A Case of an Overseas Study Tour
Based on an International Collaborative Learning Model

Shin-ichi Sato
Nihon Fukushi University, Japan

Makoto Kageto
Nihon Fukushi University, Japan

We have been working on the World Youth Meeting (WYM), an international collaborative project. Presentations developed through international student collaboration comprise the core of the WYM. While being conscious of both learning processes and products, prior and follow-up leaning is implemented. This learning model focuses on learning stages and expansion of communication. We consider this model helps to improve the quality of activity when it is applied to overseas fieldwork practiced in higher education. We would like to introduce this learning model and the result of its application to an overseas study tour held by our university. We believe this is a good example showing an overseas study tour is an opportunity to actively use the knowledge and skills learned at the university. In this study, we also show the relevance of our model to classroom learning.

Keywords: overseas study tour, WYM, collaborative learning model

INTRODUCTION

Overseas study tours are often practiced at universities. Participants in these tours are stimulated by hands-on experience in the field. However, what they learn concretely from such tours is hard to quantify. Such tours do not lead to follow-up activities, either. Acquisition of basic abilities aiming at more meaningful experience should also be considered.

On the other hand, it has been pointed out that classroom learning lacks practical application. Without any practical application, students may have neither necessity nor motivation to learn. Even if they learn, they lack of awareness of the constraints of the "real world" and concomitantly, the motivation to learn. We have to be conscious of the fact that what students learn in the classroom is only truly acquired when it is put into practice (Kubota 2003). Jonassen (1999) also argues that Constructivist conceptions of learning assume that knowledge is individually constructed and socially constructed by learners based on their interpretations of experiences in the world.

In our study, we would like to explore overseas study tours and their relevance to classroom learning. Keeping in mind that communication ability in English along with information processing ability are the basis for this activity, we will examine classroom English learning, specifically information processing and the Internet. We have designed and applied our approach to the World Youth Meeting, an international collaborative learning project to overseas study tours, for this study.

RELATIONSHIP TO EARLIER STUDIES

Overseas study tour

Overseas study tours are, in most cases, carried out as a part of the curriculum for international understanding and inter-cultural understanding. They are often practiced in higher education with an expectation to inspire students. They are most valued for the actual trip itself as well as the hands-on experience. Generally speaking, unlike studies or research undertaken for academically specialized fields, activities discussed in this research (such as overseas tours), are aimed at helping students realize what they need to learn and motivating them to learn through their experiences.

"Study tour in the Philippines" is the overseas study tour discussed here, with the main activites being a visit to a local university, and voluntary work at an orphanage. Seven freshmen, three sophomores and two teachers took part in this tour.

Earlier Studies

Study tours are organized at many universities as a part of the curriculum. Because overseas study tours offer cross-cultural contacts and real experiences, students get eagerly involved in the activities in general. However, it is difficult to present a clear concerted goal because students feel differently about their fieldwork experiences. In addition, purposes of the tours tend to be such abstract and ambiguous ones as "finding individual tasks" or "motivating students to learn". The outcome of the activities is likely to turn out to be unclear. Decisions made by students can be hard to identify as practical action and be gradually forgotten. Although various programs exist to enhance the effect of study tours, there has not been an examination of associated learning models (including pre and post activities), undertaken.

In order to make such a tour a meaningful one, we consider authentic stages should be prepared for it. We need a sophisticated philosophical background as a basis for the study tour so that we may research a Constructivist learning environment. Kubota, (2003), suggests some metaphors to complete activities related to Constructivism. The activities are designed to achieve the following objectives:

- deciding on theme(s) autonomously
- finding issues and autonomously addressing them
- problem solving on authentic stages
- various approaches to learning through experience
- prompting for introspection
- scaffolding supporting student expression
- encouragement of participants to move up to the next level
- drawing upon the knowledge of people from various backgrounds
- ability to monitor
- ability to reflect

These viewpoints are related to the standpoint that "knowing is to construct meaning in oneself" (Miller & Miller, 2000).

From another perspective, Suzuki, (2006) also points out the context in which this kind of activity can be evaluated; authentic activity, modeling of accomplished works, plural roles and viewpoints, collaborative knowledge construction, supporting expressions, reflection, surfacing of implicit knowledge, scaffolding, and accurate evaluations.

Various international projects are prepared for the application of English and information processing

abilities. Some such projects are currently being undertaken. In the ICT Model School Network sponsored by the APEC Cyber Educational Cooperation (ACEC), junior high and high school students from the ACEC member countries (including South Korea, Japan, and Indonesia), are having exchanges through Teleconferencing and other activities while pursuing their themes of inter-cultural understanding and English education. Four to six schools from each country participate in activities as model schools and have experimental exchanges. The network is centered in South Korea. The "Asia-Europe classroom", sponsored by The Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF) is another international exchange project making use of networking amongst junior high and high school teachers. The common language is English and anyone capable of communicating in English can take part in the project. The project is intended for teachers in Asia and Europe. Currently, a peace project and other international exchange projects are under way to promote interchange among the regions. The World Youth Meeting is an international exchange carried out through the collaboration of universities and teachers in Asian countries (Kubota, K., Kageto, M. et. al.).

Objectives of this study

As an authentic setting like an overseas study tour where students work outside classrooms together with people from other organizations, the Filipino orphanage provides an example. Students are expected to plan to act in the real world with the viewpoints of Constructivism. In the process of planning, managing and evaluating their activities, a learning environment was created, in which "school knowledge" was promoted to "active knowledge". Students pursued activities in this environment in which they found issues on their own and also suggested solutions. The Conference of the Central Council of Education suggests 'the authentic settings' as a 'learning experience'. Kubota and Suzuki show this learning experience from the viewpoint of Constructivism. In "The important viewpoints and policies for motivating young people and promoting well balanced growth", it is stated, "(the) learning experience should be established in all young people's lives. Trial and error, and competition with each other should be fostered" (MEXT, 2007).

The use of English is typical in international collaborative project (ICP)s. The WYM in particular has been held eleven times counting its former project the "Asia High School Internet Exchange Project". It has its roots in learning styles including pre and post-event activities with the core activity being presentation through international collaboration. It is listed as a model project for APEC. We think it is very meaningful to expand this activity model.

During overseas study tours, students gain hands-on field work experience along with planning. This hands-on experience is the core activity, which we consider equivalent to presentations (organized through international collaboration) at the WYM. For this reason, we will replace presentations at the WYM with hands-on experience overseas, design an overseas study tour based on an activity model of the WYM, practice and evaluate it. It is a new approach to improve the quality of overseas study tours through the incorporation of the international exchange model (Kageto 2004).

ACTIVITY MODEL AND ICT USE

Components for international exchange

Activity components of the WYM are shown in Fig.1. Activities are designed to focus on three elements. Activity stages include: pre-event, event, and post-event collaboration among participants, and products produced as a result of learning. We will examine the details of such activities.
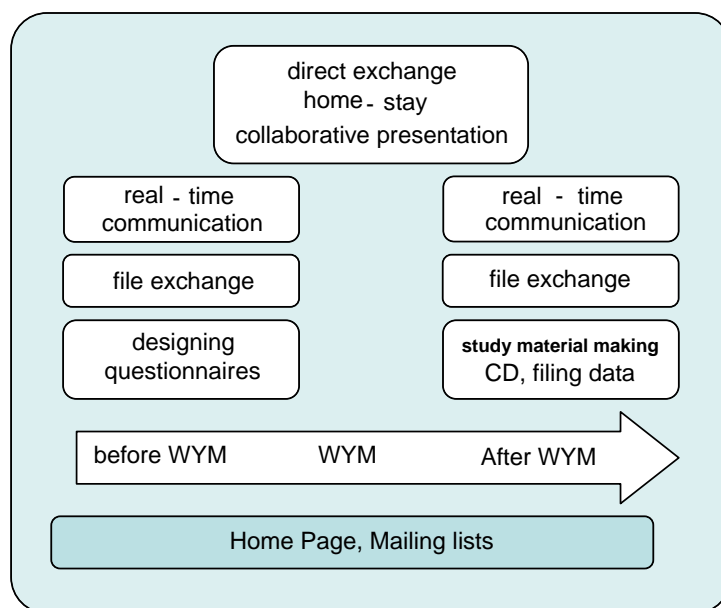
direct exchange
home‑stay
collaborative presentation

real‑time communication | real‑time communication

file exchange | file exchange

designing questionnaires | **study material making** CD, filing data

before WYM   WYM   After WYM

Home Page, Mailing lists

Figure 1. *Components of WYM*

(1)   Stages

This project consists of the following three stages:

- preparation prior to delivery of English presentation through collaboration in Japan
- actual delivery of presentation
- sharing comments through a home page and creation of presentation CDs

Pre-event activities: Students should be aware of the purpose of activities. They also need to have active communication with each other in order to work effectively as team members.
Event: By working together, students should take advantage of actually being in the field for exchange and have more effective communication with others while making this adjustment.
Post-event activities: Students should organize materials gathered in the field and clarify direction for the next activity. They also will promote the event by creating CDs.

Each stage clearly produces activity images for the following year.

(2)   Collaboration among participants

It is necessary to have a phase in which all participants realize that they are indeed a part of the event. The most dramatic phase throughout the whole one-year long activity plan is the delivery of the presentation. "Exchange" becomes something tangible in an authentic setting and through that participation "awareness of being a part of the event" can be experienced.

(3)   Products

Students in charge keep records of other students' presentations. Animations, sounds, pictures and transcripts are all recorded on CDs. These CDs are distributed to participating schools as products of the year and are used as teaching materials.

The three elements listed above are taken into consideration when designing the tour for this study.

ICP model and Constructivism

Fig.2 presents two elements of WYM, stages of the activities on the horizontal axis and homogeneity on the vertical axis.
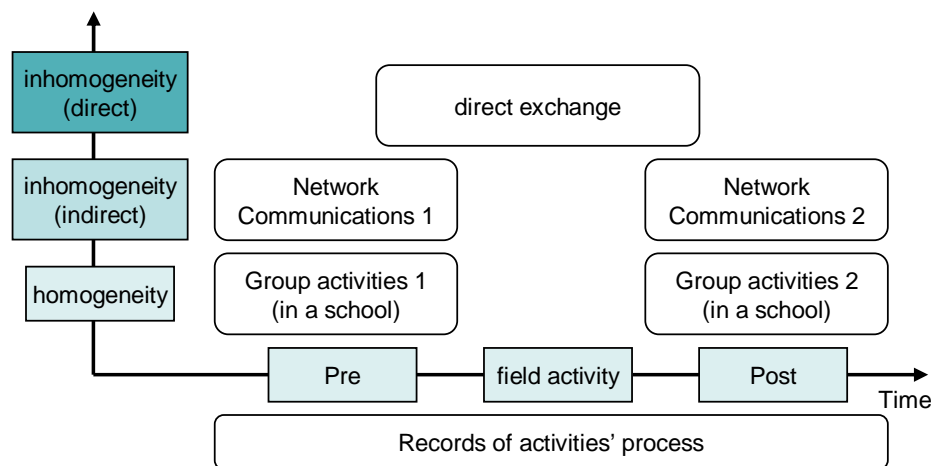

Figure 2. *International Exchange Model*

The elements of study based on Constructivism are generally characterized as "authenticity", "work of masters as a good model", "manifold roles and viewpoints", "collaborative knowledge building", "reflection", "articulation", and "scaffolding" Suzuki (2005). This study tour is not for specialized education so, the element of "work of masters as a good model" is not taken into consideration.

The following statements show how the other elements are related to the models. The activities undertaken in the course of direct exchanges can be said to be part of an authentic situation. Network communication and group activities are also authentic situations where students learn English and ICT skills. Because a group of individuals are required to work collaboratively on such activities, "manifold roles and viewpoints" and "collaborative knowledge building" are carried out through network communication and group activities. Being aware of the "records of activities' process" also practices "articulation". At the same time, "manifold roles and viewpoints" are acquired and "collaborative knowledge building" is promoted.

Plan for an overseas study tour based on the model

For this study, we designed a study tour in the Philippines. The schedule included a visit to a local university and a visit to an orphanage. A report was to be written after the tour. Noted below is the activity design at different stages. Collaboration and Products will be commented upon when applicable.

(1) Activities in the field

This is a design for "direct exchange" in an ICP model. There are two main purposes for this study tour. A visit to a local university and a visit to an orphanage are scheduled. During the visit to a local university, a presentation which introduces the local university, and campus tour guided by local students, are to be held. In these activities, Japanese students are expected to become aware of their communication ability in English and to learn how local students of similar age regard their studies. They are also to compare a real Philippine university with their preconceptions of what one would be like.

The purpose of a visit to an orphanage is to think about welfare and what students can do to help by listening to Headmaster and other staff. At our university, teachers usually coordinate such study tours and students are required to follow schedule as guided. In such cases, students have no opportunity to voluntarily work on activities. To solve this situation, following the WYM model, opportunities for students to take the initiative in working on local activities are set up as below:

Japanese students also give presentations to introduce their university to local students after campus tours are given by the local students, students have a half-hour interview session besides having individual contact with children at the orphanage, students organize an event called "Japan Day" for the children

These core activities can be considered collaboration.

(2) Preparation

This is a design of "Group Activities" and "Network Communication" in an ICP model.

Collaboration among participants is necessary as the tour includes activities students have to coordinate, while in an ordinary tour, activities are simply explained to the participants. Participants take responsibility in preparing presentations, Japanese teaching materials, and a Japan Day program. They also keep records of all activities.

Students are responsible for several aspects of the preparation due to the limited number of participants. Through these pre-event activities, students become aware that they are indeed taking action. What they create through this process will remain as products and will also be used in actual activities during the tour. In the end, it will lead to recording of their activities, renewal of web pages, and creation of CDs. Tangible products support the activities. Students are expected to work by themselves to find answers to their questions because they must initiate activities.

(3) Follow-up activity

This activity is also a design of "Group Activities" and "Network Communication" in an ICP model.

A report is to be submitted as has been traditionally expected after such a tour. It cannot be a simple description of sentiments, however, because of the activity design. Students keep activity records in order to clarify direction for the next activity. They will also promote the event by creating CDs. Students are expected to voluntarily plan on follow-up activities as well, because the stage-by-stage designing of activities make them conscious of their goals and creation of products. A collaboration phase or activity in the field remains a core activity in this design.

Relevance to classroom learning

Students seem to have stimulating, hands-on experience during an overseas study tour. In this section, however, we would like to comment on information processing and communication in English, which are learned in the classroom.

(1) ICT use:
- students use email, mailing lists, and text messages from cellular phones
- students keep records of their activities with a digital camera
- digital pictures are placed in shared files
- students give presentations using media such as university presentation files
- students learn to understand the properties of different software such as Word, Excel and photo processing programs for better material usage.

(2)   Communication in English:
- students are able to communicate in English in most daily situations
- students understand the form of e-mails written in English
- students give presentations about their university, Japanese culture and their region

These are real and practical situation for learners of English Communication and ICT use.

PRACTICE

Activity outline

Ten students participated in the tour. In accordance with their plan, both pre-event and follow-up activities were carried out without delay.   As soon as the participating students were decided, the first meeting was held. Participants stayed in the Philippines from February 11th to February 20th. Following the tour, they reported their activities to freshmen as well as to the whole university.   Activity reports were concluded at the end of March and this tour as a study model was examined.

ICT learning environment for practice

The following are about the ICT learning environment set up for network communication and recording and the sharing of each other's activities.

(1) Web pages

A home page was set up for providing information. For this study tour, because there were fewer participants, the home page was made concise including the listing of basic information, SNS mentioned below, and links for photograph sharing. It is a site to share the ongoing learning process and progress of individual and group activities.

(2) Mailing lists

Mailing lists were used for participants to keep in contact with one another. They were effective in planning meetings for preparation.

(3) Data sharing

Through the home page, products made before and during the tour and digital pictures were stored and shared. This data could easily be stored and accessed anytime, anywhere. SNS was also used to improve group works (Sato, S., and Kageto, M. 2006).

(4) Real-time communication

Students regularly contacted local staff to inform each other of their activities.   Contact with the Philippines was mainly made via cellular phone by a student representative; the information was shared via mailing lists.

ACTIVITY ANALYSIS

Application of knowledge learned in the classroom

Here is our evaluation of how effectively knowledge learned in classroom was applied during the tour.

(1) ICT use

Contact among students was basically maintained through text messages from cellular phones. Emails from PCs were used when files had to be attached. Notification of the sending of attachments was made through the mailing list. They sent 110 messages to the mailing list.

Word was used to make resumes. Excel was employed to track spending while Power Point was helpful for making Japanese teaching materials. The tour offered students situations in which their knowledge of computer software was helpful.

(2) Communication in English

Learning basic communication skills in English was down to individual effort and we think there is room for improvement. Students used skills they had learned when giving presentations and having interview session with local students. The students used what they had prepared fully. However, they were incapable of handling unexpected questions. Many of them reported afterwards that they had realized their English was not sufficient. Some of them made specific plans to study English such as studying with a radio English program. Students themselves seemed to feel their communication skills in English were inadequate. This has led some of them to further study English and attempt English proficiency tests.

(3) New Media "Social Networking Service"

A Social Networking Service (SNS) became a prominent way for students to share their knowledge. They used this media at every stage of the activity. Even after coming back to Japan, they shared 9,021 digital photos with which they could easily share their experiences. These materials helped students to reflect upon their activities so that they could describe what they contributed to the orphanage and how they helped each other achieve their objectives. Table.1 shows how they used SNS for better communications.

Table 1. *Utilization of SNS and Digital Camera　(1/12 〜3/25)*

The number of postings to SNS	69
The number of times SNS was accessed	2616 PV
The number of digital camera files uploaded	9,021（about 10GB）

Activity at each stage

(1) Pre-event activity

Students took responsibility for preparing presentations and the Japan Day program. In addition to meetings they had with teachers, they planned and had meetings on their own. They planned their presentations to encourage a better understanding of Japanese students. During the planning process, they also came up with contrasting questions for local students. For "Japan Day", students prepared materials such as picture cards for teaching Japanese, a trial cooking lesson and items for an introduction to Japanese animations and folk tales.

(2) Field activity

Students designed time schedules for local students and children. They kept records of their progress along with adjustments they made. They had a meeting every morning to review and adjust their activities. Their instructors attended the morning meetings to provide further assistance.

(3) Follow-up activity

Students kept activity records in order to clarify their direction for the next activity. They also promoted their events by creating CDs. The students proposed an exhibition be held to present the stored data of their activities. Students themselves held an exhibition to introduce their experience. They are also planning for their next activity. The exhibition shows that the learning environment provided for this program was efficient. Such an environment enabled students to readily access records of their activities and to promote and reflect upon their performance.

It was pointed out that exchanges should not be conducted within only a limited period but that network communication should be continued for fostering English study.   Students feel it is necessary to keep in contact with local people to improve their skills.

CONCLUSION

We have designed an overseas study tour based on an ICP.   In this design, the collaboration phase was placed as a core activity. Stage by stage designing was planned while keeping the end products in mind. In this way, it became possible to practice fulfilling activities that in turn, resulted in follow-up activity. Some students said that they should not just focus on the activity while they were in Philippines but also on future projects they could proceed with elsewhere. Other students gave us feedback in reports that highlighted the photos on SNS surely reminded them of the warm-hearted hospitality and lovely smiles of children that they met. These experiences encourage students to learn how they can further support development in the communities they have visited and form a sustainable relationship with the local people through the Internet, which works well as a tool for communication.

The tour also offered students opportunities to apply what they had learned in information processing and English communication classes. Better acquisition of skills and motivation for further learning were realized. The international exchange model appears to be effective in designing overseas study tours although we think further detailed analysis of activities is necessary. It is our intention to continue practicing overseas study tours based on this model.

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