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Sense of Place, Imaginative Mobility, and Intercultural Awareness Through a Map Making Project in a Study Abroad Program

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Abstract

This article analyzes the perceptions of two undergraduate learners' regarding the educational impact of a collaborative map making project in the context of a summer study abroad program in France, focused on language learning. Over the eight-week long program, students created a digital map with textual and visual annotations that helped them to reflect on their prior associations with a location or landmark in the host country, the associations that members of the host country had with this location, and finally their own experience after visiting the location. The objective of this project was to help students to experience a more nuanced sense of place, to articulate imaginative mobility, and, as a result, to develop an increased level of intercultural awareness. The participants' reflections after the end of the program suggest that through the engagement with the tasks associated with the project students engaged in imaginative mobility and developed a more nuanced sense of place. In particular, the experience of eliciting perspectives from local informants had a positive impact on their development of intercultural awareness.

Keywords:

Maps, collaboration, sense of place, imaginative mobility, intercultural awareness

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Introduction

The vast majority of former study abroad participants describe their international experience as a phase of accelerated personal growth, academic commitment, and intercultural development (Dwyer, 2004). For many, the intercultural experience is without doubt associated with their interpersonal interactions with participants and members of the host community. This article broadens the understanding of intercultural development beyond interpersonal interactions and is, in particular, interested in the impact of the study abroad location on the learner's development. We suggest that providing learners in study abroad settings with opportunities to articulate imaginative mobility and to develop a more nuanced sense of place will increase their intercultural awareness.

The first part of the article provides a theoretical foundation of the project by introducing and formulating working definitions for the following key concepts: Intercultural awareness, sense of place, and imaginative mobility. Further, we will argue that map-making projects can create an instructional setting that helps to integrate cognitive and affective dimensions associated with these three key concepts. The second part of the article describes the digital map making project that nine American study abroad students completed during their eight-week long summer program in Aix-en-Provence, France. The third part of the article documents a qualitative study that assesses the effectiveness of the map-making project. We will share and analyze the perceptions of two of the undergraduate students, who used digital technology to co-create a map that juxtaposed the official narrative, their local network's opinions, and their own real experiences of a variety of locations and landmarks in the host country. The conclusion will summarize findings, point out limitations, and outline future research directions.

Background

The first part of the article will discuss the three interrelated theoretical concepts at core of this study and provide working definitions that inform the methodology of the case study in the second half of the article. These concepts are intercultural awareness, sense of place, and imaginative mobility. In this part, we will also formulate a hypothesis and postulate that collaborative digital mapping projects can provide context to integrate student tasks that resonate with all three concepts holistically.

Intercultural Awareness

Since the 1990s, researchers have done increasingly systematic work on the concept as well as the development of intercultural communicative competence (e.g., Byram, 1997; Byram & Fleming, 1998; Byram et al., 2001). The initial objective of a significant strand of this work was to expand the notion of communicative competence used in second language teaching (Canale & Swain, 1980). The field increasingly recognized that effective second language use was associated with a wide range of skills, knowledge and attitudes that helped learners to navigate the intercultural dimensions of human interactions. Thus, language learning environments should not narrowly aim on linguistic proficiency but should, in addition, help learners to develop intercultural fluency. Byram (2008) defines this objective and the cognitive pathway towards intercultural fluency as follows: “Being ‘intercultural’ involves analysis and reflection about intercultural experience and acting on that reflection.... The individual becomes an ‘intercultural person’ only when intercultural experience becomes the focus of his/her attention, analysis and reflection.” (p. 186). In other words, learners become more interculturally competent, if they develop an awareness that helps them to habitually notice and consciously assess products, practices, and perspectives they encounter in the new environment. Byram’s (1997) assumption that this awareness develops through attention, analysis, and reflection provides an instructional roadmap for educators who intend to foster their students’ intercultural awareness that serves as a foundation of intercultural communicative competence.

Byram’s (1997) postulates that critical awareness, which manifests itself through conscious attention, cognitive analysis, and critical reflection, serves as a foundation for ICC. This hierarchical notion resonates with Baker’s (2011) proposed definition of intercultural awareness, which we will use in the context of this study to operationalize this concept. Baker (2011) defines intercultural awareness as (p. 202):

“a conscious understanding of the role culturally based forms, practices and frames of reference can have in intercultural communication, and an ability to put these conceptions into practice in a flexible and context specific manner in real time communication.”

Many practitioners consider the study abroad environment a formidable setting for the development of intercultural competence, and therefore researchers have made great efforts to verify this claim and investigate

intercultural development during international experiences. The following metric helps to understand the volume of this work: Between 1995 and 2020, a total of 84 peer-reviewed research articles on study abroad that include the keyword “intercultural” appeared in *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad*, the major research journal in the field. Whereas surveying the vast body of research on study abroad and intercultural development in a detailed manner would go beyond the scope of this article, the overall consensus in the research community is that international experiences can — but do not necessarily have to — increase the intercultural communicative range of a student (Anderson et al., 2006). In order to optimize intercultural development among our students we wanted to facilitate their interactions with their local environment: (1) by providing ample and authentic exposure to cultural products, practices, perspectives, and communities and (2) encourage the learners to notice new input and engage in analysis and reflection.

Not surprisingly, the research literature both on intercultural communication as well as on learning in a study abroad context focuses predominantly on interpersonal interactions between the individual and members of the target language community. This article focuses on the interaction between the learner and the location, both real and imagined. Therefore, in the following, we will briefly introduce two concepts, sense of place and imaginative mobility, in order to generate an understanding of intercultural awareness that is not limited to social interaction but includes the interaction between study abroad students and the location of the study abroad experience.

Sense of Place

Sense of place can be understood as an individual’s relationship with a geographic location. Previously, it has been defined as a “living ecological relationship between a person and a place” (Lim & Barton, 2006) and “a relationship to a place, a dialectical way of thinking of and experiencing a biophysical and cultural place” (Derr, 2002). Sense of place becomes the lens through which we experience space and make meaning of our spatial experiences.

The concept sense of place is theoretically anchored in sociocultural theory that views culture as a system of schemata and practices (Sewell, 1999). This system includes language, rituals, symbols, and embodied practices that are

tioned to a geographic space. Originally developed by cultural geographers, anthropologists, sociologists, and urban planners, research focusing on sense of space explores the relationship between people and spatial settings.

Sociologists are attracted to the concept sense of place because it suggests that place is not just a geophysical phenomenon but also, as one of the founders of the field stated, a fundamentally social construct (Tuan, 1977). Building on Tuan's (1977) foundational work, a number of scholars within and beyond the field of sociology have contributed to enriching the meaning and theory of place identity (Carrus et al., 2005; Hauge, 2007; Huigen & Meijering, 2005; Peterson, 1988; Relph, 1976; Saleh, 1998; Twigger-Ross et al., 2003; White et al., 2008). While topographies exist independently of an individual's perceptions and experiences, they only derive meaning based on human engagement (Cresswell, 2009).

Whereas scholars focusing on intercultural development in study abroad settings have not yet used the concept of sense of place as a category in their research, colleagues in the fields of tourism studies have used the concept. The objective of their research is to analyze values and meanings of places, their intangible qualities, and to gain a holistic perspective of place that provides contextual and descriptive data about people's physical, cognitive, and emotional relationships with a location (Kyle & Chick, 2007; MacLeod, 2002; Puren et al., 2007). The use of the concept in tourism studies has inspired the theoretical framing of the present research study in international education because both phenomena, travel and study abroad, provide individuals with the experience of displacement.

Based on these considerations, we are defining sense of place for the context of the article as the individual's (1) conscious awareness of his/her perceptions of the immediate physical environment that includes topographies, objects, sounds, olfaction, subjects, and relationships and the (2) meaning-making act of integrating the multiplicity of these place-based factors into a holistic understanding of the location that shapes immediate and future perceptions of the physical environment. We regard the development of a sense of place as a fundamental contributor towards an individual's intercultural awareness.

Imaginative Mobility

It is a universal human experience that before we visit a new place, we imagine it in our minds. When we eventually have an opportunity to visit a location and develop an authentic sense of the place that we have only before constructed as an imaginative place, our actual experience of the real place never completely matches the mental image.

Navigating the disconnect between the prior mental construction of a place and the actual experience of a real place is at the core of the study abroad experience. The friction between imagination and reality represents one of the most gratifying dimensions of study abroad for our students, but it can also become a source of frustration for participants. Some students who prepare to go abroad have anxiety prior to the departure, because they imagine discomfort as a result of having to interact with a host family with minimal linguistic skills, only to be pleasantly surprised upon arrival to be integrated by an extremely welcoming and supporting host community. Other students have unrealistically positive expectations for a study abroad destination and the social dimensions of an international experience, but they end up being disappointed by the realities of everyday life in the host country.

Sheller and Urry's (2006) concept "imaginative mobility" provides a theoretical framework in order to describe the human experience of imagining a place before visiting it. In their seminal article, which introduced the so-called mobility turn within the social sciences, they provided a taxonomy of mobilities and subsequently guided the past fifteen years of sociological research in the areas of migration studies, transportation studies, and tourism studies. Besides differentiating mobility of objects, corporeal mobility, communicative mobility as well as virtual mobility, they also suggest a fifth category that is especially relevant for the present article: Imaginative mobility. We use Sheller and Urry's (2006) definition of this concept that describes "imaginative travel [...] involving experiencing or anticipating one's imagination of the atmosphere of place." (p. 218). In our view, Sheller and Urry's coinage atmosphere of place resonates strongly with the notion of sense of place discussed above. Therefore, in the context of this article, we consider imaginative mobility as the act of developing a sense of place in anticipation of actually experiencing the place for the first time.

Why Maps?

In our work with study abroad students, we focused on map making projects, because we assumed that the characteristics of this text type as well as the tasks associated to collaboratively creating a digital map of the study abroad experience offers the potential of helping students articulate imaginative mobility, to refine a sense of place, and therefore to develop the intercultural awareness of the learner.

Maps are non-linear multimodal texts that merge graphical features, words, and pictograms into complex socio-semiotic systems (Kress, 2010). Kress (2010) defines multimodal as “any text whose meanings are realized through more than one semiotic code” (177). Maps use visual, pictographic, and linguistic strategies to communicate information. This information relates to both topographic realities of a natural space as well as human activities. Arguably, the primary objective of a map is to provide a factual representation of physical realities of the known world. But maps are also sites to imagine the unknown. This latter narrative function was often achieved by adding pictograms to a historic map, for example the depiction of a sea monster added to a map to communicate the dangers of transcontinental sea travel. Therefore, in the context of this article, we define a map as a text that has the capacity to blend physical reality as well as individual experiences with the mapmaker's imagination.

Digital maps allow dynamic content through the integration of layers, markers, and embedded multimedia content. The digital cartographers create layers of information that they then digitally project on a base map. The ability of maps to simultaneously represent imagination and reality is essential to this project's focus on sense of place as well as imaginative mobility. Whereas a digital base map delivered through the online platform represents the topographic space as realistically as possible, the annotations in the form of markers, images and short written vignettes created by the user represent expectations, the perspectives of local informants, their emotions, and individual experiences. The pedagogical affordances of using digital maps in educational study abroad contexts have been identified by Free and Ingram (2018), who argue that digital map-making tasks “encourage students to ask questions about what is missing in conventional cartographic representations, and how these are different from an embodied engagement with space” (p. 7).

In the following, we will describe a digital mapping project that aimed at providing students opportunities to articulate imaginative mobility and sense of place. We postulate that tasks associated with a digital map making project allow the articulation of imaginative mobility and the refinement of a sense of place, as learners can integrate expectations, emotions, and individual perceptions in the form of annotations on a digital map.

Digital Map Making Project

In the summer of 2016, nine undergraduate students collaboratively created a digital map of their study abroad experience in France. All were enrolled in an eight-week long summer French language program for novice-level and intermediate-level learners of French offered by Vanderbilt University. In the following, the article describes the context of the program and the learning environment associated with the digital mapping project.

During the summer program, all students lived in apartments with at least one other American and one French-speaking peer, usually an undergraduate from one of the six local universities. To replicate some of the features of family homestay programs, each participant was matched with a local family. These families hosted the program participants for dinner and thus provided participants with opportunities to expand their social networks and to exclusively converse in the target language in a social setting.

In addition to their language courses, both American and local faculty led participants on six-day long trips in the region and a five-day long excursion to Paris. To contextualize the excursion program, all students were automatically enrolled in the one-credit course Cultural Study Tour. For this course, students researched in small groups the destination for an upcoming excursion and shared their findings in the form of presentations with their peers. The class was conducted entirely in English because the expression of nuanced cultural observations and self-perceptions required language proficiency that those students who join the study abroad program as absolute beginners did not have. Work conducted in the context of this seminar, conversations with local informants such as members of the host family and the Francophone roommate, and the actual experiences during the excursions provided the foundation for the annotations on the digital map.

Specifically, students completed the following three writing tasks each week that led to the creation of three annotated markers on the digital map:

- (1) A short, reflective vignette that describes their expectations prior to the visit based on the factual information of this place, i.e., “what is the official narrative of the place?”
- (2) A second vignette that reflects the associations of the place among a local informant, i.e., “what do your French friends think about the place?”
- (3) A third vignette after the trip that gives account of their actual experiences after having visited the place, i.e., “in which ways did your actual experiences conflict with the official narrative and the perceptions of your local informant”, or, more plainly, “what surprised you?”

Following the excursion, students made short presentations, sharing not only their reflections but also smartphone photographs that illustrate each of the three vignettes. Finally, they uploaded the three vignettes and images to the digital map.

As a GIS platform for the project, we decided to use the free digital mapping and story-telling tool "StoryMapJS," developed at Northwestern University's Knight Lab. The learners' collaborative efforts over the summer resulted in a digital map with a combined total of 63 annotations that each consisted of a short vignette and an image. These 63 annotations are organized as 21 trios, each representing "the official narrative", the "local narrative", and "the surprise element".¹

In Dessen and Urlaub (2020), we have provided a discourse analysis of three vignettes and images one of the participants created in order to document the "official narrative," the "local perspective," and "the surprise element" associated with the excursion to Paris. This article will focus on student perceptions of the project, which are documented and will be analyzed in the following.

Student Perceptions of the Project's Impact

We conducted a qualitative study to get a systemic idea on the actual impact of the tasks that were associated with the mapmaking project. In the following, we will describe the methods and share the codebook we developed to analyze the data. Lastly, we will present and discuss the results.

¹ The digital map the students produce can be viewed using the following URL: <http://tinyurl.com/jqfabh9>

Methods

Holliday (2010) describes a variety of possibilities that qualitative research methods offer. Qualitative studies are especially useful to describe and analyze the ways in which subjects behave, engage, and feel within a clearly defined social context. We therefore used a qualitative methodology to measure student perception of the mapmaking project.

Three months after the end of the summer program, in October 2016, two students responded to our request for participation in the study. They were invited to share reflections on the impact of the project on their experiences as study abroad students. We chose a three-month time gap between the end of the study to provide students with some distance to reflect on their experience and to find out if the students had maintained the interactions with members of the host country that project intended to foster.

Joe and Alice, both pseudonyms of the two students, were both undergraduate students enrolled at Vanderbilt University during the study abroad program and in the following fall, when the data collection occurred. Joe, aged 20, was a pre-med major. He participated in a summer program, because the academic requirements of his program did not allow him to spend an entire academic year abroad. An avid traveler, he took several weekend trips to other locations in Europe and combined the academically rigorous program with extensive travel each weekend, not untypically for contemporary American study abroad participants in Europe. In addition, he took advantage of the excursion program to familiarize himself with the region around Aix-en-Provence. Alice turned 20 during her summer abroad and was preparing to major in psychology. While she was as Joe at the intermediate low level, she was timid to speak both in class and in social settings. She was friendly with many of the students in the program, but unlike Joe, who had a large network of friends, Alice mostly interacted and traveled with two other women. Alice engaged in less independent travel during the summer and spent most weekends in Aix-en-Provence, enjoying the farmer market, cooking, and exploring local eateries.

Both participants had studied two semesters of French at their home university before they arrived in France. In the beginning of the summer program, they were able to maintain conversations in the target language at the intermediate-low level. During the summer, both students were enrolled in

language classes, took a seminar on Provençal Literature, and the Cultural Study Tour activity that used the digital map making projects as a central form of engagement.

The two participants provided reflections in response to the following two prompts: (1) How did the tasks associated with the collaborative creation of the digital map impact your learning about the host country and your experience living in the host country? (2) How did the tasks associated with the collaborative creation of the digital map impact your social relationships to members of the host community? The participants were given 45 minutes to respond to these two open-ended prompts.

Data Analysis

Because qualitative, case study research is inherently subjective, the validity of the research depends on how the data are collected, organized, and analyzed. For this study, we developed a codebook using Holliday's (2010) methodology. We organized the codebook around the following three notions: (1) Sense of Place; (2) Imaginative Mobility; (3) Maps and Map-Making Tasks. Each of these three notions emerged during a preliminary data analysis based on grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, Glaser, 1992). Patterns in the responses were initially interpreted using Boeije's (2002) approach to constant comparative methodology to identify emerging patterns that shed light on how the two study board participants perceived the impact of the map-making project on their study abroad experience. For each of these notions we listed key terms or codes to identify the kinds of issues and topics mentioned in the written responses as well as noteworthy quotes from the participants' written responses. Table (1) below represents the codebook we developed for the study.

Notions	Codes
Sense of Place	Locations (official narrative, local informant, own experience) People (host family, roommates, tutors, instructors, other students) Reflections (nuanced perceptions, appreciation, rejections, indifference)

Maps and Map-Making Tasks	Maps (topography, social geography) Annotations (markers, pop-up windows) Photographs (stock, individually taken) Materiality (building an actual map) Collaboration (working together with classmates)
Imaginative Mobility	Expectation (assumptions and association before the experience) Memory ("souvenir" of individual and group experiences after the experience)

TABLE (1): CODEBOOK

Results and Discussion

Both participants responded to the two prompts and thus generated four written reflections. On average, responses were 292.5 words long. Responses to the first prompt eliciting the perceived impact of the project on the learning experience were, on average 258 words and thus significantly shorter than the responses to the second prompt on the perceived impact of the project on the social relationships that averaged 327 words. This difference suggests that participants have been more engaged in reflecting on social and affective dimensions of the project than on its cognitive impact.

The following section will provide a qualitative analysis of the four written reflections. We will first focus on Joe's two responses and then turn to Alice's two responses.

In his first reflection, Joe praised the mapping project as an opportunity to link the excursion program in the region around Aix-en-Provence with his academic experience during his summer abroad. Many of the places he visited in that context were places that were also featured in the assigned readings in a class on Provençal Literature he was taking during the summer. In his reflection on the impact of the mapping project on his learning experiences, his reflection explicitly connected places associated with the digital mapping project with those described in the literary texts by Marcel Pagnol, Alphonse Daudet, and Jean Giono. Thus, the digital mapping project helped him better understand the symbolic meaning of places in literary narrative, but the mapping project enabled him to link the imaginative mobility he had experienced through the literary texts with his individual experience as a result of the excursion program.

"While Aix is a beautiful city, it was fun to broaden our view of the region not only by going to see the different places but learning about the background and significance of these locations. It was especially helpful to see the different areas of Provence for the Provençal literature class.

Many of the novels were very descriptive of Provence, and to have an actual visual image of what the authors were talking about was helpful in understanding more deeply the texts we read.”

Further, Joe describes how the tasks associated with the digital mapping project forced him to explicitly contrast his prior assumptions he had about a place with his actual experience. Visiting these places, writing about them, and taking digital photographs prompted him to first articulate his imaginative mobility and then critically confront these prior assumptions as he visited the places. Lastly, the task forced him to approach a place with a higher level of awareness for his own, personal, immediate experiences and process these independently from his preconceptions of the place.

“It helped me to become more aware of my own preconceptions of a place, to listen to my local friends, and then to visit the place myself and focus on my very personal experience, instead of just seeing what I had expected. It made me more aware of the complexity of the places I visit during the study-abroad program in France.”

As a result of the collaborative nature of the mapmaking project, Joe and his classmates engaged in frequent and nuanced conversation about place, meaning, and experiences. They discussed a large variety of places both among themselves and with local informants before the visit and thus engaged in creating a collaborative imagination of a place. After the excursion, they shared their thoughts, justified the images they chose, created the annotations they uploaded to the digital map, and thus challenged their prior assumptions. This collaborative, reflective, and interactive process encouraged Joe not only to reflect and articulate his own perceptions and experiences but also to make sense of his peers’ reflective contributions to the digital map. Confronted with different projections, narratives, interpretations, and experiences of identical places, Joe realized and appreciated that a single place often yields a multitude of vastly different but yet legitimate reactions and interpretations.

“... we had so many conversations about the places we were going and the things we heard about them before. It really showed me that there is not a single story. Instead, there are many different angles.”

Regarding the impact of the project on the social relationships he had built during the summer in France, Joe reports that the tasks structured and facilitated conversations he and his dinner group members had with their host family. The mapping project required him and his peers to prepare and ask

questions related to their upcoming excursion and would also yield follow-up conversations once the group had returned from their visits. This context provided him and his peers to transform the dinner conversation from superficial small talk into a meaningful intercultural exchange.

“Our group was definitely timid at first because we had not had much experience having long conversations with French people. This was not so much due to our lack for French, but really more because we did not really know what to talk about except for the weather or the latest soccer results from the Euro 2016 tournament. But as the days and weeks progressed, I think we opened up much more, because the mapmaking project required us to seek out the opinions of local informants.”

These conversations also provided Joe with opportunities to reflect on the ways perceptions of places are connected to a local informant’s sense of belonging. Specifically, he noted the fact that his host family identifies as outsiders to the local community despite the fact they had lived in Aix-en-Provence for many years. Due to the family’s Corsican roots, the family assumed that their views on certain places in the hexagon were unlike those of other locals who had grown up in the town.

“I found it interesting that despite the fact that they had lived in Aix for a long time, they also saw themselves somewhat as outsiders when discussing with us their views regarding various locations in the south of France.”

Lastly, Joe was intrigued by the polarizing way members of the family assessed the various locations he discussed with them. He felt that their frankness did not only help with the project, but one could also speculate that the project itself generated intercultural exchanges that Joe perceived as highly authentic.

“I also learned that practically all members of the host family had pretty strong opinions, which helped me a lot with the map assignment. They either loved or disliked places.”

Many of Alice’s reflections on the project’s impact mirrored those expressed by Joe. In her response to the first prompt, Alice highlighted the project’s power to influence the ways in which she perceived and experienced the places she visited during the excursion program. Rather than superficially visiting places like a tourist, the mapping project helped her to experience and appreciate the complexities of the places she visited. While she had to research

the official narrative of the various places and then interact with her local social network to elicit their opinions and thus develop imaginative mobility, she valued the opportunity to fully immerse herself into her personal experience during her visit.

“It [the mapping project] encouraged me to explore the history of a place before the trip and to hear from locals their opinion about the place. When I then visited the place, I had already heard these narratives, and that freed me up to consciously focus on how I experience the place.”

As a result of the digital map making project, Alice felt legitimized in developing and articulating her individual experiences about different places, since she felt she had done the work of contrasting different narratives about the place before the visit.

“The project gave me the legitimacy to experience a place independently from the official narrative and the opinions of my local informants. However, the official narratives are also important to me. (...) It also helped me engage in self-reflection before and after the trips, making my personal growth and learning much more intentional”.

Like Joe, Alice also traveled during the summer independently of the program. During these trips, she integrated some of the tasks she encountered in the context of the mapping project to her own personal travel activity. While she admitted that she did not necessarily replicate the three vignettes, she reported that she engaged more critically and with a higher level of awareness with her surroundings and that she was more intentional in tuning in to her experience of space.

“When traveling on my own on the weekends, I always wished that I had more context/background on the places like the study tour course provided. It also helped me engage in self-reflection before and after the trips, making my personal growth and learning much more intentional.”

Alice also describes how the result of the project, the digital map, continues to serve as a memento of her time in France, which she shared with her family and friends at home. The map not only represents meaningful reflection on places she had visited, but it also serves as a digital scrapbook that includes reflections and images her peers uploaded. Leafing through the project and going through the annotated map allowed her to revisit her time in France and relive her experiences and impressions long after her return home.

“Lastly, I enjoy having the map project as a digital souvenir of my time. I could show it to my parents. Especially because it includes the photos of others, some which I may not have. It will provide me with opportunities to “go back in time and space” to revisit our collective experiences and reflections in France.”

Like Joe, Alice perceived the mapping project as a powerful springboard to start meaningful conversations with her host mother.

The mapmaking project was for us a perfect “ice-breaker.” When we told her –for example — that we are going to Nice this week, and asked her what she thinks about Nice, she had a lot to say. After our return from Nice, she was eager to hear what we did and how we felt about the city.”

Alice sought out her opinions about the places she was to visit and enjoyed discussing the broad subjects that would come from her initial questions. Often, these conversations highlighted different viewpoints between her and her host mother; the disagreements, however, did not result in silence but in genuine intercultural dialogue that helped Alice better understand not only her local informant’s perspectives of but also her own viewpoints.

“While I often disagreed with her, it was interesting to hear her reasoning. I feel like I have a better understanding of some of the perspectives in France (and the U.S.) regarding immigration, terrorism, and national pride.”

Her host mother’s opinions were supplemented through the conversations Alice had with Julie, one of the tutors, who worked for the study abroad program as a language assistant. Alice valued Julie’s local perspectives since she herself had spent time as an au pair in the United States and thus had recently experienced an international experience that mirrored Alice’s situation. In the same way that Alice as an American was developing and refining her perspectives on French culture, Julie had gone through the process of navigating U.S. culture during her visit. The two women bonded over their shared intercultural observations.

“She was very kind, smart, and helpful, especially when traveling around Paris together. It was interesting to hear her perspectives on the U.S., as she had spent some time working as a nanny in San Francisco. Having her as an informant was incredibly stimulating due to her international background.”

Findings and Conclusion

In order to illustrate the objective of intercultural education, Byram (1997) uses the metaphor of the tourist, who “remains essentially unchanged” as a result of the traveling experience, and he contrasts this shallow experience with that of the sojourners, who process their experience as an “opportunity to learn” and develop the “capacity to critique” cultural conditions. Participating in the digital mapping project clearly helped the two study abroad students described in this article to experience substantial parts of their experience in France as sojourners and not just as tourists.

The students’ responses suggest that their participation in the digital mapping project engaged in imaginative mobility to refine their sense of place. As we argued in the first part of the article, we consider imaginative mobility and sense of place as important contributors to the individual’s intercultural awareness. The participants’ responses indicate that the tasks associated with the project provided students with an impetus to research a destination, to elicit the opinions of local informants, and encouraged them to articulate their personal experiences. The project helped the learners to appreciate place as a social phenomenon. The tasks encouraged learners to learn about the official narratives of places, interact with locals and understand their perspectives, pay attention to their own experiences, and construct meaning through a reflecting on differences between the official narrative, the local perspectives, and their individual experiences.

The responses of the two students confirm a number of our expectations. We were not surprised that the project altered the way learners experienced place in a study abroad program and provided a site to explore imaginative mobilities. We also expected that participation in the program provided students with more opportunities to interact among each other, with local informants, and their host family. We assumed that participants would value the resulting map as a memento of their international experience.

Other responses surprised us. We underestimated the impact that the project had on the quality of the interaction between students and host family. Whereas we assumed students and host would interact more during dinner times, we did not expect that the project provided students and hosts with a springboard to debate contentious issues such as immigration, terrorism, or patriotism. Since this conversation genre and the topics are far beyond the scope

of typical intermediate-level speakers, we hypothesize that elevated intercultural awareness compensated for a lack of lexical and morphosyntactic competencies. However, the hypothesis that students were able to navigate these speech events as a result of their intercultural awareness requires further investigation.

We also did not expect that the tasks that students completed in the context would translate into strategies that students apply during personal travel, but here again we need more research in order to find out if this is a common effect of the digital map making project.

Lastly, we were surprised that the students did not elaborate in great detail on the product they collaboratively produced: a multimodal map. They saw the main value of the map as a memento, but they did not draw attention to textual features, such as the layers, annotations, markers, and images, despite the fact that over the semester all students developed digital competences to create a complex, multimodal map. Multimodality, for the two participants in this study, is not necessarily a noteworthy feature of a finished product. Instead, for them, multimodality means to be collaboratively engaged in a multiplicity of related tasks that happened to produce a multimodal text. Thus, the project was successful for the two participants, because they embraced multimodality as a collaborative practice instead of understanding multimodality as a textual feature.

Virtually all study abroad scholars and practitioners agree that some of the most valuable learning experiences during an international experience occur not in a classroom but through authentic interactions in the field. Whereas engineering intercultural growth environments outside the classroom can be a challenge, the theoretical concepts of sense of place and imaginative mobility introduced in this article represent useful learning goals for study abroad programs that intend to explicitly foster intercultural learning outcomes. A focus on tasks outside the classroom that aim at increasing the study abroad student's sense of place by providing sites for the articulation of imaginative mobility may represent an opportunity to help students to achieve more intercultural awareness during a short-term study abroad program. The present case study indicates that participation in a digital mapping project provides multiple opportunities to positively enhance those critical learning opportunities study abroad participants make outside the classroom.

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