

Lessons learnt for developing meaningful study abroad programs: A case
study of a Montreal CEGEP's 2009 Study Trip

Stacie Travers

A Thesis
in
The Department
of
Education

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of Master of Arts (Educational Studies) at
Concordia University
Montreal, Quebec, Canada

April 2010

© Stacie Travers, 2010



Library and Archives
Canada

Published Heritage
Branch

395 Wellington Street
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Bibliothèque et
Archives Canada

Direction du
Patrimoine de l'édition

395, rue Wellington
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Your file *Votre référence*
ISBN: 978-0-494-67157-3
Our file *Notre référence*
ISBN: 978-0-494-67157-3

NOTICE:

The author has granted a non-exclusive license allowing Library and Archives Canada to reproduce, publish, archive, preserve, conserve, communicate to the public by telecommunication or on the Internet, loan, distribute and sell theses worldwide, for commercial or non-commercial purposes, in microform, paper, electronic and/or any other formats.

The author retains copyright ownership and moral rights in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's permission.

AVIS:

L'auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque et Archives Canada de reproduire, publier, archiver, sauvegarder, conserver, transmettre au public par télécommunication ou par l'Internet, prêter, distribuer et vendre des thèses partout dans le monde, à des fins commerciales ou autres, sur support microforme, papier, électronique et/ou autres formats.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur et des droits moraux qui protègent cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

In compliance with the Canadian Privacy Act some supporting forms may have been removed from this thesis.

While these forms may be included in the document page count, their removal does not represent any loss of content from the thesis.

Conformément à la loi canadienne sur la protection de la vie privée, quelques formulaires secondaires ont été enlevés de cette thèse.

Bien que ces formulaires aient inclus dans la pagination, il n'y aura aucun contenu manquant.


Canada

ABSTRACT

Lessons learnt for developing meaningful study abroad programs: A case study of a Montreal CEGEP's 2009 Study Trip

Stacie Travers

This thesis is based on a case study of a Montreal CEGEP's 2009 Study Trip abroad. The focus of the study reported here was on examining the specific elements of a study abroad program that may result in meaningful and educational impacts on participants. The case study attempts to uncover the best practices for each phase of a short-term study abroad program's life cycle: pre-departure, in the host country and upon returning home. All seven participating students and the person responsible for the program were interviewed. These interviews, along with student journals and curriculum materials, were examined. The thesis also presents a review of the burgeoning literature examining the educationally positive impacts attributed to study abroad programs and arguing for their inclusion in post-secondary curricula.

The findings illustrate the important learning moments of a formal and informal curriculum plan which help enhance the study abroad experience from the point of view of the participants. These lessons can be used by study abroad stakeholders (participants, educational institutions, administrators, coordinators, and funding agencies) to increase the educational impacts of these programs. More broadly, this study also provides insight into ways of teaching and learning (not necessarily abroad) that are more meaningful and which bring about more profound change and growth in learning for students as well as teacher practice. This broader emphasis may help to understand the processes and mechanisms underlying quality experiential education programs.

Acknowledgements

My sincere thanks to Arpi Hamalian, who gave me the confidence I needed to write this thesis and whose years of experience and accomplishments encourage me to aim high and take chances. Thank you also to everyone who took the time to read and provide helpful feedback on both my proposal and this final thesis.

Many thanks to all the case study participants and coordinators who openly shared their thoughts and opinions, as well as their time and whose ideas both encouraged and inspired me.

To my husband, thanks for giving me the space and encouragement to make it through this program and for thinking rationally when I had lost all ability to do so.

To my family, thank you for your continual interest, support and pride in all that I do.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION, LITERATURE REVIEW AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS.....	1
1.1 A personal narrative.....	1
1.2 Not about the change.....	2
1.3 Audience and aims.....	3
1.4 Measuring the outcomes of study abroad.....	5
Global awareness	
Intellectual and personal growth	
1.5 Defining study abroad.....	7
1.6 Gaps in study abroad research and my research questions.....	8
1.7 Experiential education and study abroad.....	9
Merging theory and practice	
CHAPTER 2: THE CASE AND METHODOLOGY.....	14
2.1 The Study Trip.....	14
Background	
Aims	
Structure	
2.2 Describing the methods.....	19
Ethics and consent	
Data collection	
Data analysis	
Evolution of the research design	
2.3 Presentation of participants through narratives: Interests, expectations and motivations.....	26
Lisa	
Shannon	
Emil	
Greg	
Tanya	
Kristen	
Amanda	

CHAPTER 3: RESULTS.....	35
3.1 PREPARING FOR THE EXPERIENCE ABROAD.....	35
3.1.1 Information sessions.....	35
Non-traditional methods of informing	
Tasting the culture	
Getting ready to get along	
3.1.2 Fundraising.....	45
3.1.3 Recommendations.....	48
3.2 MAXIMIZING THE EXPERIENCE ABROAD.....	50
3.2.1 Immersion: More than just bucket showers and outhouses.....	50
Staying close	
Moving in	
Recommendations	
3.2.2 Reflection: To journal or not to journal.....	59
Making time to write	
Telling vs. Reflecting	
Reflecting on the bathroom	
Recommendations	
3.2.3 Participatory involvement: Learning by doing.....	67
Field experience	
Community development	
Interviews	
Cultural events	
Recommendations	
3.2.4 Meaning and personalization: Self-directed learning.....	87
Personal projects	
Presentations	
Recommendations	
3.2.5 Group Dynamics: Knowing the participants.....	95
Group size and composition	
Bonding	
Team work	
Recommendations	

3.2.6 Structure: A time and a place.....	101
Planned meetings	
Goals and aims	
Recommendations	
3.2.7 Emotions: Feeling and dealing.....	110
Creating opportunity	
Letting it out	
Recommendations	
3.3 RETURNING FROM THE EXPERIENCE ABROAD.....	120
Readjusting to home	
Spreading the word	
Keeping in touch	
Recommendations	
CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSION.....	129
4.1 The “Blue Print”.....	129
4.2 Further research.....	134
TABLE: What to consider when developing a study abroad program.....	136
REFERENCES.....	137
APPENDICES.....	139
Appendix A: Ethics consent form for study abroad participants.....	139
Appendix B: Ethics consent form for trip coordinators.....	141
Appendix C: Pre-departure questionnaire.....	143
Appendix D: Journal guide.....	147
Appendix E: Interview guide for participants.....	148
Appendix F: Interview guide for trip coordinator.....	149
Appendix G: Verbal explanation of research.....	150
Appendix H: Transcription rules.....	151
Appendix I: List of data codes.....	154

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 A personal narrative

It was February 2003. I was 21 years old. The sun was hot, as it had been every day for the six weeks prior. The sky, a clear blue, reflected in the crystal clear waters of the Atlantic. My 23 peers and I were nestled into long canoes on our way to meet an indigenous people, the Kuna, in their natural environment. I'd be lying if I said I didn't feel like Margaret Mead, about to uncover an exotic culture. After all, I'd seen Kuna women in Panama City, the country's capital, in markets selling their beautiful hand-woven quilts or *molas*. They dressed in bright patterned tops and skirts with matching kerchiefs covering their short cropped hair. I had wondered about their lives, their beliefs, their language and their culture, and was excited for the planned visit to their *comarca* or traditional region.

As the canoes neared the shore, my attention shifted from the clear waters dotted with tiny islands and palm trees to a group of young boys happily splashing in the waters near the dock. It seemed as though the whole community was there to greet us, especially the children. A few moments later, as the children ran towards me wanting to hold my hand and touch my hair, reality slowly sank in. Most of the children, though smiling, appeared sick. Several of them stood out with their snow white skin and bleached blond hair; these moon children, as they are called, were covered in red sores and burns from sun exposure. I also soon found out that those beautiful waters the young boys had been playing in doubled as the community's toilet.

The next four days spent in this community were filled with moments of wonder and awe as I learnt about traditional beliefs and philosophies, tasted the little traditional food

our hosts could offer, was shown how to sleep eight people in a two-hammock grass hut and spent time with these wonderfully playful children. I also learnt about the extreme poverty affecting the area, the government's lack of aid, the struggle to maintain Kuna language and culture as a growing number of young Kuna moved to the capital for work, the fight to keep their forests and the medicinal plants in them and the health and sanitation problems taking a toll on the community.

I couldn't do much at the time to help. I was there to learn, not only about the issues, but also about the way the community was coming together to solve them. This experience opened my eyes to what life is like for the Kuna and it forced me to see my own "privileged" place in this world. I also believe it fostered a greater appreciation of difference and improved my cross-cultural communication skills. In the words of so many other study abroad participants, it changed me.

1.2 Not about the change

The changes I perceived in myself, whether in my mindset, in my abilities or in my relationship with others and the world around me, after this semester-long experience were real but what were their catalysts? The four days I spent among the Kuna were part of a longer study abroad program in which 23 other undergraduate students and I spent one academic semester learning about Panama's eco-diversity, cultural richness, and socio-economic problems. The four months I spent abroad were filled with new experiences. There were lectures with guest speakers; weekly field trips to sugar factories, archaeological digs, tropical rain forests and city halls; group projects; internships and the challenge of living in a house with 12 other people. However, not all my experiences abroad were educational, memorable or impacted me to the same degree.

Six years later, I can look back and ask what experiences were most effective in bringing about any real learning and transformation? What did I value the most? What benefits did I get out of each exercise, activity, trip and moment? Were these planned experiences built into the design of the program? Why did these experiences impact me and how did I use them to build on previous knowledge, shape or alter perceptions or acquire new knowledge? It is not about the change or changes that myself or other participants attribute to this study abroad experience, since that exact result may not be replicable. We all experienced similar things as participants in this program, but we achieved very different personal goals and went through varying degrees of change. All these years later, many of us may not even know if or how this experience changed us, but we can remember what we enjoyed, what opened our eyes, what taught us, what we valued then and what we value today, what we would have changed and what we would definitely keep the same. I believe that what we learnt from the Kuna in our short visit with them was more real and valuable than any class discussion we had back in our classroom/ living room. From my participant perspective, learning a culture from within that culture has more meaning and subsequently creates valued and cemented knowledge. From my researcher perspective, it is the experiences that create this knowledge and the common threads between them that deserve attention and need focus. The participants' voices give insight into what exactly these experiences are.

1.3 Audience and aims

By examining the way in which study abroad participants view the particular design and curriculum of their chosen program and how they feel these aspects enhance their overall learning experience, I hoped to uncover what specific activities, features and

characteristics students find most and least beneficial to their overall learning experience. Knowing what features and activities best enhance the students' learning and provide them the most perceived benefits, allows me to present a "blueprint" or model for schools and organizations on which to base future study abroad programs. The observations and conclusions presented here are meant to influence future curriculum and program design and to provide a basic 'what works and what does not work' for post-secondary institutions looking to expand their students' learning beyond our borders. This study was conducted to help better understand what elements of a study abroad program help participants learn more effectively and bring about influential change in the lives of the participants, whatever that change may be. More broadly, this study also provides insight into ways of teaching (not necessarily abroad) that are more meaningful to the students and which bring about more profound change. This broader emphasis seeks to understand the processes and mechanisms underlying quality experiential education programs.

This document is divided into four easy-to-read chapters and corresponding subchapters aimed at addressing the key elements of a successful study abroad program. The first chapter explains the reasons for the study, lays out the research questions and provides a review of the relevant study abroad literature. Chapter 2 serves to introduce the case and the seven participants whose perspectives are intertwined throughout the findings in narrative form, as well as detail the chosen methodology. The findings follow in Chapter 3 and are divided into three separate, yet inter-related phases of studying abroad: the preparation phase (3.1), the abroad phase (3.2) and the post-trip phase (3.3). Each of these sections addresses specific elements, experiences, and themes relating to that phase, and concludes with straightforward and concrete recommendations which are

meant to inform study abroad program coordinators and planners. The concluding chapter (Chapter 4) reviews the elements of study abroad which provide the most meaningful and educational experiences for its participants and compares them with the essential characteristics of experiential education. A final section is devoted to discussing the need for further research in study abroad which addresses the host communities' perspectives. To synthesize the results and corresponding recommendations, a table is included to provide a concise visual representation of the important elements to consider when designing study abroad programs and curricula. A detailed table of contents is also included to help easily navigate the document and consult sections in the order which readers deem most relevant.

1.4 Measuring the outcomes of study abroad

Global awareness

There have been several studies done which attempt to gauge the impacts or learning outcomes of study abroad programs. Students returning from studying abroad tend to show an increase in awareness of global issues and are said to be more globally-minded (Bates, 1997; McCabe, 1994). Not only have studies shown that study abroad participants are more aware and interested in issues and processes which affect the world, but they are also conscious of the ways in which local issues are connected to these, which can lead to increased community involvement. Thorpe (2009), through an action research project, found that youths participating in study abroad programs gained skills and values enabling them to become agents of change in their own communities.

Intellectual and personal growth

Studies also indicate gains in intellectual growth as a direct result of participation in study abroad programs. Based on their own review of study abroad research, Kauffmann, Martin, Weaver and Weaver (1992) divide these gains in intellectual growth into a) foreign language learning, b) the expansion of learning in the major and c) increased general knowledge. Gains in language acquisition have been shown to come in the form of increased listening and comprehension abilities for students who study abroad in non-English speaking countries (Ginsberg, 1992; Kline, 1998). Although much less studied, there is also some evidence suggesting that study abroad programs help university undergraduates gain new perspectives in the content and methods of their major fields. According to Kauffmann et al., (1992) “many students receive a good dose of reality about the nature of their chosen fields...(which) causes them to narrow their choices, sometimes opening their eyes to a world of new possibilities” (p.44). A further yet related aspect of intellectual growth is that of increased interest in academic issues and matters. Hadis (2005) determined that students returning to the U.S after having studied abroad showed higher degrees of academic focusing. In other words, these students placed a higher priority on learning for the purpose of increasing their knowledge and improving themselves. Hadis, however, was unable to separate these gains in academic focusing from other personal gains in open-mindedness and independence. Along with these impacts on personal development, research indicates that study abroad has the potential to increase one’s intrapersonal understanding through enhanced self-awareness, self-confidence and self-reliance; to further interpersonal development by fostering appreciation of difference and others; to encourage development of values through re-

examination and to help in the development of life direction or vocation (Kaufmann et al., 1992).

1.5 Defining study abroad

The term study abroad refers to any educational opportunity pursued outside the geographical boundaries of the learners' country of residence. Study abroad programs may involve formal classes, volunteer opportunities, internships, research or other arrangements. Given this broad definition and range of study abroad, the potential for research on the impacts of study abroad seems limitless. Not only are study abroad programs and opportunities increasing in popularity, but they are also varied in length, in aim, in size, in destination and ultimately in effectiveness when measured by their impact on the participants' learning and lives. Perhaps the most obvious division amongst study abroad programs is between short and long term. The amount of time spent in the host country generally determines whether programs fall into the former or latter category. According to Donnelly-Smith (2009), long-term programs were the norm for several years and as a result "short-term study abroad has suffered an often unjustified reputation problem" (¶3). A month, or shorter, is simply not a long enough time for any significant experience, learning or transformation to take place say the short term study abroad critics. Donnelly-Smith argues, and I agree, that the way institutions frame their short-term study abroad programs will help counter the stereotype of them being simply vacations.

At first glance, the program I have analyzed appears to fall into the category of short term study abroad. With only three and a half weeks spent abroad, it seems hard to argue that this 2009 Study Trip could be classified as anything else. Of relevance, however, is

that the program itself did not officially start when the group's plane left Montreal. There were months of preparation, fundraising and group work prior to this moment, and more than six months of required involvement with the post-trip phase of the program. This program is an example of how a study abroad experience lasting less than a full academic semester abroad can incorporate the elements these longer programs have and can quiet some of the critics and skeptics regarding short term programs or trips.

1.6 Gaps in study abroad research and my research questions

There has been much more emphasis in the research on the product or result of the study abroad experience and much less concern over the process by which experiences abroad are considered educational. Research is needed which focuses on the quality and design of these programs instead of on the varied and diverse outcomes. Referring to research in experiential education programs, Sibthorp says "simple outcome documentation is very descriptive in nature, does little to inform practice, and is commonly thought to be subject to individual participant characteristics and experience which stretch well beyond the influence of an experiential education program" (p. 23). This is true of the current study abroad research which serves to illustrate the gains and worth of participating in or offering of such programs but does little to help practitioners design and evaluate them. The question I attempted to answer was, therefore, not what changes occur as a result of these programs, but rather what aspects of a study abroad program contribute to its success. In other words, what are the best practices for successful study abroad programs? In order to answer this question it was necessary to observe and analyze the process of the study abroad experience as described by the participants.

1.7 Experiential education and study abroad

The constructivist theory of learning states that we learn by constructing new ideas or concepts based on prior knowledge and/or experience. Individuals construct knowledge by working to solve realistic problems, usually in collaboration with others. In its application, a constructivist approach to learning requires that learning be flexible and exploratory (Bruner, 1990). Experiential education, first articulated by John Dewey and others who developed theories of education triggered in and transformed by experience, is itself rooted in constructivist theory. Breunig (2005) describes experiential education as “a philosophy and methodology in which educators purposefully engage with learners in direct experience and focused reflection in order to increase knowledge, develop skills and clarify values (p.108). This definition is very similar to many of the mission statements and aims of study abroad programs. However, although it is the commonly held belief that study abroad is experiential by definition, Lutterman-Aguilar and Gingerich (2002) claim that this is not the case. They point to the abundance of study abroad programs which fail to put the principles of experiential education into practice. Claiming that study abroad programs are not experiential makes complete sense once we understand the fundamentals of experiential education as a theory of learning. The theory operates under the assumption that although all experiences can be educational, experience alone is not educational in and of itself (Dewey, 1938). Dewey used the term mis-educative to refer to any experience which works to prevent or distort growth of future experiences. He concluded that the potential to learn from experience depends on the quality of that experience; a quality divided into two aspects. The first aspect is the agreeableness or disagreeableness of the experience. The second, and equally important

aspect, is the influence of that experience upon later experiences. Experiences can therefore be situated on an experiential continuum which distinguishes between those experiences which are worthwhile educationally and those that are not.

Kolb's (1984) model of experiential learning states that in order to turn experience into knowledge, one must first reflect on their own concrete experiences, comprehend the experience as a more abstract concept, and then actively engage in experimenting with this concept. Davies (2008) sees this cyclical model as an oversimplification since it fails to include, what he believes to be, crucial elements; namely, the relevance of emotion, the importance of memory and the nature of the learner. His more complex model of experiential learning deals with the nature of the experience and includes a number of possible interactions between the various elements of any given experience. Although Kolb's model, in comparison, does seem lacking, its focus on reflection and analysis as key components of experiential education is not challenged. Following this, Lutterman-Aguilar and Gingerich (2002) assert that "any educational endeavor, including study abroad, that does not structure reflection and critical analysis of the international experience itself into the curriculum is not engaging in experiential education" (p.45). This critical analysis that they refer to is most often associated with the work of Paulo Freire (1974), who developed an experiential theory of education concerned with developing people's critical thinking skills through collective reflection and analysis of experience. These skills are often cited as both desired aims and resulting outcomes of study abroad programs, which leads Lutterman-Aguilar and Gingerich to argue that study abroad and experiential education are natural partners. They cite their common goals of empowering students and preparing them to become responsible global citizens.

Furthermore, the notion of education for social transformation is generally embraced by both the field of study abroad and the field of experiential education. Basing study abroad program design on experiential education theory, Lutterman-Aguilar and Gingerich identify ten interconnected principles which can guide experiential pedagogy in study abroad.

In experiential pedagogy, a connected learning is the best kind of learning. Learning should be integrated into one's own life and outward experiences should be connected inwards. Study abroad programs, therefore, should include ways to let experience be used as a means to developing the self in their design. This includes providing opportunities for students to be challenged, to set their own learning objectives and to share in the assessment of their learning. Problem-based content is a second important principle for experiential study abroad programs. This means that curriculum content should relate to real-life problems and when possible begin with themes generated by the students themselves. Lutterman-Aguilar and Gingerich (2002) add, however, that "if one of the goals of study abroad is to foment global citizenship, then it must broaden students' horizons by helping them to identify the problems and concerns of others within the global community" (p.54) and not end with the students interests alone. In response to both Kolb and Freire's claims, critical analysis and reflection of experiences are also required to ensure experiences are educational. Reflection works best when it is engaged in with others, and within study abroad programs, this reflection should include analysis of societal aspects. True critical analysis and reflection are thought to be the result of collaboration and dialogue, two further principles Lutterman-Aguilar and Gingerich suggest be present in any study abroad program. With collaboration and dialogue

established as essential to experiential education, “it follows naturally that community is also an essential element of international experiential education” (Lutterman-Aguilar & Gingerich, p. 60). This translates into the need to immerse in the local host community, as well as reflect upon one’s connection to the wider global community. Intercultural communication flows from this immersion and is Lutterman-Aguilar and Gingerich’s sixth element of experiential study abroad. Action, either in the form of research, volunteer opportunities or internships, is another central element. At times, however, it is not appropriate to take part in direct action during the time abroad. When this is the case, Lutterman-Aguilar and Gingerich suggest “study abroad faculty and staff help students engage in ongoing reflection upon their vocations and the type of action they may take in the future” (p.69). Finally, experiential study abroad programs should be based on mutuality and reciprocity with the host community, be guided by skilled facilitators trained in experiential and intercultural education and incorporate continuous evaluation and assessment methods.

Merging theory and practice

The need for Lutterman-Aguilar and Gingerich (2002) to outline the specific elements of experiential education required for a successful experiential study abroad program arose from the often cited gap which exists between theory and practice in experiential education. Kolb’s illustration of this gap is noted by Breunig (2005) in relation to reflection. Citing Kolb, she writes:

Many experiential education programs emphasize that reflection is an essential element of the experiential learning process and yet practitioners leave little time for debriefing, journaling, group discussion, counseling, or other forms of reflection. (p.110)

There is a noted tendency to choose action over reflection and a subsequent failure to find the balance between the two, which is fundamental to experiential education. The gap, therefore, exists between theories-in-use and theories-in-action (Breunig, p.110). When it comes to study abroad programs, this gap is represented by the great many which fail to put experiential education principles into practice such as those which “simply transfer academic credits from one traditional discipline-based institution to another without intentionally utilizing the international experience as the basis for learning” (Lutterman-Aguilar & Gingerich, 2002, p.3).

CHAPTER 2: THE CASE AND METHODOLOGY

The following chapters describe a qualitative case study carried out through interviews and journal analysis. By sitting down with a group of seven participants from the same study abroad program upon their return and by reading the journals they kept during their time abroad, I was able to use their perspectives, opinions and experiences to draw conclusions about the effectiveness of various elements structured into experiential study abroad programs.

2.1 The Study Trip

Background

The 2009 Study Trip was organized by the International Education Department of a Montreal area C.E.G.E.P (post-secondary college). The trip was part of a larger two-year project entitled Education for All, aimed at raising awareness and inspiring involvement among the immediate C.E.G.E.P community and surrounding local area on the issue of universal primary education in the developing world, with an emphasis on the inaccessibility for girls. The importance of addressing this issue was summarized in the Study Trip's promotional material in the following way:

Access to education in resource-poor countries contributes to better health, higher incomes, and increased participation in community life for all. These social and economic returns have proven to be particularly high when girls are educated.

With its focus on the second of the U.N's eight millennium development goals, that of achieving universal primary education, the Education for All project received partial funding from the Canadian International Development Agency. There was also important collaboration with the C.E.G.E.P's own Women's Studies department and their Social Justice Committee. The international partner which made the study trip portion of the

project possible was the host village's own development group. The 2009 Study Trip was the core of this larger awareness project. By providing the C.E.G.E.P community the opportunity to participate in the Study Trip or to learn from the participants, the trip aligned with the overall aims of the Education for All Project. The chosen host country was in sub-Saharan Africa and was selected due to the established relationships and contacts between an involved faculty member and the host village.

The selection process for the Study Trip began in October 2008. Open to all students willing and able to meet the demands of the trip, regardless of their programs of study, abilities or previous experience with this type of program, the Study Trip attracted eighteen applicants. Each interested student included a letter of intent, a letter of reference, a transcript demonstrating an average of at least 75% for their previous year of study and their résumé in their application. They also attended a selection interview with the trip coordinators. In November, the eight selected students were contacted and reminded of the dedication and hard work this commitment would require. The participants were made aware that they were accepting to be participants in a program which would be much longer than the three and a half weeks spent in the host country.

Some scholars warn against using the word trip or tour in the title of study abroad programs as these terms refer to isolated, one-time events and do not illustrate the way in which they can and should be an integral part in a much larger learning experience (Donnelly-Smith, 2009). Although there may be some merit to this belief, I was not involved in the planning or naming of the program and will refer to it as the 2009 Study Trip throughout. The term study trip is used interchangeably with study abroad program and includes a preparation and post-trip phase, as well as the time spent abroad. The

Study Trip originally included eight participants; however one was forced to drop out due to personal reasons, leaving seven students to begin what was promising to be a life-changing experience.

Aims

The 2009 Study Trip sought to both encourage and give students the opportunity to take informed action with regards to universal primary education. The participants were being asked to look at the causes and make the links; they were not expected to have or create solutions while abroad. In an interview with a student journalist, one of the trip coordinators had this to say when asked about the specific aims of the trip:

What we are going to do is try to answer the question ‘Why is it like that?’ This way we can be more active and develop strategies. Our job is to learn about what the situation is in one specific country... We will be able to help by taking action here, because we will be better informed. Our strategy is to tell other Canadians about what it is like, what is needed and how we can initiate change from here.
(C.E.G.E.P website)

Not only did the program aim to increase awareness about global issues, but it hoped to take things one step further by making responsible global citizens of its participants and those they would reach once they returned. In the process, students would also develop stronger leadership and communication skills. By asking returning students to share what they had learnt both in preparation for the trip and while abroad, the aim was to sensitize others about becoming involved. “It is crucial for Canadians to take action, to give their help back to the world and offer, a hand up, not a hand-out” (C.E.G.E.P website) said one of the trip coordinators.

Structure

The seven selected students along with three staff supervisors travelled to a sub-Saharan African country in June and July 2009. They spent just over three weeks in a

rural host village learning about the country's education system: the strengths, the challenges and the links between broader social economic issues. Prior to their departure, they spent several months preparing. They attended information sessions on topics from the host country's political, economic and social situations to health and cultural awareness. They also took part in various individual and group fundraising activities in order to cover the cost of the trip. Students were asked to introduce themselves, their trip and the process they were going through in getting ready for it through an online school blog available on the C.E.G.E.P's website as well. The trip coordinators were available and well-informed to help students with questions and concerns. Although this was far from a charity mission, the group did not arrive in their host village empty handed. Much of the preparation involved securing donations, deciding what to bring, coming up with feasible community projects to take part in while abroad and the logistics of it all.

Once the group had arrived in their host village and had settled in, their work began. Students were asked to choose one of three schools (a primary school, a secondary school, and a school for the blind) where they wished to observe and provide support if needed throughout most of their time abroad. Two or three students attended each school in the mornings from Monday to Friday. Most students started by simply observing the classes in progress, but became more involved as time went by. Involvement included correcting assignments, tutoring small groups of students, showing teachers how to use the computers, typing, and even teaching full classes.

In the afternoons, students usually left the schools and devoted time to their group or personal projects. There were three groups and each was assigned a particular area of focus. These groups looked at socioeconomics, politics and religion/culture. As a group,

they decided who would be of interest for them to interview, then arranged and carried out interviews which they hoped would give them more insight on that particular area. The findings were later compiled to create a presentation used upon their return. When they weren't conducting interviews for their group projects, participants may have been collecting information for their personal projects. On a topic of interest to them and completely of their own choosing, these projects encouraged students to direct their own learning and culminated in a written report available with their blogs on the school's homepage. The diversity of the participants was apparent in the topics they chose to study. With a closer look given to food and sustenance, water, the life of a person living with HIV, gender roles and education, all participants were able to learn about things they may otherwise never have focused on.

Their afternoons were also often spent attending planned meetings which aimed to increase their knowledge about the educational system in the host country and various other social issues. There were meetings with the district's education manager, local and international NGOs, a reverend, a politician, and several local villagers, to name a few. Students were expected to listen, and take notes and ask questions if possible.

Additional time was made to get involved with several community projects. There were student-led efforts to paint one of the classrooms at the primary school and to plant trees for the local host village. Students also took trips to the country's capital and a popular vacation spot. This allowed them to not only see what life was like outside a rural village and to compare, but also to take a short break from what was a very full schedule.

With their goodbyes said and the long journey home behind them, students were given a few weeks to readjust, decompress and really digest everything they had seen and

experienced while abroad. Once C.E.G.E.P was back in session at the start of the 2009 fall semester, Study Trip participants were expected to start handing in the reports they had written on their various personal projects. They also worked together with a trip coordinator to help create a picture slideshow and presentation of all they had learnt about the issue of education in the host country, as well as the interconnectivity between education, culture, gender, religion, politics, and health. Small groups were then assigned times and places to give the presentation. They began amongst their own peers, giving a total of seven presentations to different C.E.G.E.P audiences at the time of writing. They also took part in the school's Social Science Fair hosting a student panel on their trip and its focus, open to all faculty and students. Beginning in December 2009, small groups took their presentation to local high schools. Presenting to students in grades 10 and 11, the Study Trip participants called on those listening to take action and get involved how and where they could. A total of five presentations were given at two different schools with their experience and message reaching close to 430 students. A presentation was also made at a local rotary club for 30 people and there were four others scheduled at the time of writing this chapter.

2.2 Describing the methods

Due to the fundamentally experiential quality and nature of study abroad programs, I decided to use qualitative methods in this study. After reviewing Bogdan and Biklen's (2007) five characteristics common to qualitative research, three stand out as determining factors in my choosing this method of research. The qualitative method is best suited to answer my research questions as I am less interested in the outcomes of these trips and more concerned with the process of converting experiences to learning. Following from

this is the obvious interest in words or descriptive data over numbers. Finally, because research will center on understanding the participants' perspectives, it is inductive and there are no preconceived hypotheses to test.

Case studies, according to Stake, contribute both theoretically and pragmatically to educational research (Sholz & Tietje, 2002). Bogdan and Biklen (2007) add that although they vary in their complexity, case studies are generally easier to accomplish than multisite or multi-subject studies and are thus appropriate for novice researchers. In general, when "how" and "why" questions are the researcher's primary concern, when the researcher has little control over events and when the chosen focus is a contemporary phenomenon being studied in a real-life context, Yin (2003) states that case studies are the preferred research strategy. There is a great deal of complexity in study abroad programs and using methods which attempt to study more than one program at a time runs the risk of leading to data saturation and failing to provide insightful conclusions that can result in recommendations to stakeholders in study abroad. With this in mind, I chose to do a case study of a single group of students participating in the same study abroad program. The case itself is the program and all the elements that comprise it. The seven participants are not treated as cases in themselves but provide seven different views of the program, its elements and the overall study abroad experience.

In conducting case studies, researchers should aim to collect multiple types of data. Researchers can engage in participant observation gathering field notes, make use of structured interviews and surveys or obtain and analyze relevant documentation and reports (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). The primary data collection methods for this study were semi-structured interviews and journal analysis. According to Stake (1995),

interviews are the main road to multiple realities with the purpose of getting a description, linkage or explanation of an experience. The qualitative research interview tries to understand “the world from the subjects’ points of view, to unfold the meaning of their experiences, and to uncover their lived world prior to scientific explanations” (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p.1). The validity of interviewing as a method is dictated by the researcher’s ability to persistently check, question and interpret the findings theoretically (p.171). Following Bogdan and Biklen’s advice to not control interviews too rigidly, I conducted semi-structured interviews using open-ended questions and probes to uncover the participants’ perspectives. A second important data collection method was student journal analysis. The participant journals were meant to provide real-time descriptions and reflections during the on-site phase of the study abroad experience. I had hoped that reading journals learners kept while abroad would provide insight into the thought processes, feelings, questions, and experiences that occurred for each individual and possibly highlight moments of transformation, unintended learning or memorable and educational lessons.

The informants for this case study were the seven participants who had been pre-selected by the educational institution in question, along with the program coordinators. Although the trip coordinators did participate in many of the on-site activities and experienced many of the same things, they were informally interviewed only with the intent of providing background information on the program, its aims and its structure. My contact with the participants was limited to planned meetings and interviews as part of the research in an attempt to limit bias and to ensure my analysis was as neutral and objective as possible.

Ethics and consent

All participation in this study was strictly voluntary and informed written consent to participate in this project was obtained by all participants prior to any data collection. Before asking the students to sign the consent form (Appendix A), I clearly explained the purpose of the research project, making sure they understood the research process, how the data would be used and to whom the results would be presented. A copy of the verbal explanation read to each participant is attached (Appendix G). In return for their participation, all participants' real names and personal information were kept strictly confidential. Any documentation containing the participants' actual names and personal information was kept in a locked filing cabinet. Confidentiality was guaranteed through the use of pseudonyms and the promise to not disclose or publish the name of the educational institution and other identifying features of the program. I recognized the right of any participant to withdraw from the research during the study and informed them of this right outlining the procedure to follow at the time of their signing of the consent form.

Data collection

My first step was to meet with the coordinator of the department organizing the 2009 Study Trip and ask for her unofficial approval to undertake this research. With that go-ahead, I began the long ethics and research approval process. I was also given the name of a second trip coordinator who would be more hands-on in the program and who could help provide support throughout the study. As the departure date neared, I began to worry that I would not have official approval to begin any research before the participants embarked on their journey. Luckily, the trip was partially funded by an international

development agency and its coordinators were also preparing to write a report of the program and its outcomes. They saw value in my pre-trip data collection methods and therefore agreed to implement them on my behalf and to turn the data over to me if and when final approval was granted.

As an interested potential researcher I was able to attend the final pre-departure information session of this study abroad program and to introduce myself and my research. At this meeting a pre-departure questionnaire with both closed and open-ended questions (Appendix C) which I had prepared was handed to each program participant. The purpose of the questionnaire was threefold; it was used to gather demographic information; to illustrate pre-departure attitudes, beliefs and assessment of knowledge, skills and preparedness; and finally to collect information regarding their aspirations, expectations and desired outcomes of the study abroad experience. Four of the seven participants completed and handed their questionnaires in prior to their departure and this information was used in the participant narrative section (Chapter 2.3).

I knew that students were being asked to keep a journal throughout their time in Africa as a means of recording their thoughts and reflecting on what they were seeing and learning. I showed the coordinators some suggested questions for participants to address or consider while writing and they agreed to hand them out as well. They were encouraged and reminded to consult this list of questions (Appendix D) when writing their journal entries in order to ensure the desired level of reflection. Once the participants returned from abroad, they provided me with either a hard or electronic copy of their journals. I then used these journal entries as one of my primary data sources and as a way to access some of the thought processes and reflection while abroad as I was not

on the trip myself. Once the participants had returned from abroad and begun their academic semesters (or finished their summer vacations), I set up interview times with all seven of them. The interviews ran between 30-45 minutes and were semi-structured. I used a question guide, which served more as a tool to begin the interview with since once talking, most participants' responses led to further questions and other points to pursue. My aim with these interviews was to better understand what and how the experiences built into the design of the program helped or hindered their overall learning experience (for guide to interview, see Appendix E). All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed. Transcriptions are not verbatim and do not include instances of overlap, fillers, or frequent pauses. Sentences which were grammatically incorrect were changed if this helped clarify the point without changing the idea. Knowing I would need to use the participants' own thoughts and ideas to back up my conclusions, and preferring quoting them to paraphrasing them, the decisions made during transcription were aimed at producing coherent and meaningful data. A complete list of these choices can be consulted in Appendix H. Another more informal interview, about two hours long, was conducted with the trip coordinator who served as the main contact with the people of the host country. This interview was not recorded; however, careful notes were kept throughout and typed up immediately following the interview. Throughout the study, contact was maintained, and very informal interviews carried out, with the second trip coordinator, who worked at the educational institution in question. These interviews helped provide valuable insight into the background, design and assessment of this particular program. They also helped to clarify the program's aims and explain how these

aims shaped the design of the program itself. These interviews were carried out once the rest of the data collection was complete.

Short pre-departure participant interviews and various in-field activities were video-recorded. I viewed and took notes on these recordings to supplement data obtained from the questionnaires, journal entries and interviews. I watched and analyzed these data as a second source of in-the-field data, providing visual references to the experiences and environments detailed by the participants themselves in both their journal entries and their interviews. I also attended a presentation given by the seven participants and led by the trip coordinators whose audience was a group of their college peers. I took written notes throughout this presentation.

Data analysis

In order to manage and analyze the data collected, I coded all data (student journal entries, transcripts, notes on video footage and field notes from participation observation for post-trip activities) into categories which correspond to specific aspects or components of the program. These categories included specific activities such as planned meetings and fields trips, as well as broader elements of the program such as immersion and reflection. For a full list of the codes used, see Appendix I. I then read and reread the data corresponding to the different categories and searched for commonalities and shared perspectives.

Evolution of the design

The qualitative nature of this research design was meant to leave room for the design to evolve, develop and even change as the research got underway. There are various stages of the research which I had anticipated could influence the design of the project.

The first of these was the pre-departure phase where I met the participants for the first time. Without official approval, I was unable to administer the student questionnaire as I had hoped. This resulted in several participants losing their questionnaires, or completing them upon their return and forced me to rely on this data for purely demographic purposes. Online blogs could not be updated as planned while students were abroad and there was therefore no contact with participants during this phase of their program. I had hoped the journals would provide insightful and complete accounts of the three and a half weeks participants spent in Africa. Very few students, however, found the time to routinely write in their journals throughout the duration of their time abroad. It was also apparent that the journal guide was rarely consulted. These observations led me to focus not only on what was missing from the entries and why, but also to rely more heavily on the interviews and video footage. Finally, I had hoped to interview each participant upon their return and to conduct one focus group session once an initial analysis of the data had been done. The focus group idea was abandoned once the true magnitude of collected data became apparent and interviews uncovered tension between the group and one of its members.

2.3 Presentation of participants through narratives: Interests, expectations and motivations

Introduction

The 2009 Study Trip was open to students of all backgrounds in any academic program. The final group of participants was therefore, not surprisingly, diverse and unique. The six females and one male who made up this group ranged in ages from 17 to 23, although the majority of participants were in the younger range. While one had never been on a plane, another had travelled and studied abroad on numerous occasions. Their

interests were broad and their personalities distinct. Each had unique insight into what made the Study Trip memorable and educational. In an attempt to honour their expressed opinions and breathe life into my analysis, I use the participants' own words and actual experiences throughout my findings. Before detailing what they thought, I turn to who these participants are.

Lisa

“As I grow up, I have come to understand that helping someone with a sincere heart brings me the greatest joy.”

Lisa was nearing the end of her Accounting degree when the poster for the 2009 Study Trip caught her eye. She knew right then that she wanted to apply. For her, the decision was simple; she saw the trip as a chance to help out, in whatever small way, and knew it was time for her to make this commitment. This wouldn't be her first time travelling or living abroad, but it would be the first study abroad program she participated in. She expected this experience to change her. She thought she would be able to give back, to learn about a new culture and to forge new and meaningful friendships. She also hoped to understand how others viewed the world and how these perspectives compared with her own views on things. She hoped this program, especially the post-trip portion of it, where she and the other participants would share what they learnt with others, would help create awareness and get young people to take action.

Lisa is soft spoken but not shy. Although she identifies listening and observation as two of her greatest skills, she has a high degree of self-esteem and is comfortable as a leader in any situation. This may be due to her calm and collected nature, which helps her face challenges and overcome obstacles. She did, however, hope this trip would help

build her leadership skills, and present her with new challenges to tackle, and subsequently strengthen her personality.

Lisa has all the personal traits and motivations one needs to successfully study abroad and take away lessons from such an experience, but she also has a personal connection to the trip's mission unlike any other participant. Lisa was born and raised in a small developing nation herself and has seen the conditions and misery such economic vulnerability can have on people. Her own family lost everything in a fire and pulled through with the help of friends and strangers alike. Not only had her own upbringing prepared her mentally for what to many would be a tremendous culture shock, but her misfortune and accompanying fortune gave her an appreciation of giving back in whatever way one can.

Shannon

"Whether good or bad, every situation will be a learning experience and will allow me to grow as an individual."

When Shannon first heard of the 2009 Study Trip, she knew it was something that interested her, but her decision to apply was slower than some as she weighed the perceived benefits of the trip against her concerns. Attendance to a general meeting about the trip and its aims convinced her to apply and reassured her that not only did this trip correspond with her program's emphasis on intercultural understanding, but also that she would be able to make the commitment the trip required while keeping up with the academic workload of her Honours Science program. For her, this trip represented a unique opportunity that would be equally rewarding for both herself and others. It would be a chance to learn from others, but also to learn more about herself. She hoped to immerse herself in the culture and anticipated creating bonds with local people. She

expected the stories she would hear and the people she would meet to change her perspective on things. She aimed to both gain awareness of global issues and raise this same awareness in Canada upon her return.

Although Shannon was among the youngest to take part in this trip, she is an extremely well-spoken and driven individual who expresses herself very clearly. Active in dance outside of school, she views it as a way to communicate and expected it to break any cultural boundaries while abroad. She worried most about unintentionally insulting others due to cultural differences but felt very prepared to take this trip. Shannon began to reflect on things prior to departing to the host country. The more she learnt about the host country and the education system in this part of the world, the more she began to appreciate what she had and to question the status quo she had grown up with.

Emily

“To get an education is a privilege but one everyone should have access to.”

Emily, the oldest, at first glance seems an unlikely candidate for this study trip. She had never lived or travelled abroad, or even been on a plane. Most of her post-secondary education had been in professional cooking and she had only recently transferred into a Social Science program. She is an extremely soft-spoken person, some may even say shy, and in the early stages of the trip preparation, she did not see herself as having much self-esteem. However, Emily is open to new experiences and explained that perhaps because this trip would involve so many firsts was the exact reason she had decided to apply for it. She was already involved in her college’s Social Justice Committee and was genuinely concerned about the issue of universal primary education.

Emily has many interests, from cooking to reading to sports, but she also spends much of her time volunteering and getting involved. This may be why this trip, which at first glance seems at odds with her experience and personality, was really a perfect fit. She entered this commitment with understandable worries and concerns, but also with an open mind. She expected to learn from every aspect of the experience, including her first plane ride! Ultimately, Emily hoped to broaden her understanding of Africa, education and people. She knows her life is a privileged one and sees no reason not to commit her time and effort to various projects and causes, such as the 2009 Study Trip.

Greg

“I know that after a trip like this one, I will become a better person.”

It was his first day of school when a pamphlet advertising the 2009 Study Trip caught his eye. In our interview he explained that he had always expected to follow the norm. That is, graduate high school, enter college, start university, find a job, find a wife and have some kids. Nowhere in this life plan had he pictured taking a trip to Africa, getting involved in raising awareness on a local scale and experiencing all this trip had to offer. It was therefore the novelty of this program that inspired him to apply along with the pamphlet’s call to “Become global citizens”. For Greg, this trip was a chance to do something that would affect people outside his immediate surroundings. He knew he wasn’t setting out to change the world but felt *seeing* it through the lens of this trip was at least a small start towards becoming an aware global citizen.

Once Greg was selected to participate in the study trip, it was affirmed that he would in fact be the only male of the seven participants. Luckily, Greg is an outgoing and social person and saw this as a further challenge, one that would make the whole experience

more fun and exciting. As a Commerce student passionate about economic issues, Greg was really venturing outside his area of comfort and knowledge with participation in this trip dedicated to learning about universal primary education. He expected his opinions and views to be challenged and changed as a result of not only what he would see and who he would meet abroad, but also because of the participants who would share in this experience with him. He noted subtle changes in his habits and attitudes early on in his participation and looked forward to growing more as an individual throughout the entire process. For Greg, the more than year long engagement with this project would be the first time he would fully commit himself in this way and he vowed very early on to stick with it and not give up. This trip was his personal challenge but also one where he could try to do his part in understanding and reflecting on the realities of the world.

Tanya

“If you want the world to be better, then you have to make it that way.”

If there was an obvious shoe-in amongst the eighteen applicants for this trip, it was probably Tanya. A Social Studies student, Tanya is majoring in Green Studies and aims at promoting environmental sustainability. She is no stranger to studying abroad and had in fact participated in four short-term study abroad programs prior to leaving for the 2009 Study Trip. Three of those were aimed at raising social and environmental awareness amongst the participants on issues ranging from Brazil’s landless farmer movement to environmental justice in Ecuador. She is not only more conscious and aware of global issues than most eighteen year olds, but more importantly she is active in tackling them. She is involved in school projects and committees aimed at discussing issues of social

justice and creating global connections. For Tanya, this Study Trip was yet another opportunity to get involved, to learn, to meet new people and to explore a new culture.

Tanya is energetic and passionate about what she believes in and is a natural leader. She is a caring and enthusiastic person, as well as a dedicated honours student and an avid babysitter. She was extremely excited about the chance to work in schools and meet children in the host country. Aspiring to a career in the field of sustainable development, she also saw this trip as an opportunity to see firsthand what challenges developing nations face and what work is being done to meet these challenges. She clearly set out to learn as much as possible from others and saw it as her responsibility to impart this knowledge once back in Canada and to try and engage other youth to become active and engaged citizens.

Kristen

“I’ve been blessed my whole life with everything I could possibly want, and I’ve always wanted an opportunity to be able to give back.”

Kristen, a second year Commerce student at the time of her application, hoped this trip would give her the chance to help others here in Canada realize how fortunate they are to have access to education and to show them what existed outside of their comfortable bubbles. She also recognized her privileged position in life and saw this trip as a way to give back, in some small way, to those who have not been as fortunate. She really looked forward to taking this trip as part of a study group and expected all the different personalities to enrich the overall experience. Ultimately, Kristen set out to educate herself and to put herself in the position where she would be able to educate others.

Kristen describes herself as hard-working and determined. This is reflected in her school grades but also in her various sporting accomplishments. Having moved twice at a

young age, she also proved to be a very adaptable person, one who easily makes friends and can adjust to new circumstances in a short amount of time. Once selected to participate in this trip, Kristen began reading what she could about the host country and culture in order to prepare for the adjustment and to ensure that she was ready to be culturally sensitive. Able to identify past life lessons she had learnt through hard work and perseverance, she knew this trip was going to provide other such lessons, but broader and larger than anything she had ever experienced.

Amanda

“I want to help expand the horizons of others and take on a new challenge.”

Amanda’s self-professed passions are language and culture. The youngest of the seven participants, she chose a Social Science degree with a major in International Studies in order to pursue these interests. One of the main reasons for choosing this particular college was the Study Trip, which she had learnt of during her campus visit. For her, it would broaden her understanding of the inaccessibility of education in many parts of the world and would be a step towards making this a problem of the past.

Amanda is outgoing and friendly, which naturally helps her work cohesively in groups. She chose to get involved with the school’s social justice committee in her first year of studies and saw this trip as another way for her to be part of something. Although she had never been to Africa, she chose to carefully research and study the harsh global reality of child soldiers while still in high school. With African youth affected by this phenomenon in large numbers, Amanda began to make the links between these dire statistics and access to education. She hoped this trip would help her gather the information to explain this lack of access in order to inform others of the situation and to

inspire them to get involved in similar projects. The firsthand knowledge she expected to receive would also help her achieve her professional goals later in life in either international relations or development.

CHAPTER 3: RESULTS

3.1 PREPARING FOR THE EXPERIENCE ABROAD

The students who participated in this Study Trip had been selected by November 2008 and left for the host country in June of 2009. This gave them over seven months to do what all study abroad programs must require of its participants: prepare! In my interview with Rick, one of the study trip coordinators, he referred to this important and initial phase of the whole process as the start of the wave. The beginning of this study trip's "wave" comprised activities that fall into two major categories: information sessions and fundraising.

3.1.1 Information sessions

There were seven meetings held during this preparation phase. Each of these meetings was between two and three hours in length and they were held monthly and later weekly. These information sessions, or orientation sessions as they were alternatively called, served a number of different purposes. The coordinators saw them as a way to a) provide reassurance to both students and parents by informing them and addressing any concerns or worries, b) go over the logistics and rules of the trip, c) discuss and be clear on the program's aims and expectations, as well as the participants' personal goals and projects, d) give students the opportunity to inform themselves and each other about the host country and the issues they may see or situations they may face and e) give participants the chance to meet and begin working and thinking collectively. There was also a bit of language training at each session aimed at helping participants get a grasp of some the key words and phrases they would hear and use.

Although they suggested possible ways to improve future sessions, without exception, all seven participants felt that the organizers had done a great job preparing them for their time abroad. Shannon described what the preparation phase entailed during our interview in the following way:

Before leaving, it was quite a bit of prep work. We met with teachers and stuff like that to be able to properly communicate in the classrooms, how to incorporate TALULAR (teaching and learning using locally available resources) and stuff like that. So those kinds of things. And we had someone from a school for the blind, from Montreal, who came and taught us about how to help blind kids learn. I didn't work in the blind school; Tanya and Kristen did. Um, what else did we have? We learnt about third world countries and how the third world became third. So we had different lectures, different stuff like that. Um, then we had a cultural night to help learn how we eat and eating with one hand and stuff like that (pause) to get used to the culture and the food. Uh, I think that was it before. We also did presentations, like specific presentations on different, like gender, HIV/AIDS, poverty, (the) economic situation, (the) political situation, which kind of gave a nice history of the area so at least we knew that.

The details of the different information sessions are specific in many ways to this Study Trip but as Shannon's brief description illustrates, there was an emphasis on preparing students to be knowledgeable, sensitive and at ease. I asked participants to tell me how they felt about the pre-departure information sessions. The following excerpts support the conclusion that students did in fact enjoy and appreciate these activities, and also begin to hint at what may have been lacking in this preparation phase:

I find they really organized it well because we all had a schedule so once a month was pretty good and we all had to... No, actually they did a really good job because we all had to let's say make a project about one aspect of the host country, like the history of the host country or gender roles or whatever and you know it helped us have hands on learning about the country (more so) than just them teaching it to us in a room like this so... I thought that was really good for the beforehand. I just feel that they could have integrated us a little bit more, not integrated us, but brought us together a little bit more like maybe do more social activities. -Kristen

I actually really enjoyed them. I was really happy that we found out a few months before we were leaving so we had time to prepare, especially since I had never

travelled internationally before. This was my first time flying kind of thing so yeah, I was really happy to be very prepared for this. It also helped us get to know each other better before leaving seeing that we'd be living in the same house together for a month and stuff. I really enjoyed and learned a lot from the prep sessions, especially learning a bit of the language. Tasting the food before actually getting there kind of put me more at ease knowing that I was going to enjoy the food and that wasn't going to be a problem. -Emily

It was good. It was helpful. I mean, you can't, there's not enough you can learn beforehand that prepares you for what's to come but I mean it was definitely kind of the stepping stones. This is what you have to do, and this is what's going to happen, like different situations you'll encounter and how to deal with it and stuff like that. But until you get there, it kind of all hits you at once. We learnt about the language too, which is really helpful because then when you get there, just simple conversation, you can interact with people. Uh, the food was interesting. I didn't mind the food; I loved the food. My only concern was if it was going to be spicy and it wasn't so that was alright. Um, and then... It helped because it was just prep. -Shannon

Non-traditional methods of informing

There are a few main points illustrated in the above passages worth discussing.

Kristen, in her quote, refers to projects about the host country. This is a reference to short research projects in which each participant was assigned a certain aspect of the host country, its political system, history, economy, etc, and was asked to prepare a presentation for the entire Study Trip group to be given at a future information session. The immediate purpose of this type of activity is the obvious transfer of information about the host country. Students who are well-informed on the context in which they will be living and studying abroad are better able to make the links between issues, to ask the right questions and to better understand why things are the way they are. Being informed on the host country can also help avoid cross-cultural misunderstandings and de-contextualized conclusions about the host country's issues. Making the effort to learn and to try and understand the country's history, culture and current situation is also a way to show you are interested in the country you may only be staying in for a short time, and

that you value its people and culture. Interacting with local people abroad, the participants could demonstrate that they had taken time to research and in the minds of the participants this interest was well-received.

The less obvious benefits to using these types of projects or presentations as a way to gather host country information are that students were challenged to put together and give a presentation, allowed to decide on the confines of the actual research and required to become adept at listening to one another and providing feedback. The seven participants were from different academic backgrounds and while some were quite comfortable with this type of exercise, others were less at ease. Whatever their comfort level was, this was a mini-rehearsal for what they may have had to do while abroad and volunteering in the schools and what they knew they would have to do upon their return while raising awareness amongst their college peers and other local area students. In my interview with Rick, he jokingly recalled how the business students were expertly using PowerPoint for their presentations and also expressed his pleasant surprise at the presentation given by the quietest member of the group. Whether the presentations were a way to brush up on some already advanced presentation skills or a way to learn something completely new, the participants were engaged. This engagement stems both from the fact that they were invested in this commitment to the trip and that although the topic may have been suggested to them, they decided how far to take it. Kristen's earlier reference to hands-on experience is an allusion to this more self-directed learning. Students researched their topic and could read as much as they thought possible. They chose what facts, names and dates to include and how their presentation would unfold. The result was a wide range of presentations ranging from seven to ten minutes and

including a number of different styles. As they listened to each other, the students were asked to analyze the presentations in addition to digesting the relevant information. This practice in analysis helped prepare them for some of the observation they would be doing in the schools once in the host country.

Information sessions therefore do not need to be conducted in the traditional classroom lecture style. Obviously, the coordinators have the information that the participants require, but this does not have to dictate the style of the information transfer. Individual research projects and presentations, as described above, are one way to engage students and hone both their research and presentation skills. Group projects can also provide students the opportunity to direct their learning but adds the challenge of working as a team. Alternatively, students could have been assigned readings to discuss, or been asked to come up with questions they wanted answers to. The bottom line here is that information sessions are essential in any study abroad preparation phase, but that they are flexible in how they are designed.

Tasting the culture

Knowing what to expect from the host culture is another important element of these information sessions. According to both Emily and Shannon, both cited above, this 'culture tasting' helped to set some of their concerns aside. Both of them referred to their concern with the host country's food. One of the final information sessions was able to address this concern for them and others who shared it by inviting them to enjoy a traditional meal of the host country and teaching them the proper etiquette to enjoy it with. This was made possible by Rick's wife, a local of the host country, in whose village the students stay while abroad. This type of connection provides an invaluable

opportunity throughout the preparation phase and obviously may not be there for all study abroad programs. The underlying idea, however, is to uncover the concerns and worries participants may have about what is often a very different culture and to address them in the best way possible. In the absence of someone to act as a local ‘chef’, which understandably is often the case, students can try to find a restaurant to try (a very real possibility in Montreal), or informally interview past participants if there is an ongoing element to the program. Even a quick search of Wikipedia or a culinary textbook may help to prepare students for the food aspect of a new culture.

Many study abroad programs have language learning and fluency as their stated aims. These programs undoubtedly prepare their participants with formal language training, but it is the programs with non-linguistic aims that I will address here. The 2009 Study Trip was not aimed at teaching the language of the host village. The immersion in this village was not meant to help participants acquire native-like fluency. There was, however, language training throughout the preparation phase. Each information session had the students learning and practicing key phrases. This taste of the language enabled students to get an ear for what they would be hearing. Most had never heard of the language before their engagement with this trip. It also gave them the reassurance that they would be able to communicate very simple niceties upon their arrival, such as please and thank you. Perhaps most importantly, this basic training helped them learn a language that they could use to interact with people abroad. Being able to communicate, however slightly, opened doors to building relationships and showing their respect and appreciation of the host culture while abroad. In her journal, Shannon details an encounter with the language as well as her view on how locals appreciated her attempt at using it:

But I found that one of the most astounding things was how differently people perceive tourists trying to speak their language to say, an immigrant trying to speak English or French in Canada. In Canada, many people make derogatory remarks when someone from a different nationality tries to speak their language. They get easily impatient, and I believe we have all heard at least one person complain about how companies shouldn't hire immigrants to do telemarketing or customer service.

Here, people are absolutely delighted to hear you speak their language. They appreciate seeing someone put in the effort to speak their language. And what happens if you make a mistake? They happily correct you so that you can get it right the next time.

One day, I was walking towards the primary school when a group of women were at the well doing some laundry. I looked over at them, waved, and asked,

“Muli bwanji?” (How are you)

“Ndili bwino kaya inu?” (I'm good, and you?)

“Ndili bwino zikomo” (I'm good, thank you)

“Zikomo” (Thank you)

The women had the biggest smiles on their faces. That white person is asking us how we are! She is speaking our language! I did not hear them say it, but you could tell from the excitement on their faces that that was what they were thinking. I continued to walk towards the school with a smile on my face as well.

Whether Shannon's interpretation of those women's smiles was accurate or not (and they weren't just laughing at her accent or because she said the wrong thing), the point is that the basic language training Shannon received enabled her to live this encounter. She perceived this experience in a positive way and it was memorable enough to record in her journal days after it happened. Being prepared to interact with the local population can provide these and other meaningful opportunities along with the more pragmatic benefits of getting information, acting politely and making relationships.

For this trip, language and food were the main focus of the culture-themed information sessions, but study abroad programs to different countries could potentially

highlight a variety of elements in the culture tasting aspect of their preparation phases. Students may need to know about local customs, religion, health and hygiene practices, taboos, appropriate dress or all of the above. The idea is to mentally and, if possible, physically prepare students for the culture shock they may encounter by giving them the tools, experience and information they need to make the necessary adjustments. For example, students who found the food a bit bland or strange during the initial tasting found a way to disguise their reactions and show their appreciation for the women who cooked for them. Knowing what to expect in any given culture helps to foster cultural sensitivity, without which study abroad programs have no moral ground to stand on.

Getting ready to get along

Despite all that went right with these particular information sessions, there was one repeated suggestion for how to improve on them; the participants wanted more opportunities to get to know one another better. Kristen, quoted previously at length, suggested more social activities be planned which might allow participants to become more comfortable with one another and create more meaningful bonds. Although participants were familiar with each other, the relationship among them prior to the trip was still very much based on first impressions. Amanda had this to say about the atmosphere at these information sessions and the nature of the relationships among the participants:

Umm, before we went on the trip, we actually, we were very excited. That was the atmosphere every time I'd walk into a meeting after school. Because we still didn't even, we didn't know each other that well. Ummm, I, at first I thought we did. I thought I knew a bit about each person and it was only once we got to the trip, onto the trip and we were experiencing all these things that I really, really got to know people. And first impressions I had carried throughout the whole pre-departure activity completely changed.

Shannon and Kristen revealed what they thought were the disadvantages of not really knowing their fellow participants prior to their arrival in the host country. Shannon describes how the pre-trip information sessions fell short in helping her to really understand people, while Kristen details how the superficial nature of the pre-departure encounters, with regards to forging meaningful bonds, were not enough to predict the potential conflict between certain group members:

Because I find what changed the most, that you don't really expect, is that you meet the people that you're going with before but they're not the same people when they're put in that situation. I found that was the thing the most difficult to deal with and also the thing I wasn't really prepared for. Because we knew each other beforehand but not enough to say I know you well enough to know how you're going to react in this kind of situation but even less when you're actually there. You can say this won't bother me or this will bother me but when you're actually there, it changes. –Shannon

Obviously when we meet for an hour or two every month, it's very superficial you know. We don't get to know each other that well and once you start actually living with someone and always being with them 24/7 of course you're going to have disagreements or things like that. –Kristen

Although students felt well-prepared for the study portion of their trip, they seem to have been less prepared for the demands of living with six peers. That is, they had realistic expectations and assumptions about the host country, its culture, its people and the nature of what they would be doing and seeing, but false or at least incomplete impressions of one another. There are definitely bonds that are formed while abroad that may be impossible to create in the pre-departure context of a program. It is thus not my argument that this needs to be attempted. In this case, the shared experiences and emotions among the participants while in the host country created extremely strong and meaningful bonds among a majority of the participants, which they believe would not have come about in Montreal. However, providing participants opportunities to get to know each other at a

more intimate and personal level, perhaps outside the context of an official information setting or meeting, can help highlight some of the ways in which they should be prepared to adjust. Lisa, who described herself as soft-spoken, shared how she had to learn to adjust while abroad:

I'll start with the main problem that I had. I speak very low. Like, I have a soft voice; that's how you call it. And (for) many of the others, that's not the case so if I want to make a point, if all of us were around the table and they're talking already and I want to say something as well, then their voices will I don't know shadow mine? Or something like that. Like, people won't be able to hear what I'm trying to say, so it will seem like oh, maybe they're ignoring my opinion or something. Before, that's what I thought and that made me very uncomfortable. I'm like oh, my God, what did I get myself into? At night I would think like that. You know, this is just the beginning and this is how I'm feeling; this is not good at all and how am I going to survive for the next weeks? But afterwards, as the days went by, it became... Well, I was talking to Emily and she was telling me the same thing. I'm like oh, my God and then that's when there was a bond that kind of linked us I find, because she doesn't speak loud either so she understood the problem that I was going through and she was like oh wow, you're going through the same problem. Me too! So we talked about it and that made me feel like I wasn't alone.

Lisa detailed the same problem in her journal but added "I believe it will get better. I need to practice more on how to get my point across. You can do this." I included Lisa's story here because it not only gives an example of how participants can differ personality-wise, but more importantly because it points to how being unprepared for these differences runs the risk of spoiling the entire experience. Lisa's story ends happily with her finding someone who felt the same way she did, talking things through and eventually learning to cope with the way she was feeling and making adjustments to fit in. She was able to stay positive, identify the way to improve the situation and motivate herself, but what if she had let this uneasiness consume her? What if no one else had understood her? What if she never understood why it seemed no one was listening to her? Would she have enjoyed her time abroad as much?

There is no way to know how different personalities will coexist for the time they live together abroad. There may, however, be benefits in providing the opportunity for the participants to get to know each other in different contexts prior to departure in order to reveal the different strengths and weaknesses of their characters. This knowledge can allow students to mentally prepare for what they may encounter living in close quarters for such an extended period of time with people who perhaps just months ago were complete strangers!

This Study Trip was open to all students who met a few minimum requirements. Because of this, the final group of seven was a mix of students from different academic programs with different interests, personalities, goals and of different ages. There is no realistic expectation that such a diverse group, representative of many study abroad programs, would not encounter a single instance of personality clashing or group conflict. There is also no guarantee that planned pre-departure sessions or activities aimed exclusively at getting to know each other in various contexts would prevent any such clashing or conflict while abroad. The hope is that whatever the differences and whatever the source of conflict, students are prepared to adjust and deal accordingly so as not to take away from the stated aims of the trip and the overall experience.

3.1.2 Fundraising

Study abroad programs generally carry a significant monetary expense. My semester abroad included a \$3000 fee, in addition to the regular cost of tuition, the airfare and all food and expenses. When everything was said and done, my life changing experience totaled over \$7000, about two full summers of work! In my case, aside from applying for a small bursary for Quebec residents, the only way to raise the required funds was to take

on extra shifts at the hotel pool where I worked. The 2009 Study Trip, on the other hand, included a variety of opportunities for its participants to try and raise their \$4000. In my interview with Emily, she informed me how the fundraising was really part of the program itself and what she learnt from it. The following is an excerpt from our conversation:

Emily: I did fundraise. I didn't manage to fundraise for the entire cost of the trip but I... Since we found out so early, we found out at the end of November that we were going, I started saving money right away, just in case I couldn't fundraise the entire amount.

Researcher: How did you go about fundraising though?

Emily: International Education helped us quite a bit. They had this huge raffle that they started so we would sell tickets for the raffle. Whatever amount we raised while selling tickets ourselves we kept and any tickets the International Education Office sold they split amongst us. So they helped us quite a bit with that. We also had the wine and cheese event where people actually paid to come to our wine and cheese and there were raffles and a bake sale and all kinds of stuff like that. Um, and oh we also had, we also went to small businesses or large businesses with a letter saying, this is our trip, this is what's going on, can you make a donation?

Researcher: How do you think this, the department's having organized these different things for you to participate in to raise money, contributed for you? Would you have been able to do it without their help? Um, did you get anything else out of it besides the actual money? Was there anything else you learnt in the process?

Emily: It's very difficult to ask people for money. I learnt that.

Researcher: Where did you find that most difficult, selling a raffle ticket or going to the businesses or both?

Emily: It's sometimes a bit easier to sell the raffle tickets because somebody will say, oh yeah, (I) kind of like what's on the raffle ticket, I'll buy that. But then it kind of has an opposite effect too because they'll be like, I don't really like anything in your raffle, why should I buy a ticket for your raffle? You try explaining the situation: Well, it's not about buying a raffle ticket to win something; it's about trying to help us with our trip whatever. It's sometimes a bit difficult to convince somebody to completely agree with what we were doing or something like that. As far as my fundraising goes, I definitely think the

International Education Office helping with the fundraising was definitely a good idea, because I don't think we would have or I wouldn't have been able to raise as much money to help me financially if they weren't helping us out.

The idea of collective fundraising activities being incorporated into the preparation phase has a number of advantages. Obviously, it helps participants with the very real problem of having the money to participate. This likely encourages more applicants to consider the program, regardless of their financial situation. In addition to making the trip possible, organizing these collective fundraising events also encourages participants to work together and meet various times before leaving. While practicing their teamwork, participants are also eased into different types of interaction with strangers (donors). Since many of the activities were held at the college, they helped inform others of the trip, both securing interest in future trips and in the post-trip presentations. These types of activities can also give coordinators some insight into the participants' dedication to the trip, not based on the dollar amount raised but the time and effort they put in.

Fundraising activities do not necessarily make or break the study abroad experience. Some study abroad programs may be less expensive or fully funded by government grants. However, if there is the chance that the price of the trip is dictating who will and will not apply or that the stress of financing the trip is presenting a problem, program coordinators can and should consider organizing ways for participants to fundraise. Raffles, wine 'n cheese parties and corporate donations, chosen in this case study, are just some ideas, but participants can be encouraged to come up with ideas of their own. One of the 2009 Study Trip participants, for example, decided to do some house and yard work for a neighbor, who paid him in return.

3.1.3 Recommendations

The preparation phase of any study abroad program dictates the way in which the participants learn from and enjoy the abroad portion of the program. Preparing participants means ensuring they receive accurate information regarding any expectations, rules, customs and assumptions relevant to their time in the host country and perhaps to their return. The first step is deciding on what information the participants need to have. Minimally, coordinators should make sure the participants know what is expected of them from start to finish, what the purpose and aims of travelling abroad are, how to behave in a culturally sensitive manner and what to do to stay safe and healthy while abroad. Coordinators should treat the preparation phase as a course, the participants as their students and all that they need participants to know as the course material. As the teacher, coordinators can be creative in the methods used to prepare and inform. Mandatory information sessions ensure participants meet altogether and can be scheduled to fit the timetable of any program. These sessions can incorporate group work, individual presentations, role playing, guest speakers, assignments and many other proven and valued teaching methods. Preparation activities should be carried out in a relaxed and open environment where participants feel comfortable sharing and discussing their concerns and worries. Depending on the group, coordinators may consider opening these sessions to concerned or interested family members as well.

If the study abroad participants are expected to travel, live and work as a cohesive group, then it is much more beneficial for all of the activities in the preparation phase to be carried out in the same collective fashion. Since participants in these types of programs are quite often complete strangers at the start of their journey, ways to move

beyond formal niceties and first impressions should be considered. Changing the setting of an information session may help accomplish this. If the program is offered through a college, such as the 2009 Study Trip was, and sessions are typically held in a classroom, meeting in a more public place like a restaurant or café, where official preparation may give way to more informal and social conversation, is one suggestion. Coordinators may also arrange social events for only the group members to attend. Participants can use these to get to know each other a bit outside of the context of this one specific program and may also view them as a chance to be more open with their concerns and opinions on the program thus far. Overnight trips may also be useful in approximating what it may be like to spend an extended amount of time with the same people while abroad. Short leadership and trust activities can also be incorporated throughout the program, either at the beginning or end of each session. In short, finding creative and practical ways to make sure students know about and understand the program, the host culture, each other and themselves has many benefits.

The expenses involved in most study abroad programs not only significantly decrease the size of the applicant pool, but also add extra stress for most participants. In programs where a selection of applicants is required, coordinators should consider ways chosen participants may be able to offset the cost of the program. Writing grant proposals, organizing raffles, scheduling bake sales and soliciting corporate donations are some ways in which program coordinators can help participants fundraise for their trips. Having these and/or other ideas ready is useful, but participants can also be challenged to come up with and share their own creative strategies. Getting them involved will take

some of the workload of coordinators and will allow participants to bond, get engaged and show their dedication and commitment to the program and its aims.

3.2 MAXIMIZING THE EXPERIENCE ABROAD

3.2.1 Immersion: More than bucket showers and outhouses

Immersion is not just sampling the local cuisine or taking a lesson or two in the local language. In order to claim a study abroad program has immersion as one of its main defining elements, there needs to be meaningful interaction with the people, language and culture of the host country. Furthermore, this interaction cannot be sandwiched between the comforts of home. Spending the day volunteering with a local organization or interviewing locals, only to return to the luxury of a hotel room or the removed privacy of a boarding house or student only lodging, does not provide the same learning experience as immersion which allows students to live, day and night, among the local community. Study abroad programs must provide the opportunity to witness and experience as much of local life as possible.

Staying close

Staying primarily in one place, for example in one village, and getting the chance to participate in, or at least witness, many of the daily occurrences and living conditions of the host community has several benefits. There is the obvious benefit of increased exposure leading to further learning opportunities. Since the 2009 Study Trip participants stayed directly in the host village, the actual time they had to interact with the people around them was clearly more than similar programs with more seclusion. By being there when the village sounds woke the community and again when they died down at night, students were able to see, ask, and experience things that went on outside the time

constraints of a typical working day. Emily, for example, got to see how the village women made some of the staple dishes from her visits to the maize mill and the outdoor kitchens and by talking with them about the process. Others built relationships with the night guards and the guides. Still others played with the village children.

Immersion in this program meant that students would have to adjust to a hugely different way of life. Not only was the convenience and comfort of the Western lifestyle absent, but the element of physical hard work was more than apparent. When the host culture's reality differs in such an extreme way with the students' own realities, there is a powerful sense of appreciation which is fostered. Students begin to appreciate what they have back home and seriously begin to question how they had come to take so many things for granted. Emily, who spent much of her free time observing and researching the way food was prepared in her host village, spoke about the degree of hard work she witnessed firsthand in this village, as compared to what we know and are accustomed to here in Canada:

They also don't have the convenience that we do of going to the grocery store and hey, here's pre-made everything, just have to open the box and add water. They actually have to do everything from scratch. Like nsima is made with corn flour, so they have to make the corn flour. How do they make the corn flour? Well, the maize flour, they grow the corn then they dry it and then they make the flour, the whole process. It's a lot of work.

In the case of the 2009 Study Trip, where seven Canadians and their chaperones travelled to a developing country in Africa, a main benefit of their three-week immersion in that particular village was that it created a sense of comfort and belonging. The host village was essentially their home throughout their time abroad. It was a place where they felt safe and comfortable. Shannon wrote about this feeling:

I actually caught myself saying 'home' a few times over the course of the time I've been here. It's strange to think so, but in such little time, I have grown to think of this village as my home. Everyone in the village treats me like family, and everyone is so respectful. I feel comfortable being around them, and I find it admirable that with so little, they still know how to laugh, how to love, and how to enjoy life. If there is anything I have learnt from them thus far, it is that we must not focus on our misfortunes, but instead appreciate what we have, that material possessions really don't make you happier, and that we must appreciate every moment in life, whether positive or negative, for each one is a learning experience.

They were still visiting Canadians, but their hosts helped them feel less like outsiders and as Shannon's quote illustrates this inclusion taught them some valuable lessons. It was not only the adults of the village who welcomed them, but the children as well. Many of the participants describe their first trip outside the village as awkward due to the many stares. In her journal, Amanda wrote, "there were so many kids there and all of them were staring and I felt super uncomfortable." Kristen wrote about feeling quite intrusive and assumed all the kids were wondering why they were there. The fact that the children from the village where they were staying were with them brought some comfort and ease to the situation for both Amanda and Kristen. Amanda described the relief they brought and feeling as though they provided her "with a security blanket". Kristen agreed with her and wrote:

The fact that we had the village kids with us (whom we've grown very accustomed to) made me feel better because they were holding our hands and always continuously around us, which I guess demonstrated to the other kids that I had integrated myself well with them.

These relationships and the almost protective nature of the local children over «their» visiting Canadians would not have been the same without the commitment made by the students to stay and live in that particular village. Seeing foreigners make the effort to immerse themselves in as many ways as possible in a respectful manner makes the aims

and goals of the program much more believable. The host village feels less like they are there to provide some show to a group of students who are too good for their food, their accommodations, and generally their way of life. Not surprisingly, the kindness and openness of the host village created a strong attachment to these people and this village among the participants. When the students learnt that another visiting group of Canadians were invited to stay in the village while they travelled to other parts of the country for a few days, there was an immediate reaction. Emily wrote:

This (news) sent all of us on defence about 'our' village. Someone else in 'our' bed, playing with 'our' kids, eating 'our' food! How quickly we have become attached to the village and everyone there. It really will be sad to leave.

Adding to the facts that real cultural immersion provides more time and opportunity to learn new things, that it can help foster sincere appreciation of one's own reality and respect for others', that it creates a much needed sense of comfort and a place, no matter how temporary, to call home and that it demonstrates a true willingness to learn from others, there are simply experiences you cannot get if you aren't living in the action of daily local life. Shannon recorded one such experience in her journal:

One morning I decided to take my bath. Leila prepared the water for me and I carried my bucket into the bathroom. Still holding the bucket, I closed the door behind me when all of a sudden, I hear a chicken. Hmm, that chicken sounds really close, it's probably right outside the door. I turn around and all I see is a chicken staring right at me about half a meter away. I laughed, put the bucket down, and figured that I wouldn't allow the chicken to bathe with me. I got out and went to get one of the women. Ellie was in the kitchen. I pointed at the bathroom and said the word 'chicken'. She started to laugh and followed me to the bathroom. Still laughing, she picked the chicken right up and put it outside. I was able to take my bath without the chicken.

Perhaps, a bit less dramatic, Tanya spoke of a special moment and experience at the start of her days:

There was something just about when I woke up. Our window was just next to where the women would cook so we woke up by I would say around, between 4 and 5 a.m everyday, not everyone but Emily and I were sharing a room and our window was right there so we would wake up earliest, and there would be like a rooster cawing or crowing. And then the women, we would here them singing and laughing and talking and then they would be cooking and just hearing the sounds of the village; there was something really special. And then I would look up and the light, soon the sun would rise and the light would hit into the room and create like a, there was this really nice lighting in the dirt; the soil was like a reddish soil and the light that just hit everything was really nice. So for me, it was just like all the sounds and sights and like even the smells and the tastes.

Despite a few setbacks with the bathroom and an occasional tale of a cockroach, there was no negative take on the experience of life in the village and the conditions applied to it. Emily was slightly nervous about adjusting to rural village life, but ended up having no real issues. She explained:

I heard stories from the last group about these giant cockroaches and how terrible it was to like have to use the chimbuzi or the bathroom which was just like a, basically a hole in the ground, or having to bathe from like a bucket and stuff. So all these things kind of worried me a little bit. But once I was there and I saw the village and I met the people, and I actually experienced everything myself, I felt much better because it wasn't as (pause) scary as my mind created it to be. Bathing from a bucket is really not that bad; water is hot, you have your soap. It's fine. It's nice. The whole bathroom thing-really not that bad. Yeah. And the cockroaches weren't that big (laugh).

Although some participants did not adjust quite as easily as Emily, no one would have traded staying in the village for staying in a hotel. Amanda explained:

Researcher: What experiences, more than one if you want, did you value the most while abroad, while in the host country?

Amanda: I'd say definitely talking to people one on one. That's the best way to experience it. Like, for example, if we had been in a hotel with running water and our normal food or American food you know it wouldn't ...or just having people serve us and wait on us...it wouldn't really, it wouldn't have contributed at all to the experience. Because there we were living in a tiny house, tiny rooms we were sleeping in, the bathroom was outside you know, you had to empty your bodily fluids into a hole in the ground, you had to take a bucket shower and you went out to the kitchen, which was also outside, and you'd see the women cooking and laughing and that's where you get a real sense of, you know, this is where I am.

These women here that are cooking and everything, I'm not being waited on by them; I can go into the kitchen and listen to them talk and try to understand what they're doing and help them cook. And they'll show me how to cook. And the ones that speak English, or broken English, will try to talk to me and practice their English, and tell me about themselves. And that's part of the experience; that's the experience in itself. If you're going somewhere to learn about their culture, their values, their education system, how can you stay in a place or in a hotel or anywhere where you're not directly in contact with these people? Because you're supposed to! That's the reason you went there; that's the reason you got financed for the trip! It's to be with the people that you're going to study in a way.

Therefore, no matter the creature comforts that may be lacking, living among the people of the host country was greatly appreciated and created several interesting, memorable and educational experiences. The village was, as anticipated by the trip coordinators, the perfect classroom and the villagers, excellent teachers. It provided a marvelous ambiance for learning to take place. In addition, because there was a family connection between Rick, one of the trip coordinators, and the people of the host village, he knew it would provide a safe place where villagers would take the students in as family for a few weeks and make sure nothing happened to them.

Moving in

Immersion is central to any meaningful study abroad experience and is especially important when the time in the host country is short. Full immersion may include a homestay option, that is, a chance for students to live in a home with a local family. There are advantages and disadvantages to this full immersion which must be considered within the context of the program, its participants, aims and goals. The opportunity to live with a local family is often a great benefit for students in linguistic programs. It allows them to be in constant contact with the language and its idiosyncrasies. For programs requiring students to immerse themselves in places far away from home and in realities drastically different from their own, staying with local families can provide the sense of

safety and comfort that they may want or need. What's more, there are experiences and knowledge which are best lived and learnt when in close contact with the local culture, as is true in homestays. While on a short four-day trip to an indigenous village during my undergraduate semester abroad, all students were placed with local families, which in most cases meant they were given a small place to hang their hammock in a local family's grass hut. The stories of trying to communicate through what was essentially charades with the women of the households that my peers told were enough to wish you had shared the same experience. They also spent time with children and were genuinely treated as part of these families for the very short amount of time they were there. The ideal homestay is thus a welcoming and caring family with genuine interest in getting to know you and teaching you about themselves, their language and their culture.

My homestay situation, on the other hand, demonstrated how these options are not necessarily more educational or meaningful. A fellow participant and I were sent to stay with a local man who spent his days and nights guarding his most recent lobster catch. His two-story cement home was not only the talk of the village, but was also furnished. It was definitely luxurious by their standards. Sadly, I can't remember a single conversation I had with this man. There is a picture of us, which proves we did in fact meet, but this "home" was really nothing more than a place to rest at night. It seemed obvious that this arrangement was another income generating activity for him, and clearly one that brought in less than the future sale of his lobster. Since there is almost always a monetary amount given to the host family, there are always concerns as to whether or not the host family will go beyond providing the essential comforts agreed to and actually make an effort to immerse the student into their family.

The corresponding dollar amount also means that recruiting homestay families in places where interested local families outnumber the required number of homestay families can create competition, jealousy and other unwanted sentiments among the local community. In many cultures, villages are made up of larger extended families and may have certain ways of sharing wealth or making it. Without a doubt, homestay options must be considered only if and when there are agreement and interest among the local community. Study abroad programs to larger towns or cities can avoid some of the roadblocks present in penetrating rural or village life, but there must also be genuine interest for cultural sharing and exchange among all involved parties.

The students participating in the 2009 Study Trip had a house to themselves. The house, however, was nestled in the middle of a small village. There was an intimacy and a sense of feeling as though they were in fact part of a family which Emily described in our interview:

I mean it sort of was like we were staying with a family while we were there because as soon as we got to the village, it was like our home. This was our home, this was our family, (and) this is how they treated us. We were very welcome. There was always someone there to kind of sit with you or talk with you. We had Nellie, who was very much like our mother figure sort of, always there and making sure we were okay and asking, are you going to take your bath today? So it was like we were staying with a family.

There was this feeling of family felt among the participants although they had their own place to stay, but there was also an important space created in this student house. It was a space to bond (Chapter 3.2.5), and in a sense escape. Emily described the need for this space:

It's kind of intense to be in a completely different country, different continent, different culture, experiencing, seeing things (which are) very different. It's kind of nice to be able to sit down for a little while with (pause) people who understand what you're feeling, what you're experiencing, what you're seeing (pause). Kind

of like our feeling meetings that we would have with the whole group except this is a little more relaxed; you're not obliged to say anything. You can just sit there and relax and kind of unwind.

To reiterate, whether to incorporate a homestay option into a study abroad program will depend on many factors. If it does seem like something that will be overwhelmingly beneficial, it must also be feasible and most importantly, it must be something that the host community desires. In the case of the 2009 Study Trip, the idea of having students stay in the actual houses of the other villagers was brought up, but they were a bit shy about it. Rick believed this was probably due to their very modest living conditions. After a village discussion, it was agreed that it would be better if the visitors had an empty house to themselves. When full immersion through homestay is not practical, possible or desired, there are benefits to providing students accommodations to share within the host community.

Recommendations

The students' experiences and opinions suggest coordinators should find ways to incorporate immersion into study abroad programs. This can be done by maximizing the time and opportunities for participants to interact with local people. Whenever possible, and undoubtedly with physical and mental health in mind, coordinators should ensure that students are either experiencing or fully aware of the living conditions of their host community. It is recommended that coordinators make sure participants will be well-received and welcomed before any decision is made to temporarily move them into a community. Students should be prepared for what they may experience and able to be culturally sensitive and respectful throughout this shared time in the host community.

3.2.2 Reflection: To journal or not to journal

Journal writing has long been a way for both young and old to express their deepest thoughts, feelings, and concerns. It has more recently been introduced and gained popularity as a required exercise in various programs and courses, especially with adults. Journal writing in study abroad programs is meant to be reflective. In other words, the very process of writing is meant to encourage students to question and to rethink previous assumptions. In a chapter addressing narrative learning, Clark (2001) describes Lukinsky's view on journaling as follows:

(It) is a tool for introspection, powerful especially because it allows the person to withdraw from an experience in order to reflect on it, then reenter active life with a new or deeper understanding of that experience (p.89).

The journal, according to Clark, records a dialogue of the self with the self. It is this inner dialogue which helps manage emotions, reconstruct new ways of thinking, and find meaning in experience.

Before deciding upon my exact methodology for this case study, I learnt that the 2009 Study Trip participants were being asked to keep journals while abroad. The coordinators hoped this would ensure they kept a record of what they were studying and seeing in order to reflect upon it and analyze it. It was also a way to record the information and data they would need for their reports and presentations once they got back. Once I was aware of this element of the program, I immediately chose journal entry analysis as a method which could be used to access some of the on-site thought processes and feelings felt throughout the time abroad. Needless to say, I was quite excited to start reading the various entries. After my first thorough read of all seven student journals, there were

some obvious findings, a) these journals were in most part incomplete, b) there was much more narration than reflection, c) there was reflection on unexpected topics.

Making time to write

A brief scan of the journals that came my way was all that it really took to notice that most participants had not kept up with their journals for the full three and a half weeks in Africa. One out of seven students included regular entries for the entire time abroad, while two others didn't even make it past the first week. This reflective exercise was not as successful as I, and I assume the trip coordinators, had hoped. My first assumption was that they obviously had not had enough free time to write. Their schedule was pretty full and the fatigue and health problems that often come with this type of long distance travel to a new climate and culture could have also been factors. The obvious problem with my assumption was that one student had found or made the time to keep a journal while abroad. After completing all seven interviews, it was clearer that the time had been there but that it had not been specifically allotted to journal writing. That is, there was free time but it was free time to do what they wanted, which may or may not have been writing in their journals. Although in the middle of explaining that she enjoyed journaling, Kristen confessed, "It certainly took away from our free time, for sure. I'm not going to lie". I followed up with this line of questioning in subsequent interviews and generally got the same responses. An excerpt from my interview with Emily illustrates what was a common reaction to the idea of journaling:

Emily: They probably could have given us time, like a lot of time to do it because just kind of sticking us in the house and saying, "okay don't forget to write your journals" isn't the greatest plan because we'll sit there and kind of goof around or...

Researcher: So maybe like lessening your schedule a bit during the day and actually giving you 45 minutes, or whatever amount of time, to say okay this is journal time...

Emily: Yeah. Here's journal time. Sit down and write for 45 minutes. It doesn't matter if you don't write everything just get something out into your journal. It would have been, I don't know, I think it would have worked out better. Because I know there were a few people who didn't get...I didn't finish my journal. I'd get really behind and then I'd find myself having to remember, what happened three days ago? What was I feeling when that happened? Then it doesn't have the same affect.

Emily's thoughts suggest that students liked the idea of keeping journals but wanted to be assigned more time, or special time, to write them. The reminder at the end of the day to go and write in their journals was apparently not enough to inspire the whole group to do so. This may differ from group to group depending on their age, their academic background, their thoughts on journaling, or any number of factors. In any structured study abroad program where students are expected to be at certain places at certain times, or accomplish certain tasks and goals, it seems reasonable and feasible to set aside a bit of time each day reserved for journaling. This time should be used to write what they want. The danger with giving daily structured time to write is that students may simply recount the events of that particular day, with little reflection. This leads to the next problem with equating journal writing with reflecting.

Telling vs. reflecting

Even with the available time to write, there is always the possibility that what students write is not reflective. That is, the journal becomes a simple narration of events, as opposed to a record of one's self-questioning and critical thought process. Despite my brief explanation of what types of journal entries I was expecting and the journal guide I prepared to try and steer their entries in a reflective direction, I was only half surprised to

read entry after entry of what was eaten for breakfast, how much money had been spent, what time they had woken up and other purely narrative accounts of their daily events. I wasn't surprised because critical reflection is not usually incorporated into schools and courses here until university, sometimes well into university. A Social Science student may have some experience with the exercise, while a Commerce student may be in completely new territory. Program of study does not necessarily dictate one's knowledge of or comfort with critical reflection but it is something to consider. In her master's thesis which explores the links between reflective writing and transformational learning, Dali (2007) details how student teachers in education programs are asked to keep reflective journals throughout their student teaching time. She explains, however, that as a pre-service teacher herself once, she noticed a gap between her inner thoughts and the words she had written in her journal. She felt that that there were too many wasted words. Most notably, she was being asked to do something which she really had little experience with. The concept of reflection in itself is not easy to grasp. Mezirow, cited in Jarvis (2006) describes it as "the process of critically assessing the content, process or premises of our efforts to interpret and give meaning to an experience" (p.84). In other words, it involves "recapturing the experience, thinking about it and evaluating it" (Davies, 2008, p.189). It also requires critical thinking and self questioning skills, along with an understanding of the way we learn (Dali, 2007, p.1). Combining this very abstract concept with writing, a skill in itself, makes for a very demanding exercise, especially amidst very new and exciting, yet distracting, experiences. Study abroad programs can work to make this exercise an easier and more enjoyable one by including a pre-trip session or course on reflection and reflective writing. This would ensure not only that students are clear on the

purpose of the journal, but also that they have an idea of how to go about including reflective entries.

The tendency to narrate the day's events can be understood both as an inability to write reflectively, but also as a result of a misunderstanding as to the purpose of the journal. Several participants saw their journal as a way to record and remember what was happening. In my interview with Rick, he said he was considering allotting more precise journal time with the next group and asking them to write on certain themes or specific events, such as the prep sessions or the arrival. He hoped this would encourage participants to keep up with their journals and stop seeing them as tools for listing their actions.

Reflecting on the bathroom

There may be no right or wrong topic when it comes to reflection. Questioning assumptions and realities and fitting new knowledge into our existing paradigms is generally a good thing. However, given the aim of this particular study abroad program, to learn about the host country's education system and to consider the issue of universal primary education, there is an expectation that reflection through journal writing will provide some greater insight into these areas. Reflection on other topics and questions coupled with that on the issues at hand would be welcomed, but there was a surprising amount of pages devoted to thinking about the bathrooms, the showers, the insects and the slow internet service. There is nothing wrong with including thoughts and questions on these issues, but it may not have been what the trip coordinators had in mind when they decided to include journal writing in this trip's curriculum.

Shannon, who wrote most of her journal retrospectively, summed up some of the main issues students had with the journal writing in the introduction to her own journal:

I should have been writing in my journal every day, but it was difficult to do so with the eventful days we had. Furthermore, often times I grew resentful of the journals because they were taking time away from me living in the moment, from enjoying the experience. I also intended to write more once I returned, as a way of filtering out the unimportant, and including the moments that affected me most during the trip. Also, it made it easier to discuss events in topics, rather than a day-by-day analysis of what we did. Sure, I can list off what we did, but that would simply be the outer shell of the entire experience. It is how we felt, emotions we went through, the things we learnt about the host country, the people around us, and ourselves that is most important.

This excerpt supports much of what has already been discussed in the preceding pages.

That is, there was not enough time to write, writing in their journals was in a sense taking away from actually living the experience, and having to write every day encouraged a more narrative account of daily events, rather than a reflective account arranged thematically. What's interesting is how Shannon did not feel that her inner thoughts and emotions could adequately be put down on paper while abroad. For her, she needed time to process and link things together before writing out her thoughts. It would be valuable to conduct further studies and research focused on reflective journal writing while abroad for a study trip or program.

Journals are helpful tools, but requiring students to write them does not guarantee any level of reflection. They can help students remember facts and names for future post-trip presentations. They may also serve to help avoid any major blowups or rifts amongst group members as students write about their feelings, rather than express their true feelings about other group members. For many, expressing feelings in general is much easier through writing. Many of the participants used their journals to keep track of what funny things had happened, writing about them as a way to relax and unwind. None of

this is to say that journals should not be used in study abroad programs or that students did not find ways to reflect on more serious topics and issues. There were plenty of entries which are considered reflective. Here is just some of what students were thinking and writing about. Before even landing in the host country, Tanya took a moment to reflect on the meaning of what she was seeing outside her plane window:

As we flew by Kilimanjaro, it was incredible. Sadly though, there was barely a small patch of snow left at the top – so vastly different from the decades-old photographs I’ve seen of the famed mountain. This made it impossible for me to forget climate change, and consider that my lifestyle and especially this trip, are destroying the environment. Gosh, what delightful thoughts go through my head!

After her very first visit to the secondary school, Kristen, shocked to learn of the large class sizes and to see the crowded classrooms, began to record her thoughts and reflections on the situation and draw comparisons with students in Canada:

I thought about how these kids come to school every morning at 7:30, after they finish morning chores, and how uncomfortable they must be. And that made me realize how fortunate I am to be going to a big school that has so many resources. But even more I started thinking about my friends who just drop out of school because “it’s boring” or it’s “too much work” and that just made me really aggravated because they don’t realize the amazing chance and opportunity they have to just be attending a school with an actual floor and brand new chalkboards.

Lisa, while sitting in on a class, noticed the group photographer outside the window. He was working with one of their guides and training her in photography so that she could assume his role for future group visits. This got Lisa thinking about how foreigners were often able to find work and run successful businesses when local people struggled to get by. She wrote about skin colour truly being the key to success. In her own words, “Coming here makes me realize how powerful being White is and the impact he/she can have. It was the same in Haiti, but I guess I forgot.”

It seems that with a little more practice, time and perhaps guidance, journaling could have been an effective reflection technique since participants were engaged in what they were learning and there is evidence that they were trying to sort it all out.

Recommendations

If journal writing is the way in which coordinators hope to get the study abroad participants to reflect on what they are seeing and experiencing, it should not be assumed they know how to do this. It can be worthwhile to consider incorporating workshops or even a full-credit course on reflective writing into the design of any study abroad program. It is important to ensure students have time to work on their journals while abroad. Special journal time may work better than asking students to use their free time to journal. Keeping in mind that regularly scheduled entries may encourage narratives rather than reflection, these strictly narrative style entries can be discouraged by asking students to include a 'why' section for each experience they narrate. Why they think they feel the way they do, why what they saw happened the way it did, why someone reacted a certain way, even why the bathroom situation is the way it is! Another suggestion is to have the students take on different themes which they see as emerging. Writing daily does not mean entries need to be started and finished in that same day. They may take up a theme one day and stay with it for several days. Coordinators should remember that some people simply do not enjoy writing. No matter the time and preparation, mandatory journals (especially in non-credit programs such as this one) will not always produce reflective thought. However, not writing reflectively does not mean reflection is not taking place. When planning study abroad programs, considering other ways to get students to reflect, such as faculty and student-led reflective discussions, can be

beneficial. These can be less time-consuming and the interaction they require may leave students feeling like reflection is less of a chore. Although ongoing reflection is preferred, there are ways to incorporate reflective activities after the time abroad ends as well. Again this can be done through discussion or even presentations with question and answer periods which would encourage students to think about why things were the way they were.

3.2.3 Participatory involvement: Learning by doing

It's hard to imagine the purpose of a study abroad program in which the participants do not engage and involve with the host community. However, as I mentioned when citing Lutterman and Aguilar in the literature review (Chapter 1), study abroad programs are not experiential by nature. There are several programs where a class or group and their teacher are simply transported abroad. That is, the same group who may have studied together in North America are now studying as a group in a different country. Participants are often sheltered from the world beyond the partnering university or borrowed classroom and there are no real expectations for them to communicate and build relationships with locals. There is often no emphasis on understanding the host country's culture or learning the language. Quite simply, these types of study abroad programs keep participants in a bubble and then make claims to having provided real international experience. In his PhD dissertation entitled *The Experiences, Meanings and Outcomes of Studying Abroad* (1999), Shougee refers to this Bubble or Island Model of study abroad programs. He defines these as typically U.S programs set in a foreign country on the campus of a foreign university and employing American teachers. Other

programs follow an immersion model and try to immerse students in the academic and cultural life of a foreign university (Shougee, 1999).

Many of the study abroad programs out there fall somewhere in between these two models, including the one in which I participated in 2003. My fellow participants and I were housed together in two houses in Panama City. We were about ten minutes outside the city center permitting us to access it by taxi and other public transportation. The living room of the main house doubled as our classroom, where we had regular lectures Monday through Wednesday. These lectures were given by university staff, who had travelled with us to Panama, although several professors made use of local guest speakers as well. With the exception of an occasional trip to the market and our weekly field trips to Panama's diverse forests, (fitting given our first course was biology and focused on neotropical environments), we were very much living in a bubble for the first few weeks. Our bubble burst quite suddenly when the demands of our required internship became clearer. Prior to departing we had been asked to choose from among a list of proposed research projects we would be interested in working on. Each project was organized by and carried out with different community organizations, from environmental NGOs to a group of Catholic mothers concerned with providing quality preschool education to local children (that was mine). Thursdays and Fridays were devoted to working on these projects. Initially holed up in our secure and suburban residence, we were now out in the real world conducting interviews, volunteering to teach, file and fix, getting to know and understand those we came into contact with, being invited to meetings and parties and navigating it all on our own. There is no question that I learnt much more from each of these internship-related experiences than I did sitting in a simulated university classroom.

However, I wasn't really aware of the value of my internship and its connected encounters until I met another group of study abroad participants. These biology students from a U.S Ivy League school, who were also interested in the diverse biological landscape Panama had to offer, were surprised to learn that we lived so close to the city, that we worked side by side with local people and that we could speak Spanish. We were shocked to learn that they had never taken a taxi, that they had yet to see any of Panama City's nightlife and that few could manage a word in Spanish. They were getting hands on experience with the rainforest's vegetation but very little experience with real people. I remember feeling very lucky to be a part of what in hindsight was a well-diversified program. Not only did we have internships, but we also had scheduled trips and meetings throughout our time abroad which brought us into contact with local people from all walks of life. Some days we would meet with mayors and politicians and other days we would talk with farmers and fishermen. There were trips to sugar cane fields, shrimp farms, salt pans and banana plantations but also to offices of new residential developments, banks, NGOs and hotels. At times we were there to listen, observe and learn and at other times we were expected to participate. From internships, to group projects, to field trips, we were involved in finding the answers to our questions about the state of and challenges facing the country's economic, social and environmental development. It is to a closer look at ways to create this participatory involvement that I know turn.

Field experience

The specific aim of studying abroad differs from program to program. However, when the purpose of travelling abroad is to learn something that is better learnt in this foreign

context, what better way to do it than by actually working or assisting in the very context you want to know more about. Experiencing real life phenomena as it occurs provides a learning experience which is unmatched in the classroom. Learning by doing is not a new concept and there is no need to defend it here. Anyone involved in study abroad programs, no matter their design, sees the value in seeing and experiencing things firsthand. The questions are: where is the field and what should participants do in it?

The field will be determined once the program's aims are clearly defined. The 2009 Study Trip had raising public awareness in Canada on the issue of universal primary education, with a focus on the challenges girls face in obtaining this education as its general aim. Their field was therefore the schools. Three local schools were chosen: a primary school, a secondary school and an integrated school for the blind (with both sighted and non-sighted students). Participants were asked to choose which of the three they wanted to visit; this meant that there were two or three participants at each school. In these small groups, participants were expected to spend each morning for the majority of their time abroad learning at these schools. While there, they would observe, take notes and offer classroom assistance if and when they could. During their time spent in the schools, they were to look at how the system worked, what challenges were faced and how both teachers and students were managing despite them. It seemed that the main concerns involving planning an educational field experience had been addressed; participants had a place, time and purpose. While interviewing the seven participants two months after their return to Montreal, it appeared as though they had all valued their field experience in the schools despite moments of frustration, discomfort and insecurity. Lisa explained her experience as a tutor at the secondary school:

Lisa: Well, I was asked to tutor. Well, first of all, the teacher asked me if I wanted to teach but we said, all of us said the same thing because they asked all of us as well, we said that we didn't have that knowledge to be able to stand in front of a class. But one day, we did a big tutoring session and I did tutor kids from the business section and it was very interesting. It turned out to be a full class. I thought it was just a few students but they were like 30 students so I just sat in front of the class and taught them a few things.

Researcher: What was interesting about it?

Lisa: Well, at first it was scary, like oh my God, it's a full class! I didn't expect that. And I asked them, "Do you have any questions?" And they were all looking at me like they had no questions, but prior to that the teacher had given me something to explain to them. I don't remember what it was, maybe it was the break even, something, and I had to show them how to do it. And the first time I did it and I asked the class, "Do you have any questions? Do you understand? If you understand, show your hand." And nobody put their hand up and I'm like, oh my God! So I have to do it again. So I did it a few times and afterwards the atmosphere became relaxed and you know we were able to interact. It was very fun. I loved it. It was amazing!

Although Lisa describes this part of her field experience as interesting and amazing in our interview, her journal expresses another view of her time in the school. The following quotes point out how there can be a physical discomfort which gets in the way of enjoying these experiences in the actual moment.

June 23: "My back hurts from sitting on this bench. I want to lean back but I can't!"
"Business is boring!!! No wonder the students are so quiet."
"Back to Form 3 because the other is too boring"

June 24: "I'm so hungry right now."
"Jehovah help me. School seems so long."
"I'm sooooo bored right now, someone please shoot me!!!"

June 25: "I'm getting hungry right now and want to go home. Emily feels the same way."

Lisa's journal, one of the longest and clearly very honest, was filled with detailed and interesting observations of her days at the school as well. The obvious contrast between some of what she was writing and the impression of her time at the school which she shared during our interview is an indication that with time and distance from the actual

experience, participants learn to appreciate things more. They can easily forget the small discomforts they felt and focus more on what they learnt, who they met and what they saw. Emily, who in our interview described how respectful students were and how much she had learnt from and enjoyed her time in the school, included a journal entry with a very different tone:

This afternoon was a lazy one. Then we had study hall for Form 2. I did NOT enjoy it. I had a group of very disrespectful guys with me. Also, they just asked random questions on subjects I had not done in years. They also expected me to have the answers instantly. Not fun. Not at all.

Her following entry, written on Day 14 of their trip, indicates that there was a growing and shared dissatisfaction with the field experience:

Tanya worded it perfectly the other day when she said we were all becoming disenchanted with our jobs in the schools. Each morning it gets more difficult to drag myself to school. Although I am loving this trip, this country, I am not feeling the same with the school or education system.

This dissatisfaction was a combination of hunger, fatigue and boredom for some, and other more real concerns and frustrations. Tanya described what a typical morning at the schools was like and expressed her concern that their presence in the schools was really not benefitting the students:

Tanya: Well, the first couple of days we'd sit at...we would go into...we looked at the master schedule and we tried to pick classes that we want, that we thought we could be useful in and that we wanted to observe. But then we soon realized the schedule isn't always followed that well. But we still did this and even from the get go, teachers would involve us right away. We would help out different groups, because it was a small school so there would be maybe 6 to 15 people per class so the class would be divided usually into two or three groups and then me and Kristen, who was also working with me, we would each get a different group, and we would help them out. And then a couple of days into it, we started just teaching classes. Like the first day we taught a class. They were just like "oh, there's a teacher absent so here are some books, and these are the lessons you're going to do." (laugh). So with about 30 seconds before we were supposed to start teaching, we'd look at the material (and) just quickly decide what we were going to do.

Researcher: How did you feel in that situation?

Tanya: At first I was really nervous because I was like, what if I don't teach it properly, or I don't really know what I'm doing. But then I realized, I looked at the material, (and) I did know what I was talking about, so I just made sure to read the teacher's guide. Obviously, I didn't have a specific lesson plan that I could prepare days in advance, but there were suggestions in the teacher's guide, and I used my own experience a bit to come up with what to do with the students. We just kind of took it from there and we made sure to speak slowly and help the kids and make sure everyone was following.

And after that day, it was the end of the first week and we had two more weeks, it was pretty much doing all kinds of stuff. Teachers would ask us to teach a class but sometimes it wasn't even because they weren't there; they would just leave and go on break, which I don't know... I sometimes understand because they are going through a lot and they're really underpaid and they need a break but sometimes I was like, well we're not really helping if we're just replacing their teacher and going to leave again. The students aren't getting extra help; they're just getting a different teacher, and the teacher is not very permanent for them. So, I wasn't too sure about that but... Sometimes we would help with corrections, we would type for the teachers, because at the end of our stay, the last week we were there, they start having all these exams and the teachers had just gotten these computers and then all of sudden they'd be like "oh, I have an exam in half an hour. Can you please type this?" So, they would all sit there watching me and Kristen and we would be typing really fast and they would just... It was their first time using computers (and) they'd be really slow so I taught some of them how to use a diskette, how to save on the computer, that kind of thing. So whatever, it was really like whatever the teachers wanted us to do...

Although Tanya was initially nervous about teaching, her comments illustrate that she was in fact able to manage the class and found ways to effectively communicate the required material to the students. She also expressed her concern with the degree to which they were really supporting and making a difference in these classrooms and for these students. In her mind, acting as substitute teachers was not doing much to help the students learn since they were not permanent fixtures in these classrooms and in the lives of these students. Tanya's partner at the school for the blind, Kristen, described her field

experience as difficult and explains why being asked to teach classes was not what she had expected or prepared for:

Kristen: Ummm, it was difficult because we went over there and of course we were supposed to be tutors or aids in the classrooms but they thought we were teachers so they made us teach classes. And of course sometimes they would make us teach things that I didn't agree with, like for example that abortion is murder and everything like that, which I don't agree with. Or that there are gender roles. Like I had to teach that women were meant to cook and to stay at home and so that was difficult even though I did talk about gender inequality in that class but they didn't really seem to understand what that was. But um, (pause) yeah.

Researcher: Did you enjoy anything out of the time that you were volunteering in the school itself?

Kristen: I did. I didn't so much like teaching. I don't really think that's my thing but I did enjoy seeing the activities the teachers did with the kids. Like, since you know that they don't have a lot of resources, they used other things. Let's say sticks to help them learn how to count or they had like a little garden experiment, because they have agriculture studies over there, and so she would bring, the teacher would bring them outside and help them learn like that, so I thought it was a really interesting way for...that's what I enjoyed most- to see them make do with what they have.

As I interviewed the participants and read their journals, it became clear that they had prepared to help and assist where possible while at the schools, but that they never expected to become the teacher or be asked to evaluate the style and pedagogy of the local teachers. The pre-departure information sessions reiterated the notion that the purpose of this trip was to learn from the host country, not to impart their knowledge and cultural ways. They were students ready to learn, not teachers ready to teach. However, although they were clear on the reasons for being in the schools, it was soon obvious that the local teachers had different expectations. Amanda's story highlights these expectations and explains how they began to lead to frustration:

Amanda: So at first we just sat in the back of the class and looked at how he did things and we were there to learn from him. Learn what, you know, what they do, or how they teach, what methods they use because obviously there's a lack of

resources. Ummm, and off the bat, the first day he took us into the office and he asked us, "So what did you think of my lesson?" And you're like, "Oh you know, it was really well done" and everything. And I don't know, I thought he was fishing for compliments but he actually wanted to know because he held us, he sort of held us on a pedestal. Because he said you're the White people, we want to learn from you, tell us what, well tell me what I did wrong and what I could improve on and what I did right. But I'm just a student you know. You went to teacher's training college. You know what you're teaching better than I do, well it should be that case, so who am I to tell you what you're doing right and what you're doing wrong? And we tried to explain that to him but he didn't want to hear anything about it. He just insisted, so we told him. And one of one of the things that I thought would help was that everyday he would give a spelling test and their pronunciation of the words is different, because you know they have an accent when they speak, and so we would try to write down the words as well, what he was saying, but more often than not we got them wrong because we heard the wrong word. So then we thought, you know maybe the kids as well because the kids... He would correct it in class and many of the kids didn't get it right either so we told him, you know perhaps once you say the word, read it in a sent, use it in a sentence and that way it'll help the kids better understand. And he said "Yeah, yeah that's a very good idea, very good idea" but he never ended up using it. So, it's little things like that. You try to help but they don't necessarily take that...

Researcher: So how did you feel?

Amanda: Um, (pause) I didn't... I don't know because I told them, I, we said it once, you know: you could do that. And he didn't take it into consideration so I said okay maybe he forgot, you know the next day he forgot. And then the following day after that he asked me to read the words so I said okay if I'm going to read the words, I'm going to try using the words in a sentence. So I explained to the kids, "I'm going to say the word twice, then I'm going to use it in a sentence and I'm going to repeat the word again". So they seemed to have understood me so I did that but they were confused, they were all over the map "Oh my god, what's she saying?" you know? And so I said, okay you know we're going to try it that way and we'll see what the results give but the results just, they haven't improved. So I said okay, maybe you know it's not the best technique but then again if they continue, if he actually did that, maybe it was my accent because they also had trouble understanding me from my accent, so I was thinking if he did it, maybe they'd understand better. But he still didn't do it. So, it was frustrating. You know at some points I was just like, I know the teachers want their students to succeed but at the same time (pause) they're not always willing to go the extra mile.

Amanda seemed to think that the reason for the teacher wanting their advice on his teaching, despite having told him she was not a teacher, was her skin colour. Lisa, the

only non-white participant on the trip, had an alternative explanation. When asked how she felt when the local teachers turned to her for advice and help, she said:

Well it makes us, well, me... well... I'm not that great you see. Just because they hear that I live in Canada and they think you're amazing, which is not necessarily true, you see. So the branding Canada I don't know it just gives you, it's like it's a brand. If it's on you, it doesn't matter which colour you are but if you live in Canada than you must be rich or I don't know super smart.

Local teachers may have assumed that this group of foreigners had more knowledge and more power to help them than they actually did. Whatever the reason for this assumption, all study trip participants at some point experienced moments of discomfort and uneasiness when it was assumed that they were teachers or that they knew better than the trained teachers. I brought up this misconception that the local teachers seemed to have of their Canadian visitors in my interview with Rick, one of the trip coordinators and the main organizer of the on-site phase of this program. He admitted in hindsight that these assumptions and expectations of the study trip participants and their role in the classroom may have stemmed from having spoken only to the headmasters of each school. He added that in the future he would have to speak directly to the teachers themselves in order to avoid any similar confusion.

Preparing participants and local hosts by giving them realistic expectations and accurate information helps to make the field experience enjoyable and beneficial for all those involved. What is a study trip for some is a daily experience for the teachers and students involved. Neither of these parties wants to have their time wasted and this is more likely to be avoided when all parties agree on the purpose and outcomes of the field experience. Despite feelings of frustration and occasional concerns with what good they were doing in the schools, it was clear that whatever their feelings about their field

experience, spending time in the schools presented a learning opportunity. Through observation and communication with teachers, students and headmasters, participants were able to discover both accurate facts and explanations regarding the education system. The following excerpts from my interviews with Emily and Amanda include more than their general opinions and feelings about working in the schools. As they talk, it becomes apparent just what kind of observations participants were making and the types of information they were gathering:

Researcher: Okay. Do you want to tell me about your experience, how you felt about your experience at the school?

Emily: Well at first I wasn't at the school I originally wanted to work at.

Researcher: Which was?

Emily: I wanted to work at the primary school. I thought I would feel more comfortable with younger children because I'm a sort of very quiet person. But everybody wanted to work at the primary school, so that was a bit of (a) difficulty. And then finally they decided well okay, these people are, there are three people working at the primary school. And they had already decided on the two people working at the blind school, which were Tanya and Kristen. And then nobody wanted to work at the secondary school. So, I was just like, "Fine I'll do it" and I looked at Lisa and I said, "You're going to do it with me" and she said, "Fine, we'll do the secondary school." And Greg had already volunteered. So yeah, at first I was a little bit, feeling a bit unsure about it but then after we started going and sitting in on the classes and met the teachers, met the students, I felt way more comfortable. The students are so respectful there. You don't have to give off, you know how here teachers have to give off that sort of air of authority, like I am the teacher, respect me. If you don't, then I'll give you detention or something like that? But there it's very different. The students, they come in, they sit down, they respect the teacher, they have respect for who is giving them, whoever is giving them this education.

Researcher: Why do you think that is?

Emily: Maybe because they appreciate the chance to get this education. The primary school is free. It's free to attend. The secondary school is not free to attend, which means their parents, their family, whoever it is, has to pay for them to go, and not everyone can go, so I think they really appreciate the chance to get this education. They appreciate that that teacher standing in front of them is trying

to give them this information. And I mean the classes were huge; some of the classes are over 100 students for one teacher. That's huge, especially when the teacher is trying to teach them something like physics, (which) aren't exactly simple concepts he's trying to get across to them and he can't exactly give a one on one with everybody, with every 100 of the students.

Researcher: A hundred students in a class?

Emily: A hundred students in one class and he doesn't have a teachers' assistant unless there's maybe a student teacher, which there were none (of) in the secondary school. They usually go to the primary school. So I think that the students really appreciate that chance. Obviously there are always, you know, a couple of troublemakers wherever there are kids, right? It doesn't matter where you are.

Researcher: How was the overall experience in the schools? Did you enjoy it? Did you feel it added to the...

Amanda: It definitely added to the experience. Most definitely. Because I got to see how the school system worked. Like, for example, I realized that they have a curriculum; they put up a schedule and teachers are supposed to be in this class at this time and then switch classes but they don't follow it. And classes can go on for as long as the teacher decides and then once the teacher's lesson's over, well then the next teacher will walk in. So, they don't really follow a schedule, except for breaks (laugh). The kids know when the breaks are and the breaks are the only times that, the only thing in the schedule that's to the book. And a lot of the time also the teachers, they would start class late, they would decide to have teachers' meetings in the middle of class time. So, the kids would just be in the classes and be fooling around waiting for their teachers to show up and we'd be on the side you know waiting for them to finish and it's not like they have a full day of school either. The older kids go from, no the younger kids go from 7:30 to 12:00 and the older kids go from 7:30 to 2:00 or to 3:00. But either way that's...

Researcher: Do you know why?

Amanda:...they don't start right away. Ummm, because it takes a long time to walk to school, for some kids, they live far away. Other times to fulfill household duties. That's another reason. And during the summer it gets very extremely, it gets very, very hot so it's better to start early in the morning when it's still cool.

I chose to ask participants about their time in the schools because I agree with the idea of giving study abroad participants a field experience for the learning and benefits they can bring about, but I also remember the in-field moments of frustration, fatigue,

boredom and confusion sometimes associated with these experiences. Learning that the 2009 Study Trip participants had moments of excitement and joy along with feelings of dread and frustration was not surprising. The goal of planning these field experiences is not to make each and every moment in the field enjoyable but rather to create learning opportunities, whether these are brought about by a failed attempt at teaching a class or a day of discomfort due to the classroom conditions. Many of the participants learnt that they had no interest in being teachers. Others wondered how students managed to learn anything at all in these overcrowded and dimly lit classrooms. They also learnt to appreciate their own schools more. Kristen, when asked what the first thing she tells people who ask her about her trip is, summarized this last point in our interview:

Well, obviously I tell them that it was a life changing experiment and that it, uh experience I mean, and that it changed the way I view education. I tell them that before I went there, I wasn't quite sure why I was in school and everything. And I went over there and I discovered that I'm actually really fortunate to be able to go to school and to have such a beautiful school. And uh, yeah. And I also tell them that, because a lot of my friends have dropped out of school, so I like to tell them that they have no excuse really. I understand that they're still searching for themselves, but they have no excuse to not be in school.

Community development

If organizing a field experience as part of a study abroad program seems logistically impossible, another way to get participants involved in the community is to incorporate small scale development projects into the program structure. The word development here is meant to include a range of activities which improve the lives of the local community in any degree and which bring more benefits than problems. Although participants may be encouraged to think of projects and ways to help improve their host communities, there should be consultation with the local community and complete acceptance before any project gets underway. The 2009 Study Trip participants found different ways to give

back some of their time and energy to their host community and its betterment. From planting trees and painting classrooms to setting up local support groups and assisting with fundraising efforts, the seven participants found themselves busy with a variety of local projects. Although the benefits each project brought to the community were higher than any problems created, the participants were the overwhelming benefactors having profited by learning lessons that could have only come about through their engagement in these projects. Shannon describes two of these projects at length, while Greg briefly comments on his involvement with a solar panel project:

[Excerpt from Shannon's journal]

Before leaving, Tanya had the idea of planting trees while we were abroad. All of us were excited about the idea because we were trying to find ways to offset our carbon footprint. Trust me, three planes to get to Africa and three more to come back does not emit only a small amount of sulphates, nitrates, carbon dioxide, and all that other junk we pump into our air. We knew this and we wanted to do something about it.

When we arrived with our hoes, ready to plant our trees, we were stopped by the chief. He was afraid that since we were planting trees during the dry season that the trees would die because of the lack of water. Rick tried to convince him that the trees would not die, but the chief was skeptical. Besides, trees are expensive to buy, and he wanted to make sure that all the money that was spent on purchasing them would not go to waste. He and Rick made a compromise about the number of trees that were going to be planted, and began.

Planting trees was a lot of fun. We all worked together and took turns carrying buckets of water, digging the holes, and then finally planting the tree. My favorite moment during this process was when I carried a bucket of water on my head. I had seen the women in the village do it, and I wanted to try it myself. Two women from the village helped me put it on my head, and then I walked towards where the others were.

Walking with the bucket is interesting. It doesn't feel as heavy as if you were carrying it in your hands, but it still is a lot of weight. The key thing is balance. Your back needs to be completely straight. I used my hands to help keep it on my head, but most women don't even need to use their hands. Also, I carried it for a relatively short distance. Most women carry buckets on their heads for kilometers. I love the women here. They are so strong.

While I was walking though, the Chief pointed at me, looked at Rick, and said “Look! She is carrying a bucket of water on her head! She can do it!” He was so impressed that when he came to our meeting once we finished planting trees, he mentioned it again. I was happy that I had made him proud, but I was also happy because I was proud of myself. I didn’t know if I would be able to do it, but I managed. Do I consider myself as strong as the women here? Absolutely not. But I believe that this trip has proved to me on several occasions that I have strength I wasn’t aware I had.

[Excerpt from interview with Shannon]

The painting is a little interesting because you know, you know the saying: you make plans, and life laughs at you? Because you leave and you’re like oh, we can do this and then when you get there, all your theoretical planning just seems to go to the garbage and you have to start fresh. And just getting everything together and then when you get there, you have to network, find out who can do what and then you think about resources and stuff like that. Like when I was talking about all the water... trying to dispose of things and just nothing is working. So that was the first day. The first day was a little frustrating. And then the second day went better, but I mean because we had three weeks to get there, find a painter, make sure that the school was okay with it because we had no way of asking them before. Then, to get the paint, bring the paint, and then get all the painters together and decide what we were going to do so... And then also the funding that we were getting from elsewhere too kind of lagged. So all that put together it was kind of like, well okay it didn’t exactly go how we planned it to but...

[Excerpt from interview with Greg]

There’s a small project coming up for solar panels with Lisa and we started to do, we went to the credit union, it’s like a bank, with Andrew, the guy who’s helping us from the credit union to have an account. We had a meeting with him and it was really interesting... It’s really interesting because I never did that in my own country, talking with real businessmen about really business concepts, but I did it in Africa.

These three quotes are included together and at length because they demonstrate both what types of projects might be considered but more importantly they illustrate the potential benefits these projects bring to the participants. The 300 trees the group had so ambitiously hoped to plant was reduced to 30, and it was after only minutes of holding a hoe in hand when the realization of what real hard work village life entailed dawned on

those helping. Each participant took away a different lesson from their roles in the various projects and the local villagers came away with at least 30 new trees and a freshly painted classroom. They also got a short moment of rest as others took on the brunt of the hard work. There is much debate as to whether study abroad programs take more from the host country than they bring to it. Community development work is a step towards creating this balance and one which has valued learning implications for the study abroad participants.

Interviews

Using interview techniques throughout their time abroad allows participants of any study abroad program to gain firsthand knowledge and it gives them the opportunity to express interest in other people's lives. At the same time, interviews, both formal and informal, can create bonds and relationships between the visiting group and the host community. Not only can participants take the initiative in finding direct answers to their own questions, but hosts can also take the opportunity this dialogue presents to ask questions of their own. The coordinators of the 2009 Study Trip hoped encouraging participants to conduct interviews with locals would "oblige them to do the face to face and to get in their lives". Interviews can be tools used as part of larger projects. The following is an excerpt from my interview with Lisa in which she describes how she gathered information for her own personal project on education:

Lisa: I interviewed one guy, his name is Thomas, and two girls. They were in the same class, form 4. And I wanted to compare the difference for a male studying and the females, like their point of view and then the challenges they face. So this is why I did the interview for them and it was, it is different I find.

Researcher: What did you discover?

Lisa: Well, I discovered that for the male, they do face a lot of pressure as well. On the culture side, they have to feed their family and things like that. And for the females, the two girls, because at a very young age, sometimes they get pregnant, they have to get married, you know because the parents sometimes can't take care of them anymore so if you're married then you know we have less responsibility, according to the parents. But they didn't want that. They wanted to have something more, they wanted to pursue their education even more and go and travel.

I was able to watch these interviews that Lisa is referring to since they were recorded on video. Not only is it clear that Lisa is thoroughly engaged in the conversation and asking very relevant and interesting questions, but it is also quite obvious that the three students she was interviewing loved being able to give their opinions. Thomas, who was interviewed alone, seemed passionate about his right to education and matter of fact with the reality of the education system while the girls, interviewed together, looked thrilled with the fact that they are being interviewed, taped and video-recorded. Lisa explained that these girls were suddenly quite popular at their school after being chosen to participate in this project. Kristen also commented on her experience interviewing others, although a bit less formally. Her comments highlight the bonds this type of social interaction and genuine curiosity and interest can create:

Researcher: Did you enjoy that part of the experience (interviewing)?

Kristen: I did. It was really fun. Like there was this one specific teacher who I got along with really, really well and she kept telling me "Oh I want you to...I have a brother, I want you to meet him so you can marry him and you can live here" (laugh). And it was really interesting to see her, because I'm not a religious person, and it was really interesting to um... Because she would interview me and (ask) "Oh you don't believe in God, so what do you believe in?" And then I would ask her questions about why she believed in that and what made her come to believe in that and why she thinks it's positive to do that and do this. So it was a lot of like debate and discussion with this teacher and I really enjoyed that.

Interviews can be reciprocal and enlightening ways to open the connection between people and engage in the lives of those being interviewed. They can be part of group or

personal projects, used to set up community work or simply as ways to pass time. Life histories can also be interesting projects which encourage participants to learn about one particular individual or family. The candidness and honesty that comes through in interviews often has a very real affect on the one gathering the knowledge. Not only are they honoured and surprised that the person is sharing, but they are also more likely to remember and reflect on what they are hearing. Amanda's personal project ended up being a life history of a young man named William. She explained some of what she learnt from her interviews with him when we spoke:

I did my personal project on an AIDS orphan named William. And he confided in me and told me that he was HIV positive and he was going to get tested to see if it (had) got any worse, to see if he had AIDS. And he was hoping that he could improve on his life; he wanted to go to school to become a teacher and help others learn about the world and also with the money he would help his younger siblings go to school and get a better life as well. But when I left, he still didn't know yet if he had AIDS or not or if it (had) progressed anymore. So that uncertainty bothered him so much; it frustrated him. He didn't want to tell his grandmother, because he was living with his grandmother at the time, because he didn't want to burden her with that and he didn't want to take the medication because (pause) his grandmother would find out and he didn't want her worrying. And it's also costly for the medication. So...I could just sense you know his sense of despair. Like he couldn't get out of it and he needed some sort of support. And eventually he got that support from one of Rick's friends, who is a teacher, a professor, who met Thomas and decided to help him financially but even at that there's only so much you can do.

Amanda's experience interviewing William shows just how much one can learn from choosing to interview local residents but also the way in which the personalized nature of these encounters can create feelings of empathy and understanding. The extreme contrast of William's life and her own and the fact that he seemed to be telling her things that were unknown to his own family did, however, become difficult to deal with. This is another situation that needs to be fully discussed in the preparation phase. If participants want to learn from the local people, they must expect them to share their stories and these

stories may be very different from their own. With the right preparation, interviews can engage participants in a very real and meaningful way.

Cultural events

Cultural events are occasions formally or non-formally organized by locals for locals which showcase the local culture. They are not recreations of traditional village life for the benefit of naive foreigners. The authenticity of these events is what gives them purpose and meaning in relation to a study abroad program and its participants. These events can not be organized by the trip coordinators; they can only coincide with the timing of the trip. This is what happened when the 2009 Study Trip participants got to attend a community event for “The Day of the African Child”. Many of the participants commented on this event describing the passionate speeches, choirs of beautiful voices, incredible dancing and their fortune at being able to witness what they thought was a very unique event. The following is a bit of Tanya’s description from our interview:

We went to a place where everyone else was from the host country and they were putting on a show for their own community: The Day of the African Child. And it was just incredible, and it was really authentic, and they were speaking out against child abuse, and they were dancing their traditional dances, and they were using um, basically traditional culture to talk about a relevant issue. And that was...Yeah, that day was great. It was the first... We got there on a Friday afternoonish and that was Sunday, so it was before we even got to the schools (that) we got to experience that jump into the culture, which was really good.

This jump into the culture, as Tanya calls it, gave them a chance to glimpse the host culture from a more inclusive standpoint as they were invited to sit, dance and be entertained alongside other community members. Several expressed how lucky they felt at getting this opportunity to witness a real cultural event, especially one as large and important as this one. The fact that this opportunity presented itself so early on in their trip created both an excitement among the participants with regards to the rest of their

time abroad and an initial understanding of the culture, which would help contextualize some of the issues they would soon be learning about.

Recommendations

Participation in the host society and involvement with local people are central to any study abroad program. Coordinators should seek to maximize the time and number of ways participants can get involved with the local community. Field experience in the form of internships, volunteer work or simple on-site observation provides learning opportunities whether the entire experience is enjoyable or not. These experiences should, however, be well planned with an appropriate place, a reasonable time and a well-defined purpose. All involved parties should be clear on the outcomes of any field experience. When possible, a meeting with all stakeholders should be held prior to the start of any field experience in order to discuss and sometimes negotiate aims and goals. Community development in the form of practical and manageable local projects is another way to encourage interaction and involvement while simultaneously working to create a balance between what the program brings to the host community and what it takes away. Participants can be encouraged to suggest projects, but there must be acceptance from the local community prior to the start of any project. Coordinators may choose to make these types of projects the sole purpose of their program requiring participants to survey, plan and carry out sustainable projects in cooperation with the local community. Throughout these and other participatory activities, interviewing should be encouraged as a means of collecting data, building relationships and personalizing the nature of the information collected. Interviewing, however, is not a skill which comes naturally to all, nor is it something that unfolds or is accepted equally in all cultures.

Participants should have some background and practice in appropriate interviewing techniques and a trustworthy network must be built with the local community to ensure hosts are ready and willing to be interviewed. Cultural or religious norms may dictate who can be interviewed and what topics are open for discussion. Participants should also be prepared for what they might hear. Keeping communication open between the on-site coordinators and the participants can help ensure these interactions are benefitting both parties and not creating burdens to shoulder. Finally, it is worth researching whether or not the scheduled time abroad coincides with any cultural events in the host country and considering ways in which the participants may be included in these. Inclusion may simply mean attendance, but there may also be opportunities to join in the given event. Local or national holidays, although not ideal for scheduling meetings or working in the field, may be the perfect time to find cultural events taking place.

3.2.4 Meaning and personalization: Self-directed learning

When content is meaningful to the learners, they are more likely to connect with and reflect upon what they are learning. One way to give meaning to content is to make it personal. In other words, ensure that the learners, in this case the study abroad participants, have a say and a stake in what is being learnt. By choosing what it is they want to learn and directing themselves in going about learning it, participants can both pursue what interests them and examine the process by which they go about learning. In adult education circles, this type of meaningful and personalized learning is central in self-directed teaching methods. Stephen Brookfield (2009) summarizes this concept and explains how it does not exclude learning in groups:

Self-directed learning is learning in which the conceptualization, design, conduct and evaluation of a learning project are directed by the learner. This does not

mean that self-directed learning is highly individualized learning always conducted in isolation. Learners can work in self-directed ways while engaged in group-learning settings, provided that this is a choice they have made believing it to be conducive to their learning efforts. (p.2615)

Personal projects

Each participant in the 2009 Study Trip was asked to carry out a personal project.

These individual projects gave every student the chance to research something of their choice. The coordinators hoped these projects would help students accomplish their own personal goals and avoid frustration with researching issues they may not feel as connected to or interested in. Although it was the general focus of the entire program, Lisa decided to take a closer look at education. When asked why she chose this as her project, she replied:

I think it's a very important subject, especially in that country. And I wanted their point of view on how they consider education. Here, sometimes, I find that we, because we have education, well it's not free but we have it, people tend to, like ah, let's just skip class and you know things like that. And I wanted to compare this view in Montreal, especially at my school, and their view on education.

Lisa interviewed students at the local secondary school where she was volunteering and put together what she learnt in the form of a written report available online at the study trip's website. She seemed to be confident in her approach to her project, but others hesitated when asked to go ahead and research what they wanted. Although quite confident about her choice of topic, food, Emily was not really comfortable with interviewing people to collect the information. She explained:

I'm a very a quiet person so going up to somebody and having to engage conversation or ask them questions was something that scared me a little bit because it's not something I usually do (pause), but once we got to the village,

and we started talking to new people or they started talking to us, you started feeling a bit more comfortable. And once you realize, you know this is my project, no one is going to do it for me, I have to you know get started, it kind of gives you a bit of motivation.

Personalizing a project and having participants work on them individually can act as motivation. Not only can they make decisions throughout the research process, but they must make those decisions, which forces people to be more assertive, decisive and to interact with those who can inform them. In addition to a report, Emily was interested in taking some recipes she had learnt abroad and making them into an environmental fact book/cookbook with her fellow study trip participant, Tanya. She thought these books might even be sold to help fund a future study trip. Personal projects of this nature should be this flexible.

Asking a group of participants to come up with a topic to research may not be enough to inspire participants to truly pursue their interests in an educational manner. Coordinators can try and help participants find possible topics before their departure by finding out what interests them and/or suggesting projects they know are important in the host community. Kristen, for example, wanted to explore gender issues and decided to help start a support group for the young girls of the village, one of whom was pregnant, after Rick presented this as an option. Choosing what to study before leaving has its advantages. Participants can begin to focus their research questions and start to think of ways to collect the information. They may even decide on how they want to present their findings. The coordinators who will be on site can also suggest people to talk with or places to visit, assuming they are familiar with the host country. Meetings may need to be set up ahead of time and choosing a topic as early as possible may facilitate this. Also, if participants have a general idea of what they want to study as soon as they arrive in the

host country, they can begin to make observations right away. There is, as Shannon pointed out, one important problem with making these choices before ever entering the host country:

Before leaving, there's different categories and you're like oh that's probably going to interest me while I'm there, but you say probably going to interest me when I'm there, but then a bunch of different ideas come to your brain. You're just like oh, this is interesting, this is interesting and you end up choosing something that you weren't even planning on doing.

After considering traditional vs. Western medicine and dance as possible themes for her personal project, Shannon settled on gender and masculinity. The time of the trip will determine whether participants should be encouraged to come up with project ideas before departing or whether they can wait and settle into their surroundings before making this decision. The idea is to give a clear aim with some guidelines, like including a presentation of findings, but to leave as much room for flexibility and creativity as possible. Coordinators should act as support and avoid directing these types of projects.

Understanding the purpose

Meaning can also be created by ensuring activities have clear and understood purposes. Without understanding why they are being asked to do something, it is hard for participants to make sense of their experience. This understanding does not necessarily need to come before or during the experience, but can also be part of the post-experience reflection or discussion. The purpose should not contradict the general aims of the program, unless the point is for students to uncover and understand this contradiction. Tanya's comments illustrate this last point and shed light on how not seeing the purpose of the experience left her feeling that she had not benefitted from it as much:

Well, we did have this one weekend where we were going away to, I guess, a resort. I don't know, by the lakeside; it was the tourist haven. Everyone's White

there and everyone has money. And you just sit there and you have a tab. Like you can go and eat there like... It's like... There are many buildings so there's the dining hall and you would go, and you could just put everything on your tab. Then you could get a drink, then you could go walk around, you could come back... It was just very weird and it felt... The first night we got there, already I was like oh, this feels so neo-colonialist because we sat out looking at the lake, and we could see these lights, and I was just thinking, how many locals are experiencing exactly this? And we're just kind of sitting here like oh, yeah, we're in the heart of the host country. And that was something that I didn't really like, but I think that I was kind of expecting that. When I found out we were going, before the trip, I thought oh, cool, a nice weekend to relax but as it came closer and closer to leaving, I wished we had more time in the host village because three and a half weeks isn't that much so I would have rather spent more time actually being with people than just... I don't know. I mean, the resort turned out... I even got sick one day there or actually the whole weekend I got sick there and it was, I think, from stuff (laugh) there. But that's not really the reason why. For me, it just... there was no meaning to it and I could have just been with these same people in Canada just sitting, even at my college.

In my interview with Rick, I asked why he had included this three day trip in the structure of the program. He explained that there were two reasons: to give students a break from what ends up being a very busy first couple of weeks and to let them see a bit of the country. He said it would have been unfair to not take them to see some of the beautiful country. When I mentioned how one student had difficulty dealing with the contradiction between the day to day struggle of rural life and this exotic backpacker's haven, he said another reason for bringing them there was to let them in on these two very different realities which coexist. He was pleased to learn that Tanya had questioned the purpose, but Tanya would have taken more away from the experience had she been aware of Rick's aims. Also, no other participants mentioned this juxtaposition of realities as something that bothered them so having a group discussion during or after this short trip would have helped others reflect on this disparity of wealth and given Tanya a concrete reason for having taken this trip.

In the previous example there were several reasons for taking participants to this resort, some were quite obvious, while others remained undiscovered. At other times, however, participants had no idea why they had been asked to do something. An example of this is an impromptu tour of a local hospital. Tanya explains:

And another time, the first time we went to the town nearby, our guide... We were just walking and then all of a sudden he took us into the hospital, and he, we didn't know beforehand and he didn't even say we're going into the hospital now. And we just walked in and all of a sudden we're like, what are we doing here? Because we didn't feel we had a purpose. It was me, Emily and Greg who were with him. And so we walk into the hospital and there was, it was dark and it was crowded; there were so many people. A lot of people were really sick. I don't think that they wanted us there watching them or even coming. They're there to be treated. And then we just walked, there was just so many people and then all of a sudden we just walked by as if we were so important. And then we didn't even do anything meaningful either! We just walked down the hallway where there were more people waiting and looking kind of miserable because they were all sick and everything, and then we just walked out. And everyone was just staring at us the whole time and I felt it looks like, oh, we're so privileged and we just want to walk through and look at all the poor people who are sick. And in that... I really didn't like that feeling and I was kind of upset because I didn't realize, our guide was from a village, and I didn't realize he was going to take us into some random hospital like that. And I really felt it then, like a tourist.

The guide Tanya refers to was one of three local villagers who were hired to act as knowledgeable escorts, translators and cultural brokers while providing a sense of security. Unable to speak with this guide myself, I am not sure what his intentions were in bringing the participants into this hospital. He may have thought this was the kind of thing they wanted to see, or that by showing these conditions to these wealthy foreigners he could get them to help. Whatever his purpose, because it was unclear to the participants, they really could not take anything from the experience. They saw the conditions and in that sense can now describe what it was like in this hospital, but because they were unaware of why they were there, they missed out on other potential learning. Had they known, for example, that they were to look at the ratio of patients to

nurses or been prepared to talk with the patients, the participants would likely have valued the experience more. The situation may still have been overwhelming or uncomfortable but with a goal to accomplish they could have focused on this rather than the awkward stares and uneasiness they felt.

The majority of Study Trip participants had difficulty finding meaning in their field experience at first. Several of them questioned the point of being in the schools. They were clear on what they were meant to do there, but when their expectations clashed with the teachers' and they could not assist in the ways they thought they would be able to, they were unable to justify being there. Journal entries illustrate that this was a shared feeling at times as participants wrote how they would rather stay in the village, or that they were dying to get out of the classrooms. Since they felt that their goal of assisting the teachers was unattainable, many were unable to create meaning from the experience. Slowly, however, participants learnt to restate their aims and began to find purpose and meaning in what they were doing. Some settled on finding meaning in what little they were able to help with, whether it was correcting papers or typing up tests. Others enjoyed their unexpected chance at teaching, while still others focused on what they were observing and what it all meant. As their time in the schools progressed, participants began forming relationships with teachers and students alike which added meaning to the experience. Because Tanya was the most vocal when it came to discussing meaning making and giving purpose, I asked her what her most meaningful experience was overall:

Ahhh. Well definitely building relationships with people in the village. I liked to just talk to them or sometimes, it's harder with a language barrier, even though they speak English, to have conversations, but sometimes we'd be doing things together: playing games with the older girls, sometimes we'd together lead a

group of kids and play with them, and I found that really meaningful. Just sharing stories with people, being at the schools and being able to help out a bit or just observe was meaningful. I mean if we had just like, if we had gone to the hospital in another context, I think it could have been meaningful. But if you're just walking through and staring at people you just feel really insecure. I don't know what I got out of that, because I didn't learn anything about the hospital, I didn't learn anything about the people who were there, and I felt like I was just intruding on their moment of not being well so...

A final point about creating meaning and understanding purpose is that the activities, meetings and situations which are planned as part of any study abroad program do not have to be equally as meaningful or enjoyable to all participants. Although the trip to the hospital was clearly disconcerting for some, the guide could have simply stated that this was in fact the reason for visiting, to put the participants in an uncomfortable situation and create some intense emotions. The fact that it was not discussed is what may have been counterproductive to any real learning. Participants do not need to agree with the reasons and purpose of each experience, they just need to understand them or at the very least an attempt must be made to explain and justify why things are done and help link them to the overall aims of the program.

Recommendations

Participants need to know, either before during or after, the purpose of what they are doing while abroad. Understanding why they are doing something creates meaning which makes for a more valued learning experience. Coordinators do not need to formally discuss or explain their reasons but should find ways to ensure the purpose is clear. An informal announcement on the way to a scheduled visit or a casual discussion over a meal after a certain experience can help to clarify purpose. Personalizing experiences by encouraging participants to pursue their own projects and to interact with people as much and possible will also make things more meaningful.

3.2.5 Group dynamics

Group size and composition

At this point, it is becoming clear that planning a study abroad program is a lot more than booking a few flights and finding accommodations. Because of the amount of preparation and planning involved, there is an argument to be made for selecting a manageable group of participants. The number of participants and the cohesiveness of the group will make a huge difference in the overall impact of the experience. I was one of 24 participants while in Panama during my undergraduate semester abroad. A number this size ultimately leads to the forming of subgroups or cliques. There was really no practical way to bond and interact with all 23 other participants, especially since our large size dictated that we live in two separate houses. Tanya had also participated in a larger study abroad program and compared it with the 2009 Study Trip, which took seven participants abroad:

Researcher: How did you feel about the size of the group?

Tanya: I liked it because...I've been on trips before where it's a bit bigger and I just find when you're bigger, you feel more touristy; you don't feel like you're getting as much out of the country. You just feel like wherever you go, you're a huge clump just walking around. We were big enough that I didn't have to spend all my time with one person, in which case I probably would have gone crazy (laugh), so it was nice because I thought we got along really well. We bonded; every night we would just hang out, just talk and laugh. It was a good size for that because everyone could feel included but it...yeah. It didn't get too cliquey I don't think.

The size of the group enabled everyone to get to know one another but also avoided having to constantly be around the same people, which in programs where students, live, study, work and relax as a group can sometimes lead to rifts and disagreements. Several other participants agreed that the size of the group was ideal for the same two reasons.

This is not to say that organizations and institutions interested in organizing study abroad programs should necessarily limit the group size to seven. With all the benefits attributed to studying abroad, it seems more logical to extend these opportunities to as large a number of participants as possible. However, with more participants, there is an increased chance in encountering problems. Supervision and safety can be of greater concern, group tensions may multiply and intensify, planning meetings, events and activities will ultimately become more complex and participants may interact more with one another than with the local people of the host country. One way to keep the number of participants in the host country to a manageable size and offer these unique learning opportunities to as many people as possible is to consider implementing ongoing programs where small numbers head to the host country each semester, half year or summer on a continual basis. The advantage here is that previous groups can become involved with the planning for future groups and incorporate their own suggestions and advice into the future group's preparation.

Equally important as selecting a manageable group size is selecting a group of participants who will work well together and who can teach each other. The 2009 Study Trip was open to college students in all academic programs. The resulting selection included students from Commerce, Science, Women's Studies, Environmental Studies and more. The advantage of having such diverse fields of study represented in the same group was that participants were introduced to perspectives and interests they would have otherwise overlooked or ignored. Emily explained this advantage as follows, "We're exposed to different things because this person is going to be studying the environment, so we're going to be looking closely at the water or the wells or lack of wells in different

villages.” Others reiterated that they really learnt quite a bit from their fellow participants and that had they travelled with six students from the same academic program, they may have lost out on these new lenses or ways of approaching issues.

Although there were clear advantages to having participants from a range of disciplines, this is not always practical or applicable. Nursing teachers may wish to organize a study abroad program for their students, who clearly share the same program of study. The diversity in this case can come in the form of personal interests outside school, background or personality. The idea is to select a group who will differ in their interests, opinions, and views and who will ultimately learn from one another as much as they teach. Coordinators should find ways to get to know the applicants through interviews, essays or other applicable selection methods before choosing the participants. Participants should not be selected based solely on academic transcripts or test scores. Attempts must be made to understand their motivations, preferences, interests, qualities and abilities before selection takes place in order to decide what composition will maximize each participant’s learning opportunities. In programs where selection is not a factor, for example programs where the low number of applicants allows all who apply to participate or where open registration in a specific course or membership to a specific organization decides who goes abroad, coordinators can still find ways to expose the various differences and use them to the group’s advantage. Getting to know the participants early on and giving them the chance to really know one another in a variety of contexts can help highlight the group’s diversity even in cases where similarities seem to abound.

Bonding

Despite the need to prepare participants for their time abroad and their commitment to the program, there are some things that may occur more easily and naturally while abroad. The bonding that can take place between group members of a study abroad program is rarely a stated aim of these programs but was a highly valued experience for the 2009 Study Trip participants, who mentioned it frequently. Many of their comments suggested that they really only got to know one another once they were in the host country. Amanda admitted that her thoughts about the others changed in a good way once they began living this experience together:

I thought I knew a bit about each person and it was only once we got to the trip, onto the trip and we were experiencing all these things that I really, really got to know people.

And first impressions I had carried throughout the whole pre-departure activity completely changed.

Kristen explained why she enjoyed the time she spent hanging out with her group members:

I didn't really know any of them before I went except for like the meetings so it was really interesting; it was really fun actually to get to know them on that trip because it was a really emotional trip, right. So, it was really interesting to learn how everyone was coping with it and how everyone felt about certain things, and how we all really got along with one another based on our different strong points and our characteristics so um, yeah, that's it.

Kristen's comments illustrate how the closeness of the group was a result of their different but reinforcing personalities. In addition, once the participants grew close, they were able to help one another cope with the emotional part of the experience. At another point during our interview, Kristen elaborated on just how the closeness she had with other participants worked to help her develop personally:

Researcher: Okay. What experience, so activity, trip, moment, anything, do you think you valued the most while you were abroad?

Kristen: Um, I know it wasn't the purpose of the trip but I definitely liked that comrade, camaraderie aspect that we had and that it made learning so much more fun because we were doing it all together you know and we always had a purpose and we were all supporting each other to get the information that we needed. Like I know the person that I went to, to uh, that I taught with at the School for the Blind, she really helped me, I find, even though she might not know it, develop as a person and she really pushed me and we really pushed each other to acq, to get what we needed to get from that trip so I really liked that.

There were several journal entries where participants wrote fondly about their downtime in the evenings when they got to hang out and relax together, as well as got to know one another. Several seemed to eagerly await these opportunities. Emily explained that this bonding really helped her to unwind from the day's sometimes intense events. At a student panel where all seven participants were asked in front of an audience of their college peers to describe their high points of the trip, Greg, the first to reply, answered that this 'night bonding' was a highlight for him. Lisa, who was second to answer, also cited nightly games and bonding. Kristen agreed. Rick, the trip coordinator and panel facilitator, interjected at some point asking them if there were perhaps more outward experiences relating to the host country that they had appreciated. The answers shifted and began to center around meeting and interacting with the children and immersion in the host culture. Initially, I was surprised to hear bonding mentioned as a high point given all the other experiences I had heard and read about but as I re-read the participants' journals, it became clear that this bonding was more than making new friends and unwinding after a long day. Most participants were only able to express how they were feeling and what the experience meant to them or how it changed them with others who had gone through the same things. It is unlikely that these same bonds could have been

formed in Montreal prior to departure, no matter the amount of preparation. Participants needed to be pushed and moved by what they were experiencing, and they may also have needed the vulnerability that comes with new and different surroundings. Coordinators should consider ways to provide bonding opportunities while abroad since this was a major reason cited for enjoying the overall experience. No one knows who will make these connections with whom or whether participants will really open up and share but there is more a chance of this happening if the space and time are provided. There must be a balance struck between giving the participants space and time to be together as a group and ensuring they make the effort to integrate and interact with people of the host country. The 2009 Study Trip participants spent their days working, talking to and spending time with locals and their evenings together unwinding and bonding. Other options include scheduling trips within trips where sometimes the bus ride alone brings people closer. Intra-group bonding need not be a priority or focus of a study abroad program but it cannot be ignored for the benefits it brings to the participants, be they emotional support, sense of home or valued enjoyment.

Recommendations

Organizing a study abroad program for a large group of participants runs the risk of running into logistical problems and prevents participants from truly immersing themselves in the host culture. In addition, participants may only be able to get to know each other on a superficial level when there are a large number of group members. Each program will have its ideal size and will depend on many factors, including the aims of the trip, the host community, the number of supervisors or faculty members abroad and

the nature of the activities structured into the program. Coordinators need to keep the number manageable and ensure it fits with the specific nature of the program. Using a selection process where applicants are considered but not guaranteed a spot on the trip can control the size of the group, as well as the composition. Selecting participants with diverse interests and experience can create valuable learning opportunities. Applicants can be interviewed separately or in small groups. Team building activities can be used with the applicant pool to get an idea of the potential strengths or weaknesses of certain partnerships. Participants, once chosen, might be asked to write essays or answer questionnaires on different issues in order to form research groups accordingly. Getting participants to work together in teams while abroad and allowing them a safe environment to unwind can set the scene for potential interaction and valued bonding. Housing participants together, introducing a number of small tasks to be done in rotating teams, taking weekend field trips or requiring students to eat meals together are all small ways to create situations conducive to bonding.

3.2.6 Structure: A time and place

The time which study abroad participants spend abroad is filled with experiences which are planned and anticipated, as well as those which are unexpected and spontaneous. There is definitely an argument to be made for the value of unplanned and unstructured experiences and the following is not intended to argue against these often memorable and meaningful moments. The purpose, rather, is to argue for some overall

structure to any study abroad program. The amount of structure and scheduling will depend on the aims and goals of the program, as well as the length of time spent abroad. Three and a half weeks in a country which took two days to get to and another week to feel accustomed to the stares and whispers was much too short for the majority of the 2009 Study Trip participants; most would have been happy to stay a few more weeks. Because their time abroad was relatively short, the program was fairly structured. In other words, participants had places they needed to be, goals they had to accomplish and some time to explore and unwind as they wished. It was generally agreed that their days were extremely busy, but that this was the best way to maximize their experience abroad and to learn and see as much as possible. A typical day started between 5:30 and 6:00 a.m. Groups spent their mornings observing and volunteering at the schools, followed by lunch and an afternoon of meetings, group work, interviews or short trips. Dinner followed with an evening meeting and free time to journal and hang out. These evening meetings (discussed in 3.2.7) gave the participants an idea of what lay ahead. Lisa said, "It was very well organized. We always knew ahead." Although this general schedule was in place, few students complained about having to follow it. Shannon explained:

And it's strange because even though in the mornings, we'd get up and go to school and stuff like that and we'd be back for lunch at a certain time, even though it was at a certain time, I never felt like I was being scheduled to do something. At least I didn't anyways.

The key is to provide enough structure to ensure participants are comfortable and able to maximize their learning abroad, but not so much as to risk exhausting or frustrating participants. Flexibility and freedom to pursue their own interests were instrumental in making the 2009 Study Trip an enjoyable experience. Greg excitedly recounted an

experience which demonstrated the type of things participants could do and how he appreciated the freedom with which he had to do it:

We had a tight schedule but it was more when we went to other villages, in other villages, in the city. When we were in our village, Rick would just give us time to do our personal projects. If it was to go do an interview with someone, just tell me where you're going, just go with a guide or you can go alone, you don't need a guide. And you go do an interview and you come back...when you're in the village, you can go wherever. You can even ask him, can I go to the city? There's someone I want to talk to and he would bring you or like I did...I was trying to do something with a guitar, like trying to adjust the sound with it, with a little machine and I didn't know how to use it and the guide told me, okay just give me the guitar and I'll bring it to a teacher at the blind school, bring it to him because he knows how to adjust it. And I'm like, okay I'm going to come with you and I was able to go. I didn't have to stay in the village because it was dangerous outside. So that was fun. I just had to tell one person so I didn't have to go and find Rick which would lose time...That was cool. My Dad would just be scared, where is he, with my cellular... It was a secured freedom.

The admittedly busy daily schedule of the Study Trip was met with what most believed was sufficient freedom and opportunity to explore their own interests and to make their own experiences.

Planned meetings

In order to meet some of the program's aims, participants met and visited with various people during their time abroad. These scheduled or planned meetings were set up by the program coordinators and were meant to give participants the opportunity to listen to and ask questions of different people to improve their understanding of the host country and the challenges being faced. Greg wrote fondly of their visit with an 89 year old World War II veteran:

This man was in WWII from 1943-45. He had to walk from his country to Ethiopia and then got shipped to Burma to fight off the Japanese. He was a soldier in the British army. He is still able to ride his bike even with the burden of old age. AMAZING-SPECTACULAR!

Emily especially enjoyed their trip to the World University Service of Canada (WUSC) office. It was an interesting and meaningful experience for her since she was personally involved with a fundraiser in which she, along with fellow participants Tanya and Greg, raised money for bicycle ambulances in the host country. She said, “We got to go there and actually ask about how our money is used to distribute these bicycle ambulances. It was really interesting to see (things) firsthand and stuff like that”. Others found their meeting with the Canadian International Development Agency, in the country’s capital, very informative, feeling it taught them quite a bit about the country’s education system. Greg took note that 60% of the country’s schools are owned by religious institutions, for example.

However, these meetings were not always well-received. When I asked Kristen about the experience which she valued the least or the element she would do away with, her reply was “a lot of the boring meetings that we had that didn’t make any sense”. When asked to provide an example, she said:

Um, I don’t remember what the meeting was but...I mean, we had meetings with high officials of the education system or whatever who would tell us statistics and things like that but I mean I much preferred doing fieldwork where you know, you go into the school, you find out the actual um, uh passing rates and statistics, and what they need, their opinions, why there’s a dropping rate and why this and why that. And I felt it was much more real to learn from the actual teachers or the actual students than from people who were way up there.

It is understandable that some students may not be as interested in the policy side of things, but not looking into what happens at the policy or government level would be excluding an important piece of the puzzle for a program aimed at understanding the challenges of providing universal primary education. My own experience as a study abroad program participant had me meeting with town mayors, factory owners, plantation

managers, bank directors and city planners. Even if these meetings had been in my first language, not my third, and had taken place in comfortable environments, not freezing air conditioned offices or hot sticky factories, I still don't believe I would have found them all that interesting, which is why I sympathized with Kristen. What coordinators have to keep in mind is that the people who may be in the best position to provide certain information are not always able to present this information in an interesting way and, more often than not, do not have the facilities and resources conducive to lively and appealing presentations. The 2009 Study Trip participants were especially disappointed with one meeting in which the official read off a piece of paper. Although they felt this was pointless, seeing as how they could have read the paper themselves, he likely took time to prepare and obviously took time out of his day to meet with them. Planned meetings can be memorable and appreciated, but it is up to the coordinators to do the work of not only setting up the meetings, but also preparing the participants for what to expect and encouraging them to take notes and ask questions. Coordinators should also communicate their expectations to those who will be presenting and inform them of what to expect from their meeting. Officials, administrators and directors may assume a formal presentation is what is expected of them while participants may be much happier and interested by an informal discussion, tour or question and answer period. The planned part of these meetings, should they be included in the structure of the program, is meant to mean more than arranging the time and place.

Goals and Aims

The structure of a study abroad program does not need to be decided by the coordinators. By getting participants to discuss and set their own personal goals for their

time abroad, coordinators can encourage participants to create their own structure. Helping participants express their goals and suggesting ways and methods to go about achieving them will assist participants in creating a plan or structure for their time in the host country. The 2009 Study Trip participants had personal projects which they worked on throughout their time abroad (Chapter 3.2.4) forcing them to make decisions about what they wanted to accomplish and how they would do so. Emily wrote of her goal to do things she would normally not do, things that challenged her, that would normally scare her or that she would have refused to do. Some participants set out to become more assertive and learn to be heard, while others made a point to use the local language as much as possible. Some were determined to overcome fears of cockroaches or outhouses. Aside from these daily challenges, many participants decided to get involved with various small-scale development projects which were going on in the area. Tanya, for example, became involved in a fundraising effort for a neighbouring village's well which led her to schedule time to visit the various water sources in the area and talk to people about the challenges they faced with regard to this valuable resource. Lisa and Greg found themselves involved in a project to install a solar panel and made time to attend meetings and discuss the role they could play. Others dedicated themselves to helping train the teachers at the local schools in basic computer knowledge which meant they spent any number of hours learning to explain things they barely remembered learning. Greg detailed this interesting experience:

I don't know if it was the first time, it had to be the first time they saw or at least computed with computers because you had to teach them the basics. But I was, I can say that I was born with the computers, kind of. Like, I was maybe ten when I started so from ten to now. I'm not the best but I know how to write, I know how to open programs. They didn't know anything. It was really interesting. It was amazing. It was as if, it was as if...Because I never had anyone to teach me

because my Dad it was the first time also so it...okay, that's something else. So with the teachers, you sit down and you tell them bit by bit. They didn't even know how to use a cursor which was really funny because you're just accustomed to it. You're just like, this is easy. But they had to go (at) it slow and you had to tell them you can go faster, but if they go faster, they go off the screen. And then you have to tell them what is left, what is right and then...You have to really tell them the basics and then sometimes, you're so accustomed to do something, that you don't remember the methods, how to do it, you just know how to do it when it's time to do it so sometimes I would be blank.

In addition to personal goals and aims, participants need to also be aware of the overall objectives of the program. Coordinators need to set these objectives and make sure they are communicated effectively to the participants. The 2009 Study Trip participants were not simply heading to Africa to see how others lived; they set out to look at how the education system worked in the host country, who was in school, who wasn't, which resources were available to the teachers and students, which weren't, and how politics, gender roles, religion and economics influenced education. They had a lot to accomplish and knew they would use their time at the schools, interviews, meetings and meaningful interaction with the villagers to find the answers they were looking for. Understanding the goals and aims of the program helped them understand its structure and encouraged them to manage their time. Often, clearly explaining the goals can help justify a given element or activity structured into the program when participants are not enjoying themselves.

Free Time

Providing structure does not mean excluding free time. In fact, quite the opposite, free time should be structured into the program. Without sufficient time to do what they want, participants run the risk of resenting the activities which take away from their time to

relax. Kristen, one of the few who felt she needed more free time spoke about their daily routine:

I'm not going to say it was brutal but I mean I don't like waking up early and we had to wake up at 5:30 every single morning and then you know eat, go to the school from I think 7 to 12:30, get back home, eat lunch and then after that we would always be having a meeting in the nearest town or another town or going to see another school or going to see the clinic. We always had something to do in the afternoon or planting trees or something like that so... And then after that we would eat supper and after that we would have like a meeting and after that like maybe at 9 we would start having our free time you know and plus it wasn't even free time cause we had to write our journals, not that that wasn't fun because I like doing that but that was pretty hard. It would have been fun to have a little more time to ourselves besides... Because even on the weekends we had stuff to do.

Greg admitted that they had a pretty busy schedule but in contrast to Kristen felt that he had enough free time. In fact, he found the trip rather relaxing and enjoyed all the time he had to think and write in his journal. His favourite memory was spending some of his early morning free time running with one of their guides:

Greg: I ran. I did morning jogging two times with our guide. That was amazing. You... it's because I tried to like (pause), I tried to exaggerate it a bit but while running, the village, all of the villages are getting alive. Once I was running, and you would see a group of four people, I don't know if it was a family, but they, it was 5:00 in the morning and they had a f...um..., not a fireside, but you know fireside *mais comme*, not fireplace like when you're in the forest and you're camping.

Researcher: A fire.

Greg: A campfire?

Researcher: Yeah. Campfire.

Greg: There you go. There was a campfire and they would just be there and it was cold. Five in the morning over there is -5, because it was winter when we were there. But that was interesting and just I know the second time we would run and then we would come back and just see the landscape of the mountain with the sunrise. That was like, I... (pause). That was incredible. I just, that's the moment that, when I think about the host country, that's what I think: Me running and just... I never thought I was going to be able to run in Africa. Like do what I like

in Montreal, like the most to do but do it another country. It's not what I miss the most but it's something that I, uh (pause)...It makes me sad that I know that I won't be doing it for a long time in that country.

While Greg woke up early to jog, Lisa used one of her Sundays to attend Church. Many found time to explore the local marketplace, check out the nightlife and even attend a debate at the local high school. Free time in the village was generally spent keeping up with their journal writing, getting to know their fellow participants, talking with the villagers and perhaps most fondly playing with the children. No matter what participants find to fill their free time with, providing it's safe and legal, giving participants the opportunity to decide what to do can help make the overall experience more enjoyable.

Recommendations

Study abroad programs work well when they provide some structure to their participants. Coordinators should decide on the aims of the program, possibly with the participants, and look at concrete ways to accomplish these aims while abroad. Participants should be encouraged to set personal goals as well, and coordinators can support them in deciding how best to achieve these goals. Setting up meetings with different figures may help provide insight into various issues or illustrate new perspectives, but these meetings are not always enjoyable. If possible, talk to both the informants and the participants beforehand to clearly lay out the expectations and purpose of these meetings. Requesting informal style discussions may help engage the students and remove some of the stress of planning for these meetings. Understanding the conditions in which the meetings will take place beforehand can help coordinators better prepare the participants. By knowing the length, place or style of a meeting and communicating this information to the participants, appropriate measures can be taken to

ensure participants are physically comfortable and mentally alert to take away from the encounter. No matter the activities and outings you may have planned, there must be some time left for the participants to make their own experiences. Providing free time will help ensure participants relax both mentally and physically, in addition to pursuing their own interests and making meaningful memories.

3.2.7 Emotions: Feeling and dealing

Creating Opportunity

The 2009 Study Trip was an emotional experience. The nature of this specific trip, its location, its structure, the group of participants and the aims, allowed for a spectrum of different emotions. Participants described their feelings of joy, amazement, anger, sadness, shock and happiness. In our interview, Greg said if I named an emotion, he could find a moment during his time abroad where he had experienced this emotion. Several wrote of intense waves of emotion. Kristen, describing a ceremony the group attended for The Day of the African Child wrote:

The music started playing and the kids started dancing and at that precise moment, I got an immense wave of emotion. I'm not quite sure what it was but I got all teary eyed. Now that I think about it, it could be happiness, gratitude, or the fact that I felt really fortunate to be there.

Despite Kristen's description of what appears to be a joyful moment, as I read journal entries and poured over the interview transcripts, it became clear that it was the emotions generally categorized as negative, ones we generally try to avoid, such as shame, helplessness or fear that had the most memorable impact. Shannon prefaced a journal entry which she entitled "Guilt" in the following way, "Undoubtedly, there were quite a few moments on the trip when I experienced feelings of guilt. Some are mentioned in other entries, but this one has its own entry because it is a moment I will never forget.

Never in my life have I felt emotions this intense.” Shannon went on to describe an incident where she felt forced to lie to a group of school children about not having any pens left to hand out, since the number of interested students outnumbered the school supplies she had hoped to distribute. She later spotted a lone boy and decided to give him a shiny new pen unaware that the other children were watching her. They approached at a running pace and began shouting for their own pens. She hurried on in the direction she was heading and decided to give the remaining school supplies to the teachers to put in the school library.

Some of Kristen’s guilt and emotions came from her realization of how non-appreciative she was of what she had as she compared the children in the host country to herself and others here in Canada:

It was emotional because it was something that we hadn’t gone through before you know. We’re used to our standard of living where it’s normal for us to come to school and to bring our laptop and to research stuff on the internet or something. And it was just emotional to see these kids who, like they’re 80 in a classroom and they don’t have anything but they want to go to school and they’re really excited and they wake up at 5:00 in the morning, do their chores and go to school. And it was emotional because I guess a lot of us felt really guilty too that we didn’t appreciate our life as much as we should. So that was really emotional.

Along with feelings of guilt, there were many references to feelings of shock. Lisa, who had grown up in a developing country herself, had thought she was a bit better prepared for facing the conditions they were likely to encounter in the host country. She described her feeling of complete shock upon seeing where the students she was interviewing lived:

Lisa: When I entered, the condition in which they live was a blow to me because I didn’t expect it to be that *mediocre* (in French)?

Researcher: Mediocre.

Lisa: Exactly. And for a second in my head I'm like wow, all these girls live, there were about 30, in just one little room and they have no beds, nothing like that; it's just something they put on the floor and then that's it. And all of them have their luggage in front of their little...mat, is that what it's called?

Researcher: A mat, okay.

Lisa: And I was like, wow this is really something. I mean I've never seen that in Haiti myself because I was always let's say in the city and I didn't, I never saw...I know it's bad but I never really saw it that bad. And I said to myself, this could have been you in this place. What made me different from them? It just happened. Sometimes...I mean we can't choose where we're born, which country so it is something. It makes you want to do something about it but then again it's very, you're limited in what you can do.

The shock Lisa experienced at seeing how these girls lived caused her to reflect on her own life and set her thinking about what might be done to improve the situation. Amanda was also quite impacted by something that she says completely shocked her in her meeting with an education official in the capital city:

He was talking about university and how there 100 students enrolled in university so I asked him, "Well how many students are enrolled... okay so that's just for the region, but approximately how many students are enrolled in the country?" And he said "No, no in the entire country, there are only 100 students in university". So that's something that really shocked me. I couldn't believe that you know and most of them of course were male so that was something that was hard to wrap my head around.

Feeling sad, shocked, guilty or useless got in the way of enjoying the culture, places, and people of the host country. Participants had to find ways to come to terms with these emotions. Tanya had strong feelings of discomfort and guilt which she associated with being White. The following excerpt from our conversation details her thoughts and the way she found to deal with these emotions:

Tanya: For me the discomfort was just people's perception of me because it was inflated I find, I found and that, it...So I try to express to people how people look up to you when really it was White people who actually enslaved them and colonized them, made them work on plantations and we converted them, we took

away their like traditional religion and now everyone's Christian no one really practices the traditional religions so...

Researcher: So did you find a way to deal with it?

Tanya: I think so. I mean, being, feeling guilty is kind of counterproductive because it's not actually going to help the situation, so I just tried to help them understand that there's no reason to think that White people are better, that we're all equal and explaining that I was getting a lot out of the trip, I was learning from them, that I was just a student. Because sometimes the teachers would introduce us to their students like we were some great teacher and we were so knowledgeable, and we explained to them, well we're going to help you, but we're also just students, and we're learning, and we're learning from your teachers. And I think when people realize that you are learning from them too it, immediately the relationship changes because they realize you want to get to know them. We would talk to the teachers and they would tell us about their lives, so then they would realize oh, we're not just there to tell them what we want them to do.

Tanya dealt with the root cause of her discomfort, the misconceptions which the local people seemed to have of her, by communicating her thoughts directly to the local people. By trying to convince them that she was learning a great deal from her experience and that she was no better than them, she began a dialogue with people which gave her the opportunity to set things straight and open up to them as well.

It became clear that whatever the emotions, positive or negative, these feelings really worked to intensify the entire learning experience for the participants. The impact of these emotional experiences was both valued and memorable. How then can a study abroad program create the opportunity for such a range of intense emotions? Is there a way to structure feelings into a program? It seems that a lot of the emotions which were felt grew out of the very different social and economic reality the participants were witnessing. The people and the place is what made the experience emotional. The children were especially important in intensifying the emotions throughout the experience. Coordinators of study abroad programs cannot do much to control how any

given participant will feel in a certain situation, but they do have the power to select the host community. In doing so, they can try and ensure that the participants will be welcomed, that the hosts are ready and willing to open up and share their lives, that the culture and social reality of the host country differ in significant ways for there to be ample opportunities to learn, and that the host community is diverse in their makeup. This last point means that a host community with both genders and all ages can be beneficial both for the wealth of information and perspectives they offer and for the very unique role children play in helping create memorable emotional experiences. Once a host country and community are selected which fit these criteria and align with the aims of the program, remembering to structure immersion (Chapter 3.2.1) and involvement (Chapter 3.2.3) into the program will help to create opportunity for an emotional experience.

Letting it out

Where coordinators have more control is in finding and incorporating ways to deal with any strong emotions participants feel begin to get in the way of enjoying their time abroad. The obvious exercise which comes to mind when talking about facing one's emotions is discussion. Group discussion can be a way for participants to express how they are feeling, to be comforted and advised by their peers and to keep trip coordinators informed on what feelings the participants are having and how this may be affecting their overall experience abroad.

As part of the 2009 Study Trip, group discussions were held in the evenings at regular intervals. These discussions or meetings took place with all seven participants, and the accompanying supervisors. There was a practical side and purpose of these meetings in that they allowed schedules to be discussed, technical questions to be addressed and they

enabled the coordinators to stay up to date on the participants' health, safety, concerns and progress. Equally important, these meetings provided the space for sharing and working through some of the strong emotions the participants were having. Some students even referred to them as their "feelings meetings". The meeting format was one in which a talking stick, or in this case a horn, was passed around the group allowing each person to speak about what was on their mind. If someone was talking, the others were expected to refrain from commenting, interrupting or laughing. There were a lot of raw emotions expressed, which for some was initially quite uncomfortable. Emily expressed her reluctance and hesitation at opening up this way but added that she did appreciate these discussions:

Emily: I thought it was a good thing to do. Again, the whole sharing of the feelings thing is not my type of thing since I'm quiet, I keep to myself, but when we sat in the circle at night and a couple of nights it was, tell me how you're feeling, what you're thinking, make sure you know you're not going to have a breakdown here I was kind of happy, a little reluctant, but happy that we were given this opportunity to say you know this is what I am feeling, this is how I feel. (pause) Is it normal? Is everyone else feeling like this?

Researcher: And most of the time you felt how, after having expressed your feelings?

Emily: Pretty good because I realized you know everyone else is pretty much feeling the same way, or I would say something and someone would say, maybe you shouldn't feel like this because you know this is the way it is blah blah blah. So there would be solutions to my problems or kind of a backup, it's okay if you feel like this. Sometimes things were solved, other times there was just comfort knowing you were not the only one feeling a certain way and even if you were, maybe you had support, so it helped.

As Emily's comments illustrate, these meetings gave participants the chance to say what they were thinking and feeling in a group environment, where others either understood exactly what each other was feeling, or at least listened and suggested ways to deal with things or new ways of thinking about things. Tanya, who struggled throughout the trip

with feelings of guilt, explained how sometimes group members were really able to make a difference in this meeting space, especially when they could provide alternative perspectives:

When I was telling you that sort of White person dilemma...I remember the first Wednesday we got there, all of a sudden a lot of us started feeling really, really guilty and we started having some problems, so we decided to talk about this as a group. And we spent a whole meeting, and some people were more expressive than others but I think everyone left like at least feeling that they could release something and they understood that a lot of people were going through this. And Lisa, I don't know if you've interviewed her yet or heard about this but, she is from Haiti and so she was telling us, because we felt guilty, so she was telling us from her perspective when she was in Haiti, when she would see like White foreigners come in develop, like start development, how she felt about it. And I think that made a lot of people feel more comfortable with what we were doing, we didn't feel so guilty anymore.

Because Tanya could not remember the exact words which Lisa used to bring her this comfort and help her feel a bit more at ease, I asked Lisa to explain what perspective she shared at this meeting. I began my question by asking whether or not she shared these feelings of guilt:

Researcher: Before I ask you what exactly you said, were you dealing with the same feelings of guilt that they were dealing with?

Lisa: No. It was different for me. I didn't know they were having those types of feelings. It was so surprising. I'm like oh, wow! I would never guess that they were feeling like that. This was the first time (that) actually I said something and everyone was listening to me at once. I don't know what got into me that day, that night. Well, Rick asked me, do you have anything to say? And then I said, I'm thinking about it so he passed me, then the other ones talked. And then afterwards I said okay, now I have something to say, after I heard what everybody had to say. Because they were feeling guilty of what happened in the past, you know, ashamed because everybody treated them as if they were queens and king, little things like that. And I said, one thing that I said was well, it's because you're guests and you come from another country. Of course, they're going to want to make you feel special. Because I took it from the perspective like if I have a guest in Haiti, I'm in Haiti and somebody comes to my house, of course I'm going to give them my bed and it's not because I consider them as a queen or king that oh, my God you know..I do it because I want to make you feel special; this is my treat to you. And I think that's the same way that they were feeling. It's not

because...they didn't have to feel guilty I just find like it's hospitality that they had and which is something that we do have in Haiti as well. It's a pleasure for the other person to, oh you know what I'll just give you my spoon and then I'll eat with my fingers or something like that, see. It's not because I consider you as higher than me that I...

Researcher: So you just gave them this different perspective?

Lisa: Yes. I just told them that maybe that's how they feel. So you don't have to feel ashamed then...you know? And also, what happened in the past has nothing to do with you guys today. Just by applying, you took all those vaccines to come here, it's already something. Why do you have to link yourself with what other people did in the past? Well, I said that I don't really understand how they feel, why they feel like that. I didn't want to blame them, because I just wanted to say the other way of seeing things. Already you're doing something special. Because they said, you know we're not doing anything at the school. We're just sitting there and the teacher's talking. Yes, at the beginning we felt like so what are we doing? Because the teacher's are there, we're just sitting in the class; we can't teach. It felt like you know maybe this is useless, we're useless. But, and then I said to them, travelling, spending all that money, raising all this and then now you come and then you shouldn't be feeling like this. You're already doing, you're making a difference already just by being at the schools. (It) makes a difference to all of them.

Because like from the interview they would say, wow what a privilege we have that you come all the way from Canada. You come here. That gives me hope. Many students would tell us things like that. And then I said just being there shows that you're interested in them and that makes them feel special, you see, that they're not some kind of reject or thing like that. And (pause) the teachers also appreciated our presence, being at the schools. Just a smile to one of the students or a handshake... Talking to them was amazing. Once you started talking to one, then all of them would come. This is to show how they see this as a big deal. So I told them all this. I'm like you guys shouldn't feel guilty at all. You're doing something and you have no idea of the impact you have on these people. Being at the village, at the schools, and everywhere you go... Talking to them: it's something. They learnt a lot from you, we learnt a lot from them so it's a win-win situation, according to me.

Not only was Lisa able to share an alternative view which fellow participants credited with really helping them through what they were feeling, but the style of the meeting also gave her the opportunity to be heard, something she had been struggling with from the start of the trip.

The discussion meetings and their interesting format were appreciated by the vast majority of the group, even those who professed their shyness and discomfort with expressing themselves in this way. There was, however, one participant who did not look forward to these meetings and wrote about them in a way which seemed to suggest they were a nuisance. As anyone who has ever taught before knows, it is nearly impossible to please all the students with one activity and throwing out each new idea not instantly enjoyed by all can be a waste of good ideas. However, not throwing out the idea does not mean that the search must end to replace or supplement it. Talking about feelings, especially in front of a group of peers, is a very cultural and even gendered activity. With this in mind, it is worth looking at other ways to help participants deal with emotions during their time abroad. One-on-one conversations between trip coordinators and participants or even between peers may remove some of the anxieties and fear created in group situations. Journal writing (Chapter 3.2.2) can also help participants who express themselves better in writing. The important thing is that participants know that what they may be feeling is normal and likely shared, and that there are avenues for them to try and deal with these emotions should they feel the need to. Depending on the age of the participants, coordinators may also have to keep an eye and ear out for behavior or comments suggesting participants are becoming overwhelmed with the emotional nature of the trip.

Recommendations

Emotions are important in fostering learning experiences. Coordinators should select a location which shows participants another way of life, where the comparisons between the host country and their own will highlight the differences. There are great benefits to

finding a community who is willing and ready to welcome the participants. This, however, requires trustworthy contacts or firsthand knowledge of the host country. Considering ways to bring participants into contact with children, as they are usually a guaranteed source of joy and other positive emotional experiences, is one way to create emotional experiences. There should be an expectation of emotions of guilt, shame and despair from the participants, especially when travelling to material and resource poor countries. The combination of the lack of wealth and the hardworking good heartedness of a people is often a source of intense emotion for Westerners abroad. It is not necessary to avoid situations which may cause these negative emotions to surface, but the program should incorporate ways to ensure they do not detract from the learning and aims of the experience. Group discussions allow participants to share their thoughts and air their feelings. These can be formal or informal but should be held through the experience abroad. They should be at a time and place which is conducive to talking (maybe not 6 a.m) and coordinators should work to ensure that a safe and judgment free space is available. Participants should be encouraged, not forced, to talk. The group size or composition may be more conducive to one-on-one meetings or smaller group discussions as well. Providing participants with time to journal and suggesting they write about certain feelings can help those who may be uncomfortable opening up with others. After writing, participants can decide if they want to share or can be encouraged to respond to their own entries suggesting ways to deal with their feelings. Intense emotions can be effective catalysts to learning but work must be done to ensure they do not monopolize the entire experience.

3.3 RETURNING FROM THE EXPERIENCE ABROAD

Study abroad programs should not end the moment the flight home touches down.

There is a great deal of work which can and should be done upon the participants return.

Not only is there work to do on a personal level, regarding individual participants' re-entry into their own culture, but at the community level, there is also often a need to share what has been learnt, especially when programs take participants to developing countries facing economic, political or infrastructural instability.

Readjusting to home

The degree to which participants will need to readjust culturally upon their return will depend on the location and length of the abroad phase of their experience. Participants travelling to less developed parts of the world, will have much more difficulty readjusting to the materialism and overconsumption of the West than those returning from wealthy European countries, for example. The 2009 Study Trip participants spent over three weeks in a village with no electricity, no indoor plumbing and virtually no consumerism. For them, returning to Montreal and its comparatively fast pace of life was filled with confusion, reflection, resentment and disgust. Emily described what it was like for her after she arrived home:

Um, it was definitely very strange coming back to Montreal. Like we were told about the whole reverse culture shock thing but I guess we didn't really think about it too much because going to the host country, the culture shock that we experienced there, wasn't as extreme. For me it wasn't as extreme as I thought it would be, because we were made to feel very comfortable with people in the village, people at the school. Obviously many things were very different and we did experience culture shock but it wasn't as difficult as I thought it would be. But coming back, I thought it was much worse um... (pause) sorry, I get distracted easily. Um, coming back I thought it was much worse because suddenly everything seemed so fast and people here seemed so uncaring, and there were so many things that seemed (pause) silly to care about.

She went on to describe an incident at the restaurant where she worked in which a complaining customer insisted the shrimp in her dish be cut into smaller pieces. Emily was shocked at the woman's concern for what to her was the smallest of details. She wondered how that woman would fair having to make her own maize flour! I asked her if she was finding ways to share her perspective with others when these types of situations arose. She replied:

People usually just don't understand what I'm talking about, especially coming back from the trip. When you try to say, oh this happened or I see something this way or you know this bothers me a bit, why is it like this? They just didn't really get it.

One way to help participants readjust back into their cultures and their lives is to give the group chances to get together and discuss what they are noticing and feeling. They can support each other and work together to come up with effective techniques to deal with people, from strangers to family and friends, whose views suddenly seem shallow and uninformed. Coordinators can set up these meetings and guide participants in discussions aimed at resolving some of their feelings.

Participants, in addition to having problems readjusting to the ways and attitudes of those around them, can also find themselves having difficulty readjusting to the lives they left behind. The goals, plans and ideas study abroad participants have for their futures are not always clarified after a study abroad experience. In fact, participants will more likely be faced with decisions and options they had never considered and be at a loss in sorting it all out. Greg described the post-trip phase of the study trip as a second trip in itself:

Greg: It's like a confusion trip. I'm not sure whether what I'm doing right now is good. I'm not sure whether...It's really fun because it's not just doing one thing. I have so many questions and it's...I really want to figure it out by myself and it's enjoyable. Sometimes it's depressing but still I'm living something. I'm not just

following one direction but now I can see that okay there's this, there's this, there's this, there's this. So basically...

Researcher: You're referring to your career choice?

Greg: Yeah. Career and job and leaving my parents, etc. Because I want to try to be less dependent. But I'm able to see the disadvantages. I'm able to see the advantages. And from...it's as if like, I wrote it in my journal. I don't know if I wrote it in my journal but I know that in Africa I was able to think more. Now, these days, I don't have that much time to think about myself. I have, yeah well school is about me but it's more towards school. And I'm not doing anything that would really help me, not my career but my life. But in Africa, even though we had the projects to do just, it was really...I could just sit down at the house and just write my journal and while I'm writing my journal, I could just really think about myself, about what am I going to do when I came back, about anything just about me.

Although Greg mentioned being confused and at times depressed about these new decisions he needed to make, he genuinely seemed happy to have had his eyes opened the way they were and to be in this questioning phase. He also expressed wanting to deal with this on his own, which may be true for many participants, especially young adults, who are choosing career paths and deciding what to do with their lives. These decisions are, however, already difficult at this stage in life and the added experience of studying abroad and being exposed to many new ideas and perspectives can make this all that more stressful. Coordinators should keep this in mind and anticipate that participants might have a lot of questions and choices to make once home. Offering support and keeping periodic contact with participants after their return can help them in their decisions. In some cases, academic counselling services can be employed, while other cases may benefit from contact with past participants or knowledgeable faculty members. Participants should be able to turn to the program coordinators, or others enlisted by the program coordinators, for guidance and support should they choose.

Spreading the word

The 2009 Study Trip was partially funded by the Canadian International Development Agency because it promised to be a public engagement project. In other words, the grant received was based on the fact that after educating themselves about the situation in the host country, the participants would share what they had learnt and engage the Canadian public in the fight for universal primary education. Whether or not a program receives government funding because it promises to make people publically aware, doing so, especially when program aims relate to the developing world and the struggles it faces, is essential in sustaining studying abroad as a worthwhile and purposeful endeavor. The 2009 Study Trip participants were asked to put together a presentation which synthesized some of what they had learnt and to give this presentation to their college peers and students from local area high schools. The presentations were given in small groups, generally two, and the group was expected to give 20 in total, with 10 at their college and 10 in high schools. Coordinators informed the college faculty members of the study trip and the planned presentations and asked any interested teachers to contact them to schedule a student presentation for their classes. The same information was sent to local area high school teachers once contact had been established. These presentations fulfill the requirement of informing and hopefully engaging the public, but the participants found them useful for other reasons as well. Tanya felt that they helped to bring some closure to the program and also saw them as practice for a future career involving raising public awareness:

I think it's important that it feels like we're doing something after the trip because when you experience something like that, you don't want to just think that it stays in your head and no one else is influenced. And it gives some kind of conclusion to the trip as well in some ways. In some ways I don't think you can ever

conclude a trip like this; it's always going to be a part of you and I still want to write letters to the people of the village but it makes you feel like the trip has gone somewhere. It's not just staying in limbo. And I think it will be useful for later in life if I want to maybe do some public awareness. I want to go into sustainable development so hopefully that, I mean I'm sure that will involve talking to people a lot and raising awareness so this is just one step to practice that (laugh).

Sharing what they learnt throughout the program can help study abroad participants feel that their trip had a greater purpose, one which is less centered on their own individual motivations and gains. At the same time, sharing knowledge is the first step in making any type of difference. Study abroad programs often open participants' eyes to all kinds of inequality or injustice, which will remain until there is a collective global effort to remove them, one which starts with providing the public the information they need to secure their engagement.

The way the information will be shared depends on the type of program, its focus, its participants and the amount of time and commitment participants have been asked to set aside for this post-trip phase. In addition to presentations, participants may be asked to hold student panel discussions, to write up their experience and message in local available media (school or local papers, websites, blogs, etc), to set up booths at school or community fairs, or to come up with their own creative way of informing the wider public (photo exhibits, documentaries, theater pieces, etc). Local community organizations and schools may be the first place to look when trying to find the first audiences to engage. These types of post-trip projects are easier to implement when study abroad programs, to their completion, are for academic credit since returning participants can quickly get swept back up into their busy routines, balancing work and school and having to prioritize these over their commitment to the program. When I conducted my interviews with the 2009 Study Trip participants, the presentation which they would be

giving to inform local students had been put together, but there was obvious disappointment regarding the contribution and commitment of individual group members. For the most part, coordinators struggled to get participants to contribute their pieces of the presentation on time. The few whose job it was to give the first couple of presentations wished they had had the chance to rehearse more and acknowledged that there seemed to be a lack of dedication from fellow participants. Finding ways to maintain participants' dedication and commitment well into the post-trip phase of the program is crucial to the success of any follow up activities. Giving each person clearly defined roles to play in this phase of the program, along with a certain degree of responsibility may encourage participants to stay interested and involved. Linking post-trip activities aimed at sharing their knowledge with in-progress academic courses is another way to help participants fit this phase into their schedules. For programs offered through educational institutions, faculty members should be aware of the study abroad program(s) offered and consider ways to let their students who may have participated incorporate their experiences into their class work. Ideally study abroad programs, such as the 2009 Study Trip, would have a post-trip credited course in which all participants would register making all the planning, sharing and reflecting that much easier.

Keeping in touch

Study abroad participants who return to their daily routines after being abroad often lose touch. I initially kept in touch with three of the 24 participants in my undergraduate study abroad program, strange seeing as how we had been in such close contact with very few disagreements for over four months. As discussed in a previous section, most participants of the 2009 Study Trip bonded quite strongly while abroad and were equally

as sad to leave each other as they were to leave the host country. In our interview, Emily described the eerie feeling of being back in her apartment, alone, “When I came back, it was kind of strange. Like, there’s no one next to me!” Many other participants wished there were more opportunities to get together after the trip. Some, like Amanda, thought it would be great to discuss the experience as a group and to see how each other was dealing with being back:

Once we got back, we sort of, it was harder to get people all together, you know. We all sort of went our separate ways and sort of...It would be nice to have meetings again where we all got together and we discussed what we saw or we discussed what happened, sort of like to recap what we went through. Not only for the social side but also to reflect more and maybe keep building on this experience...And just to you know see the same people and see how they got along after the trip.

There were times when the entire Study Trip group did get together, but the majority felt that they would have enjoyed more occasions like this. Seeing as how they had agreed to commit for six months after their return from the host country, the majority of participants at the time of our interviews (two months after their return) hoped they could meet more often, some suggesting regular monthly meetings. Their schedules and lives had truly taken over and they were really unable to keep in touch on their own.

Coordinators should consider the advantages these types of gatherings or outings have for participants. Many study abroad participants are brought together because of the actual program and the end of the program often signals an end to the closeness of the group, not entirely by choice. Participants may appreciate an excuse to get together on a purely social level.

Recommendations

The post-trip phase of a study abroad program is equally as important as the preparation or abroad phase and cannot be neglected. Coordinators should set a tentative schedule for post-trip activities as soon as possible, so participants can make the time to honour their commitment. It is best not to let too much time pass between the return date and the first scheduled meeting. Coordinators should try and make contact, even if just by a quick e-mail, with participants relatively soon after their return. Post-trip activities should include meetings and sessions set aside to discuss the period of readjustment, reflect on the trip and being home and provide support for those facing tough decisions about their futures and careers. Inviting past participants to these meetings can help achieve some of these goals. If applicable, faculty members who have study abroad participants in their courses should be asked to help them incorporate some of what they learnt into class assignments. Most of the post-trip phase should be devoted to sharing what was learnt while studying abroad. Coordinators must find applicable, practical and appropriate ways for participants to do this. No matter the format, participants should be informed of this agenda with as much anticipation as possible. Commitment to these activities is generally better when there is academic credit awarded, but when that is not possible, assigning individual roles and handing out responsibilities can help ensure that dedication and effort are maintained. Helping participants keep the bonds and closeness they likely formed while abroad will make the entire post-trip phase run more smoothly. It should not be assumed that participants will take the initiative to contact each other and get together socially; schedules often simply don't allow it. Coordinators can organize

some casual gatherings for participants throughout the post-trip phase. These can also be used to check the progress of other post-trip projects.

CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSION

4.1 The “Blue Print”

We learn from experience, but not all experience is educational. Experiences do not lead to learning when we cannot extract anything new from them, when we fail to reflect on them, or when we cannot identify lessons learnt (Jarvis in Davies, 2008). Studying abroad can be filled with educational experiences. However, not all study abroad programs provide experiential learning opportunities to the same degree. Each program is a combination of various experiences, some educational, some memorable, some valued and others less transformative, easier to forget and not as appreciated. As our world becomes more connected and globalised, opportunities to study abroad are growing and the programs which facilitate these opportunities will likely continue to increase in number. As a result of this growing popularity, there is a need to examine what experiences afford study abroad participants the best learning opportunities and have valued educational impact. This study, therefore, aimed at uncovering the best practices for study abroad as seen through the perspectives of the participants. It was not my explicit intention to see whether the 2009 Study Trip was an example of experiential education at its best, or to prove or disprove the argument that studying abroad is naturally experiential education. The findings, however, do in fact show that the elements of the 2009 Study Trip which were most valued by its participants and which presented the most learning opportunities coincide in many ways with the key characteristics of experiential education. The participants’ perspectives helped make these general elements more concrete and brought a greater understanding to the reasons they define their experiences as educational.

Experiential study abroad refers to study abroad programs which are designed using an experiential education model. For Lutterman-Aguilar and Gingerich (2002), there are ten critical elements which should guide these types of programs. The experiences and characteristics of the 2009 Study Trip which its seven participants valued and learnt the most from correlate with many of these ten suggested elements. Namely, participants valued being immersed and able to interact with the host community and each other; being able to see or make meaning out of what they were experiencing, and having their time abroad fall between well-organized pre and post-trip activities.

Immersion and participatory involvement were the principles which provided the most memorable and educational experiences for the 2009 Study Trip participants. Students valued the opportunity to stay in a local village, despite the very different living conditions. They loved being able to see what they assumed was daily reality and ritual for these people who had graciously invited them into their community. They had new and exciting experiences side by side intense and emotional ones, all of which they felt were made possible by the type of interaction this program provided. Not only did they live in a local village, but they also spent their days volunteering at local schools, interviewing people for their various projects and were given enough space and free time to bond with their hosts. With thought and preparation, immersing participants in the host culture and maximizing their opportunities to interact with the people of that culture are two simple guidelines which meet Lutterman-Aguilar and Gingerich's (2002) call for incorporating community; collaboration and dialogue; diversity and intercultural communication and mutuality and reciprocity into an experiential study abroad program.

There is an important inward element to the valued interaction which goes beyond connecting with the host community, however. The findings here showed how group dynamics play an essential role in determining which experiences are educational and valued. A diverse group of students whose interests, backgrounds and perspectives differ will provide new perspectives and lead others to uncover new areas of interest. Although there were minor issues and disagreements, the 2009 Study Trip participants formed strong bonds with each other. The majority of participants grew close, and this community that they formed enhanced the entire experience. Not only did they have people to talk to and reflect with who had shared and lived similar situations, moments and feelings, but they also relied on one another to help them through their own individual issues and achieve their own personal goals.

Immersion and participatory involvement provided the opportunities for experiential learning, but the resounding reason for lessons learnt was that they were able to attach meaning and/or a purpose to their experiences in context: a good illustration of connected learning. Meaning was created through the personalization of experience and through emotions. Giving the students space to pursue their own interests, having them set personal goals and helping them embrace and explore both positive and negative emotions leads to meaningful or connected learning experiences. Attention paid to these elements ensures a study abroad program includes the type of personal integration and development central to experiential education programs.

Critical analysis and reflection are what makes an experience educational. Participants need to question the reality they are studying and rethink past assumptions. This is much more successful when it is engaged in with others. Reflective journals, like the ones

encouraged in the 2009 Study Trip, are generally a private exercise and therefore do not fulfill this last requisite. In addition, as my findings show, reflection is not always part of journaling. Although journals can be useful reflective tools, participants need time, direction and practice to make the most of reflective journaling. Participants can easily begin to resent writing in their journals if they feel there are other things they would rather be doing. There was no evidence suggesting students disliked reflection and critical thought, just that they would have preferred time devoted solely to this and that they may have needed more guidance in this process. They did, however, through their constant interaction, discuss and question what they were seeing and why they were feeling the way they were. The level of comfort which the students felt with one another was crucial in ensuring they engaged in this informal reflection and critical discussion on their own.

What Lutterman-Aguilar and Gingerich (2002) do not count in their ten suggested elements for experiential study abroad, but which are important for its participants and create the framework for the implementation of all other elements, is the overall structure of these programs. In other words, study abroad programs require at least three inter-related phases of learning. The first phase, preparation, is extremely important; there must be a preparation phase aimed at addressing expectations and assumptions. Participants should know what to expect from the trip, the host community, themselves and each other, as well as what is expected of them and what assumptions their hosts may have of them, their trip and their intentions. They must also learn to get along and work together as a group.

While abroad, participants should be immersed as much as possible in the host community and provided ample opportunities to interact with both this community and their peers. They should have both personal and program goals to meet within a flexible, yet meaningful structure. Throughout the duration of their trip, they should be encouraged to reflect, analyze and feel; although there are personal levels to each of these, the group should work as a whole to explore their thoughts, concerns and feelings.

The end of the time in the host country signals the beginning of a post-trip or post-experience phase. This phase is appreciated as it helps students readjust, gives meaning to their time abroad and helps maintain the closeness of the group. In many cases, there is an ethical obligation to help make the public aware of the reality that was explored. Post-trip activities to engage the public will fulfill that obligation while inspiring participants to take further action and maintain their dedication to the program and its goals.

The findings presented here illustrate the important learning moments and formal and informal situations which can be created as a result of the study abroad experience. Knowing when and how these occur helps to better plan the educational impact of similar trips/programs. The lessons drawn from this case study and analyzed here can be used by study abroad stakeholders to increase the number of successful study abroad experiences.

These stakeholders include the institutions, administrators and coordinators who can draw on this case study to better plan and design meaningful curriculum. Study abroad participants can also learn from these lessons and use them to help better prepare themselves for their own experiences. Finally, there are important implications for funding agencies. They in turn can reflect on the lessons learnt and illustrated in this case study and use them to identify well-planned learning opportunities, provide insight in

terms of program expectations and to illustrate the importance of all three phases in the program cycle and take these into consideration in their funding formula. In sum, these lessons collectively highlight ways to develop meaningful study abroad opportunities and programs for all those in support of this worthy educational endeavour.

4.2 Further research

This thesis looked at a particular study abroad program based on the narratives of the students who took part in it and filtered through my added lens as a former study abroad participant. The obvious perceptions and opinions which are missing are those of the host community and other participating locals.

The 2009 Study Trip is an example of what a future wave of study abroad programs and initiatives may look like. It is one in which participants voluntarily set out to gather information and explore the reality of life in the host country, with the aim of raising public awareness of this reality at home and inspiring people to engage and take action where it is needed. Equally, if not more, important, it is one in which the trip itself brings revenue and employment to the host country providing opportunities for these communities to plan and control their own development.

The C.E.G.E.P offering the 2009 Study Trip partnered with a local development group in the host country. This development group, still in its early stages, offered the Canadian students what they refer to as an 'exposure tour'. To do this, they recruited villagers to act as guides, night guards were hired and women were paid to handle the meal preparation, laundry and cleaning. The revenue this group's visit brought to the community was divided among the different families of this matrilineal village. This was the second time a group from this C.E.G.E.P had been hosted by this village as part of a study trip. A

third group is expected in the spring of 2010 and the development group is starting to work with other Quebec institutions interested in offering similar experiences in the future.

As this development group continues to grow and their exposure tours increase in number and popularity, it would be interesting to explore the way in which the villagers see this new income-generating opportunity. In order to determine the suitability of these programs, research is needed on both the immediate and long-term effects they have on the village and surrounding areas. Further research should look at how communities feel about hosting a group of students? What are their assumptions, expectations and understandings of these programs? Do these visits lead to meaningful, educational and memorable experiences for the hosts? What are the non-financial gains to the host community? Basically, is acting as a host community a fulfilling experience or is it viewed as a necessary intrusion to be tolerated for the revenue it brings?

With the bulk of study abroad research concerning the reasons for and outcomes of studying abroad for North Americans, and now a turn towards uncovering how to best organize educational, ethical and transformative study abroad programs, it is time to start looking at the possibility that these programs can play a part in bringing sustainable development to host countries. The next step of course will be to switch our focus in future studies from the perspectives of the participants who study abroad to those of the hosts who welcome them.

What to Consider when Developing Study Abroad Programs

Phase	Element	Suggestions
<p>PREPARING for the experience abroad</p>	<p>Information Sessions</p> <p>Fundraising</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Address expectations, customs & assumptions • Create opportunities for social interaction and bonding among participants • Encourage participants to research and present on the host country • Help offset the cost by planning fundraising activities • Challenge participants to come up with their own ways to raise funds
<p>THE EXPERIENCE ABROAD</p>	<p>Immersion</p> <p>Reflection Through Journaling</p> <p>Participatory Involvement</p> <p>Meaning & Personalization</p> <p>Group Dynamics</p> <p>Structure</p> <p>Emotions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have participants stay in a host community • Weigh the pros and cons of homestays • Offer reflective writing workshops • Give sufficient time to journal & encourage thematic entries • Don't rely solely on journaling for reflection • Include relevant field experience, community development projects, interviewing and cultural events throughout the time abroad • Have participants design and carry out personal projects • Ensure the purpose of activities, trips & experiences is understood • Keep the group size manageable and include a diversity of personalities & interests • Get participants to work in rotating groups • Plan relevant meetings & outings & give free time • Set program goals & have participants do the same • Choose host communities diverse in age, gender & circumstance who are willing to open up & share • Expect & embrace negative emotions but encourage participants to discuss and share them
<p>RETURNING from the experience abroad</p>	<p>Readjustment</p> <p>Raising Awareness</p> <p>Keeping Contact</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schedule meetings for participants to meet & discuss their feelings, concerns & plans • Offer guidance & support to participants • Plan for participants to share what they learn with the public • Organize social events to help maintain bonds among participants

References

- Bates, J. T. (1997). *The effects of study abroad on undergraduates in an honors international program* (Doctoral dissertation). Available from Proquest Dissertations and Theses database. (UMI No. AAT 9815480).
- Bogdan, R.C & Biklen, S.K. (2007). *Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theories and methods* (5th ed.). Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Breunig, M. (2005). Turning experiential education and critical pedagogy theory into praxis. *Journal of Experiential Education*, 28(2), 106-122.
- Brookfield, S.D. (2009). Self-directed learning. In R. Maclean & D. Wilson (Eds.), *International handbook of education for the changing world of work* (pp.2615-2627). Netherlands: Springer Netherlands. Retrieved January 4, 2010 from, <http://www.springerlink.com/11q16h063h33954>.
- Bruner, J. (1990). *Acts of meaning*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Clark, M.C. (2001). Off the beaten path: Some creative approaches to adult learning. In S.B. Merriam (Ed.), *The new update on adult learning theory* (pp. 83-91). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Dali, Y. (2007). *Exploring the links between writing and transformational learning: Applications to portfolio building and teacher education* (Master's thesis). Available from Proquest Dissertations and Theses Database. (UMI No. AAT MR34620)
- Davies, L. (2008). *Informal learning: A new model for making sense of experience*. London: Gower Publishing Ltd.
- Dewey, J. (1938). *Experience and education*. London: Collier Macmillan Publishers.
- Donnelly-Smith, L (2009). Global learning through short-term study abroad. *Peer Review*, 11(4). Retrieved December 20, 2009 from, <http://www.aacu.org/about/index.cfm>.
- Freire, P. (1974). *Education for critical consciousness*. New York: Continuum Publishing Company.
- Ginsberg, R.B (1992). *Listening comprehension before and after study abroad*. ERIC document #ED358718.
- Hadis, B.F. (2005). Gauging the impact of study abroad: How to overcome the limitations of a single-cell design. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 30(1), 3-19. Retrieved February 20, 2009, from Taylor & Francis Ltd.

- Hadis, B.F. (2005). Why are they better students when they come back? Determinants of academic focusing gains in the study abroad experience. *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad*, 11(Aug), 57-70.
- Jarvis, P. (2006). *Towards a comprehensive theory of human learning*. London: Routledge.
- Kaufmann, N.L, Martin, J., Weaver, H.D., & Weaver, J. (1992). *Students abroad: Strangers at home*. Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural Press.
- Kline, R.R. (1998). Literacy and language learning in a study abroad context. *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad*, 4 (Fall), 139-165.
- Kolb, D. (1984). *Experiential learning as the source of learning and development*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Kvale, S. & Brinkman, S. (2009). *Interviews: Learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing* (2nd ed.). Los Angeles: Sage.
- Lutterman-Aguilar, A. & Gingerich, O. (2002). Experiential pedagogy for study abroad: Educating for global citizenship. *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad*, 8 (Winter), 41-82.
- McCabe, L.T. (1994). The development of a global perspective during participation in a semester at sea: A comparative global education program. *Educational Review*, 46(3), 275-287. Retrieved March 31, 2009, from Academic Search Premier.
- Sholz, R.W., & Tietje, O. (2002). *Embedded case studies: Integrating quantitative and qualitative knowledge*. Newbury Park, Ca: Sage Publications.
- Shougee, M. (1999). *The experiences, meanings and outcomes of studying abroad: A qualitative multiple-case study* (Doctoral dissertation). Available from Proquest Database. (UMI No.AAT NQ41043).
- Stake, R.E. (1995). *The art of case study research*. London: Sage Publications Ltd.
- Thorpe, T. (2009). Youth learning from the world, leading in their community: A summary report. *The Ontario Action Researcher*, 10(1). Retrieved April 4, 2009, from http://www.nipissingu.ca/oar/new_issue.htm.
- Yin, R.K. (2003). *Case study research: Design and methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, Ca: Sage Publications.

Appendix A: Ethics consent form for study abroad participants

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN “QUALIFYING THE STUDY ABROAD EXPERIENCE”

This is to state that I agree to participate in a program of research being conducted by Stacie Travers of the Department of Education of Concordia University as a requirement of a Masters of Arts degree.

I have been informed that the purpose of the research project is to identify what experiences, centered in and around the study abroad program in which I am participating, are most educational and the reasons they are qualified as such.

I was informed that the research will be conducted on site at the educational institution which I attend before and after the study abroad trip. I understand that I will be asked to answer a short questionnaire prior to my departure (or a similar one upon my return) and may be chosen to participate in two separate 30-40 minute interviews at agreed upon times following my return to Montreal. I am aware that these interviews will be recorded.

I also understand that the researcher will read my journal entries and I agree to provide a hard copy of said entries at the start of the research.

I understand that my participation in this research is meant to enhance the overall study abroad experience and is not being used in any way to assess my involvement in the program.

I understand that even if I decide to participate at this time, I can change my mind in the future and withdraw from the study if I do not wish to continue. I agree to personally inform the researcher of any decision to do so or I may decide to inform Prof. Arpi Hamalian, the supervisor in the Department of Education at Concordia University, of my decision to withdraw from the study. In such a circumstance, all the data I have

contributed will be removed. I am aware that the contact information for the researcher and her supervisor are available at the end of this form.

I understand that the data collected for this study can be published but that my identity will remain confidential. I am also aware that the findings and analysis of this study will be submitted as a thesis to Concordia University and will be available as a public document in the Concordia University library should I wish to consult it.

I have carefully studied the above and understand this agreement. I freely consent and voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

Date: _____

Print name (First name, last name): _____

Signature: _____

Signature (parent or guardian): _____

(If you are under 18 years old)

IF AT ANY TIME YOU HAVE QUESTIONS ABOUT YOUR RIGHTS AS A RESEARCH PARTICIPANT, PLEASE CONTACT ADELA REID, RESEARCH ETHICS AND COMPLIANCE OFFICER, CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY, AT

(514) 848-2424 x7481 or by e-mail areid@alcor.concordia.ca

IF YOU HAVE OTHER QUESTIONS OR CONCERNS OR IF YOU WISH TO WITHDRAW FROM THE STUDY, PLEASE CONTACT EITHER THE RESEARCHER OR HER SUPERVISOR

Principal researcher: Stacie Travers

E-mail: stacietravers@hotmail.com

Tel. number: (514) 403-4443

Concordia supervisor: Prof. Arpi Hamalian

E-mail: arpiham@alcor.concordia.ca

Tel. number: (514) 848-2424 x2014

Appendix B: Ethics consent form for trip coordinators

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN “QUALIFYING THE STUDY ABROAD EXPERIENCE”

This is to state that I agree to participate in a program of research being conducted by Stacie Travers of the Department of Education of Concordia University as a requirement of a Masters of Arts degree.

I have been informed that the purpose of the research project is to identify what experiences, centered in and around the study abroad program in which I am participating, are most educational and the reasons they are qualified as such.

I understand that I will be asked to participate in one 30-40 minute interview at an agreed upon time near the completion of the program. I am aware that this interview may be recorded.

I understand that the purpose of this interview is to provide general information on the study abroad program, such as its aims, structure and other background information which will be used to introduce the program in the final written product.

I understand that even if I decide to participate at this time, I can change my mind in the future and withdraw from the study if I do not wish to continue. I agree to personally inform the researcher of any decision to do so or I may decide to inform Prof. Arpi Hamalian, the supervisor in the Department of Education at Concordia University, of my decision to withdraw from the study. In such a circumstance, all the data I have contributed will be removed. I am aware that the contact information for the researcher and her supervisor are available at the end of this form.

I understand that the data collected for this study can be published but that my identity will remain confidential. I am also aware that the findings and analysis of this study will

be submitted as a thesis to Concordia University and will be available as a public document in the Concordia University library should I wish to consult it.

I have carefully studied the above and understand this agreement. I freely consent and voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

Date: _____

Print name (First name, last name): _____

Signature: _____

Signature (parent or guardian): _____

(If you are under 18 years old)

IF AT ANY TIME YOU HAVE QUESTIONS ABOUT YOUR RIGHTS AS A RESEARCH PARTICIPANT, PLEASE CONTACT ADELA REID, RESEARCH ETHICS AND COMPLIANCE OFFICER, CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY, AT

(514) 848-2424 x7481 or by e-mail areid@alcor.concordia.ca

IF YOU HAVE OTHER QUESTIONS OR CONCERNS OR IF YOU WISH TO WITHDRAW FROM THE STUDY, PLEASE CONTACT EITHER THE RESEARCHER OR HER SUPERVISOR

Principal researcher: Stacie Travers

E-mail: stacietravers@hotmail.com

Tel. number: (514) 403-4443

Concordia supervisor: Prof. Arpi Hamalian

E-mail: arpiham@alcor.concordia.ca

Tel. number: (514) 848-2424 x2014

Appendix C: Pre-departure questionnaire

Please write your own personal responses to the questions below. Answer the questions as honestly and completely as possible. If you do not know an answer, please say so.

Section 1: General information

Name:

Age:

Gender: M F

Program of study:

Semesters of CEGEP completed:

Have you traveled abroad before?

Yes No

Have you lived abroad before (excluding vacations)?

Yes No

If yes, how long did you live abroad?

Is this the first time you have participated in a study abroad program?

Yes No

If no, describe your past experience with study abroad:

Have you visited the host country before?

Yes No

Have you visited Africa before?

Yes No

Where were you born?

Where was your mother born?

Where was your father born?

Are you involved in or with any extra-curricular activities or committees at your school?
If yes, please list them.

Yes No

Section 2: Self-assessment

What languages can you speak? Rate your level of fluency.

English	Native fluency	Can communicate in some way	Can understand a bit
French	Native fluency	Can communicate in some way	Can understand a bit
_____	Native fluency	Can communicate in some way	Can understand a bit
_____	Native fluency	Can communicate in some way	Can understand a bit
_____	Native fluency	Can communicate in some way	Can understand a bit

To what extent do the following phrases describe your current abilities? Choose the best answer and elaborate if you wish.

1. I can discuss and debate global issues from a well-informed position.

Very accurate Accurate Somewhat accurate Not very well Not at all

2. I can explain how local and global issues may be connected.

Very accurate Accurate Somewhat accurate Not very well Not at all

3. I can discuss the issues and problems of universal education.

Very accurate Accurate Somewhat accurate Not very well Not at all

4. I am comfortable as a leader in any situation.

Very accurate Accurate Somewhat accurate Not very well Not at all

5. I have definite future academic and career plans.

Very accurate Accurate Somewhat accurate Not very well Not at all

6. I am a critical thinker and often reflect and question things.

Very accurate Accurate Somewhat accurate Not very well Not at all

7. I have a high degree of self-esteem and self-awareness.

Very accurate Accurate Somewhat accurate Not very well Not at all

8. I am comfortable and feel capable of interacting with people of different cultures.

Very accurate Accurate Somewhat accurate Not very well Not at all

Section 3: Expectations and desired outcomes

Answer the following questions in complete sentences as accurately as possible.

1. Why did you decide to take part in this program?

2. What are you most looking forward to while abroad? (List as many answers as you want)

3. What single experience or aspect of this program do you think will be the most memorable? Why?

4. What single experience or aspect of this program do you think will be the most educational? Why

5. In what ways has this experience affected you to date?

6. How do you anticipate the rest of this experience will affect you?

7. What are you most worried about with regards to the remainder of this program?

8. How prepared do you feel to travel to the host country? Why do you think this is?

Appendix D: Journal guide

Please refer to this list of questions before writing your first journal entry while abroad. It is meant as a guide.

How are you adjusting to your environment?

Are there any problems or concerns you have at this time?

Have you made any meaningful connections or relationships with others?

How are the group dynamics among the participants?

What types of activities have you done today?

What were your initial perceptions of today's events?

Did these perceptions change? If so, why?

What would you change about today's events? Why?

Have you engaged in discussion with others about your experiences thus far? What was the nature of these discussions?

What has been your favorite experience abroad thus far? Why do you think that it?

Appendix E: Interview guide for study trip participants

1. Can you tell me about your arrival to your host village?
2. What did you learn from others in the village? Or from staying in the village?
3. Can you tell me about your time volunteering in the schools?
4. What did you learn throughout your time in the schools?
5. Can you tell me about any trips you took?
6. Can you describe any relationships or friendships you made?
7. What is the first thing you tell people who ask about your trip?
8. What experiences were completely new for you?
9. What did you find most difficult while away?
10. What experiences (activities, trips, moments, etc) did you value the most while abroad? Why? What did you learn from these experiences?
11. What experiences (activities, trips, moments, etc) did you value the least while abroad? Why? What did you learn from these experiences?
12. What have you learnt and valued the most in the post-trip portion of this program?
13. What would you change about the program? What would you keep the same?

Appendix F: Interview guide for trip coordinator

1. Why were students asked to keep journals while abroad?
2. What was the aim of the evening group meetings?
3. What was the aim of having students work on personal projects?
4. Why were students encouraged to use interviewing as a way to get information?
5. Why did students stay in the village itself?
6. Why were students housed in their own building (as opposed to with families)?
7. Why were students sent to the schools?
8. Why did students visit the capital?
9. Why did students visit the resort?
10. Why did students plant trees?
11. Why did students paint the primary school?
12. Why were there guides?
13. Why was there a photographer on the trip with them?
14. Why did they write reports?
15. Why did they give presentations?

Appendix G: Verbal explanation of research

Verbal explanation of research to be read to participants

You are being asked to participate in a research project entitled Qualifying the Study Abroad Experience. The purpose of the research project is to identify what experiences, centered in and around the study abroad program in which you are participating, are most educational and the reasons they are qualified as such. The focus of this study is on your own personal perceptions which you have included in your journals and that you will provide in oral interviews. The aim of this project is to identify what aspects of the study abroad experience, from start to finish, are deemed most educational and influential by you, the participants.

By signing this consent form you are agreeing to allow the researcher to access and use the information you provided in the pre-departure questionnaire, to provide the researcher with a hard copy of the journal entries which you completed while abroad and to participate in two separate 30-40 minute interviews discussing your experiences related to the program if you are asked to do so.

I will now ask you to read the consent form carefully before signing. Please give one signed copy to me and keep the other one for yourself as it contains contact information you may need.

Appendix H: Transcription guidelines

- Take out all likes which are not used to give meaning (not used as verbs or to give examples)
- Only leave ums, uhs, etc. if they represent pauses to think
- Take out back speak (repeated words)
- Use commas to show people are rephrasing what they have already started to say (ex, He didn't really, Rick didn't really tell us what to do)
- Use... when a thought is not finished and speech turns to another topic or information is interjected
- Indicate laughs, sighs, nods, pauses and other sounds or non-verbal signs which are identifiable by adding them in parentheses
- Use italic for foreign words
- Type words said with emphasis in bold
- Correct improper grammar where this can be done without restructuring the entire sentence
- Add function words (and, but, etc.) in parentheses if needed to better understand the sentence
- Use contractions which are common in writing but change those only common to speaking:

Cause-because

Hafta-have to

Hasta-has to

Kinda-kind of

Sorta-sort of

Gonna-going to

- Use the following spellings for fillers:

Um

Uh

Ummm (if drawn out)

Uhhh (if drawn out)

Mh-hmm

Yeah

Wow

Woah

Oh my God

DO NOT:

- Change vocabulary used (even if it is not a word or misused)

- Cut out any ideas, words or phrases (regardless of their relevance)

Appendix I: List of data codes

FA funny anecdote

FE field experience

PM planned meetings

DT down time

RD reflective discussion

I immersion

CP community projects

GP group projects

IT interviews

FT field trip

R reflective thought

CE cultural events

J journaling

B bonding

PP personal projects