Cultivating Global Citizenship Abroad: The Case of Asian MBA Students in Dubai

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Keywords: Study Abroad; Narrative Analysis; Intercultural learning; Critical Reflection, global citizenship

ABSTRACT: Dewey’s (1933) process of critical reflection states that experience, reflection and transformation are integral to one another and cannot be separated. For participants in this study, this becomes the method by which learners can explore and make sense of ‘learning by doing’ experiences that occur in a condensed and intense international educational experience. 24 graduate students’ critical reflections reveal perspective transformations about 1) local and global identity, 2) personal/professional balance in career path and 3) the need for collaboration and shared experience abroad. Because the United Arab Emirates (UAE) is fairly uncharted territory when it comes to understanding the nuances of 21st century experiential learning and development, evaluating how meaningful and transformative experiences can be fostered through ‘learning by doing’ initiatives serves as an important piece of dialogue in scholarship, in the region, and around the world. Exploring critical reflections from learners enrolled in a graduate business program offers insight about how their educational experiences are shaped by the context of Dubai, and what in particular encouraged meaningful learning from their individual perspectives.

Introduction

The ability to engage in inclusive and respectful dialogue within multicultural interactions is a necessary competency for all adult and higher education (AHE) learners across the ever-changing and interconnected globe. As such, assessing outcomes, participation rates, impact and experiences of study abroad programs (SAPs) stands as one of the most dynamic phenomena in adult, continuing, lifelong, workplace and higher education (BailyShea, 2009; Sharma, Phillion, & Malewski, 2011; Sison & Brennan, 2012). BailyShea (2009) broadly defines study abroad as learning that occurs outside of the geographical confines of the home country, underscoring a highly individualized and multifaceted educational experience that can take many forms. Dewey’s (1933) model, in particular, is helpful in providing a structure for exploring these individual experiences by outlining a five-step critical reflection process that allows systematic and intentional exploration of each AHE learners’ cultural perspectives when participating in a short-term...
SAP. Dewey’s (1933) five-step process for critical reflection offers AHE learners in this study, a highly individualized resource to encourage perspective transformation in the “active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusions to which it tends” (p. 9).

The objective of the present research is to explore the perspective transformations revealed within the critical reflections of graduate business students coming from China, Pakistan, India and Russia, studying and interning in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The following study begins with a brief overview of trends to provide context about what factors shape international education in a global and regional frame within the UAE and Dubai, specifically. Next, complexities associated with adjustment and socialization abroad are shared with special consideration to Dubai’s educational landscape bridging connections between context and literature. The concluding portion of the review of literature provides information about Dewey’s (1933) five-step process of critical reflection—in the foreign classroom—as a method to encourage authentic transformative learning-by-doing experiences. A short profile on the graduate participants and program is provided as background information framing the methodological approach. Findings are shared next, and indicate that 21st century graduate business students’ experiences, from China, Pakistan, India and Russia, are multifaceted. AHE learners in this study confront regional and global identity/equity, ownership of professional path, and a need for shared experience and collaboration. Implications and directions for future research are offered as concluding remarks.

Review of Literature

Global & Regional Trends

In the last ten years, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has spent considerable effort to track the tremendous rise in student mobility, with more than twice as many students leaving their home country to study, intern and build academic competencies abroad (Maslen, 2014). United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) provides categorical data on regions of the world and their corresponding trends in international education. Their data reveals students from the Asia and Pacific Region (including those from China, Pakistan, India & Russia) comprise 53% of all AHE learners studying abroad, with the majority of these students coming from China, India, and South Korea respectively (UNESCO, 2013). While what UNESCO designates as the western world (US, UK, Germany, France, and Australia respectively) receives the majority of these AHE learners, the OECD’s most recent data reports indicate a growing trend in intra-regional mobility, or students who leave their home country but stay within their home region (OECD, 2013).
The drivers which fuel student mobility come from both individual student and institutional perspectives. Bodycott (2009) suggests that Chinese and Indian students in particular, look to studying abroad as a strategy to differentiate their skill sets, complement their degree and network globally in order to set them apart from peers and increase their own marketability as job seekers. Further, both students and institutions of higher education recognize that study abroad serves as powerful experiential learning that can offer a student personal development in the way of increased intercultural awareness, intercultural sensitivity, global citizenship, self-awareness, and tolerance for uncertainty, in addition to competitive advantages in employment (Ie, 2009; Sison & Brennan, 2012; Ward & Searle, 1991). For all of these reasons, participating in SAPs is perceived as a “definite positive on a graduate resume” (Lawrence, 2006, p. 30). Rizvi (2000) notes that this is especially true for employers in the Asia and Pacific region where elevated status is designated to overseas educative experiences.

The United Arab Emirates (UAE), becomes a prime destination for students in China, India, Russia and Pakistan who are looking to study abroad within close proximity to their home country. UNESCO’s (2013) report outlines that mobility in what they categorize as the Asia and the Pacific regions indicates that many of these countries look to the UAE strategically, as a destination that offers “American-style” internships, academic experiences, and branding with increased affordability, shorter distance from their home country, and less fear of culture shock (p. 58). Becker (2010) suggests that because Dubai and the UAE in general are looking to build a knowledge-based economy and limit dependence on oil exports, a high demand exists for students.

Educational institutions like the University of Wollongong (an Australian University in Dubai) and the American University of Sharjah promote the UAE as an intercultural and exciting hub of international trade and information technology (IT). While there are many different formats or types of internationally educative experiences offered by these institutions, spanning from a short three-week internship experience to a full, long-term, four-year exchange (BailyShea, 2009), the UAE markets English-only instruction and personally-tailored learning that is industry specific (Badam, 2010). Additionally, OECD (2013) indicates that shorter, vocation-specific international programs in business have increased in popularity because of affordability and practicality. Programs across the UAE, and in Dubai specifically, capitalize on this trend by promoting educational opportunities which offer practical knowledge and application to global business and intercultural development with direct partnerships between AHE learners and local enterprises (Badam, 2010). The focus of the present research examines one particular year-long MBA program boasting cohort design, accelerated learning, and practical engagement within the international business and information technology hub of Dubai. While the aim of this study focuses on perspective transformations within a critical reflection assignment for a 30-day internship experience at the conclusion of the year-long program, international AHE learners often remark on the full-year experience as a whole. Of particular interest to the research is how learners synthesize practical and experiential learning from the local
marketplace of Dubai to their own understandings about global citizenship via critical reflection. Dewey’s (1933) five-step process for critical reflection is employed to examine how these international AHE learners make meaning about their intercultural competencies (i.e.: identity, global citizenship) and collaboration through their experiences studying abroad.

Complexities of Learning Abroad

The context of the UAE, and Dubai specifically, offers AHE learners an incredibly diverse and stimulating environment to polish and practice their professional/academic skills. However, recent scholarship underscores that benefits of experiential learning like study abroad are not guaranteed. Dewey (1933) touches on some of these same misconceptions when he explains that the experience, in and of itself, does not automatically mean that learning or any changes have occurred. In fact, truly authentic and meaningful engagement in learning abroad can be challenged by any number of complex issues. Researchers concerned with transformative, personally relevant learning-by-doing experiences abroad take notice of obstacles like adjustment (Redmond & Bunyi, 1993), development of local student and professional networks (Ie, 2009), and work-life balance (Bodycott, 2012), as well as culture shock (Bitsika, Sharpley, & Holmes, 2010) and other aspects of the socialization process. While AHE learners recognize the paramount importance of networking and building relationships, it becomes an “easier said than done” situation once abroad (Bodycott, 2012, p. 359).

Indeed, it becomes difficult to develop and harness the intercultural competencies of a global citizen if learners withdraw from the local context. Cohort models and other co-national SAP designs have been used as a remedy to culture shock and homesickness, as well as to encourage AHE learners to interact with locals abroad in short term and long term SAPs and internship experiences. Co-national program design, in the past, has offered AHE learners a way to share the experience with peers who have similar cultural identities, but of course, however it is not without limitations. Although researchers suggest co-national programs are meant to build in added social support and promote socialization with locals (Bitsika et al., 2010), critiques suggest these programs can run counterintuitive to perspective transformation, increase cultural rigidity, and discourage the AHE learner from embracing local culture and professional networks (Ward & Searle, 1991). In this study, the researcher is tasked to address the polar nature of socialization/adjustment abroad in order to encourage a healthy blend of bonding amongst peers, but also to develop global citizenship across the larger local multicultural context of Dubai. No doubt, this is another phenomenon that is easier said than done.

Critical Reflexivity

To balance concerns for adjustment/socialization and allow for individualized explorations of internship experiences for each learner, the researcher in this study utilizes scholarship at the intersection of experiential learning and critical reflection. Bennett
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(1998) explains that developing global citizenship must begin with an understanding of the self, or deep reflection. Recent scholarship places emphasis on critical reflection as a way to develop intercultural competencies and counter the challenges that are inherent in experiences of socialization abroad (Fleishman, 2012). Sharma, Phillion, and Malewski (2011) remark:

“Critical reflection brings about awareness of the self by calling into question one’s prior knowledge or taken for granted frames of reference which include beliefs, assumptions, values, and cultural norms of thinking and acting.” (p. 11).

Critical reflection places particular importance on making meaning from experience. While experience does not guarantee that learning has occurred, Dewey (1933) suggests that deriving meaning from experience can lead to transformative learning. In this context, the instructor serves as a facilitator of critical reflection by previewing the five-step process, offering definitions and examples for each step, and then creating spaces for students to engage in the process on their own. Kolb (1984) further points out the usefulness of this practice in internships when he states that experience and reflection are natural partners in a cyclical process whereby experience must be reviewed and evaluated continuously and retrospectively for the learner.

Johnson and Golombek (2011) support the value of using this educational activity by noting that storytelling and narrative are commonly used as tools in the classroom to bring reflexivity, previous life experiences, thinking and acting into intentional consciousness. International AHE learners in this study come from similar cultural lenses, and have a sense of shared experience (Baumgartner, 2001) as they engage in questioning of ideology and systems of belief. Collectively, researchers agree that systematic and strategic planning to encourage collaborative and individual reflection remain important for meaningful, authentic learning to occur (Baumgartner, 2001; Bodycott, 2012; Sharma et al., 2011).

**Conceptual and Theoretical Framework**

Sharma et al., (2011) echo Dewey’s remarks and note “experiencing, reflecting, and acting upon experience to transform how we perceive ourselves and others” is the main aim of critical reflection (p. 12). In Dewey’s definition of critical reflection, he outlines a five-step process whereby an intentional and systematic breakdown of assumptions and knowledge can occur by evaluating:

1. An experience. This first step involves identifying one particular incident or surprising event, feeling, interaction, etc.
2. Doubts, reservations and persistent confusion. Second step involves questioning and exploring areas of ambiguity surround the event.
3. A variety of tentative explanations or hypotheses. Third step includes a number of suggestions that could be used to explain the event using observations and facts.

4. Rebuilt experience to create a new hypothesis. Fourth step includes incorporating new ideas and perspectives to reason a potential new conclusion or understanding.

5. Tested hypothesis or new action. The final step involves trying out the new inferred understanding or conclusion to test its veracity.

Dewey’s five-step process for critical reflection informs this research and is employed to encourage more robust learning-by-doing experiences for AHE learners in this study. The collective dynamic of intra-regional trends in mobility, magnitude of diversity and opportunity in Dubai, and complexities of facilitating meaningful learning-by-doing abroad generate warrant to understand what the experiences of international AHE learners are in the Middle East. More importantly, what key insights do international AHE learners identify within their own private critical reflections after spending one year abroad in Dubai? The following section offers background on the program, instructional design and participants who shared critical reflections about their experiences and learning outside of their home country. This context serves as the frame from which this research was undertaken.

**Methodology**

**Background, Context & Participants**

AHE learners in this study had chosen one of four specializations in information technology (IT), finance/wealth management, global logistics/supply chain or management in Dubai within a year-long (long-term SAP format), accelerated, English-only program outside of their home country in pursuit of their MBA. The design of this program creates space for International AHE learners to share classroom experiences as a co-national cohort and also gain practical exposure via an experiential internship in their specialized fields of interest. Upon successful completion of MBA coursework, a 30-day internship experience and thesis requirements, students can choose to return to their home country and job, or participate in local job placement services on a competitive basis.

Each participant who anonymously submitted a private critical reflection voluntarily provided demographic data to identify cultural background, age, gender, and specialization. The 24 international AHE learners who participated in this study self-identified as: Chinese (25%), Indian (63%), and Pakistani (10%), with one Russian student. There were 20 males (n=20) and four female (n=4) students, which is not atypical considering the sharp contrast in the male to female ratio present in Dubai. The mean age of the participants was 23.
Research Design & Data Sources

The study received an exemption via the Institutional Review Board (of the MBA-granting institution in Dubai) as data was collected as a part of an education assessment in their course work for the class. Data sources included “Key Insights” detailing private critical reflections from 24 participants, four focus group interviews (with each specialization), observations, and field notes. While not all participants privately reflected on all 30 days, each participant engaged in critical reflection about some particular experience(s) over the 30-day period.

The 30-day internship experience takes place in the last month of the year abroad and is taken concurrently with a one-credit INT 5100 course. This course meets once a week for three hours and is divided into four modules. In the introductory module, the instructor serves as a facilitator of critical reflection in that the definitions, terms and examples of incidents and experiences which model the process are shared with students and then students practice producing their own examples to check understanding. The “Key Insights” Space for Critical Reflection (Appendix) was meant to offer flexibility to individual experiences guided by the five-step process, so that AHE learners could apply this resource to their own individual encounters and experiences. Students could write as much as they wished, or as little, for each day of the 30-day experience, and remain anonymous about key insights discovered. Each cohort member was required to submit their 30-day reflection log, but could opt out of inclusion to this research. No incentive was offered to participate in the study.

Focus-group discussions were audio-visually recorded and transcribed to offer more depth and explanation to private critical reflections. Again, the researcher looked for key words to distinguish 1) experiences, 2) doubts, 3) explanations, 4) new thinking and 5) new actions within both private and group dialogue, to offer structure and organization to the findings. Collaborative group dialogue with cohort members of the same specialization occurred in the final two weeks of the course in the third, fourth and fifth modules. This allowed the learners to revisit their “Key Insights” Space for Critical Reflection and explain or develop their ideas in more detail within small group discussions. Each of the four focus groups were conducted using open-ended inquiry, where learners were invited to share a particular meaningful insight from their private reflections. No fewer than four and no more than six students participated at one time. Further, this allowed the researcher to moderate smaller, more manageable discussions specific to the professional area of interest in order to get at some of the deeper social and overarching themes of importance.

Analysis

Anonymous critical reflections were evaluated using thematic analysis in order to recreate the meaningful experiences and insights shared by each international AHE learner. Focus group discussions prompted learners to think about a particular meaningful ‘Key
Insight,’ giving each learner the opportunity to share and hear from other peers in their specialization. Reissman (2005) notes that narrative analysis can be useful when analyzing “individuals in stories of experience” (p. 1). While many kinds of narrative analysis exist, all overlapping in some way, “thematic analysis” highlights the actual messages and “what is said, rather than ‘how’ it is said” (Reissman, 2005, p. 2). A grounded approach, like thematic analysis, showcases individual testimonies, which can offer illustrative value to a particular phenomenon or occurrence (Reissman, 2005). Other recurring themes within and across private reflection responses, observations, and field notes informed subsequent open-ended questions and discussion within the focus-group conversations.

Critical reflection is a highly personalized and intimate process unique to each learner and their experiences. While it was important for the researcher to offer flexibility and space to share private and anonymous reflections about personal development without the threat of social desirability, penalization and obligation, it is recognized that this is not without limitations. Several learners used Dewey’s (1933) guide with specific attention to each of the five steps, denoting each phase with numbers (1-5) or letters (a-e), being careful to delineate between experiences, doubts, explanations, new thinking and new actions. However, the majority of responses were relatively loose narratives that did not explicitly align to the model. On one hand, loose adherence to the five-step process offers some rich, authentic data from lived experiences, but on the other hand, underscores that systematic critical reflection may prove difficult to outline with attention to the framework for these learners. In analyzing private and focus group responses, the researcher looked for key words to distinguish 1) experiences, 2) doubts, 3) explanations, 4) new thinking and 5) new actions.

Findings and Discussion

International AHE learners, who offer “Key Insight” responses over their 30-day internship experience, reveal the nuanced experiential learning that occurs in a cohort-based MBA program. In reflecting on Dewey’s (1933) five-step process (D5SP), responses reveal that International AHE learners: 1) negotiate their national identity in a global context, 2) realign from extrinsic to intrinsic motivations about their professional career path and 3) stress the importance of collaborative, or shared, experience. Examples are provided to illustrate how these themes uniquely manifested across each participant during their 30-day internship experiences and one-year abroad in Dubai. A threaded discussion and analysis is also provided to stimulate thinking about how internationally educative experiences could be enhanced and enriched from the insights and perspectives shared by these learners.

National (home) Identity in a Global Context

Navigating changes in perspective can be difficult to map in a global context. Ramirez (2013) outlines that global citizenship is difficult to intentionally cultivate, but ultimately should encourage learners to know about others who are different and to gain new
understandings related to global interconnectivity. Dewey’s (1933) D5SP of critical reflection was utilized to promote “dialectical interaction between the self and the world. Without this interaction there is no understanding of the self, the world, or experience, nor is there change in one’s awareness or learning” (Sharma, Phillion, & Malewski, 2011, p. 12). In the first module of the INT5100 course, international AHE learners spend significant time reconciling theoretical concepts about critical reflection to their own experiences, learning and perceptions. Because students spend substantial time navigating how they make sense of their own identity, it makes sense that new ideas about who they are and what shapes their experience emerged.

In looking for key words related to Dewey’s first step of ‘the experience,’ 85% of the “key insights” critical reflections indicated that AHE learners negotiated challenges and encountered perspective transformations about how they make sense of their own national identity. In many private reflections, participants discussed what it means to identify as “Chinese” or “Indian” in step one of D5SP. Students shared a variety of ways that their identities are shaped by family members, and parents especially. Many of them echoed lessons learned about the importance of “education,” “learning,” and “knowledge.” Many of their summaries of experience in this phase could be tied back to strong family bonds and motivations to make the family “proud.”

One Indian male learner elaborated on his perspective transformation made possible by the experience by noting, “Growing up in India, I thought I knew what it meant to be Indian, you care for the family and you go to Uni and you try and not take trouble out there.” He extends that the “crowds and masses in the cities shape Indian culture and interactions” as a tentative explanation (or step three of D5SP). There were a multitude of responses that offered other explanations connecting to step three of D5SP, including ideas related to “crowded spaces,” regional stereotypes like “north Indians are smarter, more modern, than Indians of the south,” and lack of “trust” for south Indians toward north Indians.

International AHE learners recognized that studying abroad could potentially “change” their “perspectives,” and “world views,” and offer a “different landscape” for engaging in international business and connecting with Indians regardless of regional identification. One Chinese learner shared his incidental transformation by reflecting, “You think you know your own culture and people, but this place (Dubai) will surprise you.” In forming new hypotheses, with reference to step four of D5SP, participants were challenged to think critically and make sense of why their national identity, or home culture was different in the context of Dubai. One participant shared:

“I was happy to see lots of (South) Indians around. But, there was a difference. They were much more warm and hospitable than you would find back home.”
Other learners’ insights revealed feeling “shunned” or “put off” by their “fellow countrymen” because of perceived “class” or socioeconomic differences. One Chinese female shared “the social order is different in Dubai and UAE… and it’s hard to see me as a low class immigrant” explaining hesitations in step two of D5SP “key insight” response. International AHE learners, in this case, recognized differences between their national identities at home and in Dubai. While this was not an intentional learning outcome for the course, students were able to demonstrate complex cognitive processing about socially constructed ideas of class and ethnicity. Because Chinese females typically occupy positions in the hospitality and service industry in Dubai, they are not always perceived as equals in the IT field.

Participants revealed high-ordered thinking about how their conceptions of national identity are shaped, specifically within the Emirati social and professional strata. For some students, like the female from China, this presented doubt or discomfort to see herself as an outsider “worker” or laborer (who occupy a very low social standing in the UAE) rather than seeing herself as an “average Chinese girl.” About half of the participants in this case study, mostly Indian males, commented about Emirati attitudes towards Indians. One respondent pointed out in step four of D5SP that, “we [Indians] are most of the people in Dubai, but we are not equal to the locals.” This respondent revealed critical insights into how dominant culture and hegemony give power and privilege to the local Emiratis (who are the minority in number in the UAE), but do not offer immigrants (the majority of number) the same rights and luxuries. Responses do not divulge full details about this concept, but instead give a small sense of how national identity is challenged within the context of the UAE where social strata is clearly demarcated by physical appearance and occupation (Ali, 2010). Through an investigation of responses that clearly outline each step of D5SP, learners begin to understand the broader social, political and economic processes associated with identity development, and encounter transformations about how they previously understood their own identity.

Participants’ insights and considerations about their own culture created opportunities for students to take a step back from the experience as a whole. Students’ experiences and ‘key insights’ illustrate how they are developing their global citizenship through their own cultural awareness and sensitivity to local contexts. In looking at differences in national or home culture, general principles of diversity in the global context were illuminated. One participant deduced that “even in my own culture, I have realized that no single person is the same.” Ultimately, many participants illustrated how global citizenship was cultivated by sharing their newfound “global perspectives.” In sharing their new actions (step five of D5SP), many echoed this Indian male’s feeling that “cityscapes around the world” are all impacted uniquely by the individuals who compose them. One Indian female shared “the people around are no more foreign; I’m not a foreigner. We all are citizens of this Earth.”
Changing Lanes not Directions

Because the family plays an active role in deciding what educational course of action might be right for the student, this can sometimes create resistance, reluctance and resentment for the learner (Bodycott, 2009). Many advocates of SAP, including parents, are quick to argue that international exposure produces globally competent citizens of the world who are more sensitive to cultural nuances, and thus, are more attractive as potential employees once exiting the AHE institution (Ie, 2009). While this may be true given the above discussion on identity, international AHE learners from China, India and Pakistan come from inherently collectivist cultural value systems, meaning these students can experience challenges from the family which create obstacles to developing these competencies authentically (Bodycott, 2012). No doubt, this impacts the quality and possibilities inherent in an internationally educative experience. As learners critically reflect on the cultural values of Dubai in contrast or comparison to their own personal belief systems, discussions about personal passion, the family, and career path emerge.

Many international AHE learners from China, India and Pakistan are making a familial investment and there can sometimes be intense, even negative, experiences with pressures from the family (Bodycott, 2012). However, 75% of the participants in the case study reported re-ordered thinking (step four of D5SP) about their professional life and future after having completed their internship experiences and year abroad in Dubai. In many instances, participants revealed new ways of taking ownership of their learning-by-doing in the internship as illustrations of their personal development even if they had pressures from their family.

In one particular critical reflection, one male Indian student summarized (in step one of D5SP), “…my parents wanted this [SAP] for me, and I knew this to be a good opportunity, but I have friends and relationships back home.” In this case study, International AHE learners place a lot of stake in what the family would be “proud” of, and do not put their own passions and interests ahead of what their mother, father, or elders would want for them. Ultimately, obligation can take precedent, overshadowing some of the inherent benefits of self-directing one’s own study-abroad experience and building tolerance for uncertainty which each contribute to personal development. However, through their experiences abroad, students encountered opportunities to “explore the world,” “open my mind,” and “connect to passions” in ways that connect to their personal and professional interests. A Pakistani male echoed new actions (step five of D5SP) in that:

“My internship let me discover IT (information technology) from a consulting perspective, and I loved it... I know that is what I want to pursue for my future, so in a way, I am shifting lanes, but not my direction...so I feel they (my parents) will be pleased.”
In other examples of step five of D5SP, in their responses about “Key Insights” about the internship experience, participants commented on being more “self-sufficient,” “accountable,” “independent,” and “reliant on oneself,” because the internship gave them opportunities to “figure out” their areas of strength, weakness and allowed them to “grow as a person.” An energetic Indian female reported, “I have learned to complain less and accept more,” when commenting on perspective transformations in step five of D5SP. This applied not only to personal scenarios like chores and food preparation over the course of the year abroad, but also to professional scenarios within the internship like “taking copies,” or “running an industry report.” Another male participant from China shared his new perspective about navigating uncertainty in the internship on his own terms: “I would normally consult my father in our family business, but I do not have that option here, so that is one kind of cool thing, to do it my way instead.” Participants suggested that being able to navigate a new professional context in a global setting like the internship experience, without the help of the family, gave them space to discover their own personal interests and helped them to develop professionally into a career specialty of their own choosing. While this may have not manifested in a specific new action in the fifth step of D5SP for all learners, realigning motivations from extrinsic to intrinsic is a powerful action. This is an important finding in that many collectivist learners do not place value on their own individual desires. Seeing value in an intrinsic desire is one “takeaway” that many students noted helped them to understand nuances across individualist and collectivist cultures. Realignment to intrinsic motivations was present in at least one “Key Insight” entry for 60% of the participants.

In one illustration of motivational realignment, a male Pakistani learner shared, “choice has corresponded to money and what is rewarding for the whole family, but I find that management speaks to me and my own strengths” rather than supply chain and logistics which was his intended specialization. This Pakistani student, like other respondents, shared that he may have never really thought about what he might like to do or what would be suitable for him as an individual. However, through getting out on one’s own in the internship experience, he and others were able to identify what in the professional world resonated with their individual talents and abilities. Participants’ responses reveal that the “Key Insight” private space for reflection can be beneficial to outlining how personal development, with respect to goal setting and motivation, is shaped over the course of the 30-day internship and how students begin to experience changes in their own perspectives within and across cultures.

**Collaboration is Still Key**

International AHE learners reported that peer and social support were “key insights” when reflecting on their year abroad. Literature concerned with meaningful, authentically transformative education abroad continuously wrestles with how to balance adjustment and socialization within a foreign context. The question remains about how to encourage robust learning within contexts of high uncertainty and limited cultural capital. While this could
perhaps be the most lightweight finding, it is important to address the group dynamics of learning abroad, as this receives much attention in SAP design and impact (Clark et al., 2009). In this case study, participants shared appreciation for having a cohort-based program and developing a learning community. The lone Russian student shared “this cohort is like family, everyone is different, but the same thing is important for all.” Although this student did not share a national identity with anyone in his cohort, he identified as part of that learning community. Another student shared that “learning and growth increases when people come together and cooperate.” One male Indian student went so far as to say, “had it not been for my friends, I would have given up the program and gone back to India.”

Interestingly, Indian students recognize the omnipresence of fellow countrymen and women across Dubai and the UAE, however, these individuals do not necessarily represent potential peer networks or relationships. Again, sharp divides across occupation and perceived class standing can sometimes isolate and alienate members of the same cultural group (Ali, 2010). International AHE learners, in this case, seem to touch on Baumgartner’s (2001) idea of shared experience where importance is placed on the communal activity of learning and discovering. Participants stress the importance of “share(d) stories,” or “discuss(ing) events of the day” with someone who can relate to their personal situation in their “Key Insights” log about the internship experience.

Additionally, participants suggest placing much more stock in the idea of building relationships and networks cross-culturally. Learners share that family is a crucial social network, but making new friends and peer networks outside the family is also important. One Pakistani female shared:

“Your family is always going to be there, but I learned that relationships are investments, and although it’s easy to find people to have a coffee with, great friends who you can trust with your joys and moments of weakness are rare and take considerable investment.”

Nearly 90% of the participants in this case study indicated that a cohort program design was helpful to both learning and personal development in their “Key Insight” reflections. Additionally, some elaborated that having space to dialogue with other members of the specialization helped to facilitate meaning made about experiences. Based on the data collected in private critical reflections, cohort design was perhaps more impactful than sharing a national identity because students could identify industry-specific phenomena and, through interactive communication, could make meaning from multiple perspectives. Participants’ responses resonated more directly with the idea of shared experience than with feelings of alienation, culture shock or other general anxiety as a foreigner.
Conclusions and Future Directions

Private critical reflection encouraged AHE learners to individually explore their personal development in the way of increased intercultural sensitivity, global citizenship and self-awareness, and encouraged them to re-order their thinking about themselves and their world (Ie, 2009; Sison & Brennan, 2012; Ward & Searle, 1991). While the aim was to reflect on the internship experience itself, many students ended up reflecting on the experience of learning and living abroad over the full year that they have been outside of their home country. The United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Dubai specifically, is fairly uncharted territory when it comes to understanding the nuances of 21st century learning and development for International AHE learners from the Asia and Pacific region, especially India, China and Pakistan. Exploring “Key Insight” critical reflections from learners enrolled in a graduate MBA program offers insight about how their educational experiences are shaped by the context of Dubai, and what in particular shaped new perspective transformation from their individual experiences. Findings from this study both extend and challenge existing scholarship concerned with study abroad. Practical implications explain the need for pre-departure explorations and creative ways to balance adjustment and socialization once abroad.

Mapping Me: National and Global Identity

International AHE learners who shared key insights from their year abroad report new perspectives in how they see their own national identity and are able to identify multiple lenses of interpretation at the conclusion of their experience abroad. What characterizes being Chinese, Indian, Pakistani, or Russian is subjective for these students. Sharma et al. (2011) posit that it is a good idea for students to engage in deep questioning about equity and social constructions when thinking about the cornerstones of their own cultural values, attitudes and beliefs prior to studying abroad. By doing so, students are able to identify “taken for granted frames of reference” in order to discover the underlying historical, cultural and socio-political significance of identity and identity construction (Sharma et al., 2011, p. 15). Pre-departure activities that encourage AHE learners to map (conceptually, graphically, or artistically) their core cultural values and general understandings about equality and immigrant inequity, bring consciousness to the foundations of their ideology. This is especially important for Chinese, Pakistani and Indian learners who may need to reconcile the family’s wants and desires and their own experiences as immigrants. Students can then begin to make connections between the destination they will inhabit and the socially constructed values, attitudes, beliefs and professional opportunities in that country prior to arrival. Addressing the fundamental tenets of equity and intercultural competence such as these, is important to tackle before the student has left their home country, because these can be overlooked and undervalued once the learner is abroad. Intentional engagement on core issues of multicultural interaction and identity prepare the learner to engage in an ongoing process – or re-ordering, questioning and critical reflection to encourage perspective transformations.
Balancing Cohort and Local Community Engagement

Previous research suggests that encouraging students to develop professional networks in a foreign locale can be difficult, especially within co-national programs (Bitsika et al., 2010; Bodycott, 2012; Ie, 2009; Redmond & Bunyi, 1993). Offering AHE learners both collaborative and private space to critically reflect on new concepts and ideas can be beneficial for personal, professional, and transformative growth abroad (Sharma et al., 2011). Sharma et al. (2011) suggest that the key is in intentional educational planning. While there is not much research on internship opportunities with an accelerated SAP from the Chinese, Indian and Pakistani learners’ perspective, this research suggests that the instructional dynamic is powerful and could produce new insights to encouraging global citizenship and equity education.

Kolb (1984) underscores that learners come from uniquely carved paths, seeking out experiences that complement their personal, professional, and academic interests. Thus, evaluation of any given experiential learning opportunity must include the individual disposition of the learner and their interests. This case study suggests that cohort design offers international AHE learners from China, India, and Pakistan, a sense of social and peer support when they are away from home, but does not discourage interaction with locals. Additionally, participants in this study report feeling enlightened with new worldviews and increased global citizenship. Because Eastern society is rooted in collectivist ideals, cohort design may prove to be advantageous to encourage adjustment and ease culture shock for intra-regional study abroad in the Middle East.

Developing and designing individual experiential assignments, or course material like internships—where interaction with local professionals is built into requirements—reduces the likelihood of alienation, or tightening of cultural rigidity. This provides students with their own unique encounter as the “other,” within the experiential assignment, but is shared in the sense that all learners will be uniquely challenged by their learning-by-doing activity. In navigating their own national identity as the “other” in a global context, learners can generate more self-awareness and tolerance for uncertainty, and build knowledge to facilitate cross-cultural connections, which collectively contribute to increased personal development and employability. Again, it becomes important for AHE learners to be able to connect their professional interests to their personal interests. Individual experiential activities give the student freedom to discover where these intersections occur.

The unique demographic makeup, strategic geographic location, prevalence of English instruction, and short distance from China, India and Pakistan, no doubt provide ample justification for SAPs in Dubai, UAE. The duality of extremes, to which Ali (2010) refers, offers a dynamic context within which discourses of equity, power, and privilege can be discussed in a most complicated frame like Dubai. As International AHE learners navigate personal and professional identities in a global cityscape, there are critical dimensions that
can be lived and experienced in daily working life, like the internship. This poises students to critically think about complex dimensions of the social hierarchy, how equity exists within that structure, and foundations of the global economy that contribute to the most recent snapshot of Dubai. Additionally, cosmopolitan Dubai is highly multicultural, offering one of the most diverse cityscapes in the world. Students all over the globe can be a part of learning in a “tomorrow’s world, today” dynamic that is technologically innovative, globally relevant, and always adapting.
References


Appendix

Key Insights
A Space for Critical Reflection

Self-Identified Nationality/Cultural Background: _________________________________

Age: _____

Sex/gender:  M   F   I choose not to respond

Specialization: _______________________________________________________________________________________________________

Evaluate the following with respect to your experience:
1. The experience; and inferences from the experience
2. Doubts, reservations and persistent confusion
3. A variety of tentative explanations or hypotheses
4. Rebuilt experience to create new hypothesis
5. Tested hypothesis or new action

Day____/30
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Author Biography

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