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Traveling as Teachers: A Short-term Study Abroad Program in Japan

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Abstract

Introducing international elements into a teacher education program can help pre-service teachers plan, implement, and assess powerful classroom instruction. Here, the author shares the experiences of three undergraduate social studies education majors as they traveled to Japan to learn about the 2011 Miyagi earthquake, the ensuing tsunami, and the nation's subsequent efforts to improve its disaster preparedness. This article complements an earlier publication (see Callahan, 2024) which explored a different subset of participants; students chronicled here had only just begun their teacher education program. While abroad, the program participants were to collect items—literally anything appropriate for classrooms, something ephemeral (e.g., a shinkansen ticket) or more permanent (e.g., a 2000 Yen note)—that could be used as curriculum materials for a future social studies lesson that featured the people and cultures of Japan. He sought to learn the degree to which, if any, the task of gathering potential curricula could help the participants generate knowledge. The items they collected and the activities they created demonstrated only slight opportunities for generating second-order historical domain knowledge. This qualitative analysis suggests that pre-service teachers, regardless of previous international experience, may require intentional types of scaffolding, specifically conceptual and metacognitive scaffolds, to help translate a short-term study abroad program into dynamic learning opportunities. Another implication is that social studies pre-service teachers may need strong support to consider contemporary photographs as interpretable visual items of material culture.

Keywords: *Short-term study abroad programs, historical domain knowledge, Japan, social studies*

Introduction

Despite decades of advocacy promoting international and global training for pre-service teachers, they are among the university students least likely to have any type of international study experience (Mikulec, 2019). Working against this trend, teacher educators have implemented several strategies to integrate international elements into their programs. One strategy is to integrate "global perspectives" into reading assignments, delivery strategies, and assessments (Merryfield, 2000; Parkhouse et al., 2015; Ukpokodu, 2010). Another strategy is to facilitate a COIL—collaborative, online, and international learning—project where technology allows students from different nations to complete coursework together (Guimarães & Finardi, 2021; Hackett et al., 2023; Wimpenny et al., 2022). Still another strategy involves student movement: short-term study abroad (hereafter STSA) programs. These experiences are the most common

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variety of official international program for college students and they tend to carry on for fewer than eight weeks (Chiocca, 2021; Institute of International Education, 2022; Ogden & Brewer, 2019; Spitzman et al., 2025), although some programs for undergraduates last for ten weeks or more (see Mayer, 2025; Moneypenny & Aldrich, 2024). The STSA programs tend to be popular because, among other reasons, they are often more compatible with students' many scholastic and personal commitments (Goldstein, 2022).

To integrate international elements into the teacher education program that he facilitated, the author implemented an STSA experience for pre-service social studies teachers. He centered the pedagogical elements of the program around items collected abroad to be used in subsequently designed classroom activities. The research question explored here is: *to what degree can collecting curriculum during a short-term study abroad program help social studies pre-service teachers generate knowledge?*

Literature Review

Short-term Study Abroad Programs

Although STSA programs are popular among university students, they remain "critically understudied" (Iskhakova & Bradly, 2022, p. 384). Scholarship into STSA programs consistently suggest they can significantly increase students' "cognitive, affective, and behavioral skills… that support effective… interaction in a variety of cultural contexts" (Bennett, 2009, p. 97). The aforementioned characteristics are often used in definitions of global or intercultural competence (Heinzmann et al., 2015; Longview Foundation, 2008). STSA participants must be intentional, however, in their efforts to increase their competence, knowledge, and skills in international contexts: it does not simply automatically occur while abroad. Pre-departure preparations, for example, can help STSA participants become familiar with a future host nation's historical and current socio-cultural contexts and reduce potential "culture shock" (see Kambutu & Nganga, 2008). Similarly, from a teacher educator's perspective, STSA facilitators should recognize that a program will not be "inherently transformative" (Patterson, 2015, p.64) and that everything cannot be "prepackaged… to make [the] experience meaningful" (Patterson, 2014, p. 275). Participants on an STSA will need guidance to explore, and perhaps revise, ideas previously held about the host nation, its people, and its cultures (see Wilson, 1986, p. 184).

Scholarship. STSA opportunities as a research topic have garnered increased attention recently, especially in relation to program facilitators' and researchers' decision-making. Pre- and post-surveys are a prime example. Very often, participants in an STSA are asked to complete pre- and post-surveys to describe their intercultural or global competence; surveys are the most common data collected and analyzed. Scholars have noted that this "overwhelming use of self-reported measures in [STSA] research is a significant concern" because they "are vulnerable to social desirability bias" (Goldstein, 2022, p. 33; see also Dressler et al., 2022). Similarly, while "almost all programs focus on participants' growth in… intercultural competence" (He et al., 2017, p. 148), the word "competence" is usually defined by participants and supported by their self-reported evidence.

Investigations into STSA program rarely explore participants' subsequent skills or professional practice (Tam, 2016). For example, Goldstein (2022) found that in a meta-analysis of nearly 70 investigations into STSA programs, "none of the studies… directly assessed… participants' intercultural communication *skills*" (p.29, emphasis added). Conversely, the author shares here a scientific study into what participants were *able to do* as a result of their STSA program.

Theoretical Framework

This study was framed by a socio-cultural theory of mediated action (see Vygotsky, 1978; Tzuriel, 2021) and historical domain knowledge (see Lee, 2005; Lee & Ashby, 1997; Seixas, 2017; VanSledright & Limón, 2006). This framework helped the author study, analyze, and describe any connections between the STSA participants, the items they collected while abroad in Japan, and the classroom activities they subsequently designed.

A Socio-cultural Theory of Mediated Action

The author used a socio-cultural theory of mediated action as a theoretical frame and lens to explore the study's findings. The theory posits that learners' thinking and learning is nested in—and heavily influenced by—their social and cultural contexts (Vygotsky, 1978). Elaborating further, scholars have suggested that to understand the potential influence of learners' contexts, distinctions should be drawn about how learners interact with and use elements of their surroundings: these interactions are often called "mediated action" and the elements are often called "cultural tools" (see Cole, 1995; Wertsch, 1998, 2007). Cultural tools can be tangible

elements (e.g., a pencil and paper) or intangible elements (e.g., ideas such as justice and injustice) that facilitate learners' sensemaking; they mediate cognitive action.

The author was interested to learn if, and how, the participants may have used their STSA program, specifically through prescribed and discretionary events, and the items they collected to use as curriculum to make sense of their experiences in Japan and Japanese cultures.

Generate Knowledge

At the end of the STSA program, the participants develop an activity where students in a secondary social studies classroom would be asked to answer a question about Japan. To accomplish this task, they were encouraged to generate knowledge about their STSA experiences in Japan. Because the participants were social studies pre-service teachers, the author operationalized "generate knowledge" with historical domain knowledge, a theoretical frame that organizes knowledge into two specific domains.

Accordingly, the first domain—called first-order historical domain knowledge—centers around answering "who, what, where, when [and] why" questions (VanSledright, 2014, p. 5). These declarative facts can help learners form a basic understanding of names and dates and an understanding of "historical events… and chronology" (van Boxtel & van Drie, 2018, p. 155). The second domain—called second-order historical domain knowledge—is "a layer of knowledge that lies behind the production of the actual content or substance of history" (Lee, 2005, p. 32). This domain features learners using analytical strategies such as weighing evidence and crafting claims to questions about the past to think at higher-order and more critical levels (see Hicks & Van Hover, 2014; Seixas, 2017). VanSledright (2014) stated that learners engaged in second-order historical domain knowledge would be "*doing* history" (p.6, emphasis in the original). Moreover, scholars have posited six "thinking concepts" that comprise the second-order of historical domain knowledge; they are "the ability to establish historical significance, use primary source evidence, (analyze) cause and consequence, identify continuity and change, take historical perspectives and understand the ethical dimensions of history" (Sandhal, 2015, p. 21; see also Seixas & Morton, 2012).

Here the author analyzed activities developed by the participants after the STSA for any evidence of the aforementioned historical thinking concepts that might suggest secondary learners would be afforded the opportunity to develop second-order historical domain knowledge. It was assumed

that if the participants designed an activity that promoted second-order historical domain knowledge, then they too developed second-order historical domain knowledge (i.e., generated knowledge).

Method

The author worked with the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, who provided generous stipends to defray nearly all of the costs of a STSA program in Japan. He contacted the secondary social studies education majors at a large public university in the Southeastern United States and provided them with information about the opportunity: expectations, timeline, etc. Eventually, ten participants completed the eight-day STSA program in Tokyo, which centered around the 2011 Miyagi earthquake, the ensuing tsunami, and the nation's subsequent efforts to improve disaster preparedness. While abroad, the author asked the program participants to collect items (literally anything appropriate for classrooms) that could be used as curriculum materials for a future social studies lesson that featured the people and cultures of Japan. His objective was to learn the degree to which, if any, the task of gathering potential curricula and brainstorming classroom activities mediated the participants' development second-order historical domain knowledge.

Research Design

The STSA featured many formal interactions with Japanese cultural experts, business leaders, and university professors; it also featured many opportunities for informal interactions with local citizens. For example, the daily agenda for the STSA program contained a balance of prescribed events (i.e., lectures and presentations), prescribed cultural experiences (i.e., tours of temples, shrines, and museums), and discretionary cultural experiences (i.e., free periods of time to converse with local citizens and visit businesses and restaurants of their choice). See Figure 1. The author worked to ensure participants were not isolated in a type of "tour bubble," which is often the case on STSA programs (Patterson, 2014, p. 276).

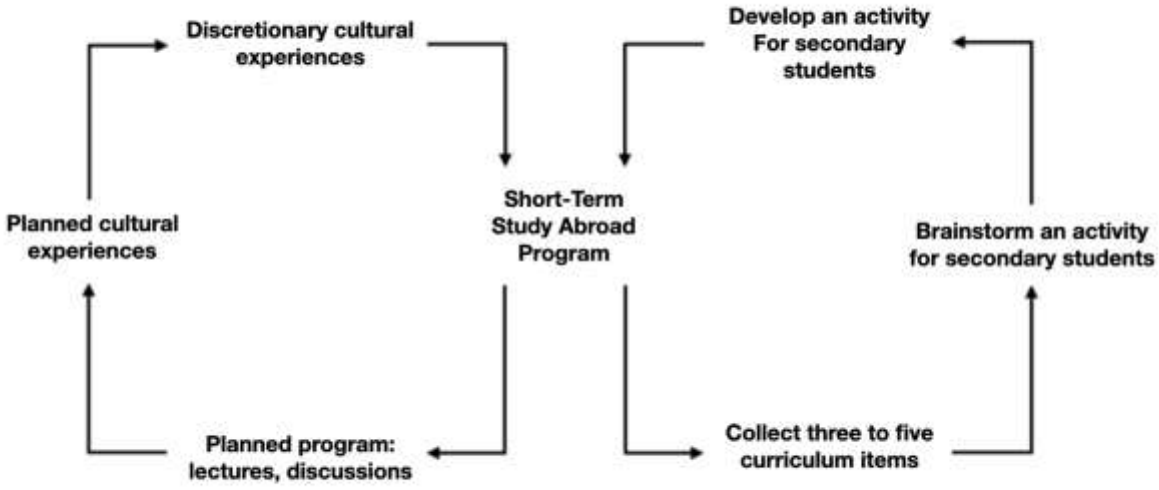

Figure 1: Program Experiences for Participants

Below are descriptions of a sub-set of participants, three social studies pre-service teachers who had not yet completed the first of three methods courses in their teacher education program. The experiences of another sub-set of participants, pre-service teachers who had completed those courses, are shared in a different space (see Callahan, 2024). This exploration centers around the degree to which the three "earlier-in-their-academic-journey" social studies pre-service teachers designed classroom activities that featured second-order historical domain knowledge.

Participants

These three secondary social studies education majors were either 20 or 21 years of age, respectively; one was a junior, the other two were sophomores at the university. What follows are descriptions of the participants; pseudonyms selected by the participants themselves are used (see Allen & Wiles, 2016). See also Table 1.

Cameron. Cameron, 20, was a Black male who had traveled internationally many times. During the Pre-interview he said: "I've been traveling my whole life. My dad was in the military and we've been stationed a lot of places… Asia, Europe." When asked for reasons to participate in the STSA to Japan, he said: "I think, personally, this will help me develop my character and become

a more well-rounded citizen." At the university, Cameron had successfully completed an introduction to education course for both secondary and elementary education majors and a course that explored general teaching approaches for pre-service teachers of all secondary disciplines.

Emily. Emily, 21, was a White female who had also traveled internationally many times. During the Pre-interview she said: "I've always just had such an appreciation and a curiosity for other cultures." She was especially interested in art, both Western and Eastern styles, because she thought it helped "make connections" between people and culture. She also shared: "Japan has such a rich history (and I want) to be able to bring that back to my students when I start teaching." At the university, Emily had successfully completed the introduction to education course, the general teaching approaches course, and at the time of the STSA, had attended several weeks of a social studies methods course (among other requirements, the program required her to complete that course, two additional social studies methods courses, and then an internship).

Jay. Jay, 20, was a White male who had only traveled internationally once. As a child, he accompanied a family member who visited Japan "very briefly"; however, he did not remember much from those few days abroad. During the pre-interview, he said: "to go back again and experience it as an adult would be so much better… I've always wanted to travel. I've been in [name of town] all my life." He also said: "Sometimes you're stuck in one place, and there's only so much knowledge that you can really use. But when you travel, you can meet other people, and you go to other places, and you have more first-hand experience." At the university, Jay, like Cameron, had successfully completed the introduction to education and the general teaching approaches course, and he had yet to complete the three social studies methods courses.

Table 1

Participants Matrix

Participant	International Travels	First Thought Pre-program	Anticipated Worldview Changes via STSA	First Thought Post-program
Cameron	Many	"I think of the typical things anyone thinks of: samurai, shogun… I also think of the tall skyscrapers in Tokyo. I think about Mount Fuji."	"I've heard a lot about how life is in Japan. I would like to experience it for myself, for a little bit."	"Buddhist temples and (Shinto) shrines we went to and the 2011 earthquake and tsunami."

Emily	Many	"the Japanese pop culture that has kind of come into the United States. I think things like anime, and some of their music have become increasingly popular in the United States."	"I've always just had such an appreciation and a curiosity for other cultures. And I think also specifically that I'm going to be a history teacher."	"It's such a beautiful country. But I also think about like how complex it was, as far as it's just so steeped in history … they've really tried to preserve a lot of like their old cultural history"
Jay	One	"a country with very rich culture, very set traditions… the electronic center of the world they produce so many of our electronics"	"being able to get out and really get some experience outside of (home town)"	"the epicenter for culture that does influence the world through use of different forms of media from TV shows to games to writing"

Data Collection Tools

To make sense of the participants' experiences throughout the STSA, the author collected and analyzed "varied sources of data... gathered across space and time" (Creswell, 2016, p. 106), including the information described below. See Table 2 for this study's data points and when they were collected.

Collecting Curriculum. During the STSA in Japan, participants were asked to collect "three to five items" to later use as curriculum resources around which they would design a classroom activity. The author distributed to each participant a handout that included heavily structured directions (see Appendix A) and a type of data collection table (see Appendix B) to record their selections. He also suggested they make textual or video notes about those selections. The participants were encouraged to collect items (literally anything appropriate for classrooms) that could be used as curriculum materials for a future social studies lesson that featured the people and cultures of Japan. These future curriculum resources could have included objects (e.g., tangible items), documents (e.g., primary accounts), static visuals (e.g., photographs, maps), and dynamic visuals (e.g., video segments that totaled fewer than five minutes), and audio (e.g., discussions, speeches).

Classroom Activity. The participants were asked to take their collected items and feature them as teaching resources in brief classroom activity for students in a secondary social studies course. The directions encouraged participants to build an activity that asked students use the collected items "to answer a meaningful question" about Japan. The data collection table was provided as space

to explain their activity's overall goal, the role the teacher would play, and what students were to do with each item collected. The author reviewed each participant's activity to analyze the degree to which it may have demonstrated potential for second-order historical domain knowledge. This activity was also contrasted to an impromptu activity they were asked to develop during the Pre-interview. The prompt for that task was: Right now, if you were to design an activity for secondary students that gave them an opportunity to think deeply about Japan. What would that activity look like?

Pre-program and post-program interviews. The author interviewed each participant a week before and then a week after the program (see Appendices C and D for the semi-structured interview protocols). He also made notes while in Japan and asked to see the participants' notes if they made any.

Table 2

Data Collection and Schedule

Data Source	Collected
Pre-program Interviews (including impromptu activity)	One week before the program
Curriculum Collection (data collection table)	During the program
Activity Designed	During the program
Post-program Interviews	One week after the program
Researcher's Notes	During and after the program
Participants' Notes	During and after the program

Data Analysis

The author followed a six-step data analysis plan, he: (1) read and re-read all of the data, and used the NVivo software program to create a case for each participant; (2) generated themes and codes within NVivo and in a physical codebook; (3) made another concentrated reading of the data within and across cases; (4) re-examined the generated themes and codes; (5) re-read each case through a lens of second-order historical domain knowledge; and (6) re-read each case through a lens of a socio-cultural theory of mediated action. This systematic approach helped ground the findings

within the data and also helped establish validity and credibility. Member checks and the author's engaged time in the field (i.e., the weeks he spent interacting with the participants) also helped establish trustworthiness (see Lochmiller & Lester, 2017).

In regard to a priori codes, he analyzed data to look for evidence that might suggest second-order historical domain knowledge: the "big six" concepts described by scholars. He also specifically allowed the participants' experiences to suggest relevant phenomena (i.e., emergent codes).

Reflexivity/Positionality Statement

Because he designed the study and led the STSA program, the author was positioned as a type of research instrument. He understood that his interactions with the participants and the data were shaped by his belief that the STSA program held potential to benefit the participants and the students they would subsequently teach. To mitigate this risk, the author emphasized reflexivity when making sense of the data (see Palaganas et al., 2017). He kept his positivity about the program at a distance and conducted routine member checks.

Findings

What follows below are thick descriptions of the items collected by the STSA participants (see Table 3) and the classroom activities they designed.

Table 3

Participants Curriculum Collection

	Item 1	Item 2	Item 3	Item 4	Item 5
Cameron	Photograph of two Bokken (wooden swords for martial arts training)	Fan with the logo of Tohoku University	Go Yen Good Luck Charm	NASA Space Calendar	Photograph of a Buddha Statue
Emily	Pamphlet describing Shintoism and Buddhism	Photograph of Sensō-ji temple (Buddhist)	Photograph of Asakusa shrine (Shinto)	An online virtual tour of Senso-ji temple	
Jay	Kokeshi Doll	A photograph of a water exhibit (from a book of artwork purchased at teamLabs Tokyo)	A photograph of the tsunami that resulted from the 2011 Miyagi Earthquake (from a brochure from the World Bosai Forum Foundation)	Fan with an image of Hokusai's *The Great Wave off Kanagawa*	

Cameron

Cameron collected five items to use as curricula, and his lesson consisted of parallel activities that he would implement for each item. First, he was to display an item he brought back from Japan and briefly lecture about the item (i.e., its utility and history, and how Cameron thought it represented a socio-cultural aspect found in nearly all "human interactions"). Then, he would distribute to students a prompt asking them to write a paragraph about a time they personally experienced the socio-cultural aspect illustrated by the item. For example, Cameron planned to show the class a photograph of two bokken that he purchased in Tokyo; he would lecture about how they were used in the past to train Samurai and are currently used for training in the martial art called Kenjutsu (translated from Japanese: swordsmanship). He would then describe how bokken are "are associated with, and are a representation of, conflict between two or more parties," pointing out that conflict is universal and "has a beginning… a mid-point, and then a resolution." Next, he would ask his students to "write about an intensive conflict from a personal perspective." Questions he planned to ask students were: "With whom and how did the conflict begin (and end)? Do you think the choices you made in the conflict are justifiable? Will you admit to playing a role in the escalation of the conflict?" Again, Cameron planned to repeat this structure for each item he collected while in Japan (see Table 4).

Table 4

Items, Aspects, and Questions from Cameron's Lesson

Items collected from Japan	Socio-cultural aspects represented by the item	Questions for students to establish personal connections
Photograph of two bokken	Conflict	Do you think the choices you made in the conflict are justifiable?
Fan with the logo of Tohoku University	Schooling	What sort of feelings—i.e., anxiety, curiosity, etc.—do you associate with schooling in your everyday lives?

Go Yen Good Luck Charm	Culturally Accepted Symbols	What are your beliefs surrounding objects supposedly bringing good luck to the wearer?
NASA Space Calendar	Dependency on the US for protection (Japan's Constitution, in Article 9, renounces war and the maintenance of military forces)	Is the forced pacifist policy of Japan fair, especially when the island is in such proximity to aggressive nations like North Korea?
Photograph of a Buddha Statue	Religion, Morality	Who in your life is foundational to understanding morality and what defines your value system? How heavily does it influence your everyday life?

Cameron's overall goal from the lesson was for students to explore their "personal perspectives… in certain events" and for each student to "make a personal connection" to the aspects represented by the items. His lesson would likely have required about five hours of instructional time.

Emily

Emily collected four items around which she centered her lesson: a pamphlet summarizing Shintoism and Buddhism, a photograph of the Asakusa (Shinto) shrine, a photograph of the Senso-ji (Buddhist) temple, and an online virtual tour of the Senso-ji temple. Her lesson contained several interconnected elements. First, in pairs students would read the pamphlet and answer questions about it; second, as a whole class they would hear a brief lecture that ended with them observing the two photographs; third, they would individually watch the virtual tour; and fourth, they would individually write a paragraph to answer, "How does Buddhism and Shintoism … influence the culture of Japan?" In the post-intervention interview, she emphasized the importance of the two photographs and how they "point out how the two religious locations are very close to proximity [they occupy space on the same grounds], and (depict) Shintoism and Buddhism and... how they are close in both relation to Japanese culture and literal proximity." She continued "images are really powerful, because they give students a visual connection to what you're actually talking

about." The overall goal of the lesson was to help students see "how embedded religion was in the Japanese culture, but more than that... it's that two religions are embedded" and "in America that's something we can relate to. (Religion) is definitely a big cultural piece and… (students) can learn to be courteous to their neighbors and their [different] beliefs and their ways of life." Her lesson would likely have required about an hour of instructional time.

Jay

Jay designed a classroom activity that culminated with students writing an answer to: How has nature and natural disasters influenced Japanese art over time? To help students develop the content knowledge to craft an answer, he planned a brief lecture to "introduce the day's topic and discuss some historical context." Then, he would ask students to visit four stations around the classroom and write down their thoughts about how the items he collected while in Japan reflected nature. The first item was a Kokeshi doll: a traditional, handcrafted wooden doll that has been a popular children's toy for centuries. The second item was a photograph from a book of artwork purchased at teamLabs Planets Tokyo, an immersive art experience that integrates technology and the physical world. The experience strongly features water and flora (see https://www.teamlab.art/e/planets). The third item was a photograph of the tsunami that resulted from the 2011 Miyagi Earthquake (the photograph was found in a brochure Jay collected while visiting the World Bosai Forum Foundation, an organization dedicated to improving disaster preparedness across the globe). The final item was a personal fan with an image of Hokusai's *The Great Wave off Kanagawa.* The overall goal of the lesson was to help students connect the lecture to the items so that they could understand "how nature has shaped Japan's history" and culture, and "see firsthand how nature's destruction can influence the art of generations." His lesson would likely have required about an hour of instructional time.

The participants met the STSA requirements asked of them: they collected items while in Japan and designed activities that had secondary students interact with those items in order to answer questions about Japan (see Table 5). Those activities asked students to complete tasks that required first-order historical domain knowledge. While some of the tasks may have held potential for students to think at higher-order levels, they did not seem to facilitate knowledge generation.

Table 5

Participants' Planned Activities

	Main task of the activity planned pre-program	Main task of the activity planned post-program
Cameron	"students, either in groups or individuals, design a territory… and then somehow challenge other students, metaphorically, of course… just to learn about (Shoguns) where they have to compete for territory, either their collaboration or just by anything else"	Students review five Japanese items and write a reflection about how each (1) represents a socio-cultural aspect found in most human communities and (2) connects to their personal lives and concerns.
Emily	"some sort of cultural learning… like virtually tours… So, I would look up some sort of tool like that online for a famous site in Japan."	Students review four Japanese items and write an essay illustrating how Shintoism and Buddhism have influenced, and coexist throughout, Japan.
Jay	"an activity based around the governmental history of Japan, and how it has evolved, leading into what it has become now. It was empirical (sic) when it started and it was very closed off from the world when it started, and how it has slowly opened up. It did become more and more influenced by other cultures around the world."	Students visit four stations around the classroom, collect their thoughts about the four items, and answer the question: How has nature and natural disasters influenced Japanese art over time?

Limitations

The findings presented here are not generalizable. The author explored the experiences of only three pre-service teachers as they each collected items from Japan and planned a classroom activity for secondary students. Despite limitations, the work presented here may inform future STSA program designs and potentially improve their effectiveness, especially for pre-service social studies teachers.

Implications

It was possible that experiencing the STSA program while activity collecting items to use as curriculum materials could have afforded the participants an opportunity to develop a powerful activity for students in a secondary classroom (i.e., one that featured second-order historical domain knowledge). While each participant developed a lesson that afforded secondary students an opportunity to think at higher-order levels, no lesson featured little new knowledge generation.

More Intentional Scaffolding

This qualitative study explored the following research question: *To what degree can collecting curriculum items during a short-term study abroad program help social studies pre-service teachers generate knowledge?* Data analysis suggests that, regardless of previous international experience, the pre-service social studies teacher participants needed much more explicit types of scaffolding. This program was heavily structured (e.g., guidance for the collection of items, prescribed events, debriefing discussions, etc.) and it featured all nine "key characteristics" for STSA programs (e.g., pre-departure preparation, culture immersion, etc.; see Donelly-Smith, 2009; Dwyer, 2004; Varela, 2017). Still, collecting items to use as curricula in a subsequently developed classroom activity seemed to only slightly guide participants to knowledge generation.

Yet, this can be considered a step—albeit a small one—toward helping them plan and implement powerful social studies instruction. No participant had completed a social studies methods course; still, each of their developed classroom activities—again only slightly—attempted to engage secondary students in tasks where they nearly developed second-order historical domain knowledge. By asking students to, off the tops of their heads, answer "Is the forced pacifist policy of Japan fair, especially when the island is in such proximity to aggressive nations like North Korea?," Cameron nearly addressed an "ethical dimension" of history, which is considered one of the six concepts that comprise second-order historical domain knowledge. Similarly, when Emily asked students "How does Buddhism and Shintoism … influence the culture of Japan?," she nearly broached "historical significance," another concept thought to comprise second-order historical domain knowledge. "Continuity and change" may have been a second-order concept that Jay nearly introduced when he asked students to examine examples of natural elements present in Japanese artwork to answer, "How has nature and natural disasters influenced Japanese art over time?"

These classroom activities were developed with guidance provided exclusively from written directions (again, see Appendix A) that contained procedural and strategic scaffolds. Scholars have operationalized scaffolding in many ways over the past century; however, germane to this study's context are scaffolds described as procedural, strategic, conceptual, and metacognitive (see Hannafin et al, 2013). Table 6 more fully describes these scaffolds. The directions distributed to the participants at the start of the STSA program guided their selection of items and the use of the

data collection table (i.e., procedural scaffolds); they also provided potential approaches toward logistically accomplishing the task (i.e., strategic scaffolds). The participants seemed to respond well to those scaffolds as they each developed classroom activities that asked secondary students to gather facts about Japan and use those facts to answer questions.

Table 6

Operationalized scaffolds

Type of Scaffolding	Guidance Provided
Procedural	how to utilize resources and tools
Strategic	approaches to solving the problem
Conceptual	what to consider
Metacognitive	how to think about the problem under study

Hannafin, M. J., Land, S. M., & Oliver, K. (1999). Open-ended learning environments: Foundations, methods, and models. In C. Reigeluth (Ed.), *Instructional-design theories and models: A new paradigm of instructional theory, Volume II* (pp. 115-140). Erlbaum.

It may have been more helpful, however, if the directions had also contained guidance as to the variety of criteria participants could have considered when selecting items (i.e., conceptual scaffolds) and examples of ways to help learners generate knowledge (i.e., metacognitive scaffolds). Interactions with this additional scaffolding—especially metacognitive scaffolds—may have helped the pre-service teacher participants develop classroom activities where secondary students interpreted, weighed, and evaluated evidence to use as support for answers to the lessons' central questions.

More intentional scaffolding may have helped the participants create classroom activities that afforded secondary students the opportunity to practice skills associated with second-order historical domain knowledge. As written, the directions did not seem to provide enough guidance for the participants to design activities that would generate knowledge.

Photographs as Cultural Artifacts

The three participants each carried a cell phone throughout the STSA program and seemed to use it very often each day. The author, who facilitated the trip and collected field notes, observed the near-continuous use of cell phone cameras throughout Japan. He anticipated that they would include several photographs as curriculum items around which to center a secondary lesson. They did. In fact, nearly half of the items selected—six of the 13—were photographs: four were photographs taken by the participants themselves, two were professionally published photographs.

Cameron and Jay tended to use their photographs as illustrations of events that underscored the importance of information. For example, Cameron's photograph of Buddha and Jay's the photograph of the 2011 tsunami were intended to remind students of the information previously shared by the teacher. Those photographs seemed to emphasize relatively uncomplicated contexts and narratives, and students were likely to accept the common understanding shared by the teacher. There were no attempts to position the photographs as documents in need of interpretation, or as evidence that could be used to support an answer to the question around which the activity was centered. Emily's use of photographs was similar, yet there seemed to be slightly more potential for second-order historical domain knowledge. As designed, Emily asked students to notice that the photographs illustrated a Shinto shrine and a Buddhist temple located near each other: that they existed in the same geographic space. There was an implicit understanding that adherents of these two worldviews could have been incompatible with one another and that the close proximity of the worship spaces could have made for conflict; however, the photograph suggested otherwise. As mentioned, this was an implicit understanding that did not seem to be featured in the lesson. Perhaps the photographs could have been explored, used with additional accounts to more overtly extrapolate an analogy for society in general, and then used as evidence to support the analogy.

The participants seemed to capture and use photographs in ways consistent with first-order historical domain knowledge: comprehending factual information. Moreover, the photographs seemed to illustrate contexts that were either already discussed or were thought to be thoroughly understood already. No participant developed an activity where secondary students would be asked to discover and evaluate messages communicated by images (see Burns & Martinez, 2002; Callahan, 2019; Callow, 2006).

Again, the guidance provided throughout the STSA could have highlighted ways that photographs can help bring about second-order historical domain knowledge. For example, the STSA facilitator—the author—could have overtly mentioned and provided examples of photographs being considered as historical documents and items of material culture: not simple depictions of objects or illustrations (Edwards & Hart, 2004). This revision to guidance may have helped the pre-service teachers ask the types of questions (e.g., "what is [to be] done" with the photograph [see Rose, 2008, p. 157]) that would have helped them, and the secondary students for who the lesson was designed, *do* history.

More explicit scaffolding may have helped the participants think of their photographs as a type of (recent) historical document and an example of material culture in Japan. This is consistent with a powerful social studies instructional approach, thinking historically about photographs (see Callahan, 2013, 2015; Callahan et al., 2009). It is also consistent with a student-centered pedagogical approach called object-based learning that centers around learners interacting with physical objects, and often using them as evidence to support claims, as a means to hone skills associated with critical thinking (McGowan et al., 2022). An object-based learning approach promotes student engagement with material, touchable objects (e.g., quill and parchment, taxidermized insects, interlocking plastic building blocks). This approach could combine well with the notion of second-order historical thinking, because object-based experiences can promote engagement and curiosity which, in turn, can lead to increased motivation to develop critical thinking skills (Bunce, 2016; Chatterjee & Hannan, 2016).

Conclusion

This qualitative analysis explored the experiences of three undergraduate social studies education majors as they journeyed to Japan to learn about the 2011 Miyagi earthquake, the ensuing tsunami, and subsequent efforts to improve the nation's disaster preparedness. The findings and discussion presented here may contribute to the literature surrounding theories and logistics of travel programs for pre-service teachers. Specifically, the findings support the notion that STSA participants, regardless of their international experience, would benefit from explicit conceptual and metacognitive scaffolding to generate knowledge from their dynamic international experiences. Findings also suggest that pre-service teachers need strong, overt support to consider

the photographs they capture while in abroad as objects of material culture, as opposed to simple illustrations. This work may prove helpful for teacher educators, especially those in social studies education, who wish to feature international experiences in their programs.

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Appendix A: Guidelines for the Curriculum Collection

Curriculum Collection

Task One: During this study visit to Japan you are to **collect three to five items** for a specific purpose: keep Task Two and Task Three (described below) in mind as you assemble your collection. As you decide about items for the collection it may helpful to make a quick note or short video to record your thoughts "in the moment." These items— ephemeral or more permanent—can be any combination of:

- *Objects*: Physical items, tangible materials, artifacts
- *Written documents*: primary or secondary accounts, tables, graphs, charts
- *Visuals*: photographs, drawings, copy of a portrait, cartoons, maps
- *Audio*: music, discussions, speeches
- *Video*: segments that total fewer than five minutes

Task Two: Thinking about the items you collected, **develop a 20-minute instructional activity** for students in a secondary social studies classroom. The activity should center around students using the collected items (at least two) to answer a meaningful question about Japan. Please use the data retrieval chart on the reverse-side of these instructions to contextualize this task by explaining:

- its overall goal
- the role the teacher will play
- what students are to do with each item featured

Task Three: Thinking about the items you collected, **develop a 20-minute presentation** (or a talk, speech, workshop, demonstration, display, exhibition, etc.) for professional colleagues in the field of education. This should center around the collected items (at least two). Also, an item may be used in both the activity and the presentation (i.e., the *activity* could require students to work with items one, two, and three and the *presentation* could use items two, three, four, and five). Please use the data retrieval chart on the reverse-side of these instructions to contextualize this task by explaining:

- its overall goal
- what each item featured is intended to accomplish

Appendix B: Data Collection Table

Curriculum Collection		
Item Object, Written document, Visual, Audio, or Video	**Activity** Instruction Activity or Presentation	**Intended Use** (Activity) its overall goal, what role the teacher will play, what students are to do or (Presentation) its overall goal and what each item is intended to accomplish

Appendix C: Pre-program Interview Script

Pre-program Interview (Semi-Structured)

1. Can you briefly introduce yourself?
2. Why are you going on this trip?
    - What do you hope to gain from this trip as an individual and future educator?
    - Do you anticipate this trip changing you in any way?
        - Personally
        - Professionally
3. What are your first thoughts when I say "Japan"?
    - What questions do you have about Japan (not about the trip's logistics, about Japan)?
4. If you were asked to design a brief instructional activity for secondary social studies students that afforded them the opportunity to think deeply about Japan, what would that activity be like?
    - Can you describe the role you, the teacher, would play in that activity?
    - What curriculum materials or resources would you likely feature? - What would students likely "do" during that activity?
    - For students we had in methods: How do you think this trip might speak to/connect to some of the things you have learned in your education coursework?
5. If you were asked to develop a brief presentation (or a talk, or a speech, or a demonstration, etc.) for professional colleagues about Japan, what would that presentation be like?
    - What would you hope to accomplish?
    - What do you think social studies teachers would want to learn from you following your trip?
    - What professional contributions can you make to a department/PLC/school following the trip?

Appendix D: Post-program Interview Script

Post-program Interview (Semi-Structured)

1. What are your first thoughts when I say "Japan?"
    - In your initial interview you stated ___ ; can you talk to me a little bit about the differences you see in your responses?
2. What questions do you have about Japan?
3. Have your professional or personal worldviews shifted because of the trip... how so? Or what about the trip reaffirmed your existing worldview?
    - How do you see yourself as a teacher now that you have experienced Japan?
4. The Instructional Activity you designed featured a few collected items from the short-term study abroad. Can you describe your thinking about each of the objects?
    - Why did you select that object; what purpose did you intend it to serve?
    - What do you hope students will get out of their engagement with the item? What questions do you think students might have about the object?
    - Were there any objects you encountered that you thought about collecting but chose not to? Why did you not choose that item?
5. How is the Presentation you developed different from the Instructional Activity? Why is that?
6. What role did the collection of artifacts throughout the short-term study abroad experience play in your visit throughout Japan?
7. Did the collection of artifacts throughout the short-term study abroad experience help you create—not just receive, but create—knowledge? (If answered "Yes" ask for examples.)
    - How will you use the objects to invite your students to build their knowledge [of the world, of the U.S., of themselves]?
    - What type of knowledge do you hope your students gain from interacting with the object?