Methods and Outcomes of Unpacking the Study Abroad Experience

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Opening Questions

Where does responsibility (accountability?) lie in student learning?
- on the student?
- on educators?
- on the host institution?
- on the credit-granting institution?

Where or when does cultural learning/intervention best take place?
- Pre-, during, or post-study abroad?
- With a mentor? With a tandem-partner? Program director?
Rising demand for a globalized workforce (Mangan, 2011)

Increase in study abroad participation, destinations, program types among more diversified majors (Open Doors, 2013)

There are no guarantees in studying abroad (Freed 1998; Rivers, 1998; Wilkinson, 2000; Einbeck, 2002; Alred & Byram, 2002; de Nooy & Hanna, 2003; Kinginger 2008, 2009; Kearney, 2010)
“Studying abroad is not a ride in Disneyland where, in return for buying an admission ticket, participants are guaranteed a thrill. Instead, participants have gained access to an opportunity to grow beyond their own narrow perspective ... The statement that ‘study abroad changed my life’ masks a potentially complex set of issues ... Firstly, it is entirely undiscriminating in implication as if ‘abroad’ were one transforming location wherein the participant will gain insight simply by being there. It consequently minimizes (or fails to distinguish between) some crucial matters: What do you study? Where do you study it? How do you study it? What do you have to do to maximize the benefits?

If we accept this vision of the study abroad experience, that it is far from an osmosis situation, then we can only feel compelled to maximize students’ preparation to make the fullest use of the study abroad experience and to support them in the most productive ways possible and feasible before, while, and once they come back from study abroad.”

-Michael Woolf (2009) NAFSA
Where are we at? And where do we go?

- Is your institution currently doing anything once students return from abroad?

- What is the best forum for students to “unpack” (process, reflect) upon return?
  - group meeting?
  - reflection journal?
  - language classroom?
  - credit-bearing course?
Intercultural Competence & Study Abroad

Culture learning outcomes: intercultural competence
Developing intercultural competence is a process
Deardorff, 2006

“And so it is also true of study abroad experiences; it is not the activity of leaving one’s homeland that creates learning, but the subsequent analysis of that activity where the real learning begins”
Montrose, 2002, p. 6-7
The need for reflection

“Study after study demonstrates the importance of providing learners with cultural content such as value orientations, communication styles, nonverbal communication, conflict styles, and ways of learning. This knowledge enables them to become more culturally self-aware and more observant of cultural patterns different from their own. . . . Cultural content anchors the intercultural experience by serving as a foundation for reflection and learning. . . . It is only through ongoing reflection that students make meaning of their intercultural encounters. They begin to challenge their own cultural assumptions, consider other cultural perspectives, and shift their frame of reference to the particular cultural context.”

Vande Berg, Paige, & Hemming Lou, 2012, p. 54
Intercultural Communication Course

- Becoming Transcultural: Maximizing Study Abroad
- 3-credit General Education Course

Coursework
- Weekly in-class and bi-weekly online discussions
- 4 critical reflection essays
- Midterm, exam

- 25-30 students
  - Mix of pre-, (during), and post-study abroad students
Content/Materials

- *Experiencing Intercultural Communication, Martin & Nakayama (2011)*

- **Content**
  - culture, communication, value orientations, non/verbal communication,
  - history, identity, language, pop culture, conflict, tourism, business, etc.

- **Cultural Simulations**
  - Bargna/ 5-tricks
  - Rocket

- Handout
Practical Considerations

- Credit-bearing or required
- Institutional red tape, buy-in
- Who may enroll in classes
- Accessibility of information
- the “run-away student” in online discussions
Two studies

1. Leipzig, Germany (Summer 2010)
   1. case-study of 2 American females

2. Dissertation Research (Fall 2010- Fall 2012)
   1. Project spanned three research articles
   2. Post-SA students
   3. Frequency Analysis, Sociocultural Approach (Kramsch, 2000)
Intercultural Competence: Meeting the Bar and Falling Short

“You see what you know. If you don’t know anything, you don’t see anything” (as cited in Fischer, 2009)

Pedagogy of the intercultural (Alred, 2003), Transcultural pedagogy (Wildner-Bassett, 2008)

Intervention Techniques (Jackson 2006a, 2006b)

Cultural Mentor (Vande Berg, 2009)

role of the program/course:
- facilitate cultural contact
- foster ‘safe’ learning environment to explore “cultural anecdotes” (Hélène Zhumbil, CERCLL 2012)
- tactfully discuss perceptions/critical cultural self-awareness
Research Questions

- Is it possible to see skills of intercultural competence for a language student studying abroad on a short-term four week program in Leipzig, Germany if they are explicitly guided to this goal throughout the program?
- Can ethnographically-styled activities lead to increased contact with the host culture?
- Is it possible to see manifestations of developing intercultural competence in students’ online reflection journals?
The Students

Lisa

- Rising Senior
- Double Major: Gender & Women’s Studies, Sociology
- Bi-cultural: Austrian-American family; heritage German speaker
- Upper division German courses, felt insecure with language skills
- Pre-developed strategies for communicating

Hannah

- Rising Sophomore
- Pre-Business
- Chinese immigrant parents; heritage Chinese speaker
- Entered college at 300-level, felt secure (borderline arrogant) with language skills
- Tennis
Lisa – Notable Competence

- savoir s’engager (interacting critically with knowledge and experience)

- Stasi museum, Monday demonstrations
  - “So this is one woman among ten people that was arrested . . . why was that?”

- The critical-incident: coffee-size
  - “To her, it was so obvious, she thought I was just trying to like… [not pay the full amount] To me, I jut never would have thought of that. . . . ‘Well, do you want me to pay for it?’ ‘No, but next time…””
savoir s’engager (interacting critically with knowledge and experience)

“Culture-wise, yeah, I mean I know that there’s the whole thing where America’s superficial and stuff, but I just wish people were just a little bit more friendly, just a little bit…. like when I ask for tap water, I wish they wouldn’t grimace at me even though I ordered ice cream and “Apfelstrudel” and a salad, and they still grimace at you when you order a “Leitungswasser” …”

The critical incident: using the wall as a hard surface to write on in the museum

“And the whole Germans speaking a little bluntly. Not harshly, but they just say it as it is. I was a little surprised. Clearly you know I’m an American, clearly you know I’m frustrated. You should probably calm down because I’m already really angry right now about this worksheet.”
Intercultural Sensitivity vs. Competence

- Intercultural competence – external behaviors
- Intercultural sensitivity – psychological ability

- Byram (1997) knowledge

- Bennett (1986) perspective shift

Experience of Difference

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Development of Intercultural Sensitivity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Denial</th>
<th>Defense*</th>
<th>Minimization</th>
<th>Acceptance</th>
<th>Adaptation</th>
<th>Integration</th>
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Ethnocentric Stages

Ethnorelative Stages

(Bennett, 1986, p.182)

*Defense/Reversal (Hammer, Bennett & Wiseman, 2003)
“I people watch a lot. Actually, people just watch me a lot; it’s really awkward. German’s have a problem with staring. And I don’t know what to do- smile? Because they’re staring at me? Grimace? because they’re staring at me? Or, I usually just pretend that I don’t see them staring at me, and then I look somewhere else.”
Moving Beyond “I Learned How to Pack Light and Effectively:” Helping Students Translate Study Abroad Experiences for the Real World

- "The big takeaway from this report is the sobering message that schools can't hide from globalization . . . [it is an] inexorable and disruptive force of change"
  Robert F. Brunner, Dean of the University of Virginia’s Darden School of Business; Mangan, 2011

- “Students have given very little thought to how their study abroad has shaped and prepared them for the world of work. In other words, graduating seniors have flunked one of their most important exams – the hiring interview because they were not prepared with appropriate examples of skills required from their international experiences.”
  Gardner, Gross, & Steglitz, 2008, p. 1
Employability

- Employers “do in fact value study abroad, when compared to a variety of other education experiences,”
  - Trooboff et al., 2007, p. 20

- Intercultural skills that are often associated with studying abroad are also valued by employers.
  - Trooboff et al., 2007, p. 29
The Job Interview

Who would you hire? Are these two students’ comments similar or different; in what way?

If people cannot accept that other cultures have different values and belief systems, they may get into trouble when they come into contact with someone who plays by different rules and does not respond well to being told they are wrong. (Lina)

Being able to adapt in all locations is extremely important for my future if I truly want to be a diplomat because without being able to immerse myself into the culture, it could be misconstrued as offensive or rebellious, both of which are undiplomatic. (Kim)
"I continue to be amazed by students' inability to articulate what they've learned. ... ‘I can't put it into words' is not a convincing argument in a job interview” (Kowarski, 2010).

Recommendations of Trooboff et.al. (2007)
- basic training to present learning outcomes in ways that employers will appreciate
- move beyond where they studied, and aspects of local cultural life
- specific knowledge, skills, and perspectives
- students need to be trained in how to bring up their experiences whether the employer does or not
Study

Study Question:
Are post-study abroad students who enroll in a course designed to foster the development of intercultural competence better able to articulate what they learned than post-study abroad students who did not enroll in such a course?

Population
Final Exams of six post-study abroad students enrolled in intercultural communication course (avg. 1408 words/student)
Online survey responses from 34 post-study abroad students (avg. 160 words/student)

Frequency analysis
course students 89/8,449
non-course students 67/5,432

Codes
learned about cultural differences, learned to be flexible and open-minded towards other cultures, learned how to assimilate/adapt to other cultures, learned culture-specific knowledge, learned about own culture
Humans do not simply “act directly on the physical world” but, instead, use symbolic tools and signs to “mediate and regulate [their] relationships with others and with [themselves] and thus change the nature of these relationships” (Lantolf, 2000, p. 1).

“Tools serve to master nature; signs serve to influence others, then to master oneself” (Kramsch, 2000, p. 137).

Process (Kramsch, 2000)
- scientific concepts as tools
- use of tools to complete assignment
- tools used as sign to convey a specific meaning
- signs may be internalized and then alter how a student views the world
How would you interpret the student quotations below?

- To claim that something is learned, implies the duty of one to not only continue learning, but also perhaps to even re-learn one’s culture and fix one’s educational mistakes. ~Liz

- We learned how to adapt in intercultural situations and ways to be more prepared for the customs of other cultures. ~Shannon

- I have learned what it means to adapt to a new culture as quick as possible. ~Michaela
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Coded Comparisons between Course and Non-course Student Responses</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Culture is learned &amp; Motivation to research/ understand other cultural beliefs – Course Student Response</td>
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<td>Before this course, I would have been scared to move to Paris (mostly because of the language) but now knowing that culture is learned is empowering in aspirations to live abroad; I have the resources to learn properly, and the motivation to challenge myself to live in a culture different from my own. (Dan, Final Exam)</td>
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<td><strong>Culture Shock – Course Student Response</strong></td>
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<td>I can see now with my initial trip to Japan, I didn’t quite have the necessary skills to cope with stay[ing] in an environment there that was so foreign to what I had known. . . . Though I was able to overcome [homesickness], ... if I had known what I know now I would’ve been able to avoid feeling that way or at least been better able to cope with it as I would’ve known that I was at the bottom or second phase of the U-curve theory, the state of feeling culture shock. (Luis, Final Exam)</td>
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<td><strong>Ethnocentric view of culture — Non-Course Student Response</strong></td>
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<td>I realize how much trouble I have living in such a macho society and accepting that sort of culture as simply another way of life coming from my background which is very much in education and open-minded ideas just makes me want to scream. (Becky)</td>
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Liz

Junior, Art History major, 5-week summer program in Orvieto, Italy; 5-week summer program in London, England; 2-week high school exchange in France

Experience

“It was certainly just that, an Italian town that gave me the biggest culture shock of my life! . . . I enjoyed the Italian siesta and lenient work hours even if it had originally seemed strange compared to my Western ‘time is money’ mentality! I, an organically strict which chocolate mocha drinker, even began to look forward to the rigorous Italian rule of cappuccino at breakfast and espresso after lunch and dinner! I feel like I came home from my trip as a little bit of an Italian myself. Now when I see a stray cat on the side of the road my first instinct is to try and pet it regardless of it looks mean or dirty.”

Online Discussion 8/30/2011
Fourth Critical Reflection Paper (12/1/2011)

(Premise) Reflection: “The authors argue that not only does culture deeply affect one’s work ethic, but also the lens with which one judges other societies.”

Uses new knowledge to test information in a new setting: independent interviews with her uncle and a Mexican-American friend

Revisits original experience to reexamine initial interpretation
Conclusions & Limitations

- Clear that all students had learned something – similar to Root & Ngampornchai (2012)
- Non-course students superficial everyday concepts
  - “I learned how to effectively communicate with different types of people and cultures.”
- Course students more specific “scientific” concepts
  - “I would have been scared to move to Paris . . . but now knowing that culture is learned is empowering in aspirations to live abroad; I have the resources to learn properly, and the motivation to challenge myself to live in a culture different from my own.”
- Limitations/ Future studies
  - Final exam v. online responses
  - actual performance in job interview
  - backgrounds (major)
Final Discussion Points

- Can all individuals become interculturally competent?
- Do they want to be? Do they want to be in a number of cultures?
- Why ICC? Does awareness of one’s preferences and/or a judgmental perspective preclude successful integration in a second culture?

   Hannah “I think it’s just a difference in lifestyle, culture, history and such. I think I could eventually get used to it, but honestly I prefer the American lifestyle where more fast-paced and more time efficient. Japan is just as fast-paced. It’s easier to adapt. Germany is nice for a vacation.”