

Do You Speak African? Teaching for Diversity Awareness in an Era of Globalization

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Abstract: Africa is a continent, not a country. Yet, a monolithic misunderstanding of Africa as a country is prevalent especially in the United States. Thus, Africans in the diaspora who speak heritage languages other than English are asked frequently if they speak African. This study countered existing misunderstandings through cultural immersion in Kenya, Africa. A comparison of pre- and post-visit data showed that participants (n = 140) developed critical cultural understanding, and became less ethnocentric. This was an essential transformation especially in the context of contemporary globalization.

Key words: globalization, ethnocentrism and cultural responsiveness

Introduction

Africa is a diverse continent. Notwithstanding its diversity, however, Africa is understood from a monolithic lens. For example, although Africa is a continent, there is a perception in the United States that it is a country. Equally common is a deficit view, perhaps because of television, that Africa is the “Dark Continent” (Shillington, 1995). As a result, Africa is largely associated with tribal wars, starvation and strange diseases (Kambutu & Nganga, 2008; Nganga & Kambutu, 2008; Nganga & Kambutu, 2011; Traor’e, 2006). The following feedback from a participant in this study before travelling to Kenya provides valuable insight: “The extreme poverty that exists, in addition to the instability of many African governments presents a very different lens to see Africans,” (threaded discussion, 2013). Another participant expressed similar sentiments thusly, “I am very nervous about the experience. I worry about food, safety, illness, and comfort,” (field notes, 2011).

Apparently, the above feedbacks show that one participant was aware that Africa is a continent. Nevertheless, a mindset that associates it with extreme poverty, political instability and lack of economic development is apparent in both feedbacks. Given the obvious misunderstanding, we (hereafter referenced as researchers) designed this study to broaden participants’ understanding of Africa. To do so, the researchers immersed participants in Kenyan cultures for up to 3 weeks. To gauge the effectiveness of cultural immersion in helping the participants to develop informed understanding, the researchers generated pre- and post-travel data. Having an informed understanding of Africa is essential in the current context of contemporary globalization.

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Globalization

Modern technologies have changed the world in multiple ways. For example, improved technologies have transformed the world into a “virtual” place of interdependence and interconnections, vis-à-vis a physical place governed by rigid cultural, economic and political boundaries (Tapscott, 2009). Indeed, advances in technology have enabled people of diverse cultures to not only mingle with relative ease, but to also interact from remote sites, thus increasing contemporary globalization.

The meaning of contemporary globalization is somehow problematic, perhaps because it is both advantageous and disadvantageous. For example, while the groups that benefit are likely to use a “global village” view, as in “we are in this together,” the exploited view globalization negatively using a neoliberal interpretation (Sleeter, 2003). Generally, neoliberalism is a framework that supports aggressive generation and protection of property rights for the developed nations only (Apple, 2004; Harvey, 1996). Irrespective of definition, however, globalization is causing increased migrations of people from poor to wealthy nations in search of economic opportunities (Cabrera, Montero-Sieburth, & Trujillo, 2012; Nganga & Han, 2013). While, immigration has provided opportunities for cultural interactions, Cabrera et al. (2012) reported that immigrants are likely to experience a myriad of challenges, including discrimination and racism.

To be sure, cultural interactions have value. However, it is problematic when it takes place in the context of neoliberalism. Indeed, globalization with a neoliberal tilt is likely to focus more on advancing the social, economic and political ambitions of the wealthy nations at the expense of other developing countries of the world (Lee, 2012; Miller, 2010, Kambutu & Lopez, 2012; Kambutu, 2013). To that end, Nganga and Kambutu (2013) recommended careful examination of contemporary globalization because it is likely to generate tensions between wealthy and poor nations. One such unease in the United States exists between the dominant society and immigrants because of different views concerning the use of heritage languages.

Language Issues

In the United States, the dominant culture expects immigrant to speak English language only. Notwithstanding, immigrants oppose the sole use of English because by doing so, they risk losing their respective heritage languages, yet language is an important aspect of identity development (Nieto and Bode, 2012). Nevertheless, being in the minority, immigrants are compelled to speak English language, albeit with foreign accents. But the dominant culture is typically impatient with foreign accents. As a result, a tense dynamic exists between the two groups. For example, English Language Learners (ELL) are likely to be excluded socially and cognitively because of their inability to speak fluent English (Gordon, 2000).

As immigrants from Kenya, the researchers have had numerous experiences with language-based discrimination. Perhaps because of speaking English with “heavy” African accents, the researchers’ cognitive abilities are also questioned either covertly or overtly, especially in higher education. Addressing the issue, Wattsjohnson (2003) indicated that it is common for the dominant culture to

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doubt the professional qualifications and cultural practices of faculty of color¹, teaching in predominantly monoracial institutions of higher learning. Meanwhile, the researchers contend with other stereotypical and ethnocentric notions about Africa. Most common are statements such as Africa has an abundance of marathon runners because Africans have to run after gazelles for “bush meat.” Equally troubling are questions about whether there are formal schools in Africa, whether the researchers know this or that person from Africa (Africa is a continent that is three times the sizes of the United States), and whether the researchers speak African.

Ethnocentrism and racism seem to be central in the existing misunderstanding of Africa. Consider, for example, the fact that increased contacts between people of diverse cultural persuasion foster cultural understanding and appreciation (Held, McGrew, Goldblatt, & Perraton, 1999). Perhaps because of ethnocentrism and racism, however, the process of developing informed understanding due to cultural contacts has not applied to Africa. Instead, Africa is associated with tribal wars, starvation and strange diseases (Kambutu & Nganga, 2008). Because ethnocentrism and racism affect negatively people’s quality of life, they should be challenged and eradicated by developing essential skills in cultural proficiency and global citizenship (Nganga, 2009; Merryfield, 2002; Merryfield & Wilson, 2005).

Cultural Responsiveness

Culturally responsive people have a critical understanding of culture. For example, in addition to appreciating the centrality of culture in identity development, culturally responsive people seek to understand how their values, beliefs, choices and bias affect other people (Chamberlain, 2005; Gay, 2000). Equally evident is the understanding that race and ethnicity influence human thinking and behavior in dramatic ways (Zamudio, Russell, Rios, & Bridgeman, 2011). Generally, skills in cultural responsiveness allow people to not only expose and confront cultural stereotypes, but to also learn informed strategies, critical to effective functioning in familiar and unfamiliar cultures (Banks, 2008).

Learning skills in cultural responsiveness occurs in many ways. However, learning through immersion is invaluable (Kambutu & Nganga, 2008). When people are immersed in unfamiliar cultures, they are likely to freely cross cultural bridges/borders, that is, invisible entities, yet very real in the socialization and allocation of societal power and privilege (Anzaldúa, 2001). The process of crossing cultural bridges/borders or building critical cultural understanding is essential, and it starts with self-awareness (Robins, Lindsey, Lindsey, & Terrell, 2002). Meanwhile, an education for global skills is equally necessary because it helps people to understand themselves within the context of global “others” (Tucker & Cistone, 1991). Given that an education for global skills supports cultural responsiveness, the researchers designed an international experience that immersed participants in foreign cultures to allow them ample opportunities to understand themselves within the contexts of Kenyan, and by extension, African cultures.

¹ Kambutu, Rios and Castaneda (2009) use the term “teachers of color” to refer to educators who self-identify as coming from African-American, Latina/o-American, Asian-American, and/or American Indian heritage.

The Study

This narrative study explored the effects of cultural immersion in terms of helping the participants to develop informed understanding of Africa. To that end, the participants (n = 140) traveled to Kenya, Africa at different times starting in the summer of 2004 to experience up to 3 weeks of cultural immersion. Immersing the participants in foreign cultures for a prolonged period of time was consistent with Derman-Sparks' (1998) caution against implementing brief cultural experiences that risk turning participants into "cultural tourists." Thus, in addition to designing programs that allowed the participants to experience foreign cultures for a minimum of 12 days, the researchers offered multiple opportunities for the participants to interact with different Kenyan cultures. For example, visits to Kenyan schools, both urban and rural, provided essential cultural experiences. Meanwhile, before and after travel, the participants reflected in writing and orally about similarities and differences between America and Kenya. They also examined ways in which the Kenya experience would influence them as citizens of a "globalized" world.

Participants

The researchers designed Kenya cultural program for students in an Elementary and Early Childhood education program in rural America. However, because of unexpected heightened interest, the general public was included. Initially, the researchers planned to offer a one time cultural experience. However, increased public demand caused the researchers to offer the program every summer with the exception of 2008. The participants were volunteers of all ages and occupations. While one to three academic credits were available for college students, other participants completed various assignments voluntarily. Thus, the data presented in this study were generated from both the participating students and the general public. The participants were mostly members of the dominant culture in rural America.

To familiarize all the participants (n = 140) with the expectations, the researchers held monthly planning meetings for up to six months before travel. Other activities such as guest speakers, formal lectures, reading assignments, online threaded discussions and question and answer sessions provided helpful information. While in Kenya, the participants used primary resources to explore Kenya's history, geography, cultures, languages, economy, education, archeology, ecology, paleontology and zoology, geo-political, ethnic, gender issues and the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Additionally, the summer of 2011 and 2013 groups participated in service learning projects. Meanwhile, a visit to various national parks allowed the participants to learn about Kenya's fauna and flora.

Data Source and Analysis

Collaboratively, the researchers identified program outcomes, generated a set of guiding questions, and established how to collect and analyze data. The participants completed open-ended questions before and after Kenya experiences. While pre-visit questions documented existing knowledge about host cultures, post-visit questions identified changes (transformation) that might have

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occurred subsequent to Kenya cultural experiences. The participants also wrote pre- and post-visit letters to themselves (copied to researchers) and kept journals/records documenting their feelings and reflections. Other data were gathered from online threaded discussions, researchers' field notes generated during planning and office meetings, and during telephone and e-mail communications between the researchers and participants. Meanwhile, the researchers met regularly to discuss the experiences, and to make meaning of written data. The researchers coded the accumulated data using pseudo names (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) and recorded them using the following initials: Td. (Threaded discussion), Wr. (Written responses), J. (Journals), E. (e-mails), L. (Letters) and Fn. (Field notes).

Findings

Qualitative analysis of both pre- and post-visit data generated numerous themes that the researchers collapsed into the following robust themes: a) misconceptions and changed views, b) appreciation, and c) globalized awareness.

Misconceptions and Changed Views

Pre-visit data showed that although a majority of the participants understood that Kenya was a country in Africa, some lacked that knowledge. Consequently, they referred to the planned cultural experience as "traveling to Africa." Consider, for example, the following response relative to a pre-visit question that asked the participants to state either their thinking, feelings and/or sense about traveling to Kenya: "Africa has always been a dream of mine to go to!" (Td., 2011). Another participant expressed a similar mindset thusly: "I am very excited about going to see Africa in person," (L., 2004). Meanwhile, all the participants associated Kenya with villages and wildlife.

Before travel, the participants completed a questionnaire. Data from the questionnaire showed that the participants believed Kenya had tribal villages everywhere (78%), wildlife everywhere (66%), barely clothed people (44%), people who live in huts and caves (33%) and diseases like AIDs/HIV and Malaria (33%). When asked to provide the source of the information they had about Kenya, a majority indicated that their knowledge was mainly from friends (100%), reading books and magazines (mainly National Geographic) 67%, teachers (66%) and from television programs such as the Animal Planet and National Geographic (44%). In the following selected quotes, a clear misperception of Kenya before travel is evident:

- When I think of Kenya, I always have a view of tribal villages
- It is just grassland and prairie or savanna as shown in the Discovery Channel
- A place without food, good hygiene and medical facilities.

The held misconceptions about Kenya affected the participants in a variety of ways. For example, before travel, a majority of them expressed a high degree of anxiety. Thus, one person was so concerned about "extreme poverty and governmental instability" that her "thoughts, senses, and feelings were in a state of contradiction," (Td., 2013). Evidently, the thought of traveling to Kenya

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made the participants quite uneasy. But while other participants were concerned about being immersed in a “strange culture among strange people and being laughed at,” (Fn., 2006 and 2007), the thought of seeing devastating poverty and diseases was most troubling as is evident in the following reflection: “Kenya is a country that is completely consumed by poverty and AIDS. This will be a very depressing trip,” (Wr., 2006).

Obviously, although the participants had not been to Kenya before, they harbored a variety of ethnocentric and racist notions about host cultures. For example, the constant use of the word “tribe” instead of ethnic groups to describe Kenyans was demeaning. Addressing the issue, Moore (2001) postulated that words deliver a particular message either overtly or covertly. So, because the Oxford Dictionary definition’s of the word tribe is “an aggregate of people in a primitive or barbarous condition,” Moore argued that whenever the word tribe is used, it provokes, albeit subconsciously, a connotation of backwardness and primitiveness. Therefore, he recommended the use of affirming words such as ethnicity. To researcher’s surprise, post-visit data showed that the participants embraced Moore’s ideas. For example, instead of using tribe, they addressed Kenyans as “hopeful, determined, hard-working, resourceful and innovative people,” (Td., 2013). The apparent use of affirming words to describe Kenyans is perhaps proof that the participants were developing nonjudgmental views after visiting Kenya.

Changed Views

Post-visit data showed evidence that after visiting Kenya, the participants developed informed views about Kenya, and African for that matter. For example, while they understood that Africa was a diverse continent, they stopped associating it with wild animals, jungle, tribes, diseases, crimes and political unrests only. Instead, they learned that Kenya was a diverse country. So, when asked to describe Kenya, the participants used informed terms such as “different cultures, friendly people, great food, westernized and beautiful country.” In addition, they showed a possible understanding of the existing media misinformation as is evident in the following response: “Kenya has 43 different ethnic groups, each practicing a unique culture, but the media associate Kenya primarily with the “uncivilized and war-liking” Masaai people,” (J., 2005). Meanwhile, the participants learned that there was plenty of good food in Kenya.

While pre-visit data showed that the participants were concerned about lack of food, post-visit data revealed that they learned that Kenya had enough food. To that end, one participant was surprised by all the “good food available . . . more than we could eat,” (Wr., 2004). The participants were equally impressed at how secure they felt. Consequently, they no longer feared the possibility of being physically harmed or contacting deadly diseases as is evident in the following threaded discussion:

Traveling to Kenya opened my eyes and taught me more life lessons than I could have ever imagined or expected. I went into our trip unnecessarily terrified. I have never met such welcoming, warm and caring people. I am so incredibly grateful to have been able to have this opportunity and am hoping to be able to go back soon! (Td., 2013)

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Because this participant was contemplating returning to Kenya, it is arguable that she developed more informed views of Kenya after the visit. This is a necessary transformation particularly in the context of contemporary globalization.

Globalized Awareness

Globalization or the interaction of people from different parts of the world is an old phenomenon that traditionally happened on a limited scale (Steger, 2009). The development of modern technologies, however, is perhaps responsible for the emergence of contemporary globalization, a large scale phenomenon that has transformed the world into a place of interdependence and interconnections (Krieger, 2005). A common trend in contemporary globalization is increased interactions between people of different cultural practices (Kambutu & Nganga, 2008). Nevertheless, contemporary globalization has multiple opportunities and challenges. Therefore, people should acquire skills essential to effective functioning in a globalized world (Nganga & Kambutu, 2012, Nganga & Kambutu, 2011). While cultural understanding is helpful, Lee (2012) supported the development of “human rights” skills to allow people to appreciate that, in a globalized world, when one group fails, all other groups are affected negatively. Notwithstanding the significance of global skills, the participants in this study appeared to have limited pertinent skills before travelling to Kenya.

Pre-visit data showed that the participants had a limited understanding of Kenya and Africa. Recall that in addition to having a mindset that Africa is a country, a majority of them associated Kenya with barely clothed tribal people who lived in huts and caves. After travel, however, data showed that the participants gained essential cultural understanding as is evident in the following 2007 email response, “Kenyan culture is generally warm and inviting. Thus, I would love to live there and experience more of Kenyan cultures.” Evidently, this response indicates that the participant did not only develop a cultural appreciation, but he also experienced a personal connection with Kenya. Meanwhile, another participant expressed a desire to return to Kenya, but using a human rights lens as is evident in the following response:

Prior to this experience, I viewed globalization positively. However, it was disheartening to see greenhouses that stretch for miles through some of the most fertile soil on the planet (land surrounding Lake Naivasha), constructed by international companies to grow flowers for export to benefit a few already privileged people while the food that should be grown there to feed the local people is imported. As the world becomes a village, it is essential that we all become empathic stewards of its resources. Our world has enough resources for everyone. A just sharing of resources could ensure that the basic needs of all people on earth are met. (Wr., 2010)

Evidently, the effects of globalization on a poor country like Kenya created cognitive dissonance in this participant. Equally apparent is his focus on human rights, thus arguing that, “as the world becomes a village, it is essential that we all become empathic stewards of its resources.” Other participants had a similar sense of solidarity with Kenya. Consider, for example, the following

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excerpt: "I became enthusiastic about Kenya's great potential for socio/economic improvement. I want to help in some way," (Wr., 2006). Perhaps because of developing a global mindset, post visit data showed that the participants were also able to understand Kenya's issues using a globalization lens.

Although the initial knowledge that the participants had about Kenya as a place of poverty was confirmed, they were able to understand poverty from a global context. Instead of blaming Kenyans, for example, the participants were able to understand poverty from a historical context, slavery and colonization especially. Equally considered were contemporary events such as new-colonialism and globalization. To that end, a participant expressed her opposition to globalization because it allowed "Whites to take land and other natural resources from the natives as if it were their right" (E., 2005). Meanwhile, another participant expressed similar sentiments adding that, "having an explanation of political and social issues provided answers about what causes poverty, but I still don't know how to change mankind to be less competitive while still remaining productive" (L., 2006).

As if to offer a solution to the expressed dilemma, a participant reported that "changing the culture of international corporate firms that are exploiting Kenyans and other third world people is a solution" (Wr., 2006). Meanwhile, another participant singled out international travel as an additional remedy because it helps people to see the negative effects of globalization, and justified her position thusly;

Mark Twain was indeed correct when he said, "travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry and narrow-mindedness." When people are fully immersed in a new environment, although scary, one gets acquainted and accustomed to it; thus making it relatable. This trip has taught me that ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to thrive in a happy, healthy and long life is an essential goal. (Td., 2013)

Discussion

Data from this study support the researchers' notion that a monolithic view of Africa exists, especially in the United States where many people think Africa is a needy country. Equally prevalent is a misunderstanding that Africa has universal cultural practices, including language. As a result, it is common for the dominant culture to ask Africans in the diaspora if they speak "African." Other statements about Africa being a land of intertribal wars, and a place that lacks food, formal education, medical services and technology support the existing monolithic view of Africa. Given that modern technologies are allowing people to interact globally with relative ease, thus transforming the world into place of interconnections (Tapscott, 2009), the existing monolithic view of Africa is inexcusable. Indeed, in the current age of globalization, the acquisition of objective information about other cultures is essential. While such information can be acquired in variety of ways, data from this study showed that planned cultural immersion programs are effective at helping people to develop objective understanding of other cultures, including geopolitical realities because cultural immersion eliminates isolation, albeit momentarily.

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Cultural isolation tends to promote misinformation, misunderstanding and suspicion. Additionally, it is likely to engender ethnocentrism, a destructive practice that cripples the hopes and aspirations of the affected people. Ethnocentrism has no room in the current age of globalization. Thus, it must be challenged and eradicated by helping people to acquire skills pertaining to cultural responsiveness in the context of globalization. Although traditional instructional approaches have value, the dominant culture is usually reluctant to abandon ethnocentric practices because they fear losing the many privileges they are accustomed to (Kambutu & Nganga, 2008). Thus, it is important to utilize other creative instructional approaches such as cultural immersion.

Immersing people in foreign cultures for a prolonged period of time has value. Addressing the issue, Merryfield, Lo and Kasai (2008) asserted that when people are immersed in other cultures, they are likely to have experiences that do not conform to existing notions, thus creating essential cultural dissonance. But because cultural immersion allows people to be physically present in host cultures, without the privilege of escaping to familiar ones, Rodriguez (2000) argued that cultural immersion enables participants to confront and resolve the dissonance experienced. This is a necessary step in the process of building cultural awareness. To that end, data from this study revealed that, after experiencing Kenyan cultures, the participants were able to develop objective cultural understanding.

Before experiencing Kenya, the participants held monolithic notions of Kenya and Africa. Recall, for example, that in addition to believing that Africa was a country, the participants held negative and simplistic notions that generally associated Kenya and Africa with tribal wars and exotic animals. However, after experiencing Kenya, they understood the country differently as is evident in the following feedback:

Kenya is a country of extremes with 43 different ethnic groups. Each group speaks its own language along with Kiswahili (national language that is spoken by all the groups), and English (business language only spoken by the schooled). Education in Kenya is free up to 8th grade. Kenya has a diverse geography and geology. Its economy is very extreme—very rich, and mostly poor who earn an average income of \$1 a day. Poverty is exacerbated by government policies that have taken land and given it to multinational corporations. (Wr., 2007)

Although this participant's view of Kenya in the context of poverty was confirmed, being immersed in Kenya allowed her to see the link between poverty and contemporary issues, globalization especially. Therefore, using Sokolower's (2006) view of globalization as a scheme by the privileged West to control earth's resources, the participant argued that "Kenya government, like other governments of poor and developing nations is a victim of the ever-growing appetite by developed nations of the West to possess all global natural resources." Meanwhile, other participants understood that historical events such as slavery and colonization, both of which involved stealing of resources, dividing people along ethnic lines by drawing artificial and arbitrary political boundaries, thus causing ethnic and state animosities, were equally responsible for the extreme poverty affecting developing countries.

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The extreme poverty that the participants saw in Kenya was troubling. Nevertheless, instead of blaming Kenyans, they showed solidarity and empathy by exploring possible ways to solve the problem. The ability to identify with Kenya's poverty was perhaps additional evidence that participants were developing essential skills in cultural responsiveness in the context of globalization. Given the negative impact of globalization on developing nations, the participants saw the need to disrupt it in order to address the "tremendous poverty and the differences between the very rich and the very poor we saw in Kenyan" (Wr., 2007). Again, what is evident here is a transformation that is causing the participants to think about poverty using a human rights lens, perhaps because of being immersed in Kenya cultures. In addition to invoking human rights perspectives, however, it is also obvious that participants were in solidarity with Kenyans plights.

The ability to identify with Kenyan issues was a welcome development. Recall that before travel, the participants were generally apprehensive and "scared of the unknown such as wars and HIV/AIDs." After travel, however, they reported being pleasantly surprised that Kenya had such "diverse economy that is supported by tourism and farming, but I wonder what can be done about poor infrastructure that is hindering progress" (Fn., 2010). Evidently, this participant was making Kenyan issues "personal" by wondering about ways to improve Kenya's infrastructure. To that end, she was not only able to identify with Kenyans, but to also "cross cultural boundaries," perhaps proving the value of cultural immersion.

To make cultural immersion meaningful, careful planning is necessary. Indeed, it is planning that separates immersion programs from tourist cultural experiences whose focus is to "wow" or excite and entertain participants (Derman-Sparks, 1998). Because a tourist-based cultural experience is likely to promote comparison (them versus us) of familiar with unfamiliar cultural practices, Williams (2005) recommended cultural immersion programs that enabled participants to interact with foreign cultures from multicultural perspectives. Notwithstanding the value, planning cultural immersion programs is a daunting task.

Planning cultural immersion programs is involving in terms of labor and time. For example, it took the researchers one year to plan each summer program. In addition to preparing the participants for travel, the researchers spent an overwhelming amount of time on logistical details such as contacting host culture/s, securing institutional commitments, marketing/recruiting and preparing participants. During travel, the researchers were involved fully with daily activities including providing cultural lectures and responding to participants' questions. The researchers encouraged the participants to ask questions in order to clarify their confusion or whatever was on their mind. Although exhausting to researchers, allowing the participants to express themselves was essential in the process of helping participants to develop meaningful understanding of host cultures. Indeed, cultural transformation is likely to occur during reflections (Mezirow, 1991). While reflecting, learners are able to make "sense" of unfamiliar cultural experiences. Indeed, when planned carefully, cultural immersion programs have the potential to promote cultural learning that is impossible to replicate in a traditional classroom.

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Conclusion

The benefits of cultural immersion are immeasurable. For example, a carefully planned cultural immersion program is likely to promote cultural transformation because participants are immersed in host cultures for days and weeks, thus giving them adequate time to make sense of unfamiliar cultural experiences. Generally, data from this study suggest that although the participants held monolithic views of Africa before travel, after experiencing Kenya, they developed an understanding that Africa is a diverse continent, not a country. Meanwhile, in addition to understanding Kenya's diversity, the participants were rarely ethnocentric, an important transformation especially in the context of contemporary globalization. Meanwhile, interactions between host cultures and the participants created space for them to learn about cultural similarities and differences, an essential step in the process of becoming culturally responsive.

Becoming culturally responsive is critical in the scheme of eradicating ethnocentrism. With increased interactions, for example, data in this study showed that the participants were perhaps becoming less ethnocentric. To that end, they drank Maasai "Pombe" (home brew), and as they did, they appreciated the similarities between Maasai and American cultures in the context of sharing alcohol with guests. This apparent cultural transformation speaks to the fact that the benefits of prolonged cultural immersion are both planned and serendipitous. Thus, measuring the amount and quality of learning inherent in cultural immersion might be impossible. Nevertheless, because it is not possible to replicate the effects of cultural immersion in regular traditional classroom-based cultural courses, educational institutions should support cultural immersion programs. Planning successful cultural immersion programs, however, is overwhelming both in time and labor.

Implications

As the world becomes increasingly a place of interdependence and interconnections, it is necessary that people acquire informed knowledge about other cultures. Because data from this study show that cultural immersion helped the participants to gain essential cultural understanding and appreciation, institutions of higher learning, teacher preparation programs especially, should consider supporting cultural immersion programs designed to help pre-service teachers to acquire skills in cultural responsiveness in a globalized context. The researchers believe that when pre-service teachers are prepared for cultural responsiveness and global citizenry, they are likely to eventually teach using a similar lens.

Culturally responsive teachers invite and prepare learners to become critical and reflective consumers of information. Thus, these teachers focus on deconstructing monolithic, racist and ethnocentric canons. Indeed, Beyer (2001) asked classroom teachers to always avoid educational activities that foster stereotypes. Meanwhile, because misconceptions about Africa are numerous, all educators should help learners to acquire credible information. As a start, teachers should always teach explicitly that Africa is a continent, not a country. Also worth teaching is the fact there is no

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language called African. Instead, the people of Africa speak a variety of international, national, regional and ethnic-based languages.

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