

Title

Cultivating intercultural learning for teachers: A case study of US Fulbright-Hays overseas seminar trip

Overview

This paper examines the development of US Fulbright-Hays participants' intercultural knowledge and skills during a seminar trip to South Korea with a focus on the relationship between activity types and participants' cognitive engagement as shown in weekly journals. Findings highlight the impacts of activity types, sequencing, and reflection activities on participants' transformation.

Purpose

Research shows that overseas cultural immersion experiences offer valuable opportunities to improve intercultural competence (Trilokekar & Kukar, 2011). Overseas study trips not only increase knowledge of the countries' society and culture, but prompt participants to reflect upon their own perception of themselves in the world (Biraimah & Jotia, 2012; McGregor et al., 2019). Research documents several factors for the effectiveness of study abroad programs, including program length, activities, participants' previous exposure to different cultures, interactions with local peers, and even housing situation during overseas stay (Medina-López-Portillo, 2004; Nguyen, 2017). Less is known about *the processes* that will shed light on how program structures shape changes in participants' knowledge, perspectives, and skills (Davis & Knight, 2023). To fill this gap, this case study examines the interplay of the *types of program activities and participants' cognitive engagement during the overseas study trip*.

The authors had an opportunity to design and carry out an overseas program for teachers in 2024, funded by the US Fulbright-Hays. A total of fourteen teachers and teacher-candidates participated in a 4-week seminar in South Korea. Analyzing the weekly journal entries of the participants during the overseas phase, we explore two research questions:

RQ1: In what ways, are the types of reaction and level of cognitive engagement associated with specific activities or events during the overseas study trip?

RQ2: How do reflections and cognitive engagement change over the course of overseas experiences?

Methods

This is *a case study* focusing on one particular group's experience in order to explore notable patterns and to expose complexities of reality (Delmar, 2010). *The study sample* consists of fourteen participants of the trip. They were recruited through a selection process based on their interests in intercultural learning, the student population they serve, and the subjects they teach. The study was approved by the Institutional Review Board of the university where the authors teach. Informed consent forms were collected, and no identifying information was used. *The data* includes narrative answers in weekly journals. Writing prompts consist of 8-12 questions each week, including general reflections on the week and lessons gained from each activity.

We developed qualitative coding schemes through iterative and interactive processes informed by *the grounded theory* (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). First stage of the coding involved identifying types of reactions. Afterwards, the reaction types were analyzed in conjunction with

different types of activities. The final stage involved analyzing the relationships between types of activities and the level of cognitive engagement according to Bloom's taxonomy (Bloom, 1956).

Results and Discussions

Below are key points regarding the relationship between different activity types (e.g., lectures, school visits, etc.) and cognitive engagement types (e.g., describing, interpreting, comparing, analyzing, applying) as well as the changes observed over time.

- The most frequent type of reaction to *academic lectures* was descriptions of new knowledge. Interpretive reactions to the academic contents appeared only when topics were familiar and relatable to the participants.
- *Education-related activities* were more likely to invite *interpretation and analysis* with frequent reference to comparisons with their own schools. Education-related activities engaged participants in higher order thinking more than any other activities.
- Reactions to the *historical and cultural field trips* were most often associated with description of new observations and knowledge. Interpretive statements were connected to participants' previous knowledge and experiences.
- *Comparisons* were an important conduit to applications. Participants often emphasized positive aspects of South Korean society, which can be applied to improve things in the US. Others used comparisons to ultimately point to the common grounds between countries, a pattern more pronounced during the final week of the trip.
- Week-by-week comparisons showed 1) a gradual increase over time in higher-level engagement toward analyzing and applying; 2) emotional engagement connected to participants' individual backgrounds and identities; 3) a shift from an awareness of "being different" in a different culture to a "self-reflection" on who they aspire to be as teachers.

The study finds that reflective processes are influenced by the *types of activities*, *the topics*, and *the framing of reflection questions*. Lectures and cultural field trips increased new knowledge, but new knowledge itself did not automatically prompt in-depth reflections. Background knowledge and interests mediate deeper engagement with topics. The study recommends on-going scaffolding and intentional sequencing to maximize higher-order engagement, including explicit discussions of background content/knowledge before relevant immersion activities, and then well-designed post-activities such as group discussions, projects, and writing. We also recommend using journal prompts explicitly requiring connecting, comparing, and applying. Including dedicated time and mental space for reflections during the trip is essential. Beyond assessment of the end-results, our study emphasizes the need to understand processes of overseas learning for effective program designs.

The limitations of this study include the small sample size with potential selection biases and insufficient data about participants' backgrounds to examine the relationship between cultural backgrounds and identities, and the differentiated learning process.

References (excluded from the word limit)

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