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“It inspires and motivates you to do something that makes a difference”: Transformational education experiences and global citizenry in a tertiary travel award

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Abstract

Literature shows that international travel as part of tertiary studies can result in transformational learning and increased global citizenry. There is a growing body of research in this field but most has focused on study abroad programmes, mainly in North American universities, based on the delivery of course content in a setting outside the country of origin. This present study examines the experience of participants from a university on a tertiary travel award with specific educational intent, but not based on a credit-bearing course delivering subject-specific content. Fifteen participants and four chaperones from five annual intakes (2013-2017) were interviewed and themes from the interviews provide evidence of the transformative educational outcomes of such an undertaking, and of how such an experience can nurture global citizenry. Findings provide evidence of all three aspects of global citizenry emanating from the travel award experience: global awareness, global-mindedness and global competence.

Introduction

One of the highly desirable outcomes of educational travel is global citizenship (McGladdery & Lubbe, 2017; Stoner et al., 2014; Tarrant, Rubin & Stoner, 2014), defined as a “global form of belonging, responsibility and political action [which] counter[s] the intolerance and ignorance that more provincial and parochial forms of citizenship encourage” (Lyons, Hanley, Wearing, & Neil, 2012, p. 361). Some of the research into aspects of effective educational tourism indicates that short-term stays (less than four weeks) can be as effective as longer stays, but that programmes need to be grounded in sound pedagogy with clear learning outcomes and assessment, and opportunities for reflection (Bell et al., 2014; Hutchinson & Rea, 2011; McGladdery & Lubbe, 2017; Stoner et al., 2014; Tarrant, Rubin & Stoner, 2014). This article examines the outcomes of a two-week trek in the Himalayas awarded to high performing tertiary students within a scholarship programme in a New Zealand. Students across five cohorts who participated between 2013 and 2017 were interviewed for the study.



Literature

A programme of travel designed with the primary or secondary purpose of learning “in a unique environment” (McGladdery & Lubbe, 2017, p. 320) is known as Educational Tourism or Educational Travel. Perhaps due to the relatively recent increase in study-abroad programmes at many North American universities (Tarrant, Rubin & Stoner, 2014), there is a growing body of literature concerning educational tourism, mostly located in the travel and tourism field (e.g. Stoner et al., 2014; McGladdery & Lubbe, 2017). In their discussion of the notion of global citizenship as a learning outcome of educational travel, Stoner et al. (2014) suggest that short-term experientially-based travel programmes “provide students the opportunity to foster a worldview that is consistent with the tenets of global citizenship” (p. 150) and that global citizens “...understand the interdependency of the world and its inhabitants, and the connective links that exist between all living things” (p. 152). They suggest that there are three key dimensions to global citizenry: concern for humanity and the environment (social responsibility), awareness of global issues (global awareness), and active participation (civic engagement). McGladdery and Lubbe (2017) suggest that effective learning from educational tourism requires a programme with clearly defined cognitive (knowledge), affective (attitude), and behavioural (skill development) elements.

Global citizenry as an outcome of educational travel/tourism entails individuals becoming aware of the frames through which they have learned to see the world, and also becoming appreciative of other perspectives. McGladdery and Lubbe (2017) explain that the process of global learning, or becoming a global citizen progresses from global awareness, or the acquiring of knowledge, through a change in attitude to social and environmental issues (known as global mindedness) to a state of global competence whereby individuals change their behaviour and realise their agency.

Transformative Learning Theory, first outlined by Mezirow (1978;1981), is defined as “an adult learning framework that explains the process through which individuals alter their existing frames of reference and ways of being in the world” (Stone & Duffy, 2015, p. 204). This theory is a useful tool for investigating the shifts in perspective integral to global citizenship which may result from educational travel. Mezirow proposes four kinds of learning within transformational education: (a) elaborating existing frames of reference, (b) learning new frames of reference, (c) transforming habits of mind, and (d) transforming points of view (Stone & Duffy, 2015, p. 205). In their review of 53 studies in travel and tourism using transformational education, Stone and Duffy (2015) identified five aspects of successful transformational learning. These include preparation, critical reflection, a disorienting dilemma, the inclusion of immersive experiences, and having a planned method of re-entry after the experience (Stone & Duffy, 2015). The second of these, the “disorienting dilemma”, is a component considered essential in transformational education, and defined as “an experience characterised by anxiety, discomfort, and dissonance” (Stone & Duffy, 2015, p. 213).

It is worth noting that these aspects of transformative education reflect a certain Western privilege; indeed most studies in this arena come from a North American, if not Western perspective. They come out of communities where there are both the space and resources to allow for the choice of opting for a transformational experience. This perspective is imbued with somewhat neo-colonial assumptions about those involved in transformative education leaving their home country to experience and then returning from an ‘other’ part of the world. There is also an assumption that those involved in transformative educational experiences will be in a position to ‘prepare for’ and then ‘re-enter’ the comfort of their own culture and home when indeed thousands of people around the world have transformative educational experiences without these affordances. For example, migrants or refugees may be forced to leave their home country for political or economic reasons, and never have a chance to return. This does not alter the fact that they experience learning new points of view, developing new frames of references, experiencing an immersive experience and a disorienting dilemma. Nor does it alter the fact that truly powerful transformative education is occurring. It is just not being offered or elected from a position of power and comfort.

That being said, within the framework of existing transformative education experience literature, Stone and Duffy (2015) note that while there have been many studies of educational travel, they have

mainly focused on study-abroad programmes, and suggest there is a need to examine other kinds of educational travel experiences, and for there to be longitudinal studies. The focus of this study is to examine what students experienced participating in two-weeks of educational travel trekking in the Himalayas and what they learned in terms of transformational education and global citizenship. Representatives from five cohorts of the travel award were interviewed, allowing for a longitudinal aspect to the study.

Context

The participants in this study are based in a New Zealand university. In 2005 a scholarship programme was established to attract students who have achieved excellence in sports or the arts in addition to academic achievement and leadership. The programme was named after Sir Edmund Hillary¹ and established with his blessing. The scholarship, currently worth \$NZ 10,000 per year, requires students to maintain high levels of both academic achievement and performance in their chosen field. Throughout the study programme of the students, the link between Sir Edmund Hillary and the students in this scholarship programme is consistently referenced, with three to four compulsory leadership days held each year when values of service and high achievement are explored. In each scholarship year, students are given Sir Edmund’s book *View from the Summit* (1999) and follow a programme of inspirational talks and fundraising events for the Himalayan Trust² for the continuance of work begun by Sir Edmund in schools, hospitals and water projects in the Solukhumbu district³.

Since 2013, a further opportunity for the Hillary Scholars (as they are known) to become familiar with, and inspired by, the work of Sir Edmund has been offered in the form of an all-expenses-paid (supported by sponsors) travel award, comprising a trip to Nepal to go trekking in the Solukhumbu Valley and to visit schools, hospitals and water projects being supported by the Himalayan Trust. Each year applications are invited and three or four students are chosen, based on their upholding of the three pillars of the Hillary Scholarship programme: leadership, academic excellence and community leadership, with a particular emphasis on leadership. As part of the award, recipients are expected to fundraise \$NZ1,000 to give to a reputable charity working in the area where they will be trekking. Often students also choose to take school or medical supplies to be distributed during the trek. The students and a university chaperone fly into the capital of Nepal, Kathmandu, and then up to Lukla where they participate in a 12-day guided trek to the Base Camp of Amadablam, a 6,000 m mountain clearly visible on the trek to Mount Everest. During this trek, they visit Himalayan Trust water purification projects, schools and the original hospital at Khunde established by Sir Edmund and supported by the Himalayan Trust.

Method

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 15 student participants and four staff chaperones in the travel award programme in which questions about the challenges, rewards and lasting impact of the experience were asked. All participants either chose or were given pseudonyms which are used throughout this article. They ranged in duration from 19:49 to 46:37 minutes and were recorded using QuickTime Player. The interviews were transcribed and transcriptions verified and/or amended by

¹ Sir Edmund Hillary was a New Zealand mountaineer and explorer. In 1953 Sherpa Tenzing Norgay and he were the first people to ascend Mount Everest (Sagarmatha/Chomolungma). Sir Edmund Hillary went on to dedicate much of his life to working with the Sherpa people of Nepal through the Himalayan Trust.

² The Himalayan Trust was established in the 1960s by Sir Edmund and Lady Louise Hillary. Today the Himalayan Trust is an international not-for-profit organisation which works in the Himalayan region of Nepal to improve water, education and health services for the people in this region (Himalayan Trust, 2017).

³ The Solukhumbu district comprises two subregions of Nepal within the Sagarmatha National Park in the North East of Nepal where Mount Everest is located.

participants. Analysis of the transcription using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was completed in relation to characteristics of transformational learning (Stone & Duffy, 2015) and global citizenship (Tarrant et al., 2014). The researcher searched and coded iteratively across the 15 interview transcripts “to find repeated patterns of meaning” (Braun & Clark, 2006, p.86). Some themes were more ‘theory-driven’, that is they were strongly linked to the questions posed and the existing literature; others were more ‘data-driven’, that is they emerged from the data set.

Participants

The 15 students interviewed comprised eight female and seven male participants, ranging in age between 20 and 33 years (see Table 1). Their areas of performance were mostly sport (ten students) with the Arts also represented (five students), and their study areas included Music, Business, Management Studies, Science, Psychology, Sports and Leisure Studies, Law, and Teaching. In addition, four chaperones⁴ (three female and one male) were interviewed for another perspective on the students’ experiences and learning.

Table 1: Student participants

Pseudonym	Gender	Year on Travel Award	Age (years) at time of interview
Craig	M	2017	20
Tasanee	F	2017	23
Rosemary	F	2017	21
Elisabeth	F	2017	21
David	M	2016	23
Aaron	M	2016	22
Thalia	F	2016	23
Sandra	F	2016	23
Karen	F	2015	25
Tyler	M	2015	24
Jake	M	2015	33
Lewis	M	2014	25
Stewart	M	2014	29
Maia	F	2013	27
Anne	F	2013	27

Findings

Across the transcribed interviews from the five cohorts who participated in the travel award, five themes predominated in their discussion of their experiences in the Himalayas. The scholars enjoyed their connections with people, whether other students in their cohort, Himalayan school students, or the guides and porters. They also appreciated the region’s physical beauty and the majesty of the mountains,

⁴ The author was a chaperone in the 2017 cohort. While she was not interviewed for this research undoubtedly her experiences shaped her analysis of the findings.

with several commenting on the silence and darkness. They were challenged by walking at altitude, with some experiencing minor symptoms of altitude sickness, others having to walk slowly because of the thin air.

The students gained a much deeper appreciation of Sir Edmund Hillary and his work in the Solukhumbu Valley. They saw the value of their fundraising for the lives of those living in this region and believed that this knowledge informed the wider scholarship community. Lastly, it is clear that the experience had a crucial effect on the students' visions of what they could achieve in their professional and personal lives for the benefit of others. The themes will now be presented with specific examples from the interview transcripts.

Connecting

Many of the highlights for the 2017 cohort revolved around people. The students enjoyed meeting children and teachers at the schools visited, and getting to know the porters. Likewise, in the 2016 cohort both Thalia and David mentioned their connection with a woman at one of the lodges whose husband had been killed in the mountains, and who was bringing up their son on her own. Aaron (2016) got on very well with the porters, and David mentioned the special close friendships made within the cohort. Lewis reported enjoying going into the classrooms of the Himalayan Trust schools, and Stewart liked seeing how people in this part of the Himalayas lived. A strong memory for both of them was playing cricket with Nepali school children in the village of Khumjung with the snow-capped Himalayan mountains in the background. Maia also enjoyed visiting the hospital, and was impressed by the staff's modest expectations regarding equipment: "We donated an eye machine that somehow... got up there to the hospital. I remember asking them is there anything else you need, and they said, no we've got everything we need and I just thought if you ask anyone in New Zealand there will always be something they're needing." The museum they visited in Namche Bazaar, established by Sir Edmund about the Sherpa people, was also a highlight for Maia, as was getting a sense of the region's religious diversity.

The physical environment

In the 2016 cohort, David and Thalia identified the achievement of reaching Base Camp Amadablam as a highlight for them. David said,

They say that Amadablam means the mother's pendant. It really does feel like...these two outward reaching arms and you feel like... Mother Nature is somehow embracing you at that moment. So that moment will always stand out in my mind because you know there were just certain things that had been troubling me at home, in my personal life, but as soon as I reached the base camp I sort of thought, nothing could ever take this away from me. No matter how much I screw up in life or how far I veer from my path... I could always come back here and feel this again. So, I think that's a really big gift actually to take away from Nepal, something I can always remember to put challenges into perspective". Thalia loved the serene peacefulness at Base Camp, and Aaron mentioned the silence as a highlight: "Hearing silence as well, like I really loved just being out in, just nothing. You just hear nature but even then nature was so quiet so you can hear anything and then it's really nice.

Jake, a music scholar in the 2015 cohort, commented on the stillness, darkness and silence he experienced while trekking. He and the chaperone for his cohort described the extended 'philosophising' that happened during the walking and in the evenings. Jake explained it in this way:

I think that the removal of like placing yourself in nature with a small group of people and nothing else is going on, it almost becomes meditative slow movement and I think that potentially gives [rise to] the deeper thoughts, because there is space to allow them.

As Anne (2013) put it,

the general vibe or energy that I felt when we were up in the Everest region, you know, just the presence that those mountains have and the space There is more nature than humans, which we really rarely get these days.

Challenges

Challenges across the five cohorts included both physical and emotional. All four participants in the 2017 cohort discussed the challenge of dealing with altitude. Rosemary, for example, had received her scholarship based on achievement in the arts rather than sport and reported being anxious about being fit enough to keep up with the other sports scholars, and wondering if she could maintain the physical effort needed for 12 days. The challenges for the 2016 cohort students were physical in terms of altitude and fitness, and, for two of the cohort, experiencing food poisoning towards the end of the trip in Kathmandu. David reported getting very cold one day when the group walked through falling snow and then had to wait while a lodge with running (i.e. not frozen) water was found. David also felt the challenges of fitness and hygiene.

Aaron had been expecting hygiene and food to be a challenge, but surprised himself by finding they were not:

I thought it's going to be hard to overcome but once I was there I sort of switched off and nothing was a challenge. It was how it was.

The 2015 cohort was also mildly challenged by the cold, a gastric upset at one point, headaches from altitude and not being able to shower for 12 days. Challenges for both Stewart and Lewis in the 2014 cohort included being kept inside for one day by bad weather. Stewart experienced a bad headache during the descent and found the cold and the food somewhat difficult. No-one interviewed in the 2013 cohort suffered from altitude sickness, but walking at altitude was one of the challenges faced.

Aside from the physical challenges, there were also emotional challenges. Elisabeth did not find the trekking physically difficult but was challenged instead by living life a bit more slowly than she was used to:

The more challenging for me was living life in that slow lane and developing better patience and not worrying about anything and not feeling like I have to be anywhere and doing anything and be okay with it.

Jake missed his three-year-old son. Lewis was confronted by the poverty he saw in Kathmandu and by the size and weight of loads carried by young children in the Himalayas. Anne also felt very conspicuous as a white tourist, and for Maia, it was the longest time she had ever been away from her family. David very wisely pointed out the individuality of challenges faced by different scholars: "I think you bring your own challenges to the Himalayas". He himself was surprised by the intensity with which he missed his family, friends, and partner. As a musician, he also missed playing the piano:

I really missed practising piano. I thought about piano a lot and because you know it's something you do every day, religiously, so it was really weird to have always music in your head and nothing to get it out on.

Deeper appreciation of Sir Edmund Hillary

The major impact of the experience for all four 2017 scholars was their understanding of the impact of the work of Sir Edmund Hillary in the Solukhumbu Valley. As mentioned earlier, all scholarship recipients were gifted a book about Sir Edmund but all of the 2017 cohort noted that seeing his work was quite different from reading about it. The scholars explained that truly understanding the impact of the work of one person, the person who their scholarship is named after, was very important. Rosemary said:

[The Hillary Scholarship] is a great programme and it's really helping me get through university and the support we get is amazing. But then to see actually, this is the main point of the programme - to emulate what Sir Edmund did and who he was.

Like the 2017 cohort, the 2016 scholars discussed the 'greater depth of understanding' of the impact of Sir Edmund Hillary and the Himalayan Trust. As Thalia explained, "it is one thing reading about Sir Ed, but another to actually see his work". It also helped her to understand Hillary was motivated to help the Nepali people:

People work as a community. You walk in there and you can see how they all work together. Their lifestyle is quite simple and yeah, it's a family feel. They are quiet but there is a spirit of generosity up there.

The 2015 cohort had much to say about what they learned about the work of Sir Edmund from their travel award experience, and how it had inspired their lives. Karen described this in detail:

To see the profound legacy that he has there was so inspiring. These people highly regard him and to see how much his influence kind of pervades everything and just to see what he did.

The two participants interviewed from the 2014 cohort (Lewis and Stewart) liked seeing the work of the Himalayan Trust and getting a real sense of what had been accomplished by the fundraising done by Hillary Scholars. All three men interviewed from the 2014 cohort believed that their knowledge of Sir Edmund had been enhanced as a result of the award. Stewart said:

To see how Sir Edmund is respected there was another big surprise. You don't realise how much of an impact he had on the people there... You can read a book, you can watch a documentary, a video, movie but seeing it first-hand, it's just powerful.

All those interviewed in the 2013 cohort noted the perspective gained on their trip of Sir Edmund's impact in this region and the fact that this is made much more real by one's being there. Nadia, the chaperone for the first cohort, said that while the travel award only goes to a handful of students in each year, the effects of this experience permeate throughout the scholarship community via stories:

It's all about storytelling. So, it's all about storytelling for the students while they are in Nepal from the people of Nepal. And then it's the story of the students and their experiences, and the storytelling of everyone who is involved in organising the trip or who is touched by the trip.

Future potential

Having returned from the trek only four to six weeks before their interviews, the 2017 students explained how the experience of the travel award had affected their lives. Craig said that having met a porter who was illiterate meant he now appreciated education much more and believed he would choose more community-oriented work in the future. Elisabeth had also been given a different perspective on her future work:

'It was like a re-inforcer that you can't live your life having it 100% about you. Like, at some stage when you get the resources then it is important to put all of those back into things that really inspire you to help others. I think that was really important for me.

Tasaneer said the experience had made her want to be involved in fundraising in the future as well as feeling she had learned about other people's leadership styles. Rosemary wanted to continue her involvement in fundraising. She had run a concert to raise the \$1000 funds for the trip and said that she wanted to continue organising a concert every year to raise funds for the Himalayan Trust. In terms of her work as a performing artist, she also felt her experience in Nepal had had a positive effect: "I think coming back from Nepal added to my performing experience because it added to my life".

Having been back more than a year, the 2016 cohort could perhaps comment more fully than the 2017 cohort on the effect the experience had had on their lives. Both Sandra and David want to go back. Sandra believes it has influenced her current work with organisations for sportspeople with disabilities and she feels she has become less materialistic. Thalia said the experience has given her the travel bug, and David said,

‘I have a much more sort of urgent feeling that I need to help in contributing tangibly to people in those countries. I wouldn’t be able to ... die happily without really giving my all in trying to give everything I could to a particular community, just like Sir Ed did.

Karen began to realise that she could use the energy she put into her sport, into doing good for others. She reflected,

I’m doing good with my sport, but it’s only doing good for me. It makes me happy but how can I use that to make a positive effect on where we live?

The effect the travel award had on the 2015 students varied, perhaps according to age and experience. For example, Jake, one of the older participants at 31 years, said he did not feel the experience made a huge impact on his life as relatively recently he had the transformative experiences of becoming a father and completing a PhD. By comparison, the experience had a profound impact on the life of Karen, who was 23 years at the time. Her New Zealand frame of reference was disoriented, and once she came home she struggled to re-enter her life as it was before she left. She ended up returning to Nepal a little later the same year to voluntarily teach English. Her experiences seemed to give her a new perspective on her previous life:

I was so engrossed and so driven in my sport. That’s what I lived and breathed. My goals was ‘only take your eyes off your goal long enough to appreciate what’s around you’. Now it’s like, yeah, I have these goals but you know it doesn’t matter. I know that I can strive for my goals but if I don’t win this there are so much bigger things in the world. Previously my biggest thing was just the athletics whereas now I have the awareness of bigger things out there.

Stewart (2014) now feels he has a connection with any people he might meet from that part of the world in New Zealand. David (2016) also said that the experience had affected his perceptions of people from Nepal whom he met in New Zealand:

“Yeah, like ‘I have something in common with you’. It makes me really excited because I know inside their head there’s a kind of perspective in the world view that is just so different from any other people here in New Zealand. So yeah, I certainly feel connected to people when I suspect they are from Nepal or India, so it’s definitely changed my perspective”.

Lewis (2014 cohort) explained the particular importance of the timing of the experience in the lives of the students:

I don’t think you can appreciate how much it’s going to change your perspective on life or your perspective on what you want to do. It’s quite a fundamental time in someone’s life.... I think it’s an incredibly valuable, eye-opening opportunity that will make you consider things which you haven’t considered before, and it teaches you [important things] before going into some sort of young career, or in some cases further travel or further study.

Stewart (2014 cohort) has realised he likes natural beauty and time for reflection and has continued to trek and travel around the world since the travel award. Lewis has also become more confident about international travel and has travelled for six weeks in India since his time in Nepal. The company he works for has an international support programme which employees can apply to participate in:

You go on as a posting in a developing country and you take a salary sacrifice but you get to work in special projects in Africa and the Middle East as well and I don't think I would have considered that unless I went to Nepal.

Of the five cohorts interviewed for this study, the first cohort in 2013 is perhaps the group in which the long-term effects of the experience can best be observed. Both students had felt a substantial impact. Anne reported she has become much more interested in the spiritual aspect of life and has gone on to work in international development, including a five-month period with a grassroots organisation in Cambodia, then ten months in East Timor working with youth volunteers. Most recently she has worked in New Zealand with a not-for-profit international aid organisation.

While Maia's work is not linked to international development, nonetheless she reports that her present work as a psychologist has been influenced by her experience in Nepal:

I think it probably opened my eyes to different cultures and religion. I think when I have different ethnicities, and cultures, clients or families with me I don't make assumptions and I acknowledge that I don't know about them. But I know that they have different ways of knowing and doing. So yeah, it has broadened my horizon and there's just not one way that things happen.

The 2013 chaperone, Nadia, noted,

I am sure that you'll find that every student will bring a different perspective on what value they gain from that and how that's changing their future pathway.

Discussion

The interviews with the 15 students and their chaperones indicated quite clearly the transformational learning aspects of this particular tertiary travel award. Unlike previous research into the outcomes of travel associated with tertiary study, this study examined an example of educational travel not associated with a specific university course but nonetheless having a very specific learning intention relating to observing and understanding the impact of the work of Sir Edmund Hillary in the Solukhumbu Valley.

Like the work of Hutchison and Rea (2011) who documented and analysed the transformative effects of a one week visit to the The Gambia with 25 beginning teachers from the United Kingdom, and the work of Bell et al. (2014) who explored the effects of short term educational experiences for 150 university undergraduate students on 24 day programmes in the South Pacific, the findings of the present study also indicates the possibility for transformative experiences in short periods of time.

The students' reports on their experiences exhibit all three aspects of global citizenry as discussed earlier (McGladdery & Lubbe, 2017): global awareness, global-mindedness and global competence. The regular meetings of all the Hillary Scholars means that those selected for this travel award already have an awareness of Sir Edmund Hillary's achievements in the Solukhumbu Valley, but students and chaperones in every cohort in this study commented on the enhancing effect of the immersive experience of the 12-day trek on their knowledge (or global awareness). If we refer to the four aspects of transformational learning outlined by Mezirow (1978; 1981), we can consider this an example of an elaboration of existing frames of reference. All the students felt that seeing the projects and people affected by the work of the Himalayan Trust deepened and enriched their understanding of the impact of Sir Edmund and his work.

There were also many examples of reflections and anecdotes which relate to global-mindedness or changes in attitudes and ways of thinking. For example, Elisabeth (2017) commented on becoming aware of the personal need to "give back", and described the new awareness she has about different ways of being in the world which has influenced her work as a psychologist. David (2016) talked about the perspective on life given to him by being in "the arms" of Amadablam Base Camp, and Aaron (2016) reported his surprise at how easily he adjusted to the unfamiliar food and hygiene routines. In the context of Mezirow's transformational learning framework, we can see examples here of learning new frames

(giving back), new habits of mind (relating to hygiene and food), and transforming points of view (relating to being in the world).

The last aspect of global citizenry, global competence, was very clearly evident in the reflections of the 15 student participants and supported by comments from their four chaperones. Many of the students were impressed to see the impact of the funds they had raised for the Himalayan Trust both as Hillary Scholars and as travel award recipients. When asked about the lasting impact of the experience, many participants said they wanted to continue fundraising and to do things in their lives to contribute to improving the lives of others. While all had been aware of fundraising and the work of the Himalayan Trust prior to their trek, it appears that this experience had made them more conscious of their personal agency in doing things for the benefit of others. This finding links to previous work with tertiary students in an educational travel experience. Linguistics students doing fieldwork in Vanuatu demonstrated that until they were actually in the field working with endangered languages, they did not fully understand some of the concepts they had previously learned in theory (Daly, in press).

The students in the present study were not only high performing academically, but they were also high achievers in their respective fields of sports and the arts. The very nature of being an elite athlete or musician requires a high degree of self-focus and discipline. It seems that the experience of travelling to see the effects of the work of the Himalayan Trust allowed many students to be aware of their ability to positively impact the world, not just themselves. Certainly it would appear that the participants had developed the potential to, as Stoner et al. (2014) say in regard to the benefits of a society of globally aware citizens, “recognise that the most innovative solutions to our world’s most complex problems reside in a paradigm of relationships that are interconnected and collaborative” (p. 153). The fact that such effects were reported by students from the 2013 cohort onwards suggests that this outcome has some stability.

Conclusion

The focus of this study was to examine what students participating in an educational travel experience in the form of a two-week trek in the Himalayas and to examine their learning from this experience in terms of transformational education and global citizenship. The findings provide evidence of the transformative educational consequences of such an undertaking, including elaborating existing frames, learning new frames, learning new habits of mind and transforming points of view. Results also showed that the participants had developed in all three areas of global citizenry including global awareness, global mindedness and global competence. They suggest that this effect is sustainable across several years. The findings support Stoner et al.’s (2014) contention that “experientially based, short-term educational travel programs provide a learning site for students to experience, grapple with, and reflect on issues global in nature - ultimately fostering a transformative experience that can lead to a shift in perspective, awareness and worldview” (p. 154).

Unlike previous studies of transformative educational programmes, this study does not relate to a traditional ‘study-abroad’ experience, and as such it provides evidence that educational travel experiences outside course-related teaching can also provide sustainable development of the knowledge, attitudes and competence which are characteristic of a global citizen. While the participants in this study were from a Western developed nation, they were not from a major world power. Indeed New Zealand and New Zealanders often experience being ‘othered’ by citizens of the more powerful Western countries, and so this also provides a fresh perspective in research concerning transformative education which usually involves students from the UK or the USA. Future studies following the trajectories of the lives of the recipients of this educational travel award could usefully add to the literature on the sustainability of the characteristics of global citizenry these individuals attained.

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