Transformative Experiences of Study Abroad: Instructor Led, Engagement and Immersion Programs

Introduction

Study abroad is famed for fostering transformative experiences for college students. However, recent research indicates that study abroad can enhance foreign language skills, understanding of different cultures and has the strongest impact on first time study abroad participants.

- Anecdotal information tells us that students feel they have changed their study abroad.
- Research suggests that study abroad can enhance foreign language skills, understanding of different cultures and has the strongest impact on first time study abroad participants.
- Study abroad can be broadly categorized into 3 types: Instructor-Led Topic/Subject Focused, Engagement Activity Instructor-Led, and Immersion through University Semester Enrollment.
- We do not know if there are common themes of transformative experiences and if these transformations are related to particular types of programs.
- There is also debate if a shorter term faculty led study abroad is equally transformative as a full semester long study abroad at a foreign institution.
- Or, if an international community engagement study abroad fosters different, or similar types of transformations as the other two types.

For this study, transformative experiences are defined as events that lead to a change in how a person sees the world. These events can be a culmination of everyday experiences while studying abroad or a single event which re-frames how a person sees the world.

Method

Three Study Abroad Program Types:

- Instructor-Led Topic/Subject Focused
- Engagement Activity Instructor-Led
- Immersion through University Semester Enrollment

Survey Development

Pilot survey instrument tested by 4 researchers with non-CANR study abroad participants. Interviews recorded for checking internal consistency in delivery and question response probes.

Random Sample Participant Selection:

Random number process for selection of 30 student participants in College of Agriculture & Natural Resources study abroad programs, 2008 – 2010

Code Development

The coding scheme is adapted from theories of transformative learning, such as the work of Cranton and Mezirow.

Transcription & Coding

Pilot interviews coded by 4 researchers to verify and clarify codes and check inter-rater reliability. Final interviews coded by 2 researchers with agreement on final codes.

Findings

Instructor-Led Topic/Subject Focused Programs:

Epistemic and Philosophical learning transformations are the most cited.

Engagement Activity Instructor-Led Programs:

Personal Adaptive and Epistemic learning programs are the most transformations.

Immersion - University Semester Enrollment Programs:

Epistemic and Philosophical learning transformations are the most cited.

Bailey Scholars Research Team

The research is by the 2010 - 2011 Graduate Fellows of the Bailey Scholars Program: Natalie Graham and Pat Crawford; with Robert Brown, Eric Cape, Rhonda Craddock, Suzanne Lang, Rog Motley, and Brianna Ziegler.

Transformative Learning Experiences

1.0 Epistemic Learning

- Respondents articulated shift in deep understanding of the curriculum and new learning frameworks.
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- 1.1 Recognizing learning styles and techniques - hands-on, lecture, experiential.
- 1.2 Learning that learning is unplanned - outside of the curriculum.
- 1.3 Learning that is a result of everyday interaction/communication.
- 1.4 Learning that learning happens as a result of reflection.
- 1.5 Learning has a result of disconnection, i.e. "getting out of the box".
- 1.6 Learning as a result of seeing one’s ignorance.

2.0 Relational Learning

- (adaptation of sociopsychological)
- Respondent indicated deepened understanding of an entity or entities because of their relationship with each other.
- 2.1 Recognizing the participants of U.S. as a nation in global context.
- 2.2 Learning about self in family, local context.
- 2.3 Learning about self in national context.
- 2.4 Learning about self in global context.
- 2.5 Learning about material realities as a function of social networks.

3.0 Personal Adaptable Learning

- (adaptation of psychosocial/adaptation)
- Respondent indicated shift in image/representation of self as a moral actor with the capacity to respond to change.
- 3.1 Evaluation of self as an individual problem-solver of challenging problems.
- 3.2 Evaluation of self as a member of a group that can solve challenging problems.
- 3.3 Evaluation of self as having adopted skills directly applicable to everyday problems.
- 3.4 Evaluation of self as having applied skills to problems since return.

4.0 Philosophical Learning

- (adaptation of phenomenological)
- Respondent indicated shift in definitions of foundational definitions of being.
- 4.1 Articulation of general shift in worldview.
- 4.2 Articulation of national identities - how others see U.S. and how we see others.
- 4.3 Articulation of specific recognition of socio-cultural categories, i.e. what it means to be American, which means to be African.
- 4.4 Articulation of specific recognition of socio-cultural values, i.e. what it means to be smart, good, or beautiful.
- 4.5 Articulation of specific recognition of socio-cultural action, i.e. what it means to work, to play, to learn.

5.0 Useful Skills and Attitudes

- 5.1 Recognition of useful attitudes and skills for study abroad experience, in country.
- 5.2 Recognition of useful attitudes and skills for study abroad experience, in U.S.
- 5.3 Recognition of useful attitudes and skills for study abroad experience, in country.

6.0 When Transformation Occurred

- 6.1 Aha
- 6.2 Gradual
- 6.3 Upon Return

7.0 Prior Study Abroad/International Experience

All of the study abroad types resulted in recognition of learning as the result of disorientation and a general shift in worldview for the students.

Instructor-led study abroad participants articulated the highest rates of everyday learning, possibly indicating that these programs promote the recognition of this skill. Interestingly, this type also indicated the least frequent recognition of learning outside of the curriculum.

The may indicate that instructor-led students recognized the importance of everyday experiences in learning, and the facilitators in learning were just as important in their learning experiences. The higher articulation of everyday learning experience to curriculum confirms that there are characteristics that promote the recognition of everyday learning, including that the learning was encapsulated in the program itself and not as self-directed.

Engagement program participants indicated a 5.0 recognition of useful attitudes and skills for study abroad experience, in country.

Engagement program participants indicated a general shift in worldview for the students. Engagement program participants indicated a general shift in worldview for the students.

Instructor-led and Immersion program students articulated the highest rates of revision in their conceptions of nation and citizenship.

Bibliography


