



Rehearsing Change: Empowering Locally, Education Globally
The Pachaysana Institute and Universidad San Francisco de Quito
“Summary of Activities, Statistics, Evaluations and Community-Based Application”
Pilot Semester: January to May, 2015 (16 weeks)

Introduction

In an effort to raise consciousness of our work, as well as promote the Fair Trade Study Abroad model, each year we will briefly summarize what we have accomplished in the Rehearsing Change program. Here we offer 1) an explanation of activities, 2) an overview of statistics, 3) a compilation of participant evaluations, 4) a look into how the work produced during the semester continues in our partner communities, and 5) conclusions. This is a summary, limited to 2500 words, to best facilitate reading. Please feel free to contact us for more information.

Activities

Due to extenuating circumstances, we redesigned our pilot semester (spring 2015), maintaining the same academic program, but changing geographic locations. The new program was 75% in Quito and 25% in the Amazon region, where we worked in the communities of Mariscal Sucre and Tzawata (more info about these communities on our website). Three international students (from American University, Brandeis University and Juniata College) participated in the program. The first week focused on international student orientation, in which we carried out the necessary health and safety sessions, and we incorporated the Quito Eterno Foundation to facilitate cultural orientation sessions. Additionally, from their very first lunch in country, international students began their integration with the local community counterpart organization, the Nina Shunku Association.

In Quito, we realized 3 of our courses (*Identity and Place*, *Theatre for Social Action and Innovation*, *Storytelling: Language and Movement*) with Nina Shunku, an urban collective of youth activists, artists and educators that applies multidisciplinary methods to the preservation and promotion of cultural identity. In the Amazon, the international students, joined by three representatives of Nina Shunku, worked with two communities (Mariscal Sucre and Tzawata) in the class *Design and Evaluation of Sustainable Community Projects*. Each of the 4 classes included 45 contact hours with our faculty, challenging readings, continuous journaling and the creation of numerous projects, which demanded live presentations in Spanish and written components. In many cases, separate readings were given to international students and local counterparts, so that each group could share different perspectives. All Quito classes were held in the “Casa de las Identidades,” Nina Shunku’s eclectically designed home in Quito’s historical center. It includes a theatre, recording studio, cafeteria, meeting rooms, art studios and public spaces. The classes’ final projects were merged into one final theatrical presentation called

ComoUnidad Despierta (a play on words signifying both “Community, wake up” and “As a united front, we wake up”), which included storytelling, dance, forum theatre, spoken word and image theatre. It was presented three times: 1) in a public space at the campus of our academic partner, Universidad San Francisco de Quito, 2) in the Plaza de Teatro in Quito’s historical center as part of the celebration for International Worker’s Day, and 3) in Nina Shunku’s small theatre. The *Projects* course was carried out in open-air public spaces in the communities of Mariscal and Tzawata, culminating with the announcement that Pachaysana would partially fund two of the created projects. Students and counterparts spent the final class sessions adapting their projects to the announced budget for practical implementation (both projects are currently being carried out in Mariscal and Tzawata).

The program included several excursions, where international students joined local counterparts for the activities. These included the Tiputini Biodiversity Station deep within the rainforest, a Toxic Tour to the most contaminated areas of the rainforest and a 5-day journey to the Galapagos islands*.

** Exceptional circumstances forced us to make changes in the calendar and simultaneously opened up the opportunity for international students to travel to the Galapagos at a highly discounted rate; however, costs are prohibitive and we could not invite the counterparts. Thus, the excursion was treated as an extra-curricular and not an official part of the Rehearsing Change program.*

Statistics

Our Fair Trade Study Abroad model redistributes the tuition/fees from the international students, assuring equal educational opportunities for the community participants. Due to the fact that we only had three students, our dedicated faculty accepted reduced honorariums for the pilot semester, thus allowing for further application of the existing funds.

GOAL: Provide an equal or greater educational opportunity to an equal or greater amount of local community participants.

Number of International Students: 3 (all completed the four courses, or 180 hours of direct contact hours)

Number of Nina Shunku Community Participants: 14 (3 completed all four courses, or 180 hours of participation, including the *Projects* course carried out in the Amazon communities; 5 completed all three of the Quito-based courses, or 135 hours of participation; and 6 completed one of the Quito-based courses, or 45 hours of participation)

Number of Mariscal Sucre Community Participants: 3 (all completed the *Projects* course, 45 hours)

Number of Tzawata Community Participants: 3 (2 completed the *Projects* course, 45 hours of participation, and 1 completed the *Projects* course and one of the Quito-based courses. Note: this final participant returned to Quito for three weeks to study the final course with our group.)

If we measure this in terms of total contact hours: 3 international students participated in a total of 540 hours of quality educational programming versus 20 local community members who participated in a total of 1800 hours of quality educational programming. In other words, without sacrificing quality (in fact, participant evaluations suggest that we increased quality), we provided over 3 times the amount of access to local participants.

Each local participant received an official certificate from the Universidad San Francisco de Quito and Pachaysana detailing the courses taken and amount of hours dedicated to the project.

Distribution of Funds: Since locals and internationals use many of the same resources, we are still working on a system for measuring funds applied to both groups, so as to assure “fair trade.” For now, we measure that almost 25% of our total operating budget was directed exclusively toward financing community projects, community counterpart excursion costs and community counterpart scholarships. This does not include costs for faculty, who dedicate equal time to all participants, and administrative costs, which are applied equally between international students and local counterparts.

Evaluations

Since we need to collect extra information for our communications with US institutions, and we seek to not overburden community counterparts, our written program evaluations for international students were different from those of local participants.

INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

- Overall Evaluation of the program: 100% say EXCELLENT.
- Fulfillment of personal and educational goals: 100% say EXCEEDED MY GOALS
- To what degree would recommend Rehearsing Change to others: 100% say HIGHLY RECOMMEND
- Overall quality of program’s education: 100% say EQUAL TO or GREATER THAN or SIGNIFICANTLY GREATER THAN MY HOME SCHOOL
- Self-Evaluation of Spanish improvement: 66% VERY GOOD, 33% EXCELLENT
- Average rating for the 4 courses: 100% rate courses and faculty as VERY GOOD to EXCELLENT (almost exclusively EXCELLENT)
- Rate the on-site staff: 100% EXCELLENT
- 100% consider the on-site affordability to be VERY GOOD or EXCELLENT
- “Provided me with greater insight into myself”: 100% Very High
- “Increased my interest in local and global development”: 100% Very High
- “Contributed to my understanding of the USA (and/or the Western world)”: 100% Very High
- “Increased my ability to adapt to uncomfortable (or challenging) situations”: 100% Very High
- “Prepared me for my future (career, continued education, etc)”: 100% Very High

When asked to make general comments regarding the program, international students offered:

- “This program pushed me so much, or pushed me to push myself so much. I feel like a bigger person - I'd like to think that I am not only more compassionate and sensitive, but also generally aware of more. It especially inspired me to continue my pursuit of something I wasn't entirely sure I could achieve - sustainable community development and cultural empowerment based in mutual relationships rather than from the top/down or outside/in.”
- “This really molded my perspectives on justice, system change, and solidarity. I uncovered my personal story, the power of creativity, liberation through art, organization, and ecology, and the need to use new relationships as a foundation for an alternative future.”
- “This was the most liberating educational experience I have had in my 21 years of learning. Although considered "higher education", I felt I held agency as a student and thinker and felt space and encouragement to grow and share in fullness.”

Evaluations reveal several areas for improvement, including the coordination among courses and faculty, communications regarding the many assignments and structuring classes so that schedules are completely respected.

NINA SHUNKU PARTICIPANTS

- Overall satisfaction with the program: 100% say EXCELLENT
- *Storytelling* and *Projects* courses: 100% rated as EXCELLENT
- *Theatre* and *Identity* courses: 85% rated as EXCELLENT, 15% as VERY GOOD
- All instructors were rated as EXCELLENT by 85% to 100% of respondents

When asked what they have learned from the program, participants said:

- “Incredible, I could break through my fears and paradigms.”
- “I never before considered roots in defining self until this program.”
- “Understand communities as a means toward a new life.”
- “It got us to read.”
- “I have never been part of a theatre piece that uses the potential of each person, and then the possibility of interacting with the audience. We often talk about social change, but seldom do you have the opportunity to experiment with it, and this program gave the opportunity.”
- “We can fight for a better life through the arts, it is a tool for transforming conflicts and empowerment.”
- “I learned to become more philosophical and how to develop my writing, especially structure.”
- “I learned how to research, how to design and evaluate projects with impact, and how to decode conflict through narrative and identity.”
- “Identity as tool for change.”
- “Able to move in spaces that I had never been able to move before.
- “Sometimes, we need to unlearn”
- “A great way to learn, understanding storytelling as an experiment of decolonizing the body and mind.”
- “A very complete process. Learning and sharing with the different communities was incredible, it opens your eyes and allows you to really see the lives of others.”

When asked what they value from learning with the international students:

- “Love... We felt together... Friendship... Sharing”
- “Found solidarity in a common goal.”
- “Learn about other ways of life and thinking, which breaks down the structures that I had formed.”
- “It helped me understand "the other" and realize that we are all brothers”
- “A give and take of knowledge, experiences, problems, and to realize we are fighting for a free world and a greater level of consciousness.”

MARISCAL AND TZAWATA PARTICIPANTS

- Overall satisfaction with the program: 80% say EXCELLENT, 20% VERY GOOD
- All instructors were rated as EXCELLENT by 100% of respondents

When asked via several questions what they have learned from the program, respondents said:

- “By working together on ideas we gain greater force”
- “(To do a project) first identify the problem and need. (Then to do the project well) how to design a project based on our reality.”
- “Developing my own knowledge, being able to support my community with the knowledge I gained”

When asked what they value from learning with the international students and Nina Shunku counterparts:

- “An incredible experience. I never imagined that an Ecuadorian and North American had so much in common.”
- “With the exchange of experiences we helped each other to achieve our goals... feels like a family”

Community-Based Application

It is too early to fully evaluate the application of our program with our community partners, but we can highlight three on-going projects:

- Mariscal Sucre – Originally created in the *Projects* course, Mariscal is carrying out a project (partially financed through international student tuition and fees) focused on capacity building and promotion of the community’s budding tourist services. It includes the contracting of workshops for their tourist guides in training, as well as the design and implementation of promotional materials and a networking campaign.
- Tzawata – Also created in the *Projects* course, Tzawata is working closely with Nina Shunku on a project (partially financed through international student tuition and fees) that uses arts and popular communication technique to promote and preserve the use of the Kichwa language among the community’s youth.
- Nina Shunku – The collective is currently adapting the final presentation, *ComoUnidad Despierta*. They will begin presenting to local high schools, universities and community organizations in the fall. The theme of the adapted version is “Let us become creators, not receivers, of our stories.”

Conclusions

We have proven that Fair Trade Study Abroad can work. Without sacrificing the high-quality of a university level curriculum, we involved local community members in the same educational process.

“Equal or greater benefits for community members” is hard to evaluate, because international students will not fully reap such benefits for years to come. That being said, we see immediate application with our community partners and consider short term benefits as equal to or greater than those of the university students.

The direct local beneficiaries (those who completed one or more of our program courses) number 20, compared to 3 international students. Interest was exceedingly high among local participants and we did not want to discourage participation.

Through resulting projects, the benefits of the program reach a greater population than the actual participants. Thus, by measuring beneficiaries of these projects, we can estimate indirect beneficiaries of Rehearsing Change. Between Mariscal and Tzawata alone, we anticipate no less than 125 indirect beneficiaries.

According to participants, the arts-based methodologies functioned as a means to better understanding self and for creating a pathway toward sustainable social change. Participants related such tools to learning more about identity and empowering a collective to work on community development.

The combination of arts-based methodologies and the equal access for local community members suggest that Rehearsing Change’s model deserves further study and potential replication/multiplication.

Finally, we believe that Rehearsing Change challenges common perceptions of “the way we do education,” especially international education. While far from perfect, we bring the following characteristics into the fold, all of which come together to inspire change in how we do education:

- Decolonial education. Even the most well-intentioned international educational programs can promote a colonial model, providing life-changing experiences to international students with limited benefits to local communities. Our process seeks to break down this outside-in or top-down model and our structure might actually serve as a decolonizing force in the communities with which we work.
- De-institutionalizing education. We have an incredible partnership with USFQ, yet we do not work in their spaces. We bring USFQ-quality education to the communities, freeing participants to learn and create according to the reality within which they are living. The participants do not feel the walls or pressures of the university; rather, they feel the urgency and applicability of the material.
- Multi-lateral learning. We bring together members of different communities to learn about the problems of our complex world and practice creating solutions. This scenario is meant to reflect our global and local realities. Small communities are part of a globalized system as much as the global community depends on small ones to survive.
- Applied multi-disciplinary learning. Our courses cross over many disciplines and respect multiple kinds of knowledge, as well as how the knowledge is produced. While much of the methodologies are arts-based, the content stretches from Political Ecology to Applied Linguistics to Mythology. Participants use creative methods to interrelate the disciplines within the contexts of our partner communities.