

A Model of Faculty Cultural Adaption on a Short-Term International Professional Development Experience

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Abstract

College of agriculture graduates must be prepared to work effectively within a global workforce and to have cross-cultural experiences. Unfortunately, every student is not able to participate in study abroad programming. However, students benefit from global perspectives integrated into the curriculum. Teaching faculty must possess an understanding of culture in order to effectively educate their students. The purpose of this study was to develop a grounded theory to explain the process of cultural adaptation that occurred when one group of U.S. faculty traveled abroad for a short-term professional development experience. The following eight stages emerged from the study: preparation and planning, excitement, frustration, building relationships, cultural comparisons, cultural understanding, cultural appreciation, advancing expertise and future plans. Faculty participants uniquely experienced a variety of stages of cultural adaptation, although not in the same sequence. Facilitators of similar experiences should take these stages into account as they plan study abroad programs.

Introduction

Graduates from colleges of agriculture must be prepared to work in a global economy (National Research Council, 2009). A globalized agricultural industry requires graduates with cross-cultural experiences and an understanding of agricultural issues around the globe (Acker, 1999). A preferred way to provide international experiences for undergraduates is study abroad (Tritz & Martin, 1997). However, financial limitations and language differences are often reported as barriers to studying abroad (Briers, Shinn, & Nguyen, 2010). Faculty can avoid these barriers while simultaneously reaching

more students by integrating global perspectives in courses they teach on-campus (National Research Council, 2009). However, this approach requires faculty to have an understanding of both the culture and the technical discipline as applied in a given country. This study explores how faculty adapted during a short-term international professional development experience in Trinidad and Tobago.

Conceptual Framework/Review of Literature

This study was conducted with the intent of developing grounded theory to explain the process of cultural adaptation that occurred when one group of U.S. college faculty traveled abroad for a short-term professional development experience. As Lincoln and Guba (1985) acknowledged, "*No a priori theory could anticipate the many realities that the inquirer will inevitably encounter in the field, nor encompass the many factors that make a difference at the micro (local) level*" (p. 205). However, this study was informed by two contrasting works on culture shock (Oberg, 1960) and the intercultural adaptation process (Hottola, 2004), specifically in the tourism sector. These works helped the authors to consider the phenomenon of cultural adaptation prior to exploring its existence in an academic professional development context. An overview of the relevant theories follows.

The concept of culture shock was first described by Oberg (1960) to describe the unpleasant feelings and stress a sojourner experiences in an unfamiliar culture. Oberg hypothesized that four stages exist within the process of culture shock: honeymoon, crisis, recovery and adjustment. These stages follow the "U-Curve" pattern proposed by Lysgaard (1955) to represent the

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emotional highs and lows associated with the process of culture shock. The honeymoon stage is characterized by the excitement and euphoria associated with being in a new environment. Sojourners are likely to overlook minor grievances and focus on the positive. The honeymoon stage gives way to the crisis stage as sojourners begin to experience frustration and anxiety as a result of the differences between the new environment and their home environment. A lack of familiarity may drive the sojourner to seek interactions with other nationals from their home country (Oberg, 1960). Oberg identified the crisis stage as the point where true culture shock occurs.

In the recovery stage, sojourners take action to increase their comfort in the new environment. This may include learning the local language and customs as well as developing new relationships with host nationals (Manz, 2003). The final stage of Oberg's (1960) theory of culture shock features the adjustment of sojourners to the host society. Sojourners accept the norms and values of the new society and no longer experience the same levels of anxiety.

Subsequent researchers have been critical of Oberg's (1960) theory of culture shock. Brown and Holloway (2008) found international postgraduate students' feelings of excitement were overshadowed by their anxieties and frustrations, contrary to Oberg's characterization of the honeymoon stage. Church (1982) questioned whether or not it was imperative for sojourners to proceed through the stages in order and challenged the lack of key indicators specific to each stage. Ward and Kennedy (1993) asserted the focus on culture shock had impeded more valuable investigations examining "the process and product of cross-cultural transition" (p. 221).

An alternative to focusing on the shock experienced by sojourners when traveling has been provided by the emerging study of intercultural adaptation. Intercultural adaptation seeks to understand the psychological, emotional, ecological and behavioral aspects of "tourists' learning process in the new environment" (Hottola, 2004, p. 447). Using case studies of backpackers in South Asia, Hottola proposed the dynamic model of culture confusion as a grounded theory for explaining intercultural adaptation. Hottola's (2004) dynamic model of culture confusion begins with an initial onset of culture confusion. Culture confusion "focuses both on the problematic part of the adaptation process and on the frequently simultaneous presence of enjoyment, success and learning" (Hottola, 2004, p. 453). Confusion initially occurs at the very beginning of an international experience, brought on by the onslaught of new information. The initial phase of confusion lasts only a few days as sojourners begin to develop a basic understanding of the new environment (Hottola, 2004). Rather than the initial euphoria described by Oberg (1960), Hottola described the frequently variable emotions of the initial phase as both positive and negative, with a tendency toward the negative as sojourners begin to adjust to the realities of

their new environment. The first impressions developed by a sojourner during the initial phase may influence his/her attitude for the remainder of the travel experience.

Further deviating from Oberg (1960), Hottola (2004) described the initial phase as the phase where "shock" is mostly likely to occur resulting from extreme disappointment, sensory overload, or a combination of both. Individuals who find themselves experiencing overload shock will regress in their experience; as explained by Hottola: "*Not infrequently, much time is spent within the accommodation during the first few days in the new environment, with periodical short excursions to the potentially stressful public space*" (2004, p. 457). Spending too much time in isolation away from the public space or having continued negative experiences - especially illnesses - associated with the public space can lead sojourners to develop negative perceptions of the differences that exist in their new environment (Hottola, 2004). This hampers intercultural adaptation.

A phase of adaptation and opposition follows as tourists begin to form more concrete attitudes towards their new environment (Hottola, 2004). Adaptation is associated with increased knowledge and improved perceptions of control. Adaptive sojourners are likely to want to return to the same place again someday. Conversely, sojourners experiencing opposition tend to view the hosts and their cultural differences with hostility, have trouble interacting with members of the host culture and are highly unlikely to ever return. Hottola found high levels of adaptation and opposition were unlikely to develop in short-term sojourners, due to the lack of long-term immersion in the new environment, although significantly positive (e.g. developing friendships) or significantly negative (e.g. experiencing harassment) experiences may cause short-term sojourners to become adaptive or oppositional more quickly than expected.

According to Hottola (2004), "*the majority [of sojourners] probably have feelings of relief and euphoria of returning home mixed with feelings of longing for their travel experiences, new friends and tourist/sojourner status*" (p. 460) during the readjustment period. Reverse culture confusion may occur as sojourners struggle to reconcile what they have learned during their travels with the values and norms of home. In some cases, sojourners may even prefer the other environment but generally readjustment will not be a major issue following short-term experiences (Hottola, 2004).

Although insightful, the theories outlined above may not be sufficient to explain the cultural adaptation experiences by university faculty members who travel abroad on a short-term professional development experience. This group of people is likely more educated than the average tourist and the purpose of this travel (professional development for faculty) likely created a different kind of experience than typical tourism. This research will seek to understand this phenomena of cultural adaptation in this specific context.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to develop a grounded theory to explain the process of cultural adaptation that occurred when one group of U.S. faculty traveled abroad for a short-term professional development experience.

Methods**Context**

In March of 2011 a group of eight faculty from the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences at Texas A&M University spent 10 days in Trinidad and Tobago to learn more about agriculture and culture. Travel was funded by a USDA grant designed to help faculty integrate global examples into their courses back on their home campus. Global examples were integrated through the development of Reusable Learning Objects (RLOs) that would be used to educate students on campus. In addition to these faculty participants, there were two faculty coordinators and two graduate students in agricultural education from Texas A&M University and two of the researchers from the University of Florida who accompanied the group. While in Trinidad and Tobago, the group had frequent contact with faculty and students from the University of the West Indies.

Faculty participants included three females and five males. Areas of study included human nutrition, youth, fisheries, horticulture, GIS/GPS, education and distance education. The participants were from the following locations: California, Italy, Ukraine, Texas, Tennessee, Japan, Oklahoma and North Carolina. Additionally, the two faculty coordinators were from Texas A&M University and included one female and one male professor originally from Texas and Alabama. Areas of expertise include social science/educational research design and program evaluation. The two graduate students were females from Texas and Indiana studying agricultural leadership.

The trip included a wide variety of activities, including frequent visits to the campus of the University of the West Indies (UWI), tours of agricultural operations and visits to cultural and environmental sites of interest. The entire group was together for about half the time. During the remaining time, participants accompanied hosts from Trinidad to explore sites of interest related to their disciplinary expertise. The group spent eight days in Trinidad and then two days in Tobago. In Trinidad, the entire group stayed at a family-run bed and breakfast located in a suburban area outside of Port of Spain and near the UWI campus. While in Tobago the entire group stayed in a tourist hotel near the airport and the beach.

Data Collection

Primary data for this study were collected through semi-structured interviews and during a focus group conducted while on the trip. The semi-structured interviews took place throughout the entire program and participants were interviewed individually, in pairs, or as a group. Nine individual interviews, two paired inter-

views, 2 group interviews and one focus group took place. The focus group occurred in Tobago on the last night in the country. Participants were asked to reflect on their experiences on the trip and express how they were impacted. Secondary data were collected through participant observation by the two researchers. Primary data were used as the basis for this study and the secondary data were used to help interpret primary data.

Data Analysis

A third researcher who did not attend the trip initially analyzed data and then the team of researchers collaborated on final interpretation of the data. Prior to data analysis, the transcript from the focus group was reviewed three times by the researcher. The first reading allowed the researcher to gain familiarity with the transcript; the second reading allowed the researcher to think about the data in terms of the proposed research question and the third reading allowed the researcher to reduce the data set by disregarding any data that was deemed irrelevant based on the specific research question.

The reduced data set was analyzed using the constant comparative method. The constant comparative method was used because it allowed the researcher to identify patterns within the data (Dooley, 2007). In order to draw connections between identified patterns (Dooley, 2007), the following procedures were used: open coding, axial coding and selective coding (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Line by line coding was used during the open coding phase of data analysis in order to categorize the data line by line (Glaser, 1978). In accordance with Charmaz (2006), the researcher completed line by line coding as quickly as possible to help ensure that the codes that emerged were based on the data and not pre-conceived ideas. Once each line of the transcripts was coded, the researcher began axial coding in order to differentiate and separate the identified codes from the first stage of coding (Grbich, 2007). Axial coding categorizes the data by bringing the segmented data that emerged during open coding back into a coherent whole (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The final stage of analysis was selective coding. Selective coding allowed the researcher to systematically select categories, compare across categories and explain the relationships that emerged from the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Additionally, the researcher used in vivo coding throughout the analysis process. In vivo coding allowed the researcher to "preserve participants' meanings of their views and actions in the coding itself" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 54). The researcher used the in vivo codes to gain a deeper understanding of what was happening within the context of the participants (Charmaz, 2006). They also helped to ensure that the researcher's analysis of the data was representative of the participants' experience (Charmaz, 2006). The Codes that emerged from data analysis were used to develop stages of cultural adaptation.

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Once the third researcher finished the initial analysis of the data, the three researchers met to discuss initial findings. The other two researchers helped refine and clarify the emergent themes using field notes gathered during participant observation of the experience. This served as a mechanism to triangulate the data and ensure trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Trustworthiness was also ensured through the use of prolonged engagement and persistent observation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Additionally, an audit trail was maintained by the researchers to track methodological decisions and a member check was conducted.

Data is presented below in the form of statements directly from participants and in summarizing statements from the researchers. Participants are represented using aliases to ensure their confidentiality.

Results and Discussion

The findings of this study have been organized in the form of overarching stages that include preparation and planning, excitement, frustration, building relationships, cultural comparisons, cultural understanding, cultural appreciation, advancing expertise and future plans. The stages and sub-stages will be expanded upon throughout the following sections.

Preparation and Planning

Participants did not entirely know what to expect from the Trinidad and Tobago faculty international professional development experience. In preparation for the experience, faculty members consciously thought about their feelings and experiences that they may encounter during the experience. Mark recognized the invitation to attend the experience as a wonderful opportunity, but did not have any idea of what to expect from this experience. In addition, prior to the experience, Mark struggled with why the program leaders wanted to travel with a large group of faculty members and take on more responsibilities. However, Carrie had the opposite concern. She was struggling with how she would fit in with a group of faculty from the college of agriculture, since she was the only faculty member from a different college. Janet expected to view the faculty study abroad experience through a problem focused lens that would enable her to focus on the country.

Academic Focus

There was a major focus on the creation of the reusable learning objectives (RLOs). Mike noted that he focused on the academic expectation of the experience, which was to create RLOs. Forethought was given to what type of academic information that would be useful in the preparation of the RLOs (Mike). Bob also believed that the focus of the experience was to create teaching materials based on technical content. Carrie stated, "I came here on this trip knowing that I had to look consciously look for data that I could use for my RLO..." The focus on the RLOs prior to the faculty

study abroad experience brought on some frustration and anxiety towards the RLOs. Mike said, "I'm not sure I still understand exactly what that [RLO] is. RLO that's sort of a mysterious concept."

Excitement

Participants experienced excitement from time to time throughout the experience. Sara expressed excitement to be on the trip and to try new foods. She was also eager to learn about agriculture within Trinidad. Sara was very excited to learn about how the youth are taught in Trinidad. Additionally, Carrie felt excitement when she witnessed a conversation that led to a discussion on research methods. Excitement was not only experienced in regards to teaching and academics. Excitement was also experienced through the interactions with the people of Trinidad. Sara was passionate about "understanding the people and social behavior" prevalent in Trinidad. Mark was also eager to learn about the culture in Trinidad as well as participate in traditional tourist activities.

Frustration

Participants also experienced frustration. Faculty struggled with the length of the experience and the amount of time away from their families (Tom). However, Tom indicated that the study abroad experience was purposefully long in order to allow the participants to gain an understanding of the culture of Trinidad and Tobago. Frustration regarding the length of the experience diminished after the fifth or sixth day of the program and participants began to understand the importance of a lengthy program that provided plenty of opportunity for cultural immersion (Tom). Additionally, the food caused frustration with some of the participants. Tom complained about the food being too spicy to eat and that the spiciness caused upset stomachs.

Building Relationships

The interactions with local people from Trinidad and Tobago helped the participants to have a positive experience. Tom indicated that emersion in the culture and interactions with the people of Trinidad and Tobago would allow relationship development. Mike validated Tom's suggestion by indicating that the interactions with local people and the formation of relationships were some of the most meaningful activities of the experience. Interactions with the people of Trinidad and Tobago were not isolated to the professional workplace. Sara was invited and welcomed into a woman's home. The woman did not mind that the house was not perfectly clean or that holiday decorations were still up (Sara). Sara felt that the act of being invited into a stranger's home helped to forge a lifelong friendship and contributes to her desire to return to the country. Additionally, interaction with local people allowed Kate to experience everyday life in a meaningful way that is often overlooked on vacations.

Extended interactions with people from Trinidad and Tobago allowed for the participants to continuously experience the culture of the country. In referring to the UWI faculty and students who accompanied the group, Mark said, "I also appreciate the fact that you guys have been with us constantly and that was like having a piece of the country always with us."

Cultural Comparisons

Participants compared their observations and experiences to the observations and experiences that they have had in the United States (U.S.). Bob was surprised when he observed the geography because he thought that Trinidad would look like east Texas or the coast of Florida. Comparisons were being made in order to make sense of their observations. David and Bob noticed that the airport was built right along the beach. They both mentioned that the beach was prime real estate and therefore would not be used for an airport in the U.S.. David noticed that the rest of the beach looked similar to beach areas in the U.S. However, people in Trinidad and Tobago do use the beach for recreation and to relax with their families (David).

David noticed that the cities in Trinidad looked like cities in the U.S., but there was one major difference. The cities in Trinidad had people walking livestock down the road (David). While driving to the bed and breakfast, David noticed that there were many nice homes, but they had bars over the windows, which is not something that you would typically see in the U.S. if the home was in a safe area.

Comparisons were made regarding the mother/daughter relationships in Trinidad. The mothers in Trinidad are extremely protective of their daughters and strive to protect their daughters' reputations (Kelly). The protectiveness is similar to other cultures including people in the U.S. (Kelly). However, there was a difference when it came to mothers and daughters dressing provocatively for Carnival (Kelly). Kelly stated that "*the mother and daughter are both wearing these fabulous costumes and it's like I can't see most American mothers doing that.*" The acceptance of the provocative Carnival costumes has come about due to the celebratory tradition of Carnival (Kelly).

Cultural Understanding

It was through interactions with people in Trinidad and Tobago that allowed the participants to gain an understanding of the culture. Sara was able to ask the students at the UWI questions in order to understand how the people of Trinidad and Tobago view poverty, race and classes. A deeper conversation allowed Sara to begin to understand cultural issues that are present in Trinidad and that are not brought up in casual conversation. Sara recognized that not all aspects of culture are positive and the negatives combined with the positives provide the framework of the culture.

In an effort to be respectful, Emily had to figure out if it was culturally acceptable for the locals to eat meat. Once Emily realized that people in Trinidad commonly consumed meat, it was much easier for her to operate within the cultural norms. Additionally, Mark realized that Caribbean culture is different on each island. David realized many people in Trinidad go without the appropriate amount of food and have unsafe living conditions. However, Mark asserted that despite the poverty and poor living conditions, the people seemed very happy.

Cultural Appreciation

Even though participants experienced frustration due to the length of the experience, it was that length that allowed the participants to spend time getting to know the people of Trinidad and Tobago (Tom). According to Bob, relationship building helped him to realize how rich the experience was and how interactions with people allowed for the exploration of culture. Kate felt that she began to realize the importance of the culture in Trinidad and Tobago through a focus on everyday life. Kate's experiences in the local markets allowed her to gain a cultural understanding while experiencing cultural appreciation through participating in the everyday activities that take place in Trinidad and Tobago. Participants felt that the cultural immersion allowed them to focus on the culture (Carrie; Kelly).

Additionally, participants showed cultural appreciation through their openness and eagerness to return to the country. Mark felt that their interactions with the people in Trinidad helped them to better understand the culture and to feel comfortable traveling within in the country and being exposed to the culture. Tom acknowledged that all aspects of travel are nice, but it is the people that make the travel meaningful. "Now I can say with nearly certainty that this won't be my last time in Trinidad and Tobago" (Tom).

Advancing Expertise

Faculty looked for opportunities to enhance their academic expertise and teaching skills. Bob purposefully looked for opportunities to explore production agriculture in Trinidad. Through the observation of production agriculture, Bob was able to get a feel for agriculture in Trinidad and incorporate that into his knowledge base. Similarly, Joe acknowledged that the creation of the RLOs increased his knowledge base and would enhance his teaching skills. Additionally, communication with the professors at the UWI enabled Joe to discuss research and gain different perspectives within the field.

Future Plans

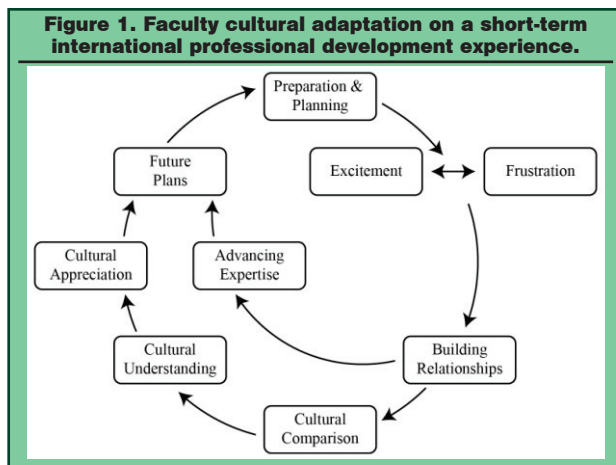
The accumulation of positive and negative experiences led the faculty to anticipate their next trip to Trinidad and Tobago. Four of the participants decided that it would be beneficial for their students to visit Trinidad and Tobago through a study abroad program (David;

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Lynn; Larry; Ryan). Mark stated that he would not hesitate to return to Trinidad on his own due to this recently acquired knowledge of the Trinidad and Tobago culture. In agreement with Mark, Joe said that he would return and contact some of the people through this program. Additionally, Mark agreed with many other participants and decided that he was going to keep some of his Trinidad money to encourage himself to return. Tom stated, "I can say with nearly certainty that this won't be my last time in Trinidad and Tobago" and that he would be willing to purchase Trinidad and Tobago money from other people. Similarly, Sara said, "*For Carnival I'm coming back and so for me to say I'm coming back I'm going to take...[Tom's] advice and keep my tt's [local currency] and that way I know I'll be back.*"

Conclusions, Implications and Recommendations

Faculty participants experienced a variety of stages of cultural adaptation, although not in the same sequence. Faculty participants went through a series of stages that were inconsistent with the existing tourism models (Hottola, 2004; Oberg, 1960). The stages experienced by participants included: preparation and planning, excitement, frustration, building relationships, cultural comparisons, cultural understanding, cultural appreciation, advancing expertise and future plans. The researchers have chosen to present these stages in the form of a cycle (see Figure 1).



The cycle begins with preparation and planning, which is characterized with both uncertainty about the experience and advanced thinking about expectations for the experience. The previous literature (Hottola, 2004; Oberg, 1960) did not explicitly address stages that might occur prior to travel, but it is plausible that tourists have similar feelings about preparation and planning.

Next faculty oscillated between excitement and frustration. They were excited about the opportunities, but were frustrated with the sacrifices made to travel and some of the food experienced on the trip. This dynamic interplay would be similar to Hottola's (2004) cultural confusion, which Hottola characterized as a period with mixed emotions. It may also correspond with Oberg's

(1960) stages of honeymoon and crisis. It would appear that in this regard that the faculty participants in the current study were similar to tourists in previous studies.

After arriving in the country, the faculty began building relationships, which continued throughout the experience. The previous research from the tourism literature (Hottola, 2004; Oberg, 1960) did not consider stages related to building personal relationships, although Oberg did express that in the recovery stage travelers might seek new relationships with host nationals. The lack of emphasis on relationships in the tourism models is understandable because the typical tourist experience is likely more focused on seeing landscapes and artifacts, as opposed to interacting with individual people.

Next, faculty progressed through two parallel pathways. On one pathway, faculty were interested in learning more about the people, first with cultural comparison when faculty compared their observations to what they know from the U.S.. Neither of the existing models (Hottola, 2004; Oberg, 1960) had a stage or phase where travelers explicitly compared their surroundings to their own country, although Hottola's opposition phase involved highlighting differences and Oberg's crisis stage also involved travelers focusing on differences. Interestingly, the two aforementioned theories characterized these as more negative stages or phase, which is different than observed on the current experience. The participants seemed to highlight differences from a more objective, observational perspective. This could be attributed to the research training that faculty received in their degree programs.

As they advanced, faculty started to seek out cultural understanding to gain a deeper insight into the people. This stage aligns with Oberg's (1960) recovery stage in which the tourist begins to gain comfort in the new environment. This stage would also correspond to Hottola's (2004) adaptation phase, although Hottola suggested that this might not occur on shorter experiences.

A few of the faculty then progressed to cultural appreciation and embraced the local culture with an eagerness for continued interactions with the people. This is also similar to Hottola's (2004) adaptation phase where the travelers embrace the local culture and seek out opportunities for more immersive experiences. Hottola suggested that this does not often happen on short-term experiences, which implies that a short-term faculty professional development experience might be different than a typical short-term tourist experience.

On the parallel pathway, which happened concurrently with learning about the people, faculty were focused on advancing expertise. This stage was an intentional focus of this particular experience and thus differentiates it from other types of tourist experiences (Hottola, 2004; Oberg, 1960). Observations by the researchers would suggest some faculty had challenges balancing the goals of learning about the people and learning more about their respective disciplines.

Finally, faculty completed the cycle by considering future plans, with most faculty expressing a desire to return to the country. Hottola (2004) referred to this group as adaptive sojourners, or travelers that had adapted to the environment and were interested in future interactions. Hottola further suggested that travelers might also face a period of readjustment and reverse cultural confusion as they transition back into their own culture. This phenomenon was not observed on this experience, likely because of the shorter duration.

A short-term faculty international professional development experience created the catalyst for faculty to move through a series of stages as they reacted and adapted to the experience. It was exciting to see that a short-term, intense experience was successful in eliciting a variety of responses from faculty. Given their busy schedules, many faculty are more likely to engage in a short-term experience, rather than a more prolonged experience. The evidence gathered in this study should be helpful in validating the potential impacts of these types of short-term experiences.

Facilitators of similar experiences should take these stages into account as they plan their trips, especially the parallel pathways related to learning about the people and advancing their own technical expertise. Maintaining an appropriate balance will likely lead to a more successful experience and greater satisfaction from faculty participants. Facilitators should also recognize that all participants may not go through each stage and participants may move through the stages at differing rates. Frequent interactions with participants will allow the facilitator to help individual participants process their experiences.

This research was conducted in a specific context. The format and activities of the experience were very intentional to provide faculty with an opportunity to advance both their understanding of the people and advance their expertise. Additionally, Trinidad and Tobago is an English-speaking nation and although the dialect was different, participants could easily communicate with the people. An experience in a different culture might yield different stages. Additional research should seek to explore other types of experiences.

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