Exploring exchange students' global minds in a study abroad project

Esko Johnson [a], Heeok Heo [b], Klaus Reich [c], Irja Leppisaari [d] & Okwha Lee [e]

[a] Centria University of Applied Sciences, Kokkola, Finland, [b] Sunchon National University, Korea, [c] University of Innsbruck, Austria, [d] Centria University of Applied Sciences, Finland, [e] Chungbuk National University, Korea

Abstract

This study was conducted in the context of an international exchange project which introduced the participating students to curricular and instructional aspects of global education and to the diversity of school systems. The aim of the research was to investigate how the exchange students constructed and reconstructed their cultural and intercultural skills, knowledge, beliefs, and identities. The research data were collected using interviews, an online survey, and students' messages posted on a Facebook group. Semi-structured interviewing was used as a major data gathering method as this made it possible to better explore the extent and qualities of the students' sense-making and learning about their exchange experience. Six themes emerged indicating that the exchange students used a range of approaches to interact and communicate with people to gain intercultural perspectives. They made sense of educational systems, and developed their selfhood and social identities in a framework of negative and positive experiences.

Keywords: *international exchange project, study abroad, global minds, global education, qualitative approach*

Introduction

Globalization accentuates the need to make sense of the changing world. Today's global interdependence has given rise to new concerns of globalization, demanding enhanced knowledge and capabilities as well as authentic empathy and solidarity to acknowledge the variability in human beings and their communities (Deardorff 2006; Hansen 2010; Mansilla & Jackson 2011). Higher education institutions commit to educating graduates who are able to learn new ways of thinking, working, and living in the world (ATC21S 2011; Tarrant 2010; Witte 2010). The growing global interdependence requires young people to engage in solving global issues and problems, and to participate in local, national and global life (Feast, Collyer-Braham & Bretag 2011; Mansilla & Jackson 2011; Reimers 2009). The young educational (professional) leaders for the future need to be aware of global issues and to acquire competencies in intercultural sensitivity, which is essential to develop global minds and perspectives. This is what global education pursues, especially in higher education.

Recently, global education has received a lot of attention from educational practitioners and policy makers. For example, the Council of Europe states that global education can open students' eyes to the realities of the world and motivate them to bring about a world of greater justice, equity and human rights for all (Council of Europe 2004). However, the concept of global education is often found to be complex, diffuse and lacking connections to the lived, everyday life as Reimer and McLean (2009) pointed out in their study. They concluded the vague meaning of global education can influence how individuals implement this concept in real settings. Thus, global education programs must connect to personal experiences and social issues. Lucas (2010) also suggested educators should have a clear understanding of global education and how to incorporate it into school curricula. One of the important approaches to define global education is to identify competences developed by global education. Goodwin (2010)

provides five main areas of knowledge that a globally minded teacher educator must demonstrate: personal, contextual, pedagogical, sociological and social knowledge. Mansilla and Jackson (2011) also proposed that global competence is the capacity and disposition to understand and act on issues of global significance. Global competence associates with four core capacities: investigating the world, recognizing perspectives, communicating ideas, and taking action.

In this study researchers decided to use the term global minds to describe the competences that can be developed in global education and the essential change in individuals who are becoming globalized. The global mind is constructed and reconstructed by shared sense-making, negotiation of meaning, and individual change. It is mediated with the help of other people, symbols, and artefacts such as computers (Linell 2003; Wertsch 1991). Thus the global mind does not only comprise a person's knowledge, skills, and attitudes, but, as we propose in this study, the global mind is related to several important aspects of the person, covering beliefs, identities, and interpersonal relations (Kim 2001; Kim 2008; Korthagen 2004; Wenger 1998).

The purpose of the exploratory study is to investigate how exchange students can develop and enhance their global minds in an international exchange project. The research question is as follows:

> *How do the exchange students construct and re-construct their cultural and intercultural skills, knowledge, beliefs, and identities?*

The research study is situated in a bilateral cooperation project based on joint European Union (EU) - the Republic of Korea funding and mutual agreement on the selection of higher education partnerships. The project aims to promote competencies of global education for student teachers in Korea and three EU countries[1]. The major activities for this three-year project are exchange of undergraduate students with a focus on pedagogy from each consortium, a mobility program for faculty members, and curriculum development for global education. In the student exchange programme, the students spend an academic term at the hosting institutions taking courses in global education; culture-generic and culture-specific courses, as well as a foreign language course, all of these making up the cultural learning component. In addition, they are involved in teaching practice at local schools during their stay of 4 to 5 months. The participating universities provide the students with the academic programme and student services including housing mentoring, and opportunities for social integration.

Method

Context of the study

During the first student exchange in the KE-LeGE[2] project, 10 European and 15 Korean students in total were sent to each partner university in the fall semester of 2011, which is 16 weeks on average. Table 1 explains the basic information about the exchange students.

Table 1: *Basic information about the exchange students*

Gender	Female	Male	*Total*
	22	3	25
Region of origin	**European**	**Korean**	
	10	15	25
Major study area	**Primary education and general education**	**Subject education**	

	10	15	25

The students enrolled in regular academic programs and took 4-5 undergraduate courses taught in English. They also engaged in teaching practice at K-12 schools and participated in cultural and language programs according to their own preferences. Each university offered the students with student services including housing arrangements and mentoring. One or two faculty members of each university, as key persons in the project, were in charge of planning, implementing, and evaluating the process and outcomes of the project.

Data collection and analysis

Research data were collected from three sources: interviews, an online survey, and messages posted on a Facebook group. Semi-structured interviews were employed as a major data collection method, since it enabled the researchers to explore each participant's experiences and to understand the scope and levels of their intercultural learning. Seven interviewers in all interviewed the exchange students two times, in the first week and in the last week of their exchange period. The interview questions were developed based on the holistic model of student teacher's change levels suggested by Korthagen (2004), and modified for the present study. The following questions were used as guidelines for the thematic interviews, conducted at the beginning and end of the study abroad period:

- What are your beliefs of cultures, communication; of "multi-cultures"? What beliefs and imagery are you driven by? And what are you uncertain about? What beliefs are emerging for you?
- How do you feel? What emotions and images do you have about things, people and yourself, now that you are starting the exchange?
- In what way do you think (you will) interact and communicate with the locals, international students and your own people/countrymen?
- Who/what are you (as a student, person…)? Where do you belong? What do you want to be and what do you want to become like?
- What do you want to study in the host country?
- What do you expect to experience in the university courses in the host country?
- What do you expect to experience in local schools?

The interviews were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed. The online survey, a secondary source of data collection, was conducted to study the exchange students' views about the project. The questions in the survey covered the students' satisfaction and opinions about the academic and extracurricular programs as well as educational services available during the exchange period. Three experts in the education field reviewed the questionnaire and suggested minor revisions of the questions. The survey was conducted in the last two weeks of the exchange period and was completed within a month with a 100% response rate.

A range of online messages posted in a closed Facebook group were collected and analyzed for grasping the temporal aspect of the exchange students' personal sense-making and behaviors. The Facebook group was set up by the researchers and used by the students and staff for the whole period of the exchange project. The participants of the Facebook group were encouraged to ask and answer questions, and to share thoughts and feelings.

The data collected by the various methods in this study were analyzed using the method of meaning condensation suggested by Kvale and Brinkmann (2008). For this research, we chose 24 interviews of 12 students whose interviews were more extended than the others, ranging from 30 to 60 minutes. These students were taking their exchange period in four host institutions. First of all, the interviews were categorized independently by the researchers. Each researcher looked at and read the interview transcriptions, determined natural meaning units in the interviews, and stated their central themes (see Table 2).

Table 2: *Examples of the natural meaning units and their central themes*

Natural Meaning Units	Central themes
Yes. I attend "Teaching and Learning" and in the class I have to do team subject, and I made a team with two Austrian students, so I could be a friend with them on Facebook and we have an appointment with our subject and so I can meet them, and actually I had an appointment in front of the railway station last Sunday, but I had to go to the Youth Olympic explanation, so I cancelled the appointment, but it is possible when more actively and	Communication using ICT
I said give me paper, give me pen, I was drawing, they were drawing, I was drawing. This? You mean this? No…this, ah…yes, this this, so it came out very very good idea but drawing everything, writing is the out, asking Google translator	Use of various ways of communication
I think the [local] people are usually shy, and when they are drunk they suddenly change	Making sense of other people

The results of coding were compared and condensed into more essential meanings in terms of the purpose of the study. As shown in Table 3, the themes identified by the researchers were reviewed and compared, and condensed as an essential, non-redundant theme, aligning with the notion by Kvale and Brinkmann (2008).

Table 3: *Examples of theme comparison and condensation*

Researcher 1	Researcher 2	Researcher 3	Condensed themes
1. Use of various ways of communication with different target groups	1. Making sense of other people	1. Use of various ways of communication	Communication for intercultural understanding
2. Communication with internationals		2. Meeting different people in different places	
3. Communication using ICT			

Subsequently, the survey results and online messages were reviewed and analysed by the three researchers in order to verify the findings from the interview data.

Five themes of meaning construction became apparent through the analysis, ranging from intercultural perspectives to issues of self-making. In the following section we will present and discuss these themes.

Results

Intercultural perspectives for gaining insights on and outside campus

In an ideal case, the exchange student l focuses on reflectively developing his or her attitudes, behaviours, and skills. Analyzing their own intercultural insights and experience, the exchange students should critically review and question the practices, conventions, and values that they 'naturally' acquired in the

home context. They should be able to reflect on the relationships among and with 'local' groups and the experience of those relationships. Furthermore, they should be able to move from one of the many in-groups to which one belongs to one of the many out-groups that contrast with them (Byram 1997; Kim 2001; Wenger 1998). Related to the above attitudes and skills, the exchange students of this study seemed to focus on several issues of cultural identity and the challenge of pluralism (for these constructs, see e.g. Kim 2008; also Dervin 2010 for a post-structuralist critique). This was shown in several interviews of the study.

> **Interviewer 3:** *What were your beliefs of cultures, communication, of multicultures before you came here?*

> **Student F:** *Before I came here, I felt there is something in [this part of the world], something special. And I came here out of curiosity, and there is something special, but you can find that also in [my country] . So I think in my country, or in [my part of the world], everywhere it is the same. Because there are many people(…) The special is not special, because you can find it everywhere. Everywhere people live and they think similarly to others, but not exactly same.* (Second interview, Innsbruck)

So how can perceptions about the host country and its people be the same, yet different, compared to one's insights about the home country and 'my people'? Perhaps this difference is, more than anything, about the unexpected lack of familiarity and certainty; about disconnectedness between 'me' and 'them' - not about deciding what is the 'same' against what is 'different' or vice versa, as one approaches fundamental understanding of diverse diversities (Dervin 2010).

> **Interviewer 3:** *Before coming to this country [as an exchange student], what were your beliefs, what images did you have, and what prejudices did you have?*

> **Student A:** *You know, if I go to places anywhere in the world, it is not my country. The first time I came here I was really lonely, so I thought that the [local] people were very friendly with somebody who is not familiar with their country, but I think [they] have strong individualism, I think. They don't care about other people, it is not egoistic, but they just do their work (…) [A]bout the closeness with other students, it was a pretty disappointing experience for me. Because when I went to the [other country] they were really friendly, compared to here. And they are comfortable and used to see [us]. But here I think it is different.* (First interview, Innsbruck)

The crucial insights gained by exchange students were related not only to higher education and teacher education, which made up the exchange student's mission and roles in their context, but also to the host country citizens' attitudes to foreigners. Based on the data, it was concluded that a majority of the students were able to successfully reflect on and explore the culture of the host society, and thus, acquire and elaborate genuinely novel meaning structures - most often in an empathetic way. Furthermore, the exchange students' interpretations were about practice and/or policies related to the host's educational and other institutional systems. The insights also included communicating and interacting with non-locals/foreigners in public and privately, and the status of religions and ideologies. From a wider perspective, the exchange students reflected on the impact of various denominations in the host country. To put it simply, through making sense of what they had learned in their courses at campus and informally outside of campus, the exchange students attempted to walk in the shoes of the locals - each in their own ways, and with varying degree of success.

This conclusion is in line with Pence & Macgillivray's (2008) findings. They studied the impact of an international practicum period on pre-service teachers and established "professional and personal changes such as increased confidence, a better appreciation and respect for differences of others and other cultures, and an awareness of the importance that feedback and reflection play in professional and personal growth."

On the topic of boundary-crossing (Wenger 1998), perspectivising, and developing insights about other cultures (Byram 1997), we should definitely refer to the many contacts, friendships, and social networks that the exchange students typically created and maintained with international non-host students. These connections and bonds might more critically be seen as international student bubbles, for the purpose of just hanging around while avoiding serious academic work. However they were more important and more productive for intercultural learning than only trying to make sense of the locals and their ways. This was also shown by the diary study of Irish students' cultural adjustment in Japan (Pearson-Evans 2006). The researcher concluded that in some cases, establishing relationships with the locals turned out to be problematic and difficult whereas international non-host student networks were productive in facilitating adjustment.

Making sense of educational systems and practice

The interview findings showed that the university campus is the most important place for students' formal and informal learning, for the effort of sense-making, and for the goal of fostering intercultural understanding and sensitivity. Many Facebook group updates confirmed this; for instance, a student wrote: *"Yesterday we visited a school and attended three classes. I felt a little bit surprised. It is quite different from our country. I am happy that I am here."* (Student, Kokkola, 17 September 2011).

Students learned how to differentiate the pros and cons of different educational approaches and to reflect on educational systems. The online survey completed by all of the exchange students confirmed this finding, with observations and reflections on differences found between the host and the home education systems. In addition, the exchange students reflected on the transferability of methods and techniques from the host to the home country.

> *Interviewer 3: What did you experience in learning in the different courses that you are taking? Do you think that these courses are helpful for your future?*
>
> *Student C: The courses gave me the opportunity to think about how I teach and how the class happens and how they talk to each other and it also gives me a chance to concentrate on education, and so I can obtain between the [host] and [home country] school system and so I see some advantages of each school system so I can adapt in the future and it is really helpful I think, because for the teacher training it is really important, I can learn a lot of things, even after I become teacher it is really important and helpful. (First interview, Innsbruck)*

Similar research findings were established in a student journal study by Brindley, Quinn & Morton (2009) where a group of pre-service teachers taking a study abroad internship program made sense of their experiences in the host schools based on their reflective observations of customs and practices. Brindley et al. (2009) concluded that the international experience made the pre-service teachers stop and ponder fundamental aspects about school, teaching, and learning. These included teachers' duties, teacher-to-student and student-to-student interactions. In a foreign internship setting, the students have "a set of experiences that cause them to fundamentally confirm or question some of their foundational presumptions about teaching."

When answering the online survey question *"What have you learned during your exchange program; about the society, culture, customs and traditions of the host country?"* one of the exchange students in Innsbruck wrote:

> *To prepare our practicum lectures, we spent lots of time to think about teaching unit and methods and I was totally interested in this assignment because I could share my own teaching methods with other friends and also get some ideas of it. After giving a lesson I got some reflection of our teaching unit, and I realized what's good and bad, so how can I deal with for the next time.*

Exposure to such differences made several students clarify their career goals and further commit to seeking a specific teaching job: *"working in international high school as a mathematics teacher is my goal and my dream, so I want to achieve my goal."* Of course, we need to understand that not all exchange students' perceptions about the differences in educational systems and practices will automatically lead to questioning their own priorities and values, and thus result in transformative learning. However, experiences in real settings initiate individuals to strengthen existing values and create new beliefs and meanings (Mezirow 2000; Tarrant 2010).

Self-identity and social identity

In this study, we defined identity as a range of meanings that the exchange student assigned to themselves as an individual (i.e. self-identity) and as a member of a group(s) (i.e. social identity). Further, we assumed that the two identities would not be fixed nor 'hidden' but rather changeable and articulated, largely because of recurring identity negotiation and re-construction boosted by the exchange period. Again, we saw this identity negotiation and re-construction to be closely related to exposure and significant moments of intercultural communication and learning (Kohonen 2005; Ricoeur 1990/1992).

As to their identities, the main findings of the interviews indicated that the exchange students worked closer towards (but in some cases also walked away from) defining their emerging teacher professional identity, often with some aspects of the global mind.

> ***Interviewer 3:*** *What was your opinion about (the course [?]) "Global Education"?*
>
> ***Student A****: That we need global education and have to learn it and is getting more important than it is now. As I learned global education I can teach my students about it and I can also give them the opportunity to think about global education, to share their ideas with other cultures or other friends, and the most important thing is, they can really act these things and (…) can really do something about it.* (First interview, Innsbruck)
>
> ***Interviewer 3:*** *Thinking back on the last months, what do you consider most important for your future professional life as a teacher?*
>
> ***Student C:*** *The most important thing for me is the communication with the students and teachers and then, a good teacher should know lots of philosophy and also should have experienced many things.(…) [I]n the future we need some global leaders and I hope to make students to be a global leader. This experience gave me the opportunity to think about it. And you know, I wrote an essay (…) when I finished it, I felt like now I realized what is my learning theory and what is my teaching method and which one is really suitable for me.* (Second interview, Innsbruck)

Despite this, we should acknowledge that identities are not negotiated and constructed harmoniously nor in a linear way without difficulty. Instead, the process inevitably brings in fluctuations of stress, adaptation and growth (Kim 2001)

Uncertainty and stress::[3] are typically related to encounters, events, and turning-points in the social arena where one's self-concept is on trial, with more or less intense sensations of inadequacy, uncertainty, strangeness, or loss of control. In the adaptation stage, the experience may become part of the totality of one's life history.

> ***Interviewer 1:*** *How is it with you as a private person, why are you learning and going to so many places and having so high expectations?*
>
> ***Student D:*** *I don't experience many things, yeah. (….) But when I went to [another country] I met the people and they were quite different. I feel weird, and it was my turning point (…) After I experienced the local cultures, I felt there are many kinds of people. I need to experience and I need to challenge myself, and I have to change myself. I except that when I*

go back to [my country] and my family and my friends say to me, you are really changed and you are now in confidence. (First interview, Kokkola)

Another student told us she had previously learned while staying abroad that her country was regarded as inferior and much less developed than the host country. For her, this was amplified by the categorization and imagery related to her country as presented in the international media: *"When I watch American drama or western movie, the way they describe Asian people is not good. Asian people have lower quality culture than theirs. So I thought all western people don't like Asian culture."* (Student B, second interview, Kokkola.) This had made her quite depressed as this negative experience of social identity was further combined with her own language problems and apprehension of speaking both in public and private arenas. This is finding is supported by a case study by Marx (2011) which portrayed a teacher student taking a semester-long intercultural program abroad. The student of the study seemed to encounter similar experiences of finding herself a cultural outsider or becoming the "other" while in the host context. However, in Marx's study these moments turned out to be productive for critical reflective thinking about cultures, particularly as she was supported by the host teacher in the process.

Proficiency in the host language and in English seems to be part of the exchange student's identity since it either blocked or enabled boundary crossing and socializing with people of the host country. For linguistic self-confidence (Noels, Pon & Clement 1996) it also seemed to be important how others (locals, peer international students, etc.) perceive and give meanings (implicitly or explicitly) to the exchange students communication capabilities.

The participants of this study were able to meet a lot of people from various parts of the world, and thus could negotiate their social and personal identities, in most cases arriving at a much more positive outcome. In the interview, the participants typically said they thought of themselves as global persons.

Stress related to intercultural exposure and situations

According to several studies (Bochner 1982; Kim 2001; Kim 2008; Kohonen 2005; Ward 2003), both positive feelings (e.g. fun, joy, sensations of beauty and exotic experiences) and negative feelings (e.g. despair, anger, frustration, and homesickness) are part and parcel of intercultural adaptation and learning. However, stress is seen as crucial to the intercultural adaptation process, as it "allows for self-(re)organization and self-renewal (…) the stress-adaptation-growth process continues as long as there are new environmental changes" (Kim 2008:364). On a more drastic note, Kohonen (2005), who studied the experience of expats, referred to the proverb that "moving is second to death from the stress point of view." Non-formal intercultural learning outside of the campus requires students to make sense of surprises and paradoxes, and to adapt to stressors of various kinds (cf. Kim 2001).

While the exchange students reported meaningful and successful experiences during their exchange period in general, their negative emotions and occasional stressful experiences were, related to reactions and verbalised perceptions by locals on campus and in the wider host context as well as by peer international students. Hurtful categorising, expressed below as 'racism', and experiences of social isolation were not uncommon in the students' accounts (cf. Ayano 2006).

> **Interviewer 3:** *When you think back, before you were coming to this country as an exchange student, what beliefs about local people did you have and what has changed since your stay here?*
>
> **Student A:** *The only thing I had a problem with here (…) was racism, because I experienced it [elsewhere], and of course there is also racism [in that country], but they are used to having lots of people other countries, so we cannot see the racism, and even if they are, they don't express it like that. And they are also really friendly. And also the [host country people] are really friendly, but not in a deep way.* (First interview, Innsbruck)

In addition, the negative emotions were related to situations where the exchange students had to adapt to new, unfamiliar academic practices, which was challenge for them. In the case below, the student was

faced with an uncomfortable situation during a group activity.

> **Interviewer KR:** *What differences of working style could you identify in the courses that you took?*

> **Student A:** *When we had a project (…) we were three. And X and me were trying to do it part by part, like she does this part and I do that part, but he wanted us to do the whole work together. It was so stressful for us, we always do it like that, I do chapter one and you do chapter two, and then we collaborate with these, but he wanted us to do step by step all together, because we don't have the same timetables, it's hard to find a time to work together. And he had really strong opinions, and we said ok (…). But we preferred it the other way. That was the problem with group work.* (First interview, Innsbruck)

Also, the exchange students experienced negative emotions when a certain situation was contrary to their expectations. As shown in the excerpt below, the students expected to meet friends through a buddy program, as well as receive support from the university. However, they were disappointed by the services provided.

> **Interviewer 1:** *Have your made friends with the locals at the university?*

> **Student D:** *In [my country] we usually have the buddy system (…) the exchange student came to our university and then we meet the friend (…) there are many Student Union tutors [at the host university], but they don't care.* (First interview, Kokkola)

Interestingly, negative and stressful emotions allowed individuals to reflect on the differences and similarities among cultures, sustain and be tolerant of stressful periods, and develop a more positive understanding of the context. It indicates how the students' emotional dissonance initiated the cognitive recognition in their contexts (Golombek & Johnson 2004), and contributed to building intercultural and global perspectives.

Interactions and communication for interpersonal understanding

Interacting and communicating are the key components for global experiences (Byram 1997; Kim 2008; Linell 2003; Mansilla & Jackson 2011). Truly dialogical interactions and communication allow individuals to share their feelings and thoughts with others, and to understand different cultures, perspectives and relationships. Dialogue is essential for making sense of other people's perspectives and experience; in many cases, people going abroad face a challenge to communicate with local people even though they use English as a common language. Using nonverbal expressions and communication technologies is an additional way for a deeper understanding in interpersonal communication (Byram 1997; Witte 2010).

> **Interviewer 2:** *How did you interact with others, especially in group work? How many roles did you do?*

> **Student A:** *Yes, we used numbers to communicate. I said give me paper, give me pen, I was drawing, they were drawing, I was drawing. This? You mean this? No… this, ah… yes, this this, so it came out very very good idea but drawing everything, writing is the out, asking Google translator.* (First interview, Korea)

As shown in the above case, the exchange students integrated a range of modes (e.g. gestures, facial expressions, numbers and drawings) to communicate with local students when communicating in English did not work well. They also used Google translator that turns texts written in local languages to English and vice versa.

We also observed that the students actively used the Facebook group to visually narrate their process of learning. Experiences could be shared more richly when audio and video were used. There was, however,

little reflection evident in the articulation on the Facebook site. Even narration directed to the small virtual community is primarily of a statement nature: what happened, or what was experienced and seen. The interpretation of what these events have meant for the individual and the growth of his/her global mind can be easily interpreted at some level, but on the other hand, remain at a more general level.

In the host context, the exchange students had many chances to understand the local cultures as well as reflect on their own cultures, which is related to how globally competent individuals understand perspectives and communicate with diverse people (Mansilla & Jackson 2011).

The interpersonal and intellectual growth is more evident in learning and working in groups. In many cases, group activities which involve solving real problems and developing authentic products can enhance individuals' communication skills (Witte 2010) and knowledge construction (Liu & Dall'alba 2012; Palincsar 1998). The findings of the interviews showed that the exchange students were respectful to group members who have a different culture, and were willing to share opinions and to learn new things from different points of view.

> **Interviewer 2:** *How did you share your emerging learning with others? What change do you identify in your thinking and action?*
>
> **Student A:** *I think improved my group working skills, I think so, because I learned to step back and let our people talk, because I always tend to [do] this this this, I want to do, I [am] ok, what do you want to do? What do you want to add? Now it's what can we do? And everybody….something like that? I think I've improved that.* (Second interview, Korea)

The exchange students had opportunities to work with local students during their regular courses. They needed to discuss relevant topics, to develop common understanding, and to make artifacts and products together as learning outcomes. During the processes, they tried to be open minded by listening to others and collaborating together to achieve their goals, which allowed them to improve their interpersonal understanding and skills. It is also evident in a response to one of the questions in the online survey, which asked "*How much did the programs/events listed above help you to get a better understanding of the culture and society of the target country? Please explain the major reason*". The respondent wrote "*When we did a group works, I realised how different we are*".

Managing various ways of communication and overcoming the challenges of working with others who have different cultural backgrounds give individuals more chances to enhance their global mind and competences (Mansilla & Jackson, 2011). In particular, group work that must achieve a common goal with culturally diverse members may be a critical context to build and enhance interpersonal and cultural understanding.

Conclusions

This study investigated how exchange students from Korea and the EU constructed and re-constructed their global minds in a study abroad project. Interviews were employed to gather evidence of participants' experiences and analyzed using the meaning condensation method. Subsequently, survey results and Facebook posts were reviewed. As a result, five themes emerged which provide insight and understanding of the students' experiences.

Personal change and growth cannot be observed easily and explicitly. However, an unfamiliar context in a different culture can significantly affect the personal growth of exchange students, as well as enhance their intercultural and global understanding. The five themes in the study showed how their experiences allow students to construct and develop a global mind.

Firstly, in the host context which was most often totally new to them, the exchange students were able to reflect on the host society and develop novel meaning structures. They used the potentials of the context,

including social networks, to develop their intercultural perspectives, each in their own ways. This enabled them to identify with the locals.

The second theme of the study, which overlaps with the first one, relates to how the exchange students made sense of the educational systems and practices which they encountered in their host school classes and exchange universities. They reflected on their own career goals within the teaching profession, and how they could use some of the instructional approaches in their home context.

The third theme opens up vistas to understanding the complexity of exchange students' identity development. These identities were typically negotiated when meeting friends and other people both on and off campus as well as in the wider social arena. Reflections about themselves as (more) global persons became apparent.

The fourth theme is about unexpected experiences and unfamiliar situations. When the exchange students were confronted with a situation contrary to their beliefs and expectations, all of their senses and emotions were actively engaged in the context, and stressful and negative feelings could dominate their emotions. However, these experiences provide students with the momentum to reflect deeply and to develop their perspective of intercultural understanding. The experiences might provide a push towards extended learning processes and transformative learning outcomes, especially as they made the students think of their identities as individuals and group members.

Last but not least, we established the fifth theme, which is communicating and interacting with people using diverse approaches to construct and reconstruct global minds. Dialogue is an essential way to share ideas and feelings, and to make sense of other people's perspectives and experiences. Also, it is evident that nonverbal expressions and technological support effectively facilitated interpersonal and cultural understanding in this study. In particular, interaction with team members to achieve common learning goals allowed the participants to be more aware of cultural differences, to be more open and tolerant of these differences, and to act in an integrative way, which is critical to the globally competent individuals.

As shown in this research study, constructing a global mind is a complex process; it happens consciously and unconsciously, it is affected by the social context, and it affects in various ways the exchange student's awareness and sense of oneself as an individual. From this perspective, global education focuses on the student's personal growth in relation to their intercultural skills, attitudes and identities. Global education is about more than obtaining knowledge and skills; it takes a holistic approach where intellectual growth combines with emotional and interpersonal understanding, and provides the continuity and interaction of educative experience (Dewey 1938). The accumulation of practical and theoretical professional knowledge with increasing diversity, sophistication and depth is certainly one of the great affordances of study abroad in order to enhance global minds.

As a team of practitioner-researchers representing a fairly wide range of cultural and educational contexts as designated by the bilateral KE-LeGE project, the researchers undertook a holistic approach to explore the exchange students' study abroad experiences. The fact that the researchers involved exchange students as research participants across two continents and interviewed each of them twice in situ can be seen as a strength of this study. The researchers also think that it was significant that they tried to be open-minded and did not look at the students' accounts of study abroad experiences based on where they came from. Thus the researchers did not compose a grammar of culture (Holliday 2011) to understand students' experiences. As Dervin (2010) puts it critically, categorizing study participants into groups defined by nationality, ethnicity, or religion may lead to promoting cultural differentialism and thus not gaining a co-constructive horizon in the research effort.

As to the weaknesses of this research study, the researchers acknowledge that an exploratory study like this is limited to formulating hypotheses and offering thematic insights as if from a bird's eye view, instead of reaching more in-depth research claims and explanations. Also, the fact that all the interviews were conducted in a foreign language (English) can be seen as a limitation when seeking rich description and trying to tap the deeper meanings of the individual research participants.

The next steps of this research will include additional interviews with the next student cohorts and triangulation with the survey data. Specific focus will be put on trying to better trace the temporal and networking aspects of the exchange experience, for instance by utilizing narrative inquiry as a methodological approach. Also, it would be very worthwhile to explore how the students, upon returning to the home context, enhanced their career goals and developed their professional and intercultural identities as part of life-wide and life-long learning.

References

ATC21S (2011). *Assessment and Teaching of 21st Skills*. Retrieved from http://atc21s.org/

Ayano, M. (2006). Japanese students in Britain. In M. Byram & A. Feng (Eds.), *Living and studying abroad: Research and practice* (pp. 11–37). Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Bochner, S. (1982). The social psychology of cross-cultural relations. In S. Bochner (Ed.), *Cultures in contact: Studies in cross-cultural interactions (pp. 6–36)*. Oxford: Pergamon.

Brindley, R, Quinn, S., & Morton, M. L. (2009) Consonance and dissonance in a study abroad program as a catalyst for professional development of pre-service teachers. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 25, 525–532.

Byram, M. (1997). *Teaching and assessing intercultural communicative competence*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters. Byram, M. (2006). Introduction. In M. Byram & A. Feng (Eds.) *Living and Studying Abroad: Research and Practice (pp. 1-10)*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Deardorff, D. (2006). Identification and assessment of intercultural competence as a student outcome of internationalization. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 10(3), 241-266.

Dervin, F. (2010). Assessing Intercultural Competence in Language Learning and Teaching: a critical review of current efforts. In F. Dervin, & E. Suomela-Salmi (Eds.), *New Approaches to Assessment in Higher Education (pp. 155-172)*. Bern: Peter Lang.

Dewey, J. (1938). *Experience and education*. In The Later Works vol. 13. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press.

Feast, V., Collyer-Braham, S., & Bretag, T. (2011). Global experience: The development and preliminary evaluation of a programme designed to enhance students' global engagement. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*, 48(3), 239–250.

Golombek, P. R. & Johnson, K. E. (2004). Narrative inquiry as a mediational space: examining emotional and cognitive dissonance in second-language teachers' development. *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice,* 10(3), 307-327.

Hansen, D. (2010). Cosmopolitanism and education: A view from the ground. *Teachers College Record,* 112(1), 1-30. Holliday, A. (2011). *Intercultural communication and ideology*. London: SAGE. Kim, Y. Y. (2001). *Becoming intercultural*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Kim, Y. Y. (2008). Intercultural personhood: Globalization and a way of being. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations,* 32(4), 359–368.

Kohonen, E. (2005). Developing global leaders through international assignments: An identity construction perspective. *Personnel Review,* 34(1), 22-36.

Korthagen, F. (2004). In search of essence of a good teacher: Towards a more holistic approach in teacher education. *Teaching and Teacher Education,* 20(1), 77–97.

Kvale, S., & Brinkmann, S. (2008). *Interviews: Learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Linell, P. (2003). *Rethinking language, mind, and world dialogically*. Charlotte, NC: IAP.

Liu, S., & Dall'Alba, G. (2012). Learning intercultural communication through group work oriented to the world beyond the classroom. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 37(1), 19-32. Lucas, A. H. (2010). *Distinguishing between multicultural and global education: The challenge of conceptualizing and addressing the two fields*. *The Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues and Ideas*, 83, 211-216

Mansilla, V. B., & Jackson, A. (2011). *Educating for global competence: Preparing our youth to engage the world*. *Asia Society*. Retrieved from http://asiasociety.org/files/book-globalcompetence.pdf

Mezirow, J. (2000). *Learning as transformation: Critical perspectives on a theory in progress*. San Francisco, LA: Jossey-Bass.

Noels, K. A., Pon, G., & Clement, R. (1996). Language, identity and adjustment: The role of linguistic self-confidence in the acculturation process. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, 15(3), 246-264.

Palincsar, A. S. (1998). Social constructivist perspectives on teaching and learning. *Annual Review of Psychology,* 45, 345–375. Pence, H. M. & Macgillivray, I. K. (2008). The impact of an international field experience on preservice teachers. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *24*, 14-25.

Pearson-Evans, A. (2006). Recording the journey: Diaries of Irish students in Japan. In M. Byram & A. Feng (Eds.), *Living and studying abroad: Research and practice* (pp. 38–63). Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Reimer, K. & McLean, L. R. (2009) Conceptual clarity and connections: Global education and teacher candidates. *Canadian Journal of Education*, 32, 903–926.

Reimers, F. (2009). Enlightening globalization: An opportunity for continuing education. *Continuing Higher Education Review,* 73, 32–45.

Ricoeur, P. (1992). *Oneself as another.* (K. Blamey, Trans.). London: University of Chicago Press. (Original work published 1990).

Tarrant, M. A. (2010). A conceptual framework for exploring the role of studies abroad in nurturing global citizenship. *Journal of Studies in International Education,* 14(5), 433-451.

Ward, C. (2003). Psychological theories of culture contact and their implications for training and intervention. In D. Landis, J. Bennett, & M. Bennett (Eds.), *Handbook of Intercultural Training* (3rd ed.) (pp. 185–216). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities of practice: Learning, meaning, and identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Wertsch, J. (1991). *Voices of the mind: Sociocultural approach to mediated action*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Witte, A. E. (2010). The global awareness curriculum in international business programs: A critical perspective. *Journal of Teaching in International Business*, 21(2), 101-131.

About the Authors

Esko JOHNSON, PhD (Education) was formerly employed as lecturer of English Language and Communication at Centria University of Applied Sciences, Finland. In addition to teaching English for academic and technology purposes, he designed and taught courses for intercultural education at his university. Dr Johnson's research interests include intercultural adaptation and learning as well as teacher development. His autobiographical PhD study, which he defended at the University of Eastern Finland in 2011, explored the development of a language teacher's professional identity, skills, and knowledge in the changing context of work.

Dr. Heeok HEO is professor in the Department of Computer Education at Sunchon National University, South Korea. Her primary interests are teaching and learning theories in technology-based environments, the development of e-Learning environments, and teacher education on ICT use and global education. Professor Heo's major research topics have ranged from philosophical conceptualizations of learning experiences via advanced technologies in K-12 education to designing advanced learning models in higher education.

Klaus REICH is teacher education coordinator at the University of Innsbruck, Austria. He specialises in teacher education and in e-learning, including e-accessibility and usability, barrier-free web design and evaluation. He calls on intense project and management experience in these fields in both university and independent research center environments.

Irja LEPPISAARI PhD (Ed) is principal lecturer of online pedagogy at Averko eLearning Centre administered by the Centria University of Applied Sciences, Finland. Her post-doctoral research focuses especially on authentic e-learning and e-mentoring, and continuing professional development. Her most recent research projects aim to create education models for e-learning which promote working life cooperation as well as create new forms of multicultural e-learning practices. She has published altogether 80 articles, half of which are published in refereed international scientific edited volumes and in refereed international scientific conference proceedings.

Dr Okhwa LEE is professor for Educational Technology at the Department of Education, Chungbuk National University. Her academic interests are educational innovation with technology support. Dr Lee has served on three President's committees including the committee for educational reform. She was the chairperson for the Korean Association for Educational Information and Media. She runs a social enterprise, after school company, "Smart School" and the educational research institute at Chungbuk National University.

Authors' Address

Heeok Heo
Sunchon National University
Jongang-ro 255
Suncheon, Jeollanamdo
Republic of Korea (South Korea)

Corresponding author
Heeok Heo
hoheo@sunchon.ac.kr
Tel: +82 61 750 3343

---

[1] The EU consortium for the project consists of four universities: Centria University of Applied Sciences (Finland) and University of Oulu (Finland), University of Innsbruck (Austria), and University of Tallinn (Estonia). The three universities form the Korean consortium are: Chungbuk National University, Sunchon National University and Korea University.

[2] The acronym 'KE-LeGE' means Korean and European Leaders for Global Education.

[3] This will be described in detail in the following section.