

English Immersion U.S.A. Program (EIP) - uma experiência educacional e sociocultural

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Resumo

Este estudo é um Relatório de Experiência (RE), que tem como objetivo descrever a experiência de participar do Programa English Immersion USA (EIP), promovido pela Missão dos EUA no Brasil como uma resposta positiva à necessidade de alcançar minorias e pessoas desfavorecidas, alunos de escolas públicas no Brasil, após a seleção do programa Jovens Embaixadores. O relato transmite a experiência do processo de seleção, do próprio programa, e tem por objetivo comunicar e destacar a possibilidade do programa de (1) promover a cooperação internacional para alcançar os objetivos da Missão dos EUA no Brasil por meio da educação e da inclusão social; (2) permitir que os participantes tenham uma experiência imersiva na cultura dos EUA e pratiquem e aprimorem suas habilidades no idioma inglês; (3) permitir que os participantes conheçam melhor o Brasil, interagindo com outros brasileiros de diferentes partes do país; (4) criar um ambiente educacional para permitir a aprendizagem transformadora e (5) alcançar a meta de desenvolvimento sustentável número 17.

Palavras-chave: Educação; Inclusão social; Cooperação internacional; ODS 17; Língua inglesa; Ensino.

Abstract

This study is a Report of Experience (RE), which is aimed to describe the experience of participating in the English Immersion U.S.A Program (EIP), promoted by the U.S. Mission

to Brazil as a positive response to the need to outreach to minority and disadvantaged public school students in Brazil after the selection of the Youth Ambassadors program. The account conveys the experience of the selection process, the program itself, the purpose is to communicate and highlights the possibility of the program to (1) foster international cooperation to reach the goals of the U.S. Mission to Brazil through both education and social inclusion; (2) allowed the participants to have an immersive experience in the U.S. culture and allowed them to practice and sharpen their English language skills; (3) allowed the participants to get to know Brazil itself better as they interacted with fellow Brazilians from different parts of the country; (4) make an educational environment to allow transformative learning, and (5) achieve Sustainable development goal number 17.

Keywords: Education; Social inclusion; International cooperation; SGD 17; English language; Teaching.

Resumen

Este estudio es un Informe de Experiencia (RE), cuyo objetivo es describir la experiencia de participar en el Programa English Immersion USA (EIP), promovido por la Misión de EE. UU. En Brasil como una respuesta positiva a la necesidad de llegar a minorías y personas desfavorecidas estudiantes de escuelas públicas en Brasil después de la selección del programa de Youth Ambassadors. La cuenta transmite la experiencia del proceso de selección, el programa en sí, el propósito es comunicar y resalta la posibilidad del programa de (1) fomentar la cooperación internacional para alcanzar los objetivos de la Misión de los Estados Unidos en Brasil a través de la educación y la inclusión social; (2) permitió a los participantes tener una experiencia inmersiva en la cultura de los Estados Unidos y les permitió practicar y mejorar sus habilidades en el idioma inglés; (3) permitió a los participantes conocer mejor el propio Brasil al interactuar con otros brasileños de diferentes partes del país; (4) crear un ambiente educativo para permitir el aprendizaje transformador, y (5) lograr el objetivo de desarrollo sostenible número 17.

Palabras clave: Educación; Inclusión social; Cooperación internacional; ODS 17; Idioma inglés; Enseñanza.

1. Introduction

Brazil and the United States are the two largest countries on the American continent. Both have dynamic and diversified discounts and great convergence of values and interests. The

United States and Brazil have enjoyed long and friendly relations, dating from its years as a Portuguese colony. U.S. merchant ships frequented Brazilian ports such as Pernambuco (now Recife), Bahia (now Salvador), and Rio de Janeiro, and U.S. Consulates appeared in the ports of Pernambuco and Rio de Janeiro in the 1810s. In 1824 when The United States recognizes the Independence of Brazil (first nation to do so), with the establishment of diplomatic relations and the opening of the Legation of Brazil in Washington. (Itamaraty, 2020)

Following this historic accomplishment, came the Establishment of the U.S. Legation in Brazil, 1825. The U. S. Legation in Brazil was established in Rio de Janeiro when U.S. Chargé d’Affaires Condy Raguet of Pennsylvania presented his credentials to Emperor Pedro I on October 29, 1825.

In this ongoing history of cooperation, there are current specific U.S.-Brazil Priority Areas of Cooperation: (1) Education, (2) Social Inclusion, (3) Science, Technology and Innovation, (4) Trade and Investment, (5) Democracy and Human Rights, (6) Peace, and Security. (U.S. Mission to Brazil, 2020)

Education is the foundation for so many other issues and it has been a priority for the U.S. Mission in Brazil for a number of years. The U.S. Mission in Brazil offers different education opportunities for Brazilians as well as Americans.

Social inclusion aims to empower marginalized people to take advantage of burgeoning global opportunities. It ensures that people have a voice in decisions that affect their lives and that they enjoy equal access to markets, services, and political, social, and physical spaces.

The objective of the present report of experience of the selection process, the program itself, to communicate and highlights the possibility of the program to (1) foster international cooperation to reach the goals of the U.S. Mission to Brazil through both education and social inclusion; (2) allowed the participants to have an immersive experience in the U.S. culture and allowed them to practice and sharpen their English language skills; (3) allowed the participants to get to know Brazil itself better as they interacted with fellow Brazilians from different parts of the country; (4) make an educational environment to allow transformative learning, and (5) achieve Sustainable development goal number 17.

2. Methodology

This is a Report of Experience, highlighting an experienced lived by the author Cláudio Antônio Klaus Júnior. The text brought also different topics from basic research

considering official information from the U.S. Mission to Brazil website and also different authors on the subject of language immersions.

3. The Program and Its Experience

In the area of Democracy and Human Rights, The United States understands that the existence of human rights helps secure the peace, deter aggression, promote the rule of law, combat crime, and corruption, strengthen democracies, and prevent humanitarian crises.

The U.S. Mission in Brazil supports the U.S. Government's goals in science and technology, from cooperation in space activities to promoting stronger ties between the U.S. and Brazilian scientific communities; and health, both with respect to addressing tropical diseases and worldwide threats.

Immersion programs and exchange programs have become popular over the years. The concept of exchange, for this experience account, is the one where the person actually travels to another country while an immersion can happen inside of the country of the person, such is the case of the English Immersion U.S.A Program (EIP).

Clear definitions of short-term immersion programs are difficult to locate and the research on these types of experiences is limited. However, common characteristics of those programs categorized as short-term immersion include brevity in duration (typically less than one month), intentionally designed learning experiences, and a possible service-learning component (Jones, 2012).

Responding positively to the need to outreach to minority and disadvantaged public school students in Brazil, Post created in 2002 the "Youth Ambassadors" program, a three-week exchange program in the U.S. which targets underprivileged Brazilian students who are examples in their communities – in terms of proven leadership, positive attitude, social consciousness, academic excellence, and English language ability.

This program became a huge success among public school students and, last year (2014) alone attracted the application of close to 12,000 students from all 26 Brazilian states and the Federal District for 37 slots. Due to the increasing number of candidates for the Youth Ambassadors Program and the limited number of slots available for the exchange in the U.S., the Embassy, in partnership with binational centers from throughout Brazil, created in 2006 the "English Immersion USA" program. This week-long program offers approximately 130 runners-up of the Youth Ambassadors selection process an immersion experience in the English language and the U.S. culture.

The program covers the following themes: U.S. history, U.S. geography English Language Learning, U.S. Culture and Society, Conversation classes Cooking sessions, Sports in the U.S., Social activities including 4th of July celebration, costume party, karaoke in English, etc.

Every year the program focusses on a different aspect of U.S. culture and requires that, at the end of the program, participants give a brief presentation on their topic. Program themes have already included “Regions of the U.S.”, “Route 66”, “Music through the Decades”, and “Sports in America”. This final project provides participants with research opportunities about the U.S., at the same time as it helps them develop their teamwork, leadership, and public speaking skills. To the extent possible, we always try to include the participation of Mission officers, English Teaching Fellows, and/or English Teaching Assistants in the program, so as to provide more authenticity to the activities.

Such immersion programs are an opportunity to get to know a country, its cultural aspects and, mainly, to learn the spoken language, people from countless countries have been interested in these programs. In this way, we understand that, generally, such participants have quick and effective learning, differentiating themselves from students who did not have the same opportunity in several aspects (Oliveira, 2016).

According to Schumann (1986), for each degree of acculturation, there is an equivalent level of second language acquisition. The author defines acculturation as the student's social and psychological integration with the target language group. That is, the more the individual has contact with the speakers of the target language, the greater the learning. In this way, the student is socially integrated into the target language group and as a result, he develops enough contact to be able to acquire the target language (*Ibid*, 2016).

Other than the language benefits of such programs, it is also important to highlight the cultural and social aspects that were developed during the experience. EIP was an opportunity for building social skills and to best understand our cultural identity as a nation and also the U.S. culture as we met citizens and learned about their traditions.

Finally, it is important to mention that this program also helps to achieve the U.N. Sustainable Development Goal number 17, Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development, especially in the subtopic:

17.6 Enhance North-South, South-South and triangular regional and international cooperation on and access to science, technology, and innovation and enhance knowledge sharing on mutually agreed terms, including through improved

coordination among existing mechanisms, in particular at the United Nations level, and through a global technology facilitation mechanism (United Nations, 2020).

EIP allows knowledge sharing and enhances the opportunities for nationals to continually foster international cooperation and activities in a global setting.

The EIP takes place every July, either with the entire group at one single location or in smaller groups at 4-5 different locations. The implementation of the EIP is always done in partnership with Binational Centers. More than 1410 students have participated in the program since its creation. All expenses, such as air transportation, accommodation, health insurance, meals, and cultural programming, are sponsored by the U.S. Embassy and its consulates in Brazil.

As explained EIP is an experience provided to those that were national semifinalists of the Youth Ambassadors (Y.A.) program, thus the preparation begins much earlier. In the case, I signed for the Y.A. program on May 7th, 2014, over a year before the immersion. On August 13th, 2014, I received the notice that I could turn in my documents for the next phase, recommendation letters and essays were part of this phase. On September 11th, 2014 I got an email saying that I was selected for the next phase of the program which was comprised of an in-person test and interview in Florianópolis, SC. The test and interview were in Florianópolis because the *Secretaria do Estado da Educação* was the partner institution I choose. Back in that year, there were two options, Joinville and Florianópolis. All the participants also received a letter from the U.S. Ambassador to Brazil Liliana Ayalde congratulating for getting this far in the selection process.

The experience of the tests and interview was very interesting. While anxious and knowing that we were in a competition it was a great environment to get to know participants from all over the state that was involved in volunteering and leadership, many of whom I still am in touch with. A couple of weeks after this phase, me along with the other three participants were notified that we were national semifinalists, the competition had over 13.000 candidates.

The final results for Youth Ambassadors were advertised still in 2014, I was not on the list. All the process was very rewarding, but I knew that I would be participating in the immersion and that was very nice. In February 2015, I along with other one hundred and twenty-five students received the email inviting us to be part of the EIP. The program was scheduled to happen from June 28th to July 3rd, 2015.

The program officially started with a picnic and welcome at the U.S. Embassy in Brasilia. All the activities were helpful to help the participants to get more acquainted, to build friendships, and to continually practice English, the number one rule of the program: No Portuguese allowed. In the Embassy, we were able to interact with many people from the diplomatic mission staff. In this edition of EIP, we also had the visit of a band whose members were Americans. Due to the big number of participants we were divided into three big groups.

At the airport, we met with the staff and also met many of the other immersioners some of whom we had already had the chance to contact over social media. We got the bus and arrived at the hotel and there we met with all the staff and the other immersioners. We checked in, changed our t-shirt, put our badge on, and finally, we were ready to dive into the English language.

On Monday, the activities were divided and, as most participants were not from Brasilia, we had a city tour, getting the chance to see many of the capital's landmarks. After lunch, we went to Casa Thomas Jefferson and had several classes in English, encompassing a maker session, dance, culture, cooking, history, geography, and e-writing. On Monday still, we also had the chance to receive a lecture from Education U.S.A, about the process of applying for an American university and also general information on scholarships and how Education U.S.A works in Brazil. We finished the evening with bowling. One interesting fact about the program is that we were able to get to know Brazil better too, as we interacted with people from all over the country.

On Tuesday most of the activities followed the same as Monday, yet we were the group to visit the Embassy on this day, instead of the city tour. Also, after dinner, we were able to get started with our projects. In this edition, each group was to make a presentation about one of the U.S. regions. In my case, we got The Northeast region of the U.S.A., which includes the states of Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania. We were to present our part of the country on the last day.

On Wednesday, our city tour included the cathedral, Power Square (Congress Building, Planalto Palace, Supreme Court Building), and Alvorada Palace. We finished this day with a dance rehearsal - which we would need to present on the last day. Thursday started with classes and project preparation and ended with a football and cheerleading practice. On Friday, the final day, we had speeches, project presentations, dance presentations, certificates, and a closing brunch.

One of the advantages of immersive experiences, whether through service-learning, study abroad, or both, is the potential for these experiences to be transformative in nature [...] transformative learning as fundamentally a question of how educational experiences (very broadly) change individuals' frames of reference, or ways of looking at and interpreting the world (Jones, 2012).

That was the case, EIP did empower me, as a participant, to see the world of opportunities and possibilities regardless of my current situation, I knew that it was possible to improve in several areas and achieve my educational and professional goals. The literature reviews:

Although experience is critical in transformative learning, the particular type of experience matters a great deal. Parks Daloz (2000) specifically identified the importance of “a constructive engagement with otherness” (p. 110) in transformative learning, which resulted in the challenging of assumptions and crossing of boundaries. Mezirow (2000) argued that experience must be paired with critical reflection in order for transformative learning to occur. Mezirow further suggested that critical reflection enables students to become more aware of their own frames of reference. Belenky and Stanton (2000) expanded on the idea of critical reflection in transformative learning, claiming that critical reflection must happen in discourse with others. As they explained, “When our old ways of meaning making no longer suffice, it behooves us to engage with others in reflective discourse, assessing the assumptions and premises that guide our ways of constructing knowledge and revising those deemed inadequate” (Jones, 2012).

The well-prepared staff of the program along with the young leader participants were able to experience such discussions that allowed transformative learning and cross-boarding thinking.

In 2020, eighty-one students from the Brazilian public school are participating, from May 26 to June 4, in the English Immersion Program – EIP. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the program did not take place in Brasilia, as it had been since 2007, but rather in an online version of a program (U.S. Mission to Brazil, 2020).

4. Final Considerations

This article brings a report of experience and as such, the experience was remarkable to the point of the authors to write it, allowing this experience to be shared by future readers. The communication is also important to allow the Academia to know the initiatives that happen around Brazil and the details of them. The goal of conveying this experience in writing was achieved.

The program was a tool to (1) foster international cooperation to reach the goals of the U.S. Mission to Brazil through both education and social inclusion; (2) allowed the participants to have an immersive experience in the U.S. culture and allowed them to practice and sharpen their English language skills; (3) allowed the participants to get to know Brazil itself better as they interacted with fellow Brazilians from different parts of the country; (4) make an educational environment to allow transformative learning, and (5) achieve Sustainable development goal number 17.

It is important that future researchers interview other participants and also seek for more information about the program. It is suggested that official data may be collected from the official U.S. Mission to Brazil website.

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Percentage of the contribution of each author in the manuscript

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