

Cultural Consultants in the Classroom: Harnessing International Student Mobility for Intercultural Learning

**Dawn Grimes-MacLellan
Meiji Gakuin University**

Introduction

With internationalization efforts intensifying across the higher education landscape, international students are increasingly being accepted at North American universities into programs ranging from sheltered short-term, bridging and Intensive English Programs (IEP); academic semester or year-long study abroad programs; to regular admission in certificate or degree-granting programs. According to the Institute of International Education, in 2013-2014 over 886,000 international students studied at U.S. colleges and universities – a number that “grew by 8% over the prior year and is now at a record high” (IIE 2014). Of the top seven places of origin of international students in 2013-2014, East Asian countries are well represented. Chinese students are by far the largest population of academically mobile students at 31% of the total number of international students, with South Korea, Taiwan, and Japan ranking third, sixth, and seventh, respectively (IIE 2014).

To many international students, irrespective of country of origin or destination, education abroad is viewed as an ideal opportunity to improve foreign language skills, gain cultural knowledge through

immersion in another society, enhance career opportunities, and much more. However, while abroad, international students often find it challenging to engage with local people and integrate into the host culture. Barriers can include the ways in which study programs are organized, conflicts with academic calendars across countries, and isolating living conditions. Despite being immersed in the target language and culture, a lack of opportunity and/or initiative to participate in local activities can limit the learning potential of many international students.

To optimize education abroad as a fulfilling and transformative learning experience for international students, it is crucial to recognize that there is a qualitative difference between “learning abroad” and “just going abroad” (Ramírez 2013). In other words, spontaneous interaction with local people and meaningful participation in the local community are not automatic outcomes of a study abroad experience and, similarly, merely accepting international students does not automatically make a campus internationalized. In order to help international students become successful in their new environment while meaningfully developing vibrantly internationalized campuses, universities need to shift their focus from simply attracting international students to considering ways in which these students can be better integrated into campus life, from scaffolding their early initiation to providing continued support throughout their studies. Opportunities for bi-directional internationalization also exist within the structure of a formal course through the exchanges and cross-pollination of ideas between international and domestic students in class. This paper discusses one such opportunity: an anthropology course on East Asia within the regular university curriculum that was developed specifically to harness student mobility by bringing international and domestic students together for mutually beneficial authentic intercultural learning. The paper begins with a discussion of the theory and practice of the study abroad experience and follows with a detailed description of the specially-designed cross-cultural anthropology course, from its theoretical foundations and curriculum to some of the challenges in its implementation. Following this, student

feedback on the course is considered and benefits of the collaboration are discussed.

“A transformative learning experience”

The discourse of study abroad brims with excitement and positive expectation. It is commonly perceived as an ideal opportunity for students to master a foreign language, get to know another culture through first-hand experience, expand their worldview, promote personal development in terms of adaptability, confidence, and independence, and increase employment marketability. Study abroad is also touted as an “adventure,” a discourse found to be prevalent in study abroad guidebooks, suggesting that students get to travel to distant and exotic places where they can make friends with people from all over the world (Zemach-Bersin 2009, Doerr 2012). Ultimately, students are sold the promise that, by participating in a study abroad program, they will have “a transformational learning experience” that will change their lives.

Without a doubt, education abroad is filled with possibilities, but it is not without challenges and there are no guarantees that it will be transformational for every student. Prominent international education scholar Jane Jackson (2015) notes, “While educational international experience is widely assumed to be transformative, leading to significant gains in intercultural competence, L2 proficiency, and global-mindedness, researchers are discovering that a range of complex internal and external factors can lead to quite disparate outcomes.” Mere immersion in a foreign culture does not automatically result in meaningful learning, and a growing body of study abroad literature suggests that we need to problematize the automatic transformation assumption (Jackson 2015, Jackson 2012, Kinginger 2009, Vande Berg, Paige & Lou 2012).

Veteran educators may feel that the concept of integrating these two disparate populations of domestic and short-term international students in a semester-long integrated course is not particularly novel, but despite the obvious benefits for intercultural exploration, the task may be surprisingly difficult to achieve. Nonetheless, those on campuses with few opportunities to easily bring the geographic

area of study into the classroom may appreciate this largely untapped resource, and though there are indeed obstacles to overcome in implementing such a course, the payoff can be substantial. Some of the obstacles lie within the formal organizational structures of the student exchange itself. Sheltered short-term or “island programs” bring international students to the host culture but even when they are situated within a university campus, opportunities for deep engagement with the university community and the broader off-campus community are limited. Similarly, intensive English programs (IEP) on U.S. campuses for students with low language proficiency can frequently isolate students from regular campus life, as their classes and instructors’ offices are often housed in a building dedicated to international education and their daily coursework and regular interactions are entirely with co-nationals and other international students. Another common institutional barrier to more vibrant exchange between international and domestic students is the frequent conflict in their terms of study, with many study abroad programs held during summer when fewer domestic students are present, and on conditions amenable to the sending institution, which may not coordinate well with the local academic calendar. It is not unusual, for example, for international students to arrive on campus for several weeks of short-term study in March during the break between academic years in East Asia just when domestic students are heading off for spring break, or for summer study in July when domestic students have already returned home.

Other structural challenges to integrating international students into the local campus community include dormitory accommodations that can isolate international students by housing them all together, perhaps at some distance from campus. Home stay arrangements can help to push international students into the local community and, when they work, can be an effective mechanism for intercultural exchange. However, a homestay relationship is a very personal and individual relationship and brings its own set of challenges, from stereotyped conceptions of host family structure on the one hand to age-appropriate behavior on the other, to setting ground rules about living in someone’s home, the responsibilities of

a cultural host, and the challenges of integrating a visitor into daily routines. Host families may have less (or more) available time than an international student may desire, and the respective life stages and interaction goals of the hosts and the visiting student may not always coordinate well. Similarly, on the institutional side, even when university administrators recognize the potential for isolation and commit their best efforts to develop programming that integrates international students with domestic peers, mismatches can occur. A language conversation partner system matching an international student with a domestic student of that foreign language is a common element of international exchange programs, but it does require effort and perspective-taking on the part of both parties to be effective. It may not always work very well when domestic students are more interested in practicing their Japanese or Korean, for example, than supporting international students in their English learning progress, and it may be difficult to strike an appropriate balance.

For many international students, establishing friendships with host culture nationals is crucial to realizing many of the promises of a successful and transformative study abroad experience. However, research indicates that this is a significant hurdle to overcome (Bochner, Hutnik, & Furnham 1985, Kudo and Simkin 2003). In a recent survey on the friendship experiences of international students in the U.S, Gareis (2012:320) found that “[m]ore than a third of the respondents (38.11 percent) had no close American friends, and students on average were not very satisfied with the number and quality of their friendships.” East Asian students in particular were found to have the greatest difficulty in establishing intercultural friendships, and “students from East Asia often had no American friends at all” (2012:320). Given such findings, it is clear that further initiatives are needed to promote meaningful interaction between international and domestic students to bring about a transformative learning experience for the visiting student, and in a win-win situation, doing so can also contribute to greater campus internationalization.

Research genre and pedagogical motivation

Before proceeding to the discussion of the course and its implementation, it seems important to briefly explain the disciplinary foundation upon which this course was developed and my pedagogical motivation for pursuing a formal collaboration between international and domestic students. As a cultural anthropologist of Japan (and East Asia more broadly), I am always keen to not merely teach students 'facts' about this region of the world. Rather, I feel a disciplinary responsibility and dedication to bringing domestic students, who often have not traveled to East Asia, as close as possible to these cultures through available interdisciplinary resources that include ethnography, literature, film and material culture. I strive to develop authentic, meaningful lessons that push students to explore new ways of thinking and learning, gaining insight from multiple perspectives as they traverse epistemic borders. In a nutshell, my aim for students is not merely to 'learn' about these cultures but to 'experience' them to whatever extent possible within the brief confines of an academic semester course on a campus geographically distant from the area of the world they are studying.

With the above pedagogical aims, in designing and developing resources for the course, I have drawn upon my extensive background in working with international students not only in regular classroom settings but also in a variety of capacities in the U.S., Canada, and Japan, ranging from international graduate student community advisor, host family coordinator at a university-based IEP, associate faculty in study abroad programs, and faculty leader for a semester abroad program in Japan that included a collaborative volunteer service component. All of these experiences have put me in close contact over the years with 'international' students from both sides of the Pacific, and I have observed and heard many of the specific challenges discussed above that these students encounter in trying to integrate into the receiving culture. One of the great ironies, of course, is that, just as at a high school dance where boys and girls hope to interact but find themselves on opposite sides of the room talking with each other, international and domestic students often

live and study in quite close proximity but struggle to establish meaningful intercultural engagement and friendship without some external impetus to do so.

As a reflective practitioner, I find that my positionality shaped by the above experiences has not only been formative in guiding my pedagogical choices, but also continually inspires and energizes me to explore and examine new opportunities to enhance classroom learning. In the following section, I discuss one particular course on East Asia that was developed at a comprehensive university on the east coast of Canada where many of the students are first-generation university students and where racial and ethnic diversity in the general population is less than seven percent (Statistics Canada 2006). Despite this relative lack of diversity in the local population, university initiatives to internationalize the campus are attracting international students, most of whom are enrolled in short-term or semester-length language programs at the Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) Centre.

Thus my motivation to redesign this particular East Asia elective anthropology course offered to regularly enrolled domestic students was twofold. On the one hand, for domestic students, the course could move beyond traditional approaches of learning 'about' East Asian cultures and instead move towards developing a cultural awareness and sensitivity towards different viewpoints held by people from other parts of the world, obtained through their day-to-day discussion of the themes of the course with East Asian international students directly. On the other hand, based on my knowledge from past experience that international students often have difficulty integrating into host cultures, though it was not my immediate mandate, once I formed the idea to combine these two student populations, I was keenly focused on also creating for these international students a structure through which their own study abroad learning experience could be supported and enriched. Thus, by inviting these TESL Center international students to formally join a university course as East Asia cultural consultants, I intended to enhance the educational opportunities for both domestic and international students. I hope that this approach will resonate with

other North American faculty who may be prompted to bring such kinds of collaborations to their own classrooms and campuses and, in the discussion which follows, I describe some of the challenges and benefits of implementing such a plan.

Course development and structure

In planning a course integrating domestic and international students at a Canadian university, one of the initial steps was to choose an appropriate theme that could explore the potential benefits of this mutual collaboration. The anthropology course, *Ethnology: East Asia* was redesigned around the central theme of *Coming of Age in East Asia*. Prior to this, however, some groundwork enlisting the cooperation from other university units was required. To my knowledge, this was the first attempt at a formal collaborative effort between university faculty and TESL Center staff, and its initial development began in conversation I initiated with a senior staff member of the university's TESL Centre to pitch the concept and explore possible implementation and international student recruiting strategies. Though the TESL Center showed great interest in such an arrangement as an enrichment opportunity for its students, I soon learned of several challenges to implementing such a plan, the first one involving scheduling. The anthropology course was already scheduled in the university calendar, set to meet twice weekly on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 11:30am - 12:45pm during the spring semester. The meeting time for this course (and, I was to learn, every other regularly scheduled university course) conflicted with the TESL Centre timetable, posing a challenge at the very outset. However, the TESL Centre, convinced of the benefit of this collaborative opportunity, generously shifted its schedule by thirty minutes one day each week in order to permit its international students to join the class. Without this creative flexibility on the part of the TESL Centre, the project would never have gotten off the ground. Yet this seemingly simple rescheduling needed to be arranged with care so that all TESL Centre students, whether they joined the anthropology course or not, would maintain the required number of hours of study for their student visas. With this settled,

an arrangement was made so that domestic students who enrolled in the three-credit course attended twice weekly as they would with any other university course, while the TESL Centre international students joined one session each week on Thursday as a non-credit elective beyond their regular intensive English studies.

International students from China, Japan and South Korea were recruited for the course with assistance from the Student Programs Coordinator of the TESL Centre who was in direct contact with the students on a daily basis. I prepared a flyer with a description of the course, including the topics to be covered and associated activities, as well as an introduction of myself as the instructor and my research and experience in Japan and East Asia. Advanced level students were identified as the target participant pool as it was determined that they would most benefit from the experience in a regular university class setting and would have the capacity to actively contribute. Even so, although I have often heard feedback from IEP students that they regretted the inability to take regular university courses, it was not clear prior to the course whether or not international students would want to participate, as it would entail an additional not-for-credit time commitment in an already busy schedule. Perhaps most significantly, TESL Centre enrolment itself was uncertain because the Centre's admissions procedures and deadlines are structured according to their own individual programs on a semester-by-semester basis. However, in the week before the course was about to run for the first time, this uncertainty cleared when sixteen international students indicated that they wished to participate; seven from China, five from Japan, and four from South Korea.

Implementing intercultural collaboration in a university course

Collaboration between domestic students and international students began during the third week of the semester, providing an opportunity for both groups of students to first settle into their respective class schedules and get to know classmates before taking on this collaborative project. It also allowed for me to introduce to my domestic students the anthropological study of East Asia and

to ground them in a general understanding of lifecourse patterns in each country. To begin, the course syllabus description read as follows:

Coming of Age in East Asia

What is a child? Who is an adolescent? Though the answers to these questions may seem obvious, people everywhere do not share the same ideas of what childhood and adolescence are, should be, or have the potential to be. This semester, our course explores growing up and coming of age in East Asian societies (China, Japan, and South Korea), examining how children and young people are shaped by cultural beliefs and values, social practices, and institutions. Two highly influential institutions in the lives of children and youth are family and school. We will examine the roles these institutions play in shaping the lifecourse paths of young people. In particular, we will investigate the ways in which rapid economic and social changes are altering the shape of the lifecourse in East Asian societies; rites of passage and social roles; the role of the state and formal schooling in the experience of young people, and in the creation of norms and deviance; gender and sexuality; the moral panics surrounding perceptions of young people; and the ways in which youth engage consumer and mass media cultures.

In addition, I also explained the collaborative framework of the course, sought student feedback on ways in which to carry out some of our planned activities, and elaborated expectations about student responsibility and cultural sensitivity as we prepared to meet with international students for the first time.

In discussing this collaboration with my domestic students, I referred to international students as “cultural consultants.” The naming of the international student collaborators was the subject of considerable thought, and the term “cultural consultants” was developed through conversations with the TESL Centre liaison after having discussed more common potential terms such as “guest speaker” or “volunteer.” “Guest speaker” seemed unsuitable in that it could convey significant authority or place an excessively burdensome responsibility on international students with which even those with higher levels of English proficiency might feel uncomfortable. “Guest speaker” also seems to suggest a limited engagement of perhaps just a single meeting and, moreover, it does

not suggest extensive collaboration. The term connotes a one-time visit by someone of experience who shares her knowledge and who engages in some limited question and answer exchange at the end of a formal presentation.

By contrast, though the international students were, quite literally, volunteers in the course who gained no credit from either the university or the TESL Center but yet devoted a great number of hours to the collaborative effort, the word “volunteer” did not seem appropriate, carrying insufficient weight for the expected level of participation and amount of time required. The nature and meaning of volunteering can sometimes be too fluid, with a wide range of motivation and commitment. I also considered how domestic students would view “volunteers” in their classroom, and was especially concerned that if they viewed international students as volunteers in an assisting role, offering time but not necessarily bringing much experience or knowledge, then this would subordinate the status of the international students in the class.

So although distinguished “guest speakers” excessively elevated the status of the international students, “volunteers” inappropriately positioned them as subordinates. My goal was to aim at a relatively balanced status among the two groups of students, with each bringing their own perspectives and knowledge about the course themes. At the same time, I did want to extend a certain level of authority to the international students, who possessed individual expertise in their respective cultures based on their own life experiences beyond what domestic students could gain from other available resources, and so the culmination of all of these considerations was the term “cultural consultants.” As the course evolved, this term did help to foster in the eyes of domestic students a legitimate and meaningful role for the international students’ weekly participation in the course. As an anthropologist, I was also pleased to see that only after several weeks of meetings did it also dawn upon domestic students that they, too, served in the same capacity for international students. As one student aptly noted in a reflective feedback assignment, “we are also cultural consultants for them.”

Over the first two weeks of the course, the anticipation of meeting the cultural consultants generated excitement and curiosity among domestic students, who saw an authentic real-world purpose to their learning that motivated them to work diligently on preparing for group meetings. Meanwhile, I felt some apprehension before the first collaborative group meeting, as the course enrollment was already at forty students and we would be adding sixteen cultural consultants for one session per week. To manage the class size and to create a more intimate environment for discussion, we created eight working groups of five students each who would be joined by two cultural consultants. Domestic students felt that having two consultants per group would enable them to support one another and also allow each international student to not only learn more about Canada but also about a neighboring East Asian country. Consultants joined a new group each week so that, by the end of the course, all members could eventually have a chance to meet and discuss together. During the weekly session when consultants were not present, the groups of five domestic students were tasked with developing discussion questions or preparing materials for the next collaborative encounter. Cultural consultants were not given homework assignments, but our class kept in touch with them throughout the week via an online discussion board, which informed them of the topics of upcoming meetings. Nonetheless, on their own initiative, many of the cultural consultants brought their own notes or other materials to class to discuss the topic for the day's discussion.

During the very first collaborative group meeting, domestic students were nervous and a bit unsure of themselves while the cultural consultants were also very quiet and surely even more anxious. Shortly after introducing myself, the aims of the collaboration, and relaying some anecdotes of my own cross-cultural experiences to relax the mood in the class, I was assisted by student leaders who helped the cultural consultants join in discussions in their small groups. Prior to this meeting, each group had planned self-introductions and other ice-breaking activities to ease the initial awkwardness and begin to get to know one another. They also prepared questions about early childhood experiences, one of the

first topics of the course. As I moved between the groups, I observed a great deal of care on the part of the domestic students to not put any one person on the spot, and to not only ask questions but also share their own cultural experiences. It did not take long for discussion to begin to flow in all directions between group participants, and before students knew it, the class time had ended before groups were ready to stop.

Group sessions continued in this manner throughout the course, with small groups allowing for an effective management of the large class, and as students became familiar with the patterns of activity and discussion, the settling in process at the beginning of each class progressed more smoothly and quickly. Based on the TESL Centre calendar, cultural consultants were able to join the anthropology class for ten weeks, and during the final weeks of the semester during which they were no longer present, the class debriefed about the experience and individually worked on synthesis papers to bring together course materials, class activities, meeting preparation work, discussions, and reflection of the semester's learning.

Course activities: Putting theory into practice

This section discusses several class activities that domestic students and cultural consultants examined together. As mentioned above, the course theme – Coming of age in East Asia – drew on a lifecourse perspective from early childhood through late adolescence/young adulthood. This approach was one of the successes of the course and was specifically designed for this type of collaboration in that the treatment of the topic could in the initial weeks begin with discussions based on tangible resources including personal experiences, observations of cultural traditions, aspects of material culture, and a film on early childhood education. All students were able to draw upon these materials for discussion. In subsequent weeks, discussions moved increasingly toward topics based less on observable materials and more on abstract experiences, ideas, and values. The timing of this shift in emphasis worked well, as all students had by this time become comfortable with one another and the class format, and cultural consultants had increasingly gained

confidence in their communicative ability. Toward the end of the ten weeks with consultants, the class was able to discuss at length social, economic and political issues affecting youth that crossed cultural boundaries.

In the early weeks of the course as we focused on early childhood, one class discussion and associated activity centered on celebrations such as the “Korean choosing ceremony” (*Toljabee*) which is held in celebration of a child’s first birthday. Prior to the class meeting with cultural consultants, domestic students learned about childhood ceremonies and festivities, and *Toljabee* was one ceremony in particular that they wanted to hear more about from Korean consultants. In this ceremony, a large table is prepared with many celebratory dishes. In addition, various items such as a spool of thread, a book, a brush, money, a pencil and other items are displayed. It is said that the items a child picks up will predict his or her future. If a spool of thread is picked up, the child will have a long life. The pencil means the child will become a good scholar. Domestic students listened intently as the Korean consultants explained the interpretations of each of the items. During another weekly meeting with consultants, students explored folktales from China, Japan, and South Korea. In a previous course, I had examined with my class the various interpretations of a folk tale such as Cinderella that is known globally but interpreted locally according to each country’s beliefs and traditions. In this course, students prepared for the group discussion of folk tales by gathering children’s books of these folktales from city libraries. Consultants were keen to see how familiar childhood stories had been rendered in English and illustrated. From this grew conversations about different versions of the folktales, the cultural meaning and values embedded in them, and even other tales with similar lessons across each culture, including Canada.

Toward the mid-point in the semester, collaborative meetings centered on schooling and the expectations and demands of different levels of education. During one session, students watched a film on examination pressures in Japan and subsequently discussed together their individual schooling experiences, academic competition and

examinations, as well as peer relationships, and sports and club activities. Moving about the class, I observed students leaning in to listen to the current speaker, following up with questions, showing surprise at some of the responses, and then turning to the next person and asking if they had similar experiences. On discussions about education, there was even some debate between cultural consultants as to which of the three countries put the most academic pressure on students. On the other hand, domestic students were often baffled by the academic rigors of childhood that the consultants described.

Later in the semester, attention turned to traditional family systems and the transformation of family life, including roles, expectations and responsibilities. To my surprise, the concepts of filial piety, respect and duty to care for one's parents, known as "Asian" cultural concepts, resonated across many students, Canadian and East Asian alike. Perhaps owing to the fact that many of the domestic students were first generation university students hailing from small communities throughout the region, with families involved in traditional industries such as agriculture and fishing, they also felt the pull of family obligations and expectations to return to their communities after university. Other discussions centered on the growing generation gap that all students seemed to recognize irrespective of cultural upbringing. On the other hand, domestic students were also intrigued by cultural differences such as China's one-child policy. Having read Fong's (2004) work on Chinese singletons, domestic students asked questions to better understand some of the ways in which the one-child policy impacted the lives of Chinese students and how the Chinese student consultants envisioned their own futures and that of their country.

Through these opportunities for collaborative investigation and discussion, domestic students not only learned about the topics of study, but from the very beginning they were able to discern differences and similarities between China, Japan and South Korea as well as cultural diversity within each culture. Often one of the greatest challenges associated with teaching students about unfamiliar and distant world regions is to be able to delve deeply enough to reach beyond cultural stereotypes. Over the course of a

semester, domestic students became quite astute at seeking out the differing points of views and experiences of cultural consultants. Likewise, the cultural consultants had multiple opportunities to engage with numerous Canadian peers and thus see beyond any 'textbook' representation to see them as individual members of Canadian society.

Evaluation of the course

Initial challenges & impediments

As indicated above, the design and implementation of the course met with some initial challenges. The differing academic calendars and course timetables between the university and the TESL Center required flexibility in order to allow the collaboration to proceed while also ensuring that international students met the required number of program hours for their student visas. The TESL Centre's process of enrolling students also delayed the possibility to recruit international students until just before the university semester began. As such, gauging the availability and interest of international students in advance was difficult, which impacted other decisions such as classroom size selection, course materials preparation, and activity planning.

Fortunately, interest in the course was sufficient to attract sixteen advanced-level international students, though this created a much larger class during collaboration days (40 domestic and 16 international students). To manage these numbers, students worked in smaller groups, with assigned leaders taking over some of the organizational responsibilities during the collaborations. While the early weeks were admittedly frenetic as students got to know one another and became familiar with activities and group responsibilities, subsequent weeks proceeded more smoothly. Even so, the amount of preparation time was substantial for all participants. A particularly helpful course management tool was the web-based discussion board which was used for brainstorming ideas for group work, keeping in touch with consultants from week to week, and reflecting on course learning. The collaboration also

made substantial demands on the instructor in terms of managing student expectations, reiterating the purpose of the collaboration, explaining differing intercultural communication styles, assisting group leaders in managing groups, and supporting the participation of international students. With students often deeply engaged in their group-work until close to the end of each class period, the instructor's role often focused on managing intercultural group discussions or the preparations for the next group session. As less time was available for whole-class debriefing in class, the discussion board also provided an opportunity to pull out important themes discussed at each class meeting and the lessons learned.

Student feedback

Although this course might be considered ambitious, all stakeholder groups (instructor, TESL Centre staff, domestic and international students) found the effort to be worthwhile, and many of the implementation challenges have subsequently been alleviated by controlling class size and streamlining class activities. Even in a course with a demanding workload, student feedback was not only positive but also reflected considerable introspection about cross-cultural learning and individual growth. A major aim for developing this collaborative project stemmed from a desire to breathe life into learning about East Asian cultures and ways of life, and of the overall experience, one student commented: "Meeting the cultural consultants was an incredibly valuable experience, both from a classroom perspective and a personal perspective. On an academic level, it allowed us to move beyond what we had read in textbooks and articles and speak to individuals who could provide first hand accounts of their youth and experiences in East Asia." Though they may not have expected it, through these intercultural encounters, domestic students also were given the opportunity to see their own culture through the eyes of international students. Another student commented, "Through this exchange we also learned how some of the consultants viewed Canada and the United States, both before their arrival in North America and during their studies here. It was fascinating to compare their views of our culture with our own

perceptions of ourselves.” Similarly, cultural consultants shared sentiments about intercultural learning: “I liked the opportunity for group discussion and cultural exchange between Canadian and East Asian students. Sometimes it was difficult speaking English, but they listened to me carefully. I was surprised by other classmates conversations too.”

The nature of the collaboration also required considerable input, preparation and management on the part of domestic students to smoothly execute collaborative meeting days. This undertaking thus promoted leadership skills while also giving students opportunities to exercise cultural sensitivity and develop spontaneous strategies for initiating, managing and completing group work. One student reflected:

I learned much from the experience not only about youth and adolescence in East Asia, but also about how to better facilitate discussion with individuals who are learning English. It is not always easy to facilitate conversations between the group and the consultants. More than just a language barrier, it is not always easy to make a stranger feel relaxed enough to talk about their life experiences and opinions. Making the individuals feel comfortable while being stared at by a group of Canadians eager to learn knowledge from the East was something that we as a group gradually learned to overcome. We found the most effective way was to offer information about ourselves, quickly learning that we were also cultural consultants for them.

Of note, Japanese students were especially reticent in the early weeks of class discussions in comparison to their Chinese and Korean peers, so it was incumbent on group leaders to explore ways in which to include them and support them in their participation. In a class meeting without cultural consultants present, we discussed various ways in which to encourage participation or, conversely, to appropriately cue more talkative students to allow space for others to participate. Group members drew upon various strategies. In some cases, group leaders approached initial discussion in a rotation format so that there was a dedicated time to listen to each person. Other times, students would ask directly about Japan, or alternatively offer information about their experience in Canada first followed by inquiring about the same topic to a

Japanese student. As students got to know one another well, they all developed effective ways of drawing one another into discussions and allowing for full participation of the various members. This effort was rewarded and motivated by the positive response from cultural consultants. Another student remarked, "What was striking and overwhelmingly surprising is the warmth and enthusiasm of this remarkable group of people. This group of consultants had an open personality that soon became infectious in our classroom. The room soon became buzzing with the conversations and sounds of people who seemed to know each other for years." Likewise, cultural consultants also found the collaboration valuable, as one Chinese student pointed out: "I enjoyed the experience because I met Canadian students and participated in a real university course. I found the Canadian students well prepared, proud and kind. I would like to be classmates with these students when I become an undergraduate here." The sense of meaningfulness gained from participating in this collaboration as voiced by this student was a key factor in sustaining international students' commitment over the duration of the course. From the outset, they were recognized for their important role as cultural consultants which made them legitimate members of the course community in partnership with domestic students. Though not incentivized by external rewards, a benefit of being able to join a regular university course was that it helped them to enter into and experience campus life from the inside rather than from on the periphery. Many of the domestic and international students also became friends, meeting outside of class, and domestic students came to know the challenges of international student life and frequently offered assistance or advice.

The collaborative component of the course was highly successful in making classroom learning authentic, as it offered immediate opportunities for students to spontaneously discuss and gain new perspectives on course themes, and the enthusiasm of all students fueled further exploration. One student explained:

A success of this experience was an insight into very different cultures. I learned much more than I ever expected and more than I could have learned from any book. The students' stories from their childhood allowed

me to examine my own upbringing. Some of it was the same but some was very different. I learned about traditions and superstitions that I had never heard of before. We discussed a tradition in South Korea that we have gone over in class where a young child chooses from a table of objects. Their choice reflects what the future has in store for them. I think this would be a fun tradition to start here. I would be interested to know what I would have chosen.

While the collaborative framework allowed domestic students to gain the personal insights of cultural consultants about course content ostensibly focused on distant cultures far removed from their own lived experiences, at the same time, the opportunity to speak with international students from those cultures encouraged domestic students to reflect on their own culture and experiences.

I learned a great deal during this process, not only about East Asia but also about myself. I grew up in a small rural area of New Brunswick where little contact is made with different cultural and ethnic backgrounds. To have an opportunity like this one to meet and interact with people from another part of the world was a huge opportunity. I learned that meeting people from other backgrounds is not as hard as it may seem at first. You just have to have the right attitude that projects a willingness to learn and to be understood.

Developing this kind of student reflexivity is often an important goal in the teaching of anthropology but is difficult to achieve in a classroom setting over a single semester. The collaborative project, however, helped this quality to emerge organically through student discussions.

Conclusion

In this cultural anthropology course on East Asia, international students served as “cultural consultants,” sharing their life experiences and cultural knowledge with domestic students studying that region of the world. For international students, the opportunity to join a regular university class where they could interact with peers provided an authentic setting to expand their English language skills, learn about their host culture, and establish friendships/networks. Meanwhile, domestic students experienced an enriched classroom environment that brought foreign culture to life

through the opportunity to meet, discuss and exchange views with cultural consultants. While interrogating course themes, they also gained significant personal insights. In addition, the collaboration encouraged domestic students to develop patience, curiosity and confidence in interacting with people from other cultures. In this way, each group of students provided an immediate human cultural lens to facilitate the process of becoming acculturated to each other's cultures, views, and perspectives. Moreover, collaborative learning helped each group build the confidence to actively participate in authentic and meaningful topics of discussion, and a more culturally responsive classroom emerged in which students came to see themselves as a community of learners.

During class meetings, domestic students and cultural consultants engaged in activities ranging from exchanging folktales from their home countries, discussing information obtained through a video on education in East Asian settings, and talking about topics related to family, education and youth culture. Though the meeting days were frequently hectic at the beginning, once the groups became settled, the discussions flowed smoothly and after each encounter, the domestic students always commented that the time had passed too quickly. When we reflected on the course at the end of the term, many students suggested that this course should become a year-long course to increase the opportunities to meet with cultural consultants, indicating to me that this collaboration was indeed a worthwhile endeavor.

Collaborative experiences like the one described above in a regular university course involving domestic and international student participants has much to offer in terms of both internationalizing North American campuses and optimizing study abroad as a transformative learning experience for international students. What is important to note, however, is that meaningful engagement between both populations is not automatic and cannot be assumed to occur spontaneously even when these two groups are in relative proximity on the same campus. In other words, attracting international students to campus does not inherently internationalize it, nor does going abroad automatically create meaningful and lasting

intercultural learning. To promote these enriching environments and experiences, it is important to “structure-in” collaborative activities for authentic learning that will give students real-world purpose and motivation to achieve learning goals. The course described here demonstrates one way in which such a support structure can be provided for intercultural engagement. Though not without its organizational challenges, instructor observation and student feedback underscores the positive impact such experiences can have on learning, which makes these efforts worthwhile.

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