

Review of: "Encounters with Others: Student Growth through Fieldwork Studies in Rural Areas"

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The paper discusses Fieldwork Studies (FWS) of graduating students in Japan, essentially a voluntary placement in rural areas to help in any way they can the local communities. I can see the benefit of this paper is in the collection of many of these experiences through interviews. There is however little contextualisation (university, academic, national or international), no discussion of negative experiences or some basic statistics and little on the scientific collection of the data. Therefore the paper needs major review of the data available (no new research needed) and their contextualisation.

The premise of the paper and the needs from universities to diversify are not very clear at the introduction and they are expressed in poor English. Many assumptions are made that are not justified and the particular collaborations proposed with rural areas apply only for very specific conditions. Even if the approach is more explained later, the type of collaboration needs to be explained within the mission of a modern university. Is it all assumed to occur in Japan?

The focus eventually is on students sent to rural placements but again this is very specific and needs to be introduced as such and in its specific academic and geographical context. I appreciate the benefits described but I do not see what educational programmes are set up as part of a university level degree and learning experience.

Rural development and university in Japan: the discussion is becoming specific now, but the first two paragraphs do not say something that is not universally known. Can these issues be more detailed for Japan, like certain critical areas or outflows to urban areas? The third paragraph moves to a better direction, but needs to be communicated better with more data from the references quoted. It is already 4 pages in the paper and little concrete has been presented and supported, but even the rest of the section, till the end of p 6, does not provide anything specific on what these exchanges of knowledge are and what educational experience is there for the students. Is it about agricultural methods or production, for example and students are at the right level to give such guidance?

The method of research also seems uncertain. The collection of partners and university participants should have been done systematically through the partnerships established rather than random internet search as it seems.

The activities become at last clear on p 7 and they appear to be direct labour or cultural support to the local communities. Since there are no academic learning outcomes apparently, could this be framed properly in the study programme? Is it part of a social education that is important to the curriculum of many East Asian countries?

Mostly positive experiences are reported in the main body of the paper. It is always worthy to report completely opposite

ones as well, though if the paper wants to place a positive angle to the FWS, it is acceptable but has to be clear, like in the title of the sections and the abstract and introduction, where the direction is discussed.

The discussion is sufficiently structured but would have profited from sub-headings – for example to divide the FWS as experienced by the communities from that of the students and then the graduates.

Discussion: it still reads partial, as it is based on the original premise, which is not contextualised. Moreover, why could similar placements and FWS have not happened in other types of areas, like suburban or problematic housing areas, if they exist in Japan? Character development is the essential gain of the students and a different perspective in their careers, but is this the only way? Such a discussion, here and the introduction, will help show the gains, otherwise it is presented as too ideal. And once again, no negative aspects are discussed or their mitigation, which is really curious. It is inevitable not to think of the huge negative effects of a forced similar movement like the Cultural revolution in neighbouring China, though something completely different.

And how long the FWS exists as a programme? Is it really early for conclusions or no scientific study has happened so far?

Minor comments

Rubinger 1982 (p 11) discussed the introduction of private schools, did not do the introduction