Study Abroad – Cultural Identity and Global Citizenship

Presented by

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This paper is based on a recently completed Masters research thesis – M.Ed. (International Education).
**Topic focus**

- What do students actually learn when studying overseas?
- What are students’ perceptions of their overseas experience and learning?
- What do we want students to learn: intercultural and international skills, global competence, global citizenship?
- What do we mean by intercultural and international skills, global competence, cultural identity and global citizenship - is study abroad effective in their development?

**Why this topic was chosen**

- To articulate students’ perceptions of the study abroad experience and the competencies they have developed.
- Student outcome research is important to promote study abroad and improve and develop programs.
- International skills and a global outlook are valued by government, business, the education sector and students.
- The impact that study abroad has on students’ personal and career development needs to be understood and recognised.
- Lack of knowledge and misconceptions about study abroad hinder appreciation of its value amongst the university community.
Methodology

- Case study centred on interviews with returned exchange students using a qualitative approach, exploring students’ perceptions of their experience.
- Students were interviewed individually, using a semi-structured format, allowing for free student narrative.
- Analysis of the data took account of the context and individual experience of the subjects.

Research findings

- Study abroad presented a significant and deep learning experience for the students.

“You can learn a whole lot of things that go beyond just studying, which you’re not going to learn in any other way. And I think it’s also quite a good time in life to do it.”
Research findings

- Study abroad precipitated an encounter with cultural identity and other cultures that affected the ways in which the students perceive their place in the world and interact with it.

“....being able to realise who you are and what your culture has instilled in you and why you do things, then how it can be different.”

Human interaction was an important component of experience and learning.

“One of the things that everyone says about exchange, which is true, is that you meet a whole lot of people. There are a lot of people who are very different......a lot of people from different countries and when you meet other foreigners - it’s not like when you meet immigrants in Australia or that sort of thing, because it’s very one way – they’re adapting to Australia. Whereas in that situation we’re both in the same situation trying to fit into a third country, so I learnt a lot more about some other cultures that way, from being friends with people.”
Research findings

- There were different levels of cultural awareness amongst the students, due to individual student context.

The interviewees comprised 10 exchange students: three male and seven female. Four students were proficient in one foreign language, four students in two foreign languages. One student had not travelled before exchange, one student had migrated to Australia as a child, three students had been on school exchanges, one student had been on a previous university exchange, and six students had travelled extensively and/or lived overseas for long periods. Four students were living in independent accommodation prior to going on exchange and six students were living in the family home.

 Returned students had little opportunity to evaluate and articulate their experiences and learning.

“After the first exchange, I’d get home and people would say, “How was it?” and I couldn’t answer – I’d just say, “Good.” Because it was like I couldn’t articulate this massive, massive experience that’s so different and things come to the fore at times and go to the background at others – all these different emotions – so I couldn’t articulate what it was like. And people didn’t really want to know either – which most people say. I didn’t want to talk about it either – or I couldn’t. Not that I didn’t want to but I couldn’t express it.”
Research findings

- Study abroad enabled the consolidation and further development of existing global competency and laid a foundation of basic skills for less experienced students.

“a globally competent person has enough substantive knowledge, perceptual understanding, and intercultural communication skills to effectively interact in our globally interdependent world” Olson & Kroeger (2001)

Research findings

- There is no evidence that students have developed a concept of global citizenship, although a potential for global citizenship is suggested by the development of intercultural and global competency skills, and a global consciousness.
Research findings

- Structuring study abroad programs in a framework of critical analysis, reflection and intercultural education would give students the tools to maximise their learning potential, and would facilitate an emphasis on societal issues, thus extending student learning beyond the personal context.

“One of the fundamental beliefs of experiential education is that experiences are not educational in and of themselves.” Lutterman-Aguilar & Gingerich (2002)

Further research is recommended to identify effective ways of structuring study abroad programs to achieve learning goals.

“I don’t know if I’ve fully understood everything yet and probably need to.”