what just happened, not just do it and move on (the transition-curve exercise; debrief sheets after consensus-building).

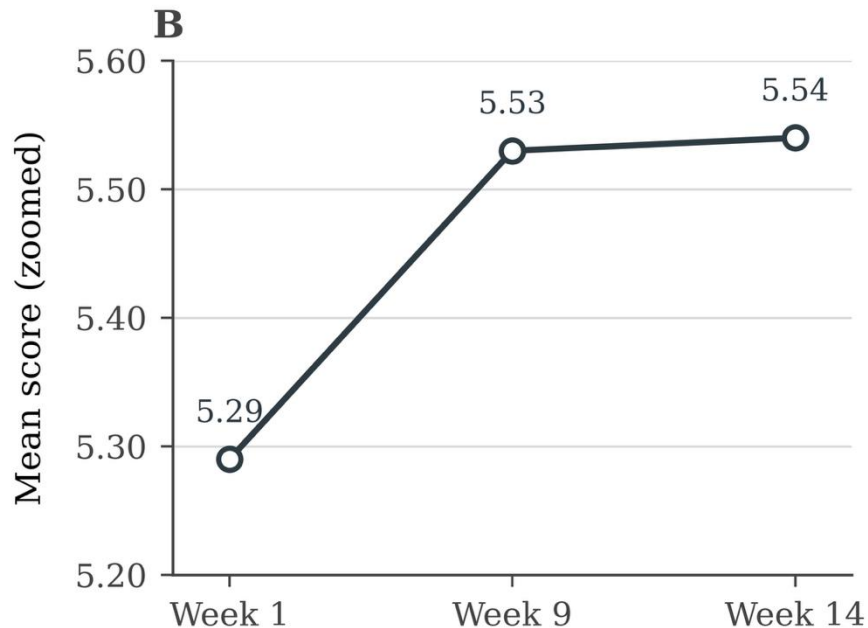
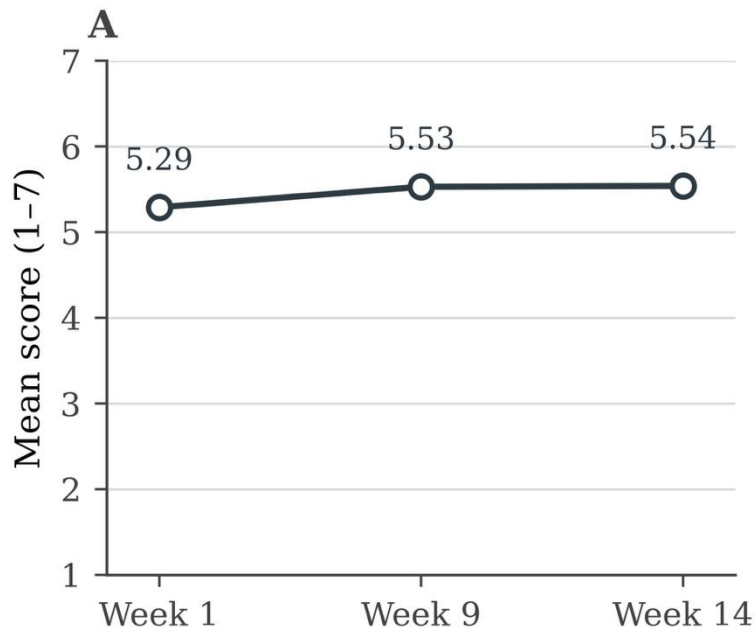
Research Design & Methodology

- IRB-approved (APU Research Compliance/Ethics Review Committee, approval #2025-37)
- Same 13-item perspective-taking / reflective-capacity scale (7-point), administered three times: Week 1, Week 9, Week 14

Full class each wave (natural drop-off across a semester)



What moved

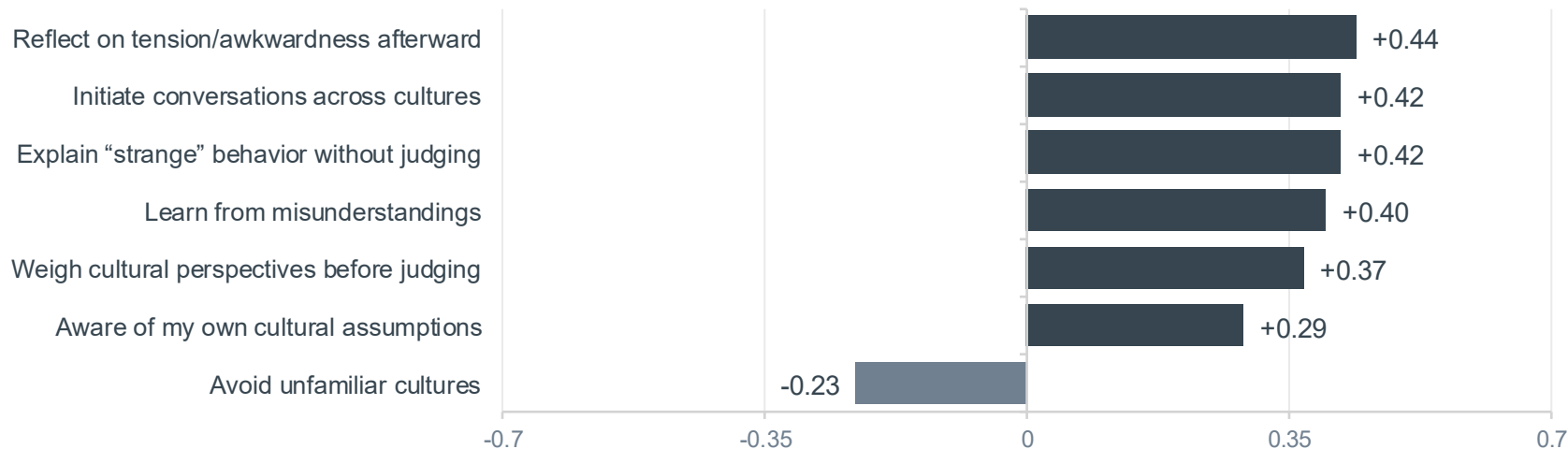


Note. Panel A shows the complete response scale; Panel B is a transparent zoom of the observed range.

WHAT ACTUALLY HAPPENED: THE DATA

Which behaviors moved most

Scale-point change per item, Week 1 → Week 14 — 6 largest movers, plus the one item that moved back



The biggest movers are the practiced behaviors — reflecting, initiating, explaining without judging — not passive attitudes. One item (avoiding unfamiliar cultures) moved slightly the other way; flagged here rather than hidden.

In their own words

“I noticed I have more stereotypes than I expected. So I tried to listen more from others.”

“I’ve decided to stop using stereotypes about a country when starting a conversation.”

“The group project was the peak of this whole class.”

The pattern fits the theory, but it does not prove causation

- Contact theory, updated by 70 years of testing, says **design matters more than proximity**
- MCW shows that principle at the scale of a university program
- This course is the same principle at the scale of one classroom — perspective-taking measurably moved, and the biggest jump lines up with exactly the weeks where the most deliberately “designed” activities (consensus-building, mixed regrouping) happened

A diverse space became a learning space through action

- None of what moved these students happened through reading about culture, but through standing on a shared board, negotiating consensus face to face, co-authoring a book with people unlike themselves

*“If **wanderlust** is what today’s forum is about — the idea that we learn by physically, socially putting ourselves somewhere unfamiliar — my classroom didn’t have to go anywhere to create that condition. It was already there. The work was designing what people did with it.”*

Illustration: Designing Belonging - Student Submission (Cross-Cultural Children's Book Project). Reproduced with the student’s explicit permission for public presentation.



You don't need APU's diversity for this to work

- The mechanism isn't “international students” specifically — it's a **structured encounter with meaningful difference of any kind**: discipline, age, native language, life experience, even just an assigned position in a debate
- This is what **embodied learning** can look like inside an ordinary classroom, not only outdoors or on a trail

“Where in your own course do students already sit near difference without being asked to do anything with it? That's your Week 6 or Week 9, waiting to be designed.”

An early result, with a clear next test

- **Week 14 data just closed;** a fuller analysis is planned for a future written piece, not for today's talk
- Thank you to Prof. Ikeda and Dale Whitfield for the invitation and the chance to think alongside speakers working in such different educational spaces

Thank you

Where is the unfamiliar already
present in your teaching, waiting to
become a learning space?

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Questions welcome.



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