

My thoughts on the overseas study trip

Masayoshi Kubo

Department of Physical Therapy, Niigata University of Health and Welfare, Niigata Japan

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Introduction

The whole purpose of this essay is to share some of my thoughts as a group leader of multiple overseas study trips. It is not exactly about how I made students behave in certain ways, but how I want them to perceive what they are about to do during the trips. Because students (or people in general) behave based on the perception of the events, not necessarily based on what it is. A trip is a translation from point A to point B. But that is almost trivial part of our overseas study trip.

A disclaimer: This may not be a true reflection of departmental policy on the study trip overseas.

Globalization

There is something funny about 'Globalization.' In one sense, our daily life has been globalized already. Take a look at the tag on your cloths. Let alone china, you can see many names of countries such as Vietnam, Venezuela and Thailand. When it comes to food, the situation is getting much more radical; more than 60% of the calories you absorbed today is not from Japan, on average. We have been 'deeply globalized' already, regardless of your preference.

Many people may believe that 'globalization' was happening in the domain of information much more significantly. It is true that we CAN

have an access to all the information around the world and they are just a fingertip away, owing to the power of the Internet. All of our university students were born and raised in the information age and they are consuming all the information, just like breathing air. REALLY? Ask your students when they read an article of any newspaper published in English. I am sure it won't be yesterday. Although they CAN have an access to all kinds of information from all over the world, a major part of the information they consume is a domesticated version.

Moving items like food and cloths all over the world takes time and energy. Conversely, information does not carry any weight and can be transferred almost at a speed of light. When it comes to information, the size of the earth does not matter any more. Why would we rather choose to move food and cloths than information? It is a value that makes this difference. We appreciated value of squid at the seashore of Peru more than knowing what is happening on the curbside of Peru.

Our globalization

If you are an engineer or sales person of one company and received a notice that you are about to transfer to one of overseas branches, English proficiency is a nice tool to carry. This is one of

Corresponding author: Masayoshi Kubo

Department of Physical Therapy, Niigata University of Health and Welfare, 1398 Shimami-cho, Kita-ku, Niigata 950-3198, Japan
TEL/FAX: +81-25-257-4416, E-mail: kubo@nuhw.ac.jp

virtual cases that the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry has in their mind. If you are a scientist just come to know that there is a group of people who share the same interest with you at one of universities in the USA, you may want to work together with them. Again, English proficiency is a first tool to pick up. This is one of virtual cases that the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology has on its list of the globalization.

For you, as a person in the field of health and welfare, what does the globalization mean? I don't know you personally, but it was a hard question for me to respond. How come? It may be an indicator that the shape of the globalization in our field is NEW; something we haven't seen yet. There was not such a thing as PODCAST even when the iPod was introduced in 1999 for the first time. But now the podcast is considered a major educational tool at top 100 universities in the world. In the field of health and welfare, there are a lot of new things popping up almost every year. Long term care insurance was introduced in 2000. Medical fee for seniors is not free any more. People may not be able to receive pensions fully at the age of 65.

Despite all the changes in the environment, our goal in this field as professionals won't change a bit; QOL supporter who knows how to maximize the quality of life of clients. Can you assure that you can accomplish the same goal under totally different environment? Or can we prepare our students for something we don't have any idea of yet?

You may think our professional education in Japan is at a very advanced level of world standard. Technologically, maybe, but professionally not really. For example, Physical therapy program in the Philippines is designed to maintain compatibility with that in the U.S.A.

That means a graduate from the program is eligible for taking the PT exam in the U.S.A. Can our graduates take the PT exam in the US? Absolutely, cannot. Within ASEAN countries, as a part of dynamic development in the framework of ASEAN VISION 2020, health care professionals can work in a country of their choice. Is Japan a part of it? The answer is NO. Is it a problem? I think so.

One of my personal long-term goals as to international activities is to export young professionals trained in our university to foreign countries. Can our student do it? My answer is 'Yes, they can.' They just don't know what it takes. It is very unfortunate that our curriculum is not compatible with that in the USA in the field of physical therapy. There is nothing students can do about it at this point of time. This part is a responsibility of the educator's side.

Right environment

Sir Ken Robinson argued that education is an organic process. One of the examples is agriculture. We tend to think that we grow rice, but that is not a true picture. What we can do is to prepare the right environment and let rice grow. We cannot globalize our students. Instead, we can provide the right environment so that our students can be globalized. It is not unusual to hear that some of our students showed significant change after finishing a clinical internship. They must have experienced a series of life changing events, which they could not find at academic settings. This is where overseas study trip shines.

When it comes to the overseas study trip, I tried to spend as much time as possible during the preparation period, which typically lasts more than 3 months. This is how I tell students at the first meeting for the study trip, "If you find yourself left alone during the trip for whatever reason, you should be able to find a way to move

on to the next destination and rejoin the group. In order to make it happen, you should carry all the information about your itinerary, either in your brain or in printed form. I prefer printed form personally, but if you choose not to carry information in printed form that is fine. “

Let's say, you are a leader of a group with 10 students with baggage. Then you'd better know that it is just impossible to cross a road as a group if the road is wide enough to have traffic lights. At some moment, you will realize that some students are left behind at the curbside on the other end and you need to halt a progression of the group so that they can catch up with you. To make you mad is that they are apparently ignorant of the very reason why the whole group is not moving forward. It is bad. Actually, it was you who made a bad decision. You are trying to accomplish something impossible. From my experiences, all you need to do is to give a group two pieces of information in advance; 1) where students need to be and 2) at what time. They are living in the information age and they should have had no problem finding out how to get these two pieces of information together.

All of the students who have participated in the trip said that they should have learned English much more diligently. As far as I saw, the statement is nice, but not reflecting reality. For daily conversation, they don't have any burning problems and all of them have survived. What is critically missing is the understanding of technical terms in their own field in English. These terms are not mastered by speed-learning nor by just watching Hollywood movies without Japanese caption. I really think that the students should have opportunities to learn those words and their usage at the university. Is there a difference between remembering technical English words and increasing vocabulary? They may look similar at the surface level but vocabulary can

grow just by using it. The overseas study trip is a perfect opportunity for them to expand their vocabulary.

There are some students who have experienced visiting abroad when they were kids. Does it help them to accomplish something during our study trip? My impression is No. They might have remembered where they visited, but typically they have no idea how to get there and how much they paid. It is because that part was taken care of by somebody else. These fragmented experiences do not become building blocks of something real. It is undoubtedly essential for them to experience a whole set of processes about the trip.

Risk management

If there is a possibility of a plan to go bad, it usually goes bad. Bad to what degree? It is up to you. I always emphasize the importance of preparing alternative plans. It is usually difficult for almost all students because of a lack of imagination. The amount of imagination depends on the amount of experience and the power of imagination allows us to foresee what is coming and keep us away from potential danger. There are two types of risks; one that we can accept and the other we cannot accept. Let's talk only about acceptable and even educational risks.

I would like our students to make all the reservations possible on their own, including accommodations, transportations and optional tours. It saves money and increases the amount of experience of the students. However, even with supervision, students can make mistakes. For example, it can be a hard job for foreigners to tell the difference between first name and family name in Japanese. The reservation of hotel rooms was made by students over the internet. When we arrived at the hotel, a receptionist could not find the reservation with their name. Some students carried a printed copy of their reservation with

them and all they needed to do was to show it. The other students did not have their reservation printed and needed to spend almost 20 min just to check in. They put their family name at a spot for a first name. It must have been an embarrassing moment for them, but that is a small risk to accumulate and imprint experiences. To tell the truth, I have made numerous mistakes of this kind and that is how I may look not so stupid with them.

Last words

I am a believer of the educational effectiveness of overseas study trip. With ample amounts of degree of freedom, students can feel what they are made of. I have started to see lasting changes in participants of the trips in terms of the degree of involvement in academic activities. Those are rewarding moments and a source of energy to plan the next trip.