

EUTOPIA Certificate of Internationalisation 2024

Reflective Portfolio by Inae Heo

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Reflective Essay

Introduction

My mission trip to the Philippines from May 12 to 17, 2024, was a valuable experience that allowed me to reflect on learning and intercultural awareness. By engaging with the local community, participating in various activities, and immersing myself in a different culture, I was able to grow personally and develop a deeper understanding of cultural dynamics. This essay will explore my experiences in the Philippines and how they align with reflective and intercultural learning outcomes.



Reflective Learning: Personal Growth through Challenges

Community Engagement

One of the significant activities during our mission trip was repainting a local school. The physical labor was demanding under the hot weather, and the resources were limited but incredibly rewarding. Initially, I thought it was just a simple painting. Still, it turned out to be about providing a better environment and improving the living conditions for the students in a less secure area.



The highlight was when the children thanked us for making their school look beautiful on their way home. They also collected our fingerprints and created a piece to remember this time. It felt wonderful to know that our sincere efforts to provide a better environment for the children were appreciated. Additionally, working alongside fellow church members, I learned the value of teamwork and perseverance. Reflecting on this experience, I realized how collective effort can positively impact the community.

Figure 2

Recreational Activities

Another major aspect of the mission trip was teaching singing and dancing and organizing recreational activities. However, managing over 100 lively students was challenging as it was my first time. I started by greeting them in Filipino to gather their attention: “Magandang umaga, Ako ay si Alice,” which means “Good morning, I am Alice.” This immediately caught their interest, and they cheered while chanting my name. Afterward, I introduced the “Shoulder Taps” game as a recreational activity. These sessions were fun, providing the children a break from their usual routines and helping them learn new play.

Video 2



After this game, the students’ focus and interest significantly increased. They participated more actively in the next sequence, the singing and dancing activities. When I asked them to come forward and showcase their dance and singing, many students eagerly stepped up without hesitation, giving their best effort. Witnessing their enthusiasm inspired me to join in as well.



Video 3

Like Koreans, Filipinos also seemed to have great enthusiasm and a strong musical aptitude. I discovered cultural commonalities by watching them easily follow and genuinely enjoy singing unfamiliar songs. Music and dance became universal languages that allowed us to connect with the children on a deeper level.

Intercultural Awareness: Understanding and Respecting Differences

Language and Communication

Learning basic Filipino phrases and attempting to converse with the locals enhanced my intercultural communication skills. Although the language barrier sometimes led to misunderstandings, it also provided opportunities for learning and growth. More important than the language was the effort to understand each other with an open mind. When words failed, we communicated through facial expressions and gestures, making me realize that true communication might not require words.



Video 4

Additionally, this mission trip made me realize the importance of the Internet and media in communication. These mediums allow us to interact with and naturally encounter different cultures. For example, the Korean drama “Squid Game” was very popular in the Philippines, and through this drama, all



the children learned the traditional Korean game “Red Light, Green Light.” Because of this, I could play the game with the children without explaining the rules. This was an amazing experience that showcased the power of K-culture. Being able to play a traditional Korean game in the Philippines was something I had never imagined.



And once again, music became a common language. After listening to Korean music, they shared their own songs. Although I was embarrassed to admit it was my first time hearing Filipino songs, I found their language beautiful through the melodies. Even without understanding the lyrics, I could feel the nation’s character, excitement, and energy through the music.

Video 5

Ultimately, we can communicate beyond all barriers. Through these interactions, I learned the importance of empathy and the necessity of an open mind and respect when communicating with people from diverse cultural backgrounds.



Figure 3

Local Filipino Cuisine

The residents prepared traditional Filipino food for us. “Kamayan” is a traditional Filipino feast where food is eaten with the hands. “Kamay” means “hand” in Tagalog, and this Kamayan tradition originated from when Filipino soldiers would gather various foods together and share them. Freshly cut banana leaves are laid out with rice, fish, fried squid and pork, chicken, eggs, mango, pineapple, and more, creating an event where people share food and interact. Kamayan is considered the best way to treat guests, and the residents eat the leftover food after the guests are done.

We usually use spoons and chopsticks for meals in Korea, so eating with our hands is uncommon. However, since Kamayan is a culture of eating and enjoying food with hands, the residents encouraged me to use my hands, and I gladly joined in their tradition, experiencing eating with my hands for the first time. While eating with hands was not as convenient as using utensils, Kamayan is a tradition that emerged from the history of Filipino soldiers having to eat without spoons or forks. Given Korea’s history of numerous wars, I could empathize with such times and enjoyed the meal. The warmth and hospitality of the Filipino people were impressive, and it was a meaningful experience to immerse myself in Filipino cultural identity and communal bonds through food.

Additionally, there is a food from the Philippines that I wanted to try. It is a popular Filipino dessert called “Halo-halo,” a type of shaved ice. I once had a native Filipino

teacher for about a year through online English-speaking classes. Although I'm no longer taking those classes, during that time, the teacher told me that I must try Halo-halo if I ever visit the Philippines. "Halo" means "mix" in Tagalog. Since in Korea, various types of shaved ice, like red bean and fruit shaved ice, are enjoyed during the summer, I was curious about how the Filipino version would differ. As it happened, I tried Halo-halo while visiting a mall and tasted it with some locals. The ingredients used were different from those in Korea, so I asked about each one and learned about the background of Halo-halo.



Figure 4

In 1902, the first ice factory was established on the banks of the Pasig River in Manila. In its early days, it was considered a small comfort for the American soldiers stationed in the Philippines. Over time, ice production technology improved, and a Japanese person introduced the "Kakigori," a type of shaved ice, to the Filipinos. This led to the creation of delicious ice desserts in the Philippines. However, the creative Filipinos started making their unique style of shaved ice by adding all sorts of delicious things around them. They topped it generously with red jelly, yellow leche flan, green gulaman, purple ube ice cream, and more, then drizzled it with condensed milk to create their own distinctive dessert.

Listening to this background while eating Halo-halo made it an even more enjoyable and delicious experience. Although it is unclear where shaved ice originated, the Philippines and Korea have their own versions today. Ultimately, food and culture evolve by influencing each other and adding their own unique colors. The reason why no food or culture can exactly be the same is that each has its historical background, geographical characteristics, ideas, and values they pursue. However, we eat shaved ice as a dessert when it is hot. Because we share this characteristic, we can relate to the food and share a common experience. The cultures are never mutually exclusive. Culture can flourish even more through mutual recognition and respect.

Conclusion

My mission trip to the Philippines was an invaluable experience that profoundly impacted my understanding of reflective and intercultural learning principles emphasized in my studies at EUCI. By engaging in community service, participating in recreational activities, and immersing myself in the local culture, I experienced personal growth and gained a deeper appreciation for cultural dynamics.

Engaging with the local community through physically demanding tasks, like repainting a school, taught me the values of teamwork, perseverance, and the positive impact of collective efforts.

Organizing and participating in recreational activities, such as teaching singing and dancing, demonstrated the universal power of music and play to connect across cultures.

Learning and using basic Filipino phrases improved my intercultural communication skills, while interactions with locals highlighted the importance of empathy and open-mindedness in overcoming language barriers.

The widespread popularity of Korean culture, exemplified by the children's familiarity with the "Red Light, Green Light" game from "Squid Game," showcased the bridging power of media and shared cultural experiences.

Experiencing the traditional Filipino feast, Kamayan, deepened my understanding of the local culture and history. This communal dining experience, where food is eaten with hands, allowed me to connect with the warmth and hospitality of the Filipino people and appreciate the cultural significance of shared meals.

Reflecting on these experiences, I realize how EUCI's reflective and intercultural learning principles have guided me in navigating and appreciating diverse cultural landscapes. The trip underscored the importance of understanding and respecting cultural differences, ultimately fostering a deeper sense of intercultural empathy.