Student Educational Responsibility:
A Case Study of Emotional Response to International Education

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Abstract

This study focuses on student emotional reactions toward new events or stimuli within a learner-centered, international education course. Using the primary tenets of appraisal theory, researchers analyzed novel stimuli, as identified by the students, and students' emotional reactions toward each stimulus. Participants were immersed into two separate Scottish island communities for a 22-day period. The primary course objective included students developing leadership skills associated with community development while working with rural Scottish communities. Results indicated that students experienced a wide range of emotions associated with multiple stimuli. Identified stimuli were dichotomized into two categories, the international immersion process as well as the shift in educational responsibility from instructor to student. Emotional magnitude and coping mechanisms differed from student to student. Post international study reflections indicated that students experienced a deeper learning experience when using a learner-centered approach to international education.

Introduction

For decades, researchers have emphasized the need for universities to assist students in developing skills and attitudes associated with success in a globally interconnected and interdependent world (Carlson & Widaman, 1988; Hayward, 2000; Snyder, Lamm, Brendemuhl, Irani, Roberts, Rodriquez, & Navarro, 2011). This is especially true within the corporate sector, where there seems to be a shortage of global leaders (Moore, Boyd, Rosser, & Elbert, 2009). In the corporate arena, the ability to relate to and interact with diverse cultures is often a pre-requisite for global employment (Pierce & Newstrom, 2000). Developing cross-cultural skills not only enhances one's ability to work with others from diverse backgrounds but also increases one's social competence within diverse societies (Harris, Moran, & Moran, 2004). In order for universities to produce globally competitive students, they must provide international experiences that shape global and cultural understanding (Gouldthorpe, Harder, Stedman, & Roberts, 2012; Moore et al., 2009).

Several post-secondary institutions have addressed these concerns by implementing courses that enhance students' cross-cultural skills and global understanding (Connell, 2003; Kitsantas, 2004; Larsen, 2004). However, the facilitation of these courses differs from institution to institution. For instance, some instructors design international experiences to enhance student civic awareness through studying specific historic events such as the Holocaust (Clyde, 2010). Others use the opportunity to assist international communities through service-learning (Prins & Webster, 2010; Tonkin & Quiroga, 2004).

Regardless of the instructional facilitation, these courses were intended to develop student cultural and interpersonal skills within an international context.

In general, research examining international courses supports the idea that global exposure and immersion can be an effective way for students to acquire cultural understanding and cross-cultural leadership skills (Brooks, Frick, & Bruening, 2006; Earnest, 2003). However, while international courses have proven beneficial in enhancing international leadership development, student response toward foreign environments can vary. In fact, students who are exposed to foreign cultures often exhibit visceral emotional reactions (King & Young, 1994). Subject to their experiences, student reactions can range from negative to positive and vary in magnitude (Van Der Meid, 2003). Emotions, deeply woven into the human psyche, play a key role in how individuals experience new cultures (Baños, Botella, Alcañiz, Liaño, Guerrero, & Rey, 2004).

Emotions are intertwined with student learning. In some instances, positive emotions improve student cognition, as explained by Csikszetnmihalyi's (1990) *Flow* theory. In contrast, in the presence of fear and anxiety, emotions diminish students' cognition by limiting higher cognitive processes (Hains & Balschweid, 2008). Students who experience learner-centered pedagogy for the first time often evoke emotional responses associated with the latter as they become responsible for their own learning (Felder & Brent, 1996). Students who are accustomed to educational settings in which an expert conveys, rather than facilitates, knowledge may not appreciate and may even resist this type of teaching (Estes, 2002; Felder & Brent,

1996). This resistance prevents many instructors from making the teacher-centered to learner-centered transition (Estes, 2002).

International education has also been shown to evoke emotion. Students who are immersed into foreign environments frequently express feelings of disconnect, alienation, and disengagement (Chinn, 2006). This cross-cultural adjustment varies among students depending on their cultural norms and beliefs as well as well prior experiences with diverse cultures (Harrison & Voelker, 2008). These feelings often stifle student engagement, limiting their educational potential (Baños et al., 2004).

Theoretical Framework

The intersect between student international experience and evoked emotion can best be explained using Scherer's (1999) appraisal theory. Appraisal theory is based on the notion that emotions are elicited from an individual's evaluation (appraisals) of events or objects (stimuli). Stimuli are evaluated using four criteria. These criteria include:

1. The extent to which the stimuli is novel or agreeable to the individual.
2. The significance of the event toward meeting the individual's needs or goals.
3. Individual ability to influence or cope with potential outcomes from stimulus interaction.
4. The compatibility of the event or stimulus in relation to social and personal norms, beliefs, and values. (Scherer, 1999).

As students interact with international events (stimuli), they place value judgments on stimuli based off their prior knowledge and perceived novelty of the stimulus. According to Scherer, Schorr, and Johnstone (2001) an individual appraises a specific stimuli based on internal beliefs, cultural norms and ability to cope with the situation. If stimuli are perceived as aligning with their beliefs, neutral or positive emotions may be evoked. However, if stimuli challenge the individual's beliefs, often negative emotions are evoked. Following initial appraisal, varied reactions occur depending on the coping process available to the individual (Lazarus, 2006; Scherer et al., 2001). Within this study, emotions evoked from stimuli are a result of the student's participation in a learner-centered international experience (see Figure 1).
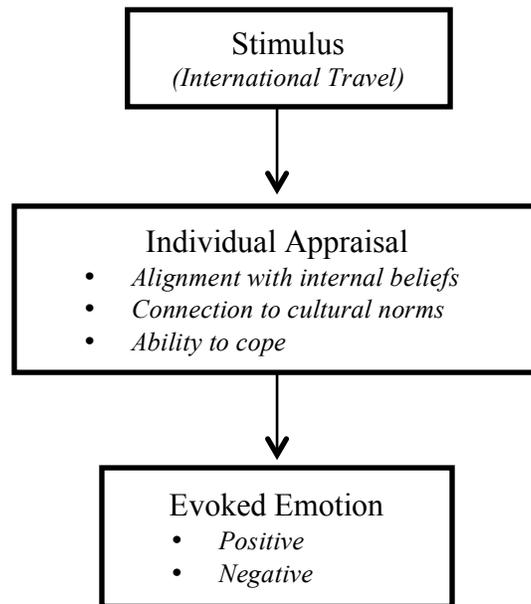
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┌─────────────────────────────┐
│         Stimulus            │
│   (International Travel)     │
└─────────────────────────────┘
              │
              ▼
┌─────────────────────────────┐
│     Individual Appraisal    │
│   • Alignment with internal │
│     beliefs                 │
│   • Connection to cultural  │
│     norms                   │
│   • Ability to cope         │
└─────────────────────────────┘
              │
              ▼
┌─────────────────────────────┐
│      Evoked Emotion         │
│        • Positive           │
│        • Negative           │
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Figure 1. Stimulus Appraisal Theory. Appraisal of stimuli in a learner-centered international travel setting

Purpose & Objectives

While there have been several studies attempting to explain the impact international courses have on student development (Ogden, 2010; Rodriguez, 2011; Savicki & Cooley, 2011), few have examined specific stimuli which evoke positive and negative emotions. The purpose of this study was to investigate student response toward novel experiences (stimuli) during a learner-centered international leadership development course. In order to examine student experiences in depth, the following research questions were considered:

1. What situations/events do participating students view as novel stimuli when immersed in a learner-centered international setting?
2. How do students appraise/react toward identified stimuli within a learner-centered international setting?

3. How are the student appraisals/reactions different toward similar stimuli within a learner-centered international setting?

Methods

Research Context

Student participants were enrolled in the course *Community Development in Scotland: A Learning Journey*. The course consisted of two components. The first consisted of a pre-immersion course implemented in Spring 2010. The course was designed to weave Scottish culture and history using insights gained from course readings, reflective journaling, Scottish case studies, and cultural activities such as a Scottish ceilidh and Burn's Supper. The second component included a 22-day international immersion experience within small Scottish agricultural island communities. During their immersion, students assumed full responsibility of their

experience by establishing local contacts, conducting interviews with community stakeholders, analyzing data, and making recommendations for future community collaborations. As students assumed educational responsibility, the educational focus shifted from a teacher-centered environment to that more learner-centered environment. The professors served as references or provided guidance when needed.

Research Participants

The international team consisted of two professors, two graduate students and four undergraduate students majoring in Agricultural Education at the University of Kentucky. For this study, the researchers focused solely on the student experiences. Student demographics including gender, age and educational level, race, geographic upbringing, and prior international experience(s) are identified in Table 1.

Table 1. Student Demographics

Gender	Age & Education Level Grad/Undergrad	Race	Geographic Upbringing	Prior International Experience(s)
Male	24 – Grad. Student	Caucasian	Rural	Afghanistan
Female	33 – Grad. Student	Caucasian	Rural	*Scotland & England
Female	22 – Undergrad.	Caucasian	Urban	Jamaica
Female	22 – Undergrad.	Caucasian	Rural	None
Female	20 – Undergrad.	African American	Rural	None
Female	20 – Undergrad.	Caucasian	Rural	Canada

*While four of the six students had traveled internationally, only one had been to Western Europe.

Data Collection

In order to obtain detailed information regarding individual assessments of international stimuli, a layered qualitative case study was undertaken (Patton, 2002). While each student represented an individual case, the primary unit of analysis was the overall class. As part of their course assignment, students maintained reflective journals prior to and throughout their international experience. Reflective journaling allowed students to convey inner dialogue, thoughts, feelings, and actions (Hubbs & Brand, 2005) as they participated in the study. Additionally, participating professors were charged with maintaining journals to record day-to-day interactions and experiences with both students and the community. More specifically, faculty documented student–faculty dialogue, student–student dialogue, behavioral observations, and cultural interactions as perceived by the individual faculty.

Data Analysis

Student and faculty journals, collected after completion of the course, became rich data sources for identifying student stimulus appraisal and emotional reactions. Using Scherer's Appraisal Theory (1999) and Parrot's (2001) emotional categories as a framework, two researchers independently coded student data, establishing interrater reliability. Researchers' used Parrot's (2001) emotional categories during initial coding to identify student emotions. Once student emotions were established, they were used to examine the stimuli that evoked the resulting emotion. Finally, second cycle thematic coding techniques were used to categorize

themes associated with both stimuli and student emotions (Patton, 2002; Saldaña, 2009).

Credibility was established by confirming first and second cycle themes with student and faculty participants during individual meetings. Furthermore, student journals were cross-referenced with faculty journals, confirming identified themes and enhancing data trustworthiness.

Limitations of Study

The study took place in a specific international setting; therefore, results only pertain to the students during the examined time and place. It is assumed students were forthright when journaling about their experiences and completed their reflections in a timely fashion. Another consideration includes faculty perceptions regarding student interactions as documented in the faculty journals. The researchers attempted to limit professor bias by cross-referencing events and conversations with student journal entries, revealing a more holistic perspective. Lastly, the findings presented are solely the views expressed by participants.

Results

Students' international stimuli are presented in five thematic categories: (a) travel preparation; (b) international travel; (c) cultural immersion; (d) individual interaction; (e) roles and responsibilities. Representative quotes were chosen to showcase the magnitude and variance of individual reactions. Due to page limitations, results were presented in tabular format with direct student quotes provided as evidence for emotional expression. Results from the first identified theme – travel preparation (prior to leaving) – are represented in Table 2.

Table 2. Primary Theme 1: Student Appraisals and Evoked Emotions

Secondary Theme	Students' Emotions	Student Evidence
How one will be perceived	apprehension, hope, happy, uncertainty, interesting, wonder, excited, stressful, nervous	*"I am very excited, stressed, and nervous. How will I be perceived in Scotland/UK??"* *"I expected most people to be intimidated… we would be mostly talking to each other."*
Pre-travel course	love, happy, like, hope, fun, boring, interest, amazed, enjoyment, like	*"Facilitations are always interesting to me…This class brought out many aspects I hadn't thought about."*
Family connection	sadness, guilt, yearning	*"As we were settling down for bed Sunday night it hit me full on. I probably cried for a good half hour. I know this is an amazing opportunity, but I feel massive amounts of mommy guilt."*
International anticipation	excitement, amazing, uncertainty, thankful, frustration	*"I am so excited to go to Scotland, but the uncertainty of what all is going on and how we are being assigned is rather frustrating."*

Students expressed four thematic stimuli relating to international travel preparation. The first pertained to cultural perception, or how the Scots would perceive the students upon arrival. Students professed a range of positive and negative emotions within this category. Perceptions of cultural isolation and solitude created feelings of anxiety and uncertainty, foreshadowing Chinn's (2006) conclusions of international loneliness. In contrast, students also conveyed emotions of excitement as they anticipated meeting new people and learning about Scottish culture.

The pre-immersion course was, for the most part, positively received. Students expressed positive emotions, including empowerment and joy, towards course content. This supports the assertion that domestic courses that utilize international contexts for learning can be well received by students (Lehman, 2009).

Finally, within the category of travel preparation, students identified leaving their families and homes and the anticipation of international travel as emotion-provoking stimuli. Overall, students expressed emotions of excitement; however, they were torn between being excited about the experience, and being sad to leave family or uncertain about the future.

The next table (Table 3) illustrates the entirety of student travel. It is important to note that students were responsible for coordinating their own travel arrangements, shifting the learning process associated with international travel to the student.

Table 3. Primary Theme 2: Student Appraisals and Evoked Emotions

Secondary Theme	Students' Emotions	Student Evidence
Urban experience (London/Edinburg)	unexcited, pissy, dread, interesting, frustrating, hate	*"I miss farms and farm animals – big cities just don't cut it for me."*
Travel arrangements	frustration, surprise, amazement, unbelievable	*"After 5 hours I'm still sitting in this damn airport! I am so upset I just want to go home. We should have all been on the same flight!! We have no way of communicating at all and this is ridiculous."*
Traveling alone	frustration, interesting, horrible, nervous, worried, scared	*"This whole ordeal is frustrating. I don't want to travel alone especially with not being able to hear. I'm so mad. At this point I just don't want to go. At all."*
Driving	frustration, annoyed, scared, petrified	*"I was petrified driving a stick shift, on the opposite of the car and on a one-way road. Definitely quite the experience and I was so scared that I parked it and about had a mental breakdown and couldn't pick up the boys."*

Data analysis revealed that international travel evoked several negative emotions. Although many of the students had traveled both domestically and internationally, few of them had traveled alone. Identified issues included communication difficulty, urban culture, and flight cancellations as catalysts for frustration, anger, and fear. Lastly, one student could not finish her driving task due to cultural differences.

Within this study, stimuli associated with independent international travel diminished the students' experience by evoking a magnitude of negative emotion. This supports Hains and Balschweid's (2008) assertion that negative emotions can limit student cognitive aptitude. Furthermore, the shift in responsibility regarding travel arrangements enhanced student anxiety as it was the first time several of the students had to make their own arrangements (Estes, 2002).

Once immersed into their rural Scottish communities, students professed six stimuli relating to their cultural interaction (Table 4).

Table 4. Primary Theme 3: Student Appraisals and Evoked Emotions

Secondary Theme	Students' Emotions	Student Evidence
Knowledge of culture (or lack thereof)	idiotic, comfortable, careful, passion, excited, love, enjoyment	*"I now understand the importance of researching where you are going… Not only can I be more comfortable but it shows the other people that you actually care."*
Connection to people in community *(Scottish Community)*	amazement, unwelcomed, hilarious, charmed, interesting, impressed, hopeful, touched, passionate, empathy, attached, protected, love	*"The pub that night was too much fun. The boys broke out the bongo and guitars, we closed the joint down and had them play music at the retreat. Yet again – more of an emotional attachment with the people."*
Social events	amazement, fun	*"Last night we went to the pub…it was a lot of fun, especially since all the people there last night were relatively our age. It was a blast."*
Food	wonderment, best, amazement, enjoyment	*"I really wanted authentic fish and chips, but my luck they had just ran out. That's okay, because I got to try some scrumdidliumptious lamb. It was a little fatty, but amazing!"*
Land & Agriculture	wonderment, surprise, moved, interesting, amazement, enjoyment, disbelief, happy	*"…there are a lot of wind turbines here. They were scattered over open fields, on top of hills, etc. It was wonderful."* *"The drive out to Inverary was fun. It was nice to see things I remembered from our honeymoon."*

Cultural norms	frustration, disgust, happy, pissed off, precious, confused	*"Our cultural experiences here have been tremendous! The night we arrived here we had a wonderful dinner & dancing party called a Ceilidh… It was so much fun."* *"There is so much unhealthy tradition here…The political processes are cumbersome and unwelcoming."*

Overall, students expressed relatively positive emotions toward their cultural interactions. Several identified the knowledge gained in the pre-immersion course as helpful in establishing relationships quickly. Students professed being pleasantly surprised by the friendliness of their communities and enjoyed adapting to Scottish cultural norms, so much so that they began feeling protected and connected to the local community (Baños et al., 2004). In most cases, the cultural experiences were appraised as positive, which heightened the student experience (Csikszetnmihalyi, 1990: Sherer, 1999). However, one student exhibited negative emotions toward the political hierarchy, identifying the political processes as "cumbersome."

The next theme encompasses the range of perspectives toward students' "home" (refer to Table 5). Throughout data analysis an overwhelming theme emerged, the student connection to home. However, the context in which they referenced home differed substantially. Several students identified strained relationships within their group as a catalyst (stimulus) for being homesick. Other students identified home as a place to which they would like to return. This is in contrast to students who identified home with family members. Specifically, these stimuli evoked emotions associated with sadness and loneliness.

Table 5. Primary Theme 4: Student Appraisals and Evoked Emotions

Secondary Theme	Students' Emotions	Student Evidence
Interaction within group	isolated, difficulty, tense, impatience, bonkers, nice, weird, disconnected, frustrating, enjoyment, sorry, enjoyment, love, comfortable, safe, faith, stoked	*"I am already exhausted. I'm getting homesick. Our group is not meshing nearly as well as it could. I feel that I need to stay excessively positive else the whole group will get down."* *"As for my future roomies on the island I am totally stoked!!"*
Home connections	despising, broken hearted, anxious, worry, regret, homesick, miss, frantic, sad, upset, scared, needy, disappointment, pressure, stress, lonely, disconnected	*"I want to go home. Never in my life have I been this homesick. Sure it doesn't help that things in (home city)… are falling apart for them & feel like I need to be there."* *"Wish I had better internet or cell service but I have realized that I don't have anyone I feel*

		I must speak to via phone except dad…Not homesick and just happy here."
Going home	hopeful, anxious, excited, heartbroken, sad, hate	*"They have been fantastic and so hospitable and the thought of leaving in a week breaks my heart."*
		"Don't know what the state of my apartment might be in though, but at least I will be HOME! HOME HOME HOME…"

In stark contrast, other students identified their new communities as their home and professed their anxiety and sadness to leave. Still others did not miss their connection to Kentucky and believed their peers to be home for them.

Finally, the following table (Table 6) showcases stimuli identified by students as they took responsibility for their educational roles within the Scottish communities. While students identified similar stimuli regarding their education development, their appraisal toward each stimuli and correlating emotions varied. Several students felt empowered and excited to be taking on their responsibilities. Others experienced situations of gender bias, evoking negative emotions toward an individual. Furthermore, some students did not feel empowered enough and felt that their efforts were useless, leading to feelings of disappointment and confusion.

Table 6. Primary Theme 5: Student Appraisals and Evoked Emotions

Secondary Theme	Students' Emotions	Student Evidence
Community interviews	nervous, frustration, uncomfortable, unsatisfied, uninterested, concerned, happy, enjoyment	*"Today I got up and ready for an interview with (person)-bastard….he wouldn't look at me and wouldn't have shit to do with me because I was female. I guess that was frustrating and really pissed me off because times have changed and I expect equal respect."*
		"She is one of my favorite people so far to talk to. She's a dairy farmer…Plus, she cusses like a sailor."
Final Project	uncertainty, concerned, anticipation, not excited, not worried, exhaustion	*"Many times I felt that we were overstaffed with not enough for us to reasonably feel like a part of the project."*
		"I believe I have done a pretty good job at beginning our initial questioning and data collection. I can't wait to learn more…"

| Individual contribution | fear, interest, unexcited, confusion, useless, happy, disappointment, beneficial | *"I feel kind of useless at this point however. This social infrastructure deal already isn't … something I'm comfortable working with let alone talking to a community about."* *"I believe that as time goes on I will become more confident and…realize that I can be an important part of this team. I can't wait!"* |

Thinking retrospectively about their international leadership experience lead students to express a more positive outlook on international travel in general. Post-trip reflections indicated students viewed their international experiences in a more positive light, when compared with some of the negative emotions expressed in on-site journaling.

Conclusions,/Recommendations/ /Implications

With increasing importance being placed on international education, global understanding gained through cultural immersion is an effective way for students to acquire this knowledge (Brooks et al. 2006). Throughout the immersion process, all students experienced visceral reactions towards their experience, although the stimuli for which they attributed the response differed from individual to individual. With this in mind, much emphasis should be placed on the importance of preparatory classwork. All students recognized the importance of conducting deep and insightful research within the Scottish communities. However, students did indicate they felt more emphasis should be placed on learning about the specifics of the country and potential social situations they could face.

Perhaps even more importantly, pre-immersion preparatory classwork should move beyond the history and culture of the study country; there should also be ample focus on how one may be affected emotionally or cognitively throughout the experience. It is recommended that educators seek to understand the student developmental process as they participate in international leadership experiences, as well as taking it into account when designing the international experience. If this process is overlooked, students may perceive their experience as negative, limiting their cultural development (King & Young, 1994). When students understand their own developmental processes, they are more likely to think metacognitively in order to adapt and respond more quickly in novel situations. Metacognitive thinking should be elaborated on prior to departure and reinforced during the class to ensure students have the skills to cope and react accordingly while overseas.

As today's educators continue to explore and begin to utilize student centered teaching, it is important for them to thoroughly understand the student-centered process. It is easy to recognize that students will have visceral responses to various stimuli they encounter within other cultures; it should be just as clear that the same students will demonstrate both positive and negative emotional responses. Therefore, just because students may have a negative visceral response towards a stimulus initially, that is not necessarily undesirable. Both negative and positive emotions can be catalysts for learning. Similarly, once educators have taken students on an international leadership experience, it may become apparent that some students were

simply not ready for international travel. While this may make certain situations more aggravating, it is not necessarily negative. It is still a learning experience for everyone involved.

Other tools that assist in making the international leadership experience more meaningful are reflective journaling and situational analysis. Both reflective journaling and analysis of situations is recommended for use in order to create a more experiential environment (Gouldthorpe et al., 2012; Ricketts & Morgan, 2009). In addition, by focusing on issues, experiences and situations encountered within other cultures, students are encouraged to consider their reactions to various stimuli. By reconsidering their reactions and making judgments, this could assist students in improving their reactions to the same stimuli in the future. In this case study, students were able to better understand the events and situations happening around them through reflective journaling. The journals served as an emotional outlet for many of the students and helped to dissolve many problems before outbursts of emotion could occur. Students documented both professional and personal growth on the trip, as can be seen from the student quote below:

> *I can tell already that I have grown a bit since day one. Slowly but surely I have gained more confidence in myself, learned to respect myself, and learned more to shut up and listen and wait for a good time/thing to say. I feel my listening skills have increased since the class we took this past semester. By utilizing this trait I believe my future will be easier seeing I can make logical statements and ideally be able to be a better conflict resolver.* (Student Reflective Journal)

For all of the aforementioned reasons, the researchers would argue that reflective journaling should be structured as a free write, instead of placing parameters around the activity. This allows students to use the journaling for their own educational purposes, and does not limit how the assignment is applied.

Finally, even as educators decide to make their international educational trips and courses more student-centered, it is still imperative to set up specific interactions, field trips and situations that allow students to experience the application of leadership within other cultures (Ricketts & Morgan, 2009). As has been illustrated throughout this study, students demonstrate a wide variety of emotional responses within stressing situations (such as international travel). Without purposeful planning, students may never think critically about the leadership skills or knowledge necessary for successful interaction within international situations. Those who get caught up in the cognitive overload may need more educational scaffolding up front – so they can actively experience and think critically within a new culture.

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