

Coriander room  
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## A comparative analysis of experiential learning in higher education: Case studies of STEER India and STEER Myanmar

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### **Introduction: Context and Theoretical Framework**

“Visible teaching and learning occurs...when there are active, passionate and engaging people...participating in the act of learning” (Hattie, 2012, p. 18), and experiential learning programmes provide a good platform for this in higher education. This paper illustrates and critically analyses the innovative pedagogical practices used in the informal learning programme of a residential college at the National University of Singapore (NUS) to impact visible teaching and deep learning within cross-cultural settings. Through its participation in the university’s Study Trips for Engagement and EnRichment (STEER) programme, the College organised experiential learning trips to emerging economies, including India and Myanmar. The study trips combine academic rigour and experiential learning using a multimodal method to explore the concepts and issues related to the chosen area of inquiry of the respective STEERs. This study is focused on two STEER programmes conducted in AY2017/18—STEER India and STEER Myanmar.

Guided by STEER India’s theme of “Community Development and Culture” and STEER Myanmar’s theme of “Sustainability and Community Engagement”, the students were offered an interdisciplinary and interactive platform to connect theories to grounded practice through relevant readings, classroom discussions, guest speakers and field visits both local and overseas. Moving beyond the traditional classroom model, students immersed in a cross-cultural setting and expanded their intellectual horizons as they learnt “to shift cultural perspective and to adapt their behaviour to other cultural contexts” (Vande Berg, Paige, & Lou, 2012, p. 18). The visible teaching and learning was grounded on “...deliberate interventions to ensure...cognitive change in the student” (Hattie, 2012, p. 19) and “...intervene(*ing*) in focused and intentional ways...embracing and enacting the view that effective and deep learning...is necessarily experiential, developmental, and holistic” (Vande Berg, Paige, & Lou, 2012, p. 25).

### **Methods: Data and Analytical Procedures**

The impact of the innovative pedagogical practices on these experiential learning programmes were systematically documented through a mixed method case study research design (Stake, 2008). The data for the study was obtained from two key sources of the two STEERs—student feedback through survey questionnaires and empirical evidence from students' reflections in the Young Talent Programme (YTP) report. The surveys, which comprised both close- and open-ended questions, were analysed using a quasi-quantitative methodology. The YTP reports were analysed using an in-depth content analysis method (Creswell, 2003). Through an iterative process of discussion and negotiation of the codes developed through a close reading of the reflective reports, themes were generated to interpret the impact on deep learning through experiential learning and deliberate teaching interventions.

### **Significant Findings and Study Contributions**

The significant findings illuminate how experiential learning has positively impacted deep learning, especially in the broadening of perspectives to critically assess community development and sustainability issues, developing a deeper intercultural understanding, and shifting of mindsets. For instance, the use of interactive activities during field visits like reflective debriefs at the end of each day of engagement helped students to revisit common stereotypes and misconceptions in these areas. In addition, the evidence also presented numerous instances of the students' growth in their understanding of the issues and ability to compare models used in these countries vis-à-vis Singapore. In addition, we hope to discuss the results along with our experiences as supervisors/facilitators, particularly how it has confirmed and complexified our understanding of how STEERs support student learning.

The study contributes to the knowledge building of developing visible teaching strategies that hold potential for effective and deep learning, especially in an informal learning setting. Our findings highlight the dynamic interplay between learning, research and teaching, particularly confirming the affordances of experiential learning through intentional pedagogical interventions, which help students understand the values in such learning opportunities and the importance of contributing productively to the society.

### **Keywords**

Experiential learning, cooperative learning, community engagement, deep learning, social responsibility

## References

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