

Developing Cultural Awareness

Step 1 is to decide '**WHO is your TARGET GROUP?**' Is it children, teenagers, college students, women or business men? Step 2 is to consider the **WORLD VIEW** of your chosen group.

World View consists of :

- **Beliefs** (beware that people may say they believe something but behave in a way that implies they believe otherwise)
- **Key events and national history** (national identity forms part of an individual's identity)
- **Interpretations of key events** (these are generally more important than the events themselves e.g. how my non Christian Japanese friend responded to riots against Japan in China in 2005 ('The Chinese have no right to interfere in what Japan decides to do') was more important than the riots themselves).

World View is shaped through:

- **Transmission of belief systems** (from earliest childhood, this is "caught" not "taught")
- **Icons** (key people in Japanese history past and present)
- **Cultural artifacts, books, movies, mass media school curricula.**

How can we uncover the World View of the Japanese groups we seek to reach? Or to put it another way, how do we get into their heads?

You can start by asking questions. Of course, you will not find one single answer to your questions but there are generally underlying assumptions that are accepted without question by most people. Examples of questions you might ask are as follows:

- Who are some of the key Japanese who have shaped Japanese history? Why did they have such an impact?
- Who are the key people in public life and popular culture today? The list might include TV and movie stars, musicians, pop groups, sports (Ichiro in base ball, sumo wrestlers) fashion leaders as well as politicians.
- What books has every Japanese read? (children's stories, manga, mukashi banashi (folk tales), Japanese literature, detective stories). If you can't read in Japanese read translations in English of eg Endo Shusaku etc.
- Are there any haiku, children's songs, games that everyone knows? (yubikiri, ジャンケン、 e.g. becoming an ichi nen sei (playing in every shop around spring time)
- What movies, animation and TV programs have they all watched perhaps many times? (Chushingura, Hayao Miyazaki, Otoko wa Tsurai yo, NHK renzoku dramas, etc, etc) What are the current favorites and why?
- Which Japanese Christians are known to non churched Japanese and why? (e.g. Miura Ayako, Sono Ayako, Hoshino Tomohiro, Uchida Kazuhiko, Watanabe Kazuko.) If you don't know one or more of these names, then your first assignment is to ask some Japanese friends to tell you about them.

You want to discover the assumptions Japanese take for granted but because they take them for granted, individuals might not be able to give you insight into them unless you ask the right questions to unlock the answers. Much of your informal research will be by trial and error. Talk to as many different people as you can. Remember also that popular culture is changing all the time so you will need to keep researching.

This article is partly based on an outline of a lecture by David Broesma, Institute for Cross-Cultural Training, Wheaton, Illinois in March 2006.