How Internationalizing Students Through Cross-Cultural Experiences May Affect Creativity

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What is Creativity?
Definition: Creativity is usually explained as the creation of something that is a) Novel and b) Appropriate.

Modeling Creativity
Insight
Because the creative process is complex, it is usually modeled through a simplified version of creativity, Insight Problems. Insight Problems are atypical from traditional, well-defined problems in that they are ill-defined. Rather than requiring linear, logical patterns in their solutions, Insight Problems usually result in an impasse where the problem solver realizes that normal methods of thought are not going to be successful. This is followed by a sudden insight, often called a ‘aha!’ or ‘Eureka!’ moment. In this moment the problem solver breaks from the traditional, logical train of thought and diverges to another more creative way of thinking. This change allows for a discovery of the solution to the problem.

Activity: Try Some Insight Problems:
1. Box man placed five full game of checkers and each won an even number of games, with no ties, draws, or forfeits. How is that possible?
2. Young boy turned off the lights in his bedroom and managed to get into bed before the room was dark. If he did not turn on the light switch and the light bulb, and he used no visor, strings, or other contraptions to turn off the light, how did he do it?

Category Formation and Insight
One interesting property of Insight Problems is that their solution rates have been shown to increase with an initial practice in creation of novel categories, called Goal Derived Categorizations (GDC). One method of GDC, called the Uses Task, is where a problem solver initially practices novel category formation by thinking of novel uses of various objects (i.e. a normal use of a book is to read, but potential novel uses are to make a shoe, a notebook, or a life preserver, etc.).

The increase in creativity from GDCs is thought to be seen because GDC practice breaks from traditional thoughts and conceptions through the formation of novel categories. When the problem solver attempts to solve insight problems after GDC practice, they then draw upon this practiced skill, resulting in an increase in ability to create novel solutions.

Activity: Uses Task for Goal Derived Categorization
Shoe Tin support your facts? Cardboard Box (Object to carry things)? What are some other novel uses for these two objects?

Research Proposal: Studying Abroad and Creativity
Looking at the model proposed by Maddux, life abroad seems to be one that is riddled with opportunities for creative insight. Furthermore, if the model is correct, study abroad experiences where students focus on cross-cultural understanding could be more effective in this process through their practice of creation of novel categories (as seen in prior Goal Derived Categorization research).

Targets of Study
We will compare 4 main groups:
- Americans with study abroad experience
- Americans without study abroad experience
- Americans without study abroad experience
- Americans with study abroad experience

Method
We will measure scores on some of the introduced moderators, and creativity, first primed by thinking about a past multicultural experience, looking to see if pre and post stay scores differ over a one semester study period.

Expected Results
- 1) only the currently studying abroad groups will show an increase in creativity over the period of measurement,
- 2) this increase will be larger in students engaged in cross-cultural understanding programs
- 3) moderators will follow previous seen relationships, but 3b) moderators also change through the study abroad experience in a way that supports an increase in creativity, and 4) creativity will be affected in a robust manner, with study abroad experience affecting most measures of creativity tested.

Possible Implications
- Development of cross-cultural understanding skills is a key factor in why life abroad creates more creative individuals.
- Cross-cultural understanding training should be an integral part of study abroad programs to maximize their effectiveness.

References

Contact Information
Interested in learning more about this research or about a possible collaboration? Please contact Matthew Russell at m.russell@umn.edu.