

4-1-2014

African Food Security Fellows' Perceptions of Their Experiences in the United States: Reflective Journaling as a Way to Interpret and Understand an International Experience

Denise George
Tractor Supply Company

M. Craig Edwards
Oklahoma State University

Shelly Sitton
Oklahoma State University

See next page for additional authors

Follow this and additional works at: <https://newprairiepress.org/jiaee>

Recommended Citation

George, D., Edwards, M. C., Sitton, S., Cartmell, D. D., Blackwell, C., & Robertson, J. T. (2014). African Food Security Fellows' Perceptions of Their Experiences in the United States: Reflective Journaling as a Way to Interpret and Understand an International Experience. *Journal of International Agricultural and Extension Education*, 21(1), 33-45. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5191/jiaee.2014.20103>

This Research Article is brought to you for free and open access by New Prairie Press. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Journal of International Agricultural and Extension Education* by an authorized administrator of New Prairie Press. For more information, please contact cads@k-state.edu.

African Food Security Fellows' Perceptions of Their Experiences in the United States: Reflective Journaling as a Way to Interpret and Understand an International Experience

Abstract

The study reports on a reciprocal exchange program funded by the U.S. Department of State. It involved 14 Food Security Fellows, including seven each from Kenya and Uganda, who were community leaders, policymakers, and media professionals. The Fellows experienced a five-week training program on issues of food security and the unique role improved communication networks could play in reducing food insufficiency in their countries. During their exchange, the Fellows were asked to keep reflective journals chronicling their training experiences and interactions with Americans and their culture. The journal entries were transcribed and coded, and emergent themes were identified in concert with the study's purpose and research questions. Established procedures to address researcher reflexivity and enable transferability of the findings were followed. The data analysis yielded 41 codes from which 11 themes were derived. The Fellows expressed a more positive attitude about Americans and the United States at the program's end. They also described an appreciation for the role of youth development in agriculture and the need for extension educators, researchers, and university personnel to work together to ensure a nation's food security. Future exchanges should provide participants with an internship experience instead of only job shadowing opportunities.

Keywords

Africa, food security, international experiences, reflective journaling

Funding Source

The authors wish to acknowledge the U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, Professional Fellows Division, who provided funding for the exchange program described and made possible the study reported on in this article.

Authors

Denise George, M. Craig Edwards, Shelly Sitton, D Dwane Cartmell II, Cindy Blackwell, and J. Tanner Robertson

doi: 10.5191/jiaee.2014.20103

**African Food Security Fellows' Perceptions of Their Experiences in the United States:
Reflective Journaling as a Way to Interpret and Understand an International Experience**

Denise George

Tractor Supply Company
Brentwood, TN

M. Craig Edwards

Shelly Sitton

D. Dwayne Cartmell II

Oklahoma State University
Stillwater, OK

Cindy Blackwell

University of Southern Mississippi
Hattiesburg, MS

J. Tanner Robertson

West Texas A&M University
Canyon, TX

Abstract

The study reports on a reciprocal exchange program funded by the U.S. Department of State. It involved 14 Food Security Fellows, including seven each from Kenya and Uganda, who were community leaders, policymakers, and media professionals. The Fellows experienced a five-week training program on issues of food security and the unique role improved communication networks could play in reducing food insufficiency in their countries. During their exchange, the Fellows were asked to keep reflective journals chronicling their training experiences and interactions with Americans and their culture. The journal entries were transcribed and coded, and emergent themes were identified in concert with the study's purpose and research questions. Established procedures to address researcher reflexivity and enable transferability of the findings were followed. The data analysis yielded 41 codes from which 11 themes were derived. The Fellows expressed a more positive attitude about Americans and the United States at the program's end. They also described an appreciation for the role of youth development in agriculture and the need for extension educators, researchers, and university personnel to work together to ensure a nation's food security. Future exchanges should provide participants with an internship experience instead of only job shadowing opportunities.

Keywords: Africa, food security, international experiences, reflective journaling

Acknowledgement: The authors wish to acknowledge the U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, Professional Fellows Division, who provided funding for the exchange program described and made possible the study reported on in this article.

Introduction

The exchange project reported on aimed to improve the outlook of food security in Kenya and Uganda by providing professional development for three key stakeholder groups whose collaboration stood to amplify their collective impact on food insufficiency: community leaders, media specialists, and policymakers. The project was funded with a grant awarded by the U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs during 2011 and 2012. The funding agency designated the participants as *Food Security Fellows*.

Research Setting and Participants

The project was implemented as a four-phase process. The first and third phases brought 26 Kenyans and Ugandans to the United States for two five-week professional development experiences. Twelve Fellows came during April 2011, and the remaining 14 came during September and October 2011. The other two phases of this reciprocal exchange included two groups of Oklahoma State University (OSU) faculty and collaborators traveling to Kenya and Uganda to learn more about the regional food security situation and related challenges of the two nations.

The study's population was the 14 Fellows who participated in the project's third phase. The Fellows were selected based on an application and interview process. After reviewing the applications, it was determined who would receive a face-to-face interview. During the project's second phase, OSU faculty members from the Department of Agricultural Education, Communications, and Leadership interviewed applicants and selected those to invite for participation. Six of the seven Ugandan Fellows were male and included two community leaders, two policymakers, and three media professionals. The seven

Kenyan Fellows included three community leaders, two policymakers, and two media professionals with four males and three females.

During the program's first four weeks, the Fellows were housed on OSU's campus, where they received training in food production, education/advocacy, food security/sufficiency, nutrition, and rural vitality. Weekends included activities in which the Fellows experienced American culture. On the program's tenth day, the Fellows began an 11-day internship or job shadowing experience with enterprises similar to their employers at home, e.g., a county Extension office; a National Public Radio affiliate; the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food, and Forestry; and Oklahoma's largest daily newspaper. During the fifth week, the Fellows attended a conference in Washington, D.C., hosted by the U.S. Department of State.

Food Security in Sub-Saharan Africa

According to the United Nation's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO, 2011), more than 925 million people in the world are hungry every day. Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) is home to 239 million hungry people (World Hunger Education Service, 2012). "Sub-Saharan Africa . . . is the only region of the world where hunger is increasing" (Sanchez, Swaminathan, Dobie, & Yuksel, 2005, p. 1). "Several biophysical and economic constraints impede sub-Saharan Africa's escape from extreme poverty, including extremely low productivity of food production, heavy burden of infectious disease, and insufficient core infrastructure in water, roads, power and telecommunications" (Sanchez, Palm, & Sachs, 2007, p. 1). Further, Mihalacha-O'keef and Li (2011) reported 39 nations needed outside support to assist with food security emergencies in 2006, of which 25 were African. Nearly four million Kenyans

and more than two million Ugandans require food assistance regularly (USAID, 2008, 2009). Improving communications on food security among the key stakeholders groups was the exchange program's central theme.

The Value of Exchange Programs for Professionals

Adult learners may study and learn in a myriad of contexts, including professional exchanges involving internships and job shadowing experiences that are rich with cultural experiences. "A guiding principle behind efforts to achieve greater understanding and mutual respect among the peoples of the world through cultural exchange is the belief that people learn to live together by *living together* [emphasis added]" (Pires, 2000, p. 41).

In terms of the professional development gained from participating in exchange programs, Gallagher (2002) described the benefits of forming collegial partnerships with international peers. International experiences can increase the desire to learn about other cultures and impact an individual's career interests (Rodriguez & Roberts, 2011). "Participation in study abroad programs enhances academic, social and cultural skills of students, makes them aware of transnational issues, and makes them better leaders of tomorrow" (Özturgut, 2007, p. 44).

Participants in a study conducted by Odell, Williams, Lawrence, Gartin, and Smith (2002) not only gained awareness of global issues, but they also modified preconceived notions about their host countries. In addition, exchange programs allow participants to view their own country and culture from a new perspective (Pires, 2000). The understanding of these different perspectives "can be dramatic when the two cultures involved are separated not only by linguistic, social, philosophical, and historical differences, but also by gaping

economic disparities such as those that exist between Africa and America" (Pires, 2000, p. 42).

Further, "[w]e should find it disheartening that most Americans continue to have a rather abysmal understanding of the world's second largest continent, on which 12 percent of humanity lives" (Pires, 2000, p. 39). Pires (2000) asserted the need to promote study abroad and cultural exchange programs, specifically in Africa. Moreover, gaining increased cultural awareness can impact the global community as well as local communities (Rodriguez & Roberts, 2011).

Rodriguez and Roberts (2011) concluded the best educational practices for instructors to facilitate during international learning experiences were to ensure that "course structure, community involvement, extracurricular activities, and reflection" occurred (p. 29). Providing opportunities for interaction with host families or local citizens increases the likelihood of more authentic events transpiring (Rodriguez & Roberts, 2011). Myles and Cheng (2003) found that participants who interacted more frequently with people from their host country were quicker to adapt to the new environment. Dooley, Dooley, and Carranza (2008) also described the benefits of personal interactions and relationships with local citizens, including cultural activities such as touring museums, to gain an understanding of the history and heritage of the local community.

This kind of exchange allows participants to experience new cultures and take that knowledge back to their respective countries (Suarez, 2003). It also enables those who host exchange participants to broaden their understanding of other cultures and facilitate future interactions successfully (Pires, 2000). These experiences promote productive communication, allowing for enhanced

social, economic, and political relations among nations (Gallagher, 2002).

Geelhoed, Abe, and Talbot (2003) described *culture shock* as a prominent barrier that prevents people from participating in global experiences. “When students experience the accumulated strains of relating to the challenges of an unfamiliar environment, they experience culture shock” (Boyle, Nackerud, & Kilpatrick, 1999, p. 203). Experiencing an international and unfamiliar environment could easily become overwhelming, especially for novice travelers (Rodriguez & Roberts, 2011). Educators, therefore, should be aware of cognitive overload (Roberts & Jones, 2009) and use guided reflection to mitigate it (Rodriguez & Roberts, 2011).

Reflection and Reflective Journaling

John Dewey is considered an important developer of the concept of reflection as an approach to learning (Hatton & Smith, 1995). “He considered [reflection] to be a special form of problem solving, thinking to resolve an issue which involved active chaining, a careful ordering of ideas linking each with its predecessors” (Hatton & Smith, 1995, p. 33). Boud (2001) defined reflection as “those intellectual and affective activities in which individuals engage to explore their experiences in order to lead to new understandings and appreciations” (p. 10).

Kolb (1984) described reflection as “the way we give meaning to the world” (p. 147). Reflection causes learners to “recapture, notice, and re-evaluate their experience” (Boud & Walker, 1993, p. 99) and it provides a vehicle to transform experiences into knowledge (Roberts, 2002). Thorpe (2002) explained reflection as “a means of monitoring our own learning, both what we know, how we know it, and the process through which we learn” (p. 80).

The most important reflection occurs after the event or experience has transpired. This is partly because the “immediate pressure of acting in real time has passed” (Boud, 2001, p. 13). This involves the individual thinking about the experience, focusing on the feelings and emotions that occurred because of the event, and reevaluating the experience (Boud, 2001). Reevaluation includes “relating new information to that which is already known, seeking relationships between new and old ideas, determining the authenticity for ourselves of the ideas and feelings that have resulted, and making the resulting knowledge one’s own” (Boud, 2001, p. 14).

“Journaling in its various forms is a means for recording personal thoughts, daily experiences, and evolving insights” (Hiemstra, 2001, p. 19). Journaling can be used to revisit past reflections, couple them with newly formed opinions and experiences, and further the learning process (Hiemstra, 2001). Professional development can occur through journaling if “dilemmas, contradictions, and evolving worldviews” (Hiemstra, 2001, p. 20) are confronted.

Moreover, “[t]here is considerable evidence of the tremendous benefit possible through a journaling technique” (Hiemstra, 2001, p. 25). Writing tasks often are used as reflection tools because the authors must be specific about what they do or think; in turn, this promotes an attitude of reflection (Hatton & Smith, 1995). “The reflective journal holds potential for serving as a mirror to reflect the student’s heart and mind” (Hubbs & Brand, 2005, p. 60). Specifically, journal writing can be “a form of reflective practice, that is, as a device for working with events and experiences in order to extract meaning from them” (Boud, 2001, p. 9). “The advantage available in most journaling formats of being able to review or reread earlier reflections makes a

progressive clarification of insights possible” (Hiemstra, 2001, p. 20).

Prompting is an important part of the process of learning through reflection (Roberts, 2002). “Asking questions beforehand increases the intentionality of the consciousness or the ‘orientation of the mind to its object’ thus deepening the experience” (Russell & Vallade, 2009, p. 104). One concern with journal writing, however, is students may write differently because they know the instructor will read their entries (Walker, 2006), i.e., “they write what they think the instructor wants to hear instead of writing about what is true to them” (p. 220). Such a concern and its consequences was a limitation of this study.

Conceptual Framework

Learning is “the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. Knowledge results from the combination of grasping and transforming experience” (Kolb, 1984, p. 41). To that end, this study was guided by Kolb’s (1984) theory of experiential learning. Kolb’s (1984) four phases include concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation or *testing*. A learner lives through an experience, observes and reflects on said experience, forms abstract concepts or implications regarding the experience, and thereafter uses those implications to guide his or her choices or testing of future experiences. Moreover, reflective journaling allows journal writers to describe and illuminate their understanding at all four stages of the experiential learning cycle (Hubbs & Brand, 2005); therefore, Kolb’s (1984) model fit well with this study.

Purpose and Research Questions

The study’s purpose was to describe how select Kenyan and Ugandan Food Security Fellows made meaning of their

experiences regarding U.S. culture, their internship or job shadowing experiences, the training procedures, and the group activities provided during a professional and cultural exchange program. Three research questions guided the study:

1. How did the Fellows’ understanding of American culture and U.S. citizens’ change as a result of the program?
2. What were the benefits and challenges as perceived by the Fellows who participated in an internship or job shadowing experience?
3. What were the reactions of the Fellows toward the training experiences and activities that resonated with their professional roles, especially aspects relevant to improving food security in their home countries?

Research Methods and Procedures

Permission was obtained from OSU’s Office of University Research and its Institutional Review Board to conduct the study. To gain understanding of how the Fellows made meaning of their experiences, they recorded daily journal entries during their stay in the United States. The Fellows were given a composition notebook for journaling. The journal entries stood to provide rich, thick descriptions of their experiences (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Hubbs and Brand (2005) said expectations should be clear and guidance provided when expecting individuals to reflect. In addition, Dunlap (2006) concluded the facilitator of the journaling exercise should “provide students with cues or guided questions to help them focus their journal responses” (p. 22). Therefore, journal prompts were provided to promote reflection and assist in answering the research questions. Preflection questions

were included as journal prompts to help participants ready themselves for the program and reflective questions probed their daily experiences. An example reflection question was, “How do you expect the culture of the United States to be different from Kenya/Uganda?”; one of four daily prompts was, “Describe what you learned today and how that could be applied to your professional life.”

At the program’s end, the journals were left with the researcher who transcribed the entries verbatim. Thereafter, ATLAS.ti was used to code and store the data. An inductive approach to coding was followed (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). When using inductive analysis, “qualitative researchers build their patterns, categories, and themes from the ‘bottom-up,’ by organizing the data into increasingly more abstract units of information” (Creswell, 2007, p. 38).

Journal entries were read prior to transcribing, during the transcription process, and again after all entries were transcribed to ensure complete data immersion and comprehension. While transcribing, the researcher created memos of reactions and possible interpretations of the data. Memoing “could be in the form of preliminary propositions (hypotheses), ideas about emerging categories, or some aspects of the connection of categories” (Creswell, 2007, p. 239). Memos were developed (Creswell, 2007) and captured in the ATLAS.ti program to help define the codes and also to assist in creating inferences based on latent content. The line-by-line or open coding (Creswell, 2007) was done to ensure the reading of each recorded word and to develop unique codes (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The level of abstraction of the coded content was one to two sentences. The transcribed entries were converted from Microsoft Word documents to text files and

those files were uploaded to the ATLAS.ti program.

After coding three journals, the codes were revised and redefined so the study’s research questions could be addressed and justified through the journal entries. This enabled constant comparison of the data; thus, codes and research questions, as codes, were adjusted continually (Creswell, 2007). As more codes emerged, the coded journals were reexamined to maintain coding consistency. The coding yielded 41 codes. Quotes from these codes were sorted into related categories based on the study’s research questions. Themes were then developed from the coded data (Creswell, 2007) and used to organize the findings by research question.

Researcher Reflexivity and Trustworthiness

Creswell and Miller (2000) described eight techniques to improve the validity of qualitative research. Creswell (2007) recommended “qualitative researchers engage in at least two of them in any given study” (p. 209). The lead researcher used four of these procedures: reflexivity; member checking; rich, thick descriptions; and peer debriefing (Creswell, 2007).

To show reflexivity, “the researcher comments on past experiences, biases, prejudices, and orientations that have likely shaped the interpretation and approach to the study” (Creswell, 2007, p. 208). To address reflexivity, the researcher kept a daily journal. The journal described the researcher’s biases and assumptions that may have influenced the analysis and interpretation of the data. To acknowledge biases, the researcher reports involvement in planning and executing the Fellows’ training program as well as daily interactions. Involvement also occurred during a 12-day period when the researcher traveled to Uganda the summer prior to the study.

The Fellows were provided, via electronic mail, transcriptions of their journal entries and were given a week to respond with changes. This allowed them to “judge the accuracy and credibility of the account” (Creswell, 2007, p. 208). Four Fellows responded with corrections that were made. Rich, thick descriptions of the Fellows’ views and settings were developed to help the reader determine if the findings are transferable or applicable to other interdisciplinary exchange programs or similar scenarios in the future (Creswell, 2007). Weekly, peer debriefings were also conducted, including consultations with a doctoral candidate from Kenya, two U.S. doctoral students who had traveled to Uganda, and four other qualitative researchers. Finally, to protect the Fellows’ identities, aliases were assigned and an extensive audit trail was kept.

Findings

Four themes emerged from the data in regard to Research Question #1.

The Fellows left the United States with a more positive attitude about Americans when compared to their attitudes toward Americans on arrival to the United States. One Fellow provided this comment in his journal:

I used to think that not many Americans were friendly. What I saw here in the five weeks was different. Although the people I would meet on elevators did not readily show good responses to greetings, those we were meeting in the offices, farms, ranches and other places we visited have been very welcoming and sharing with us. For example, the day I was with the Stillwater City Council, one of the staff was so excited to meet me that he quickly phoned his wife and jointly invited

me and hosted me at their home that very evening. I was amazed by this philanthropy and openheartedness. (F3: 909-917)

A Fellow also wrote “this program has changed my view about the American people as anti-social. I found the Americans to be courteous, social and always ready to assist” (F9: 174-176).

The Fellows found citizens of the United States to have a lack of knowledge about geography and worldly issues. For example, one Fellow made this journal entry:

People of America are ill-exposed. I came to realize that a very small percentage of Americans know the world and what actually goes on. I was surprised that a high percentage of university students actually think Africa is one country, to the extent that they don’t even know Uganda exists! (F3: 918-924)

Another Fellow wrote, “American youths do not know much about what is happening outside of their country. Their views on Africa are only guided by sorrow and lies of hunger, disease, poverty and war that is [sic] seen on TV” (F4: 49-51).

The Fellows found citizens of the United States to be generous, helpful, and dedicated to their careers and relationships. “A journalist at *The Oklahoman* surprised me this morning with gifts for my little daughter, and before I had overcome my excitement my two internship hosts had filled my desk with kids stuff” (F15: 171-173). Further, this Fellow was “. . . impressed by the sense of purpose among people who stay on top of their game here” (F15: 220-221).

The Fellows noticed a “sense of community,” which left them inspired to do

more. To this end, a Fellow reflected on his work situation at home:

. . . [M]any of the staff I work with [at home] are not fully committed in serving the community for which they work. They are not very dedicated, evidenced by the need to follow them every time specific tasks are given to them. But also, the general community in the district seems to lack commitment and passion in whatever they do. (F3: 389-393)

However, another Fellow wrote the exchange program “inspired me to be more pro-active in my community work related to food security and with my contacts I can help my village do more in food security. I can be involved in outreach programs” (F14: 146-148). A different Fellow drew this conclusion: “I’ve learned that service to humanity is the most important mission of every human being. That I can only be relevant to my community if I am of service to it” (F15: 266-268).

Two themes emerged from the data in regard to Research Question #2.

The Fellows welcomed the opportunity to learn from their professional peers and mentors in the United States. For example, one Fellow was excited to “learn how best to do things from Americans who are very successful in so many spheres” (F9: 13-14). Another Fellow explained, “[t]hese experiences are directly linked to my job. I [now] have a wider understanding from a global perspective” (F5: 133-135). And a third Fellow stated:

Before this internship, I knew my job as a university lecturer was to teach, conduct research and outreach. However, because of the separation of the three functions in Uganda, it is

always difficult to connect the three. Experiencing first-hand how the three function at Oklahoma State University improved my understanding of the job I do. (F12: 174-177)

The Fellows desired specific jobs but some were given the task of an observer during their internships; however, learning still occurred. For example, a Fellow indicated his role was more job shadowing or “. . . [as] that of a learner, my task was to inquire how things are done at the respective places, policy implications and challenges faced” (F3: 852-853). The media professionals had more specific tasks during their internships, which provided them the most hands-on experiences among the Fellows. One media professional wrote, “I’ve been published in *The Oklahoman* [, the state’s largest newspaper]! The article, about the Listeria outbreak in cantaloupe, was at one point the most viewed on newsok.com and closed the day at number three” (F15: 145-149). A third Fellow wrote, “I have learned a great deal of lessons from my internship and more so on how to improve the food security situation in Africa, especially through correct policy guidelines and implementation processes” (F7: 542-544).

Five themes emerged from the data in regard to Research Question #3.

If food security and production is to improve, the youth must be involved in agricultural endeavors. To this end, one Fellow elaborated:

The driving force behind agricultural development in the United States has been youth development programs. One of the greatest lessons I learned out of the interaction with the extension agents and members of American youth development

programs (4-H and FFA) was that American agriculture students are trained to support agricultural systems in various areas, including agricultural engineering, manufacturing, agribusiness, marketing, communication and leadership. The leadership component of the training is the most attractive element for the students, and they just love it! (F7: 118-127)

Extension services in Kenya and Uganda need to link teaching and research more effectively to be more efficient in sharing best practices with the agriculturists. To wit, two Fellows indicated these positions: “The extension system in the United States is kind of similar with that of Kenya, except for the close collaboration between teaching and research” (F6: 84-85). “There is a need for enhanced collaboration between research, teaching and communications (extension) in my country to improve food security” (F6: 57-58). Another Fellow concluded that,

[t]he inter-connectedness of extension and research make the farmers get the necessary technologies and advice for improving productivity. As a policy fellow, I take it as a king pin to be adopted and implemented if the necessary change in food security is to be realized by my local government and the central government as well. (F3: 102-105)

Using the media as an ally and being proactive can increase agricultural knowledge. To this point, one Fellow stated “[t]he importance of building relationships with the media should not be overlooked” (F5: 72-73). Another Fellow maintained “[t]here is a need to create trust between

agricultural professionals and journalists. If our message is to get to the community, the media will have to be our partner” (F6: 415-417). Another Fellow commented on using social media: “I learned about the use of social media to catalyze communications and I will be more active in Twitter and Facebook to remain in contact with my peers” (F9: 149-150).

Networking is invaluable and should be emphasized. In accord, a Fellow stated, “I can maximize my ability to improve food security in Kenya through improved linkages between media, the communities and the strengths in [sic] policymakers. The network I have established will be very useful in addressing food security in Kenya” (F9: 202-206). Another Fellow maintained the exchange program “has started a long-term collaboration between Gulu University and Oklahoma State University and I look forward to positive outcomes” (F12: 80-81).

The Fellows believed they could make a difference. In support, one Fellow wrote this:

I feel I am not the same. I have changed a lot. My worldview has dramatically improved. I feel humbled. I feel I have much respect for others and responsible for all my actions. I am excited to bring about change in my organization and society. (F7: 621-624)

Finally, a Fellow made this journal entry: “At times, we do not need political power to make change in our societies, all we need is the courage and vigor to change the world” (F4: 185-187).

Conclusions and Implications

The Fellows were eager to experience the United States, as 12 of the 14 had not been to the United States before, but they were somewhat apprehensive, as well.

Their main concerns included perceptions of Americans being arrogant and unhelpful. During the exchange, however, they enjoyed the generosity of Americans and appreciated their willingness to help them whenever possible. The Fellows also realized Americans tended to lack global knowledge, especially about Africa and their countries in particular. Some of the Fellows' views were based on their interactions with U.S. undergraduates. After the program was complete, many of the Fellows had a different attitude toward Americans, specifically regarding diversity and culture.

In addition, the professional exchange program allowed the Fellows to experience the dedication, passion, and work-related commitment of Americans. They gained an appreciation of the career-mindedness of some Americans. The Fellows' expressions of a new outlook on American culture and people is in agreement with Pires (2000), who stated international experiences allow people to acquire an understanding of other cultures. Misconceptions about countries will be righted and these experiences help to eliminate the "haves and have nots" (Pires, 2000, p. 42) attitude. Providing the Fellows with specific information before their travel, at the beginning of the program, and continually throughout the program may have helped the Fellows gain a sense of security, which allowed them to overcome the negative aspects of culture shock (Boyle et al., 1999; Geelhoed et al. 2003).

The Fellows appreciated the opportunity to complete training experiences related to their professional positions. This echoes Rodriguez and Roberts (2011) who concluded students placed a high value on applied learning activities while undergoing international experiences. Similar to Boyle et al. assertions (1999), the Fellows gained knowledge and experience from U.S.

experts and increased their professional network. As a result, the Fellows perceived they had gained a solid foundation for impacting food security in their home countries. That viewpoint supports Kolb's (1984) posit about individuals *testing* their understanding of a concept by undertaking new experiences. The media Fellows were given specific tasks or jobs during their internships; however, the policymakers and community leaders indicated they had more of a job shadowing experience, which, for some, was less specific or job task-oriented.

The Fellows also realized the importance of involving youth in agricultural endeavors. According to the Fellows, careers in the agriculture sector are not popular choices for many students in Kenya and Uganda. For example, one Fellow wrote that "as a university lecturer, I have taught students who are either forced to do agriculture by their parents or do it as a last resort because they have failed to be taken for either human medicine, [or] pharmacy" (F12: 62-64). Therefore, the Fellows were impressed with how the agricultural education/FFA and 4-H programs they witnessed led youth willingly and enthusiastically toward agricultural careers.

The Fellows perceived a need for close links between research, Extension, and the farmer because this approach to communication allows best practices to be shared with local farmers to help improve their efficiency and effectiveness (Mutimba, Knipscheer, & Naibakelao, 2010). In support, a Fellow indicated the "need [existed] for enhanced collaboration between research, teaching and communications (extension) in my country to improve food security" (F6: 57-58).

The Fellows identified using media outlets as a method to share agricultural information proactively with the public. They planned to use the networks developed

through this grant-funded program – African counterparts and new American colleagues – to enhance their impact on food security in SSA and also indicated a desire to increase commitment to their respective careers. However, the Fellows expressed an awareness of the challenges and obstacles they would face as change agents for improved food security in their home countries.

Recommendations for Practice and Additional Research

Similar exchange programs should be offered that include learning opportunities for pre-reflection, reflection, and post-reflection by the participants. In addition, other U.S. institutions of higher education should seek funding to host exchange programs that promote scholarship, professional fellowship, and cultural understanding for the international visitors and the U.S. citizens who participate. Participants in future programs should be provided the opportunity to experience internships with actual *hands-on* job roles instead of only shadowing experiences.

Exchange programs calibrated to improve food security should continue with an increased emphasis on agricultural education and extension programs that feature youth development. Agricultural professionals from developing countries should learn about agricultural education/FFA, 4-H, and other youth organizations in agriculture and how they encourage individuals to pursue agricultural careers. Communication networks should be established in other developing countries to assist in creating opportunities for youth development in agriculture. More U.S. students should take part in learning experiences, including study abroad or cultural exchange programs, involving African countries (Pires, 2000).

The opportunity exists to *triangulate* this study's findings with post-reflection interviews collected after the Fellows returned home and the project's external evaluation report to obtain a more complete understanding of the project's impact. Moreover, a follow-up study should be conducted to examine communication behaviors among the Fellows throughout time to ascertain lasting impacts on their networking, especially in regard to improving food security. In addition, more research is needed to understand better the benefits and challenges associated with mid-career professionals participating in international exchanges. Inquiries also should be done to describe the qualitative differences between internships and job shadowing experiences.

References

- Boud, D. (2001). Using journal writing to enhance reflective practice. *New Directions for Adult Continuing Education*, 90, 9-17.
- Boud, D., & Walker, D. (1993). Barriers to reflection on experience. In D. Boud, R. Cohen, & D. Walker (Eds.), *Using experience for learning* (pp. 73-86). Buckingham, England: Open University Press.
- Boyle, D. P., Nackerud, L., & Kilpatrick, A. (1999). The road less traveled: Cross-cultural, international experiential learning. *International Social Work*, 42(2), 201-214.
- Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five approaches* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Creswell, J. W., & Miller, D. L. (2000). Determining validity in qualitative inquiry. *Theory into Practice*, 39, 124-130.

- Dooley, K. E., Dooley, L. M., & Carranza, G. (2008). Beliefs, barriers, and benefits of a faculty abroad experience in Mexico. *Journal of International Agricultural and Extension Education*, 15(3), 29-38. doi: 10.5191/jiaee.2008.15303
- Dunlap, J. (2006). Using guided reflective journaling activities to capture students' changing perceptions. *TechTrends*, 50(6), 20-26. doi: 10.1007/s11528-006-7614-x
- FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization). (2011). *The state of food insecurity in the world: How does international price volatility affect domestic economies and food security?* Rome, Italy: Author. Retrieved from www.fao.org/docrep/014/i2330e/i2330e.pdf
- Gallagher, T. J. (2002). Going international in Extension: A done deal? *Journal of Extension* [On-line], 40(3) Article 3COM1. Retrieved from <http://www.joe.org/joe/2002june/comm1.php>
- Geelhoed, R. J., Abe, J., & Talbot, D. M. (2003). A qualitative investigation of U.S. students' experiences in an international peer program. *Journal of College Student Development*, 44(1), 5-17.
- Hatton, N., & Smith, D. (1995). Reflection in teacher education: Towards definition and implementation. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 11(1), 33-49.
- Hiemstra, R. (2001). Uses and benefits of journal writing. In L. M. English & M. A. Gillen (Eds.), *Promoting journal writing in adult education* (pp. 19-26). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Hsieh, H., & Shannon, S. (2005). Three approaches to qualitative content analysis. *Qualitative Health Research*, 15(9), 1277-1288. doi:10.1177/1049732305276687
- Hubbs, D., & Brand, C. (2005). The paper mirror: Understanding reflective journaling. *Journal of Experiential Education*, 28(1), 60-71.
- Kolb, D. (1984). *Experiential learning: Experience as the source of learning and development*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Mihalache-O'keef, A., & Li, Q. (2011). Modernization vs. dependency revisited: Effects of foreign direct investment on food security in less developed countries. *International Studies Quarterly*, 55, 71-93. doi:10.1111/j.1468-2478.2010.00636.x
- Mutimba, J., Knipscheer, H., & Naibakelao, D. (2010). The role of universities in food security and safety: Perspectives based on the Sasakawa Africa fund for extension education. *Journal of Developments in Sustainable Agriculture*, 5(1), 12-22.
- Myles, J., & Cheng, L. (2003). The social and cultural life of non-native English speaking international graduate students at a Canadian university. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 2, 247-263. doi:10.1016/S1475-1585(03)00028-6
- Odell, K. S., Williams, M. E., Lawrence, L. D., Gartin, S. A., & Smith, D. K. (2002). Evaluation of the international 4-H youth exchange (IFYE) program. *Journal of International Agricultural and Extension Education*, 9(1), 57-64. doi: 10.5191/jiaee.2002.09107
- Özturgut, O. (2007, Fall). Study/teach abroad programs for higher education faculty. *Essays in*

- Education*, 22, 42-49.
- Pires, M. (2000). Study-abroad and cultural exchange programs to Africa: America's image of a continent. *African Issues*, 28(1), 39-45.
- Roberts, B. (2002). Interaction, reflection and learning at a distance. *Open Learning: The Journal of Open, Distance and e-Learning*, 17(1), 39-55.
- Roberts, T. G., & Jones, B. L. (2009). A brain-based, experiential learning framework to guide international experiences. *Proceedings of the Association for International Agricultural and Extension Education, San Juan, Puerto Rico*, 25, 404-411.
- Rodriguez, M. T., & Roberts, T. G. (2011). Identifying best practices for a successful study abroad program. *Journal of International Agricultural and Extension Education*, 18(1), 19-32. doi: 0.5191/jiaee.2011.18102
- Russell, M., & Vallade, L. (2009). Guided reflective journaling: Assessing the international study and volunteering experience. In E. Jones (Ed.), *Internationalization and the student voice: Higher education perspectives* (pp. 98-109). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Sanchez, P., Palm, C., & Sachs, J. (2007). The African millennium villages. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, USA*, 104.
- Sanchez, P., Swaminathan, M. S., Dobie, P., & Yuksel, N. (2005). *Halving hunger: It can be done*. UN Millennium Project, Task Force on Hunger 2005. London, UK: Earthscan.
- Suarez, D. (2003, Summer). The development of empathetic dispositions through global experiences. *Educational HORIZONS*, 180-182.
- Thorpe, M. (2000). Encouraging students to reflect as part of the assignment process: Student responses and tutor feedback. *Active Learning in Higher Education*, 1(1), 79-92.
- USAID (U.S. Agency for International Development). (2008). *Ugandan food security outlook: October 2008 to March 2009*. Author. Retrieved from http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PNADN659.pdf
- USAID (U.S. Agency for International Development). (2009). *Food for peace fact sheet: Kenya*. Author. Retrieved from http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PNADL361.pdf
- Walker, S. (2006). Journal writing as a teaching technique to promote reflection. *Journal of Athletic Training*, 41(2), 216-221.
- World Hunger Education Service. (2012). *World hunger and poverty facts and statistics*. Author. Retrieved from <http://www.worldhunger.org/articles/Learn/world%20hunger%20facts%202002.htm>