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'Things on Your Doorstep You Don't Even Think About': Thinking Intercultural Engagement with Psychodynamic Theory

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Abstract

Opportunities for working, volunteering, and studying abroad have become popular in higher education as vehicles for the development of cultural awareness and global citizenship. However, such experiences on their own do not guarantee the development of such attributes. What appears to be essential to maximizing the benefits of educational sojourns are well-designed training and support provisions. In this paper, we present an analysis of a training and support program that we piloted in order to explore what aspects of the program facilitated the development of intercultural skills and how they did so. In our analysis, we draw on concepts from psychodynamic theory to discuss the impact that preparation and support can have in enabling students to venture out into the world of difference. Illuminating the phenomenon of study abroad through psychodynamic theory can offer a useful lens that may facilitate a move towards more relational and reflexive practices, promoting meaningful intercultural engagement.

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Abstract in Greek

Τα τελευταία χρόνια τα διακρατικά προγράμματα ανταλλαγής φοιτητών για σπουδές, εργασία και εθελοντισμό έχουν συγκεντρώσει την προσοχή ως ένα μέσο ανάπτυξης της πολιτισμικής συνείδησης και της αντίληψης του εαυτού ως πολίτη του κόσμου. Η οργανωμένη και μελετημένη εκπαίδευση και υποστήριξη των φοιτητών στα ταξίδια τους είναι καθοριστική για την ενίσχυση αυτών των εμπειριών, καθώς και για την μεγιστοποίηση των οφελών τους και της ανάπτυξη της (δια)πολιτισμικής συνείδησής των φοιτητών. Στο άρθρο αυτό παρουσιάζουμε την ανάλυση ενός πιλοτικού εκπαιδευτικού και υποστηρικτικού προγράμματος που συστήσαμε, με σκοπό να διερευνήσουμε τα χαρακτηριστικά που ενθαρρύνουν την ανάπτυξη διαπολιτισμικών δεξιοτήτων. Στην ανάλυση μας στρεφόμαστε σε ψυχοδυναμικές θεωρίες για να κατανοήσουμε τον τρόπο με τον οποίο τόσο η προετοιμασία όσο και η υποστήριξη των φοιτητών επιτρέπει και διευκολύνει την εξόρμησή τους στην «διαφορετικότητα». Θεωρούμε ότι οι ψυχοδυναμικές θεωρίες αυτές μπορούν να βοηθήσουν στην κατανόηση του φαινομένου της διακρατικής εκπαίδευσης και να ενθαρρύνουν την υιοθέτηση πιο σχεσιακών και στοχαστικών/ενδοσκοπικών προσεγγίσεων με σκοπό την ανάπτυξη μιας πιο ουσιαστικής και βαθύτερης εμπειρίας διαπολιτισμικότητας.

Keywords:

Intercultural engagement, study abroad, Third Space, psychodynamic theory, secure base

Introduction

Following the growing trend in higher education of creating opportunities for study abroad, scholars have begun to explore student experiences in order to understand and improve the impact of these international endeavors on the development of cultural awareness and global competencies (Byram & Dervin, 2008; Holmes et al., 2015; Messelink et al., 2015; Penman & Ratz, 2015). Research points to home institutions as essential in supporting student transitions abroad and in enhancing genuine intercultural contact (Messelink et al., 2015). Holmes et al. (2015) go so far as to use the metaphor of a 'safety rope' to describe the central role of the home institution in supporting outgoing students. Institutional support has been discussed in relation to students' needs for practical information (Holmes et al., 2015); spaces for reflexive self-expression (Greatrex-White, 2008; Holmes et al., 2015); opportunities for interpersonal interaction both among students (Penman and Ratz, 2015) and with foreigners (Gutierrez Almarza et al., 2015; Borghetti et al.,

2015; Holmes et al., 2015); and the enabling of a sense of self-in-the-world as growingly at home with diversity (Killick, 2012).

Alongside recognition of institutional provision of programs to prepare students for travel, there is a growing acknowledgment of the significance of longitudinal support extending to students' sojourns (Penman & Ratz, 2015) and their returns from abroad (Arthur, 2003; Thompson & Christofi, 2006). Messelink et al. (2015) have further identified the need to consider the effects of students' intercultural experiences long after they are back. Embedded in such longitudinal approaches are the concepts of reflexivity and self-awareness, both essential in developing intercultural competence (Jackson, 2012). For example, Penman and Ratz (2015, p. 51) write of 'a learning journey on the road to becoming a better stranger', a process that enables a view of otherness in relation to the self through ongoing reflexivity. Geatrex-White (2008) and Messelink et al. (2015) highlight that students' perceptions of (explicit or implicit) 'foreignness' as well as their capacity to challenge fixed notions of sameness and difference when exposed to diversity are fundamental.

Reflexivity, curiosity and openness are essentially relational processes. One cannot be curious, open, or reflexive without an 'other' or an encounter with something or someone new and unfamiliar. A recent relational turn in the field (Borghetti et al., 2015; Holmes et al., 2015) challenges fixed notions of interculturality and discusses intercultural learning through dynamic, intersubjective encounters, defined as:

an interaction (verbal and non-verbal) between two or more people in situations (not necessarily countries) where they may perceive each other to have different backgrounds (cultural, linguistic, geographical, etc.) and where these differences are salient and affect the nature of the interaction (which might include empathy, sameness and shared understandings, despite apparent surface differences). (Holmes et al., 2015, p. 17)

Killick (2012) discusses students' self-identification through others in the light of global citizenship drawing on Merleau-Ponty's (1962) view of intersubjectivity as inherent in the self-other-world triangle that defines human experience. He suggests that understandings of selfhood and otherness become challenged, develop, or emerge in reciprocity with the world encountered by the students who travel abroad. He identifies the role of relationships with significant others, both in the host culture and in the international student community, in supporting and enriching intercultural learning, suggesting the need for longitudinal, interconnected support provisions and communities.

In summary, research indicates that the home institution needs to have a central role in the preparation and support of students' study abroad longitudinally, i.e. beginning before departure, continuing during the sojourn, and lasting until well after return. Such provision includes a duty of care towards students' welfare, supporting them throughout their study abroad. It also includes the enabling of a reflexive space that fosters self-awareness and a sense of curiosity towards the 'other', aiming at enhancing the students' intercultural engagement. As indicated, the literature on the latter has grown to employ relational and intersubjective approaches to explore student development abroad. Speaking to these emergent relational developments in the field of students' intercultural engagement we look to contribute an understanding of international transitions through some notions of psychodynamic theory.

To set the context, we start by offering an overview of our Third Space Project, which was developed to meet the abovementioned conditions. The organizing department of the home institution had primary responsibility for students' wellbeing when studying abroad and therefore had a duty of welfare to them. The Third Space Project was provided in addition to this and looked to facilitate intercultural engagement by providing a safe, interactive, and reflexive space that would enable a sense of openness and curiosity in students while abroad, thereby aiming at the maximization of their learning.

In our evaluation of the project, we found that the psychodynamic notions of the secure base and the transitional object helped us understand in more depth some of the experiences conveyed by the students in their feedback on the project. Drawing on them, we consider how the relationship between the students and the home institution can support the former to develop curiosity and openness in their intercultural relationships during their study abroad.

The Third Space Project

The Third Space Project (3rdSP) was developed by academics and support staff aiming to promote students' intercultural awareness and engagement, decrease pre-departure anxiety and stereotyping, offer a sense of belonging to a community, and provide a platform to share experiences upon return. The name derives from the idea that when one culture meets another, something new—a third space—is created (Kramsch & Uryu, 2013). The program consists of a series of activities that wrap around students' international experiences, offering tools to explore, reflect, engage, and share 'culture' during the different phases of international travel. Our learning interventions draw in

part from traditions of ethnographic research as 'non-linear' and inductive modes of enquiry (Agar, 2004), encouraging open and thoughtful engagement with the quotidian life of others.

Following a longitudinal approach, 3rdSP entailed a pre-departure weekend retreat, a physical 'toolbox' and online sojourners' community, and a returnees' conference¹. At the core was the toolbox of activity cards which encourage small but meaningful explorations of the everyday. Key to working effectively with this toolbox is the adoption of a reflexive attitude towards these interactions, which underpins a more situated and sympathetic appreciation of other cultures and does not presume a priori notions of cultural difference (Davies, 2008). These attitudes and skills were introduced before students departed through workshops on ethnography, reflexive story-telling, and intercultural communication. While abroad, students were encouraged to explore, reflect, and write about intercultural experiences inspired by the toolbox on a shared blog. Sojourning students were also supported through a Facebook group and a reflexive 'Award' activity, which is part of an employability program that recognizes student engagement in non-curricular activities. 3rdSP finished with a one-day returnees' conference which further emphasized reflexivity and community-building and provided a supportive setting for students to make meaning of their entire experience abroad and consolidate their newly developed intercultural competencies.

This paper focuses on one of the core findings of the program's evaluation, namely the importance of a sense of belonging that would enable students to effectively engage in exploring the everyday, thereby encountering cultures beyond the boundaries of international university communities. To look at this in more detail, we draw on the notion of the secure base, paying specific attention to how the provision of a secure base enables ventures to the outside. Given the centrality of intersubjectivity and relationality in our program, we explore the concept of secure base from within its original psychodynamic theory context and draw on the interrelated concepts of holding, transitional object, and transitional space to enrich our analysis. Even though originally associated with infant-carer relationships, psychodynamic theory is commonly used as a theoretical framework in the thinking of education, focusing on emotional (Salzberger-Wittenberg et al., 1983) and relational (Youell, 2006) aspects of learning. Further to that, psychoanalysis, and specifically attachment theory, has come out of the clinical setting to inform social science

¹ The structure of 3rdSP was inspired by the University of Virginia's Cultural Orientation Reflection Engagement programme.

research (Fonagy et al, 2014; Lapping, 2011; Simpson & Rholes, 2015). In what follows we present the three notions above in their context before we go on to think of our students' experiences in their light.

Psychodynamic Theory

Secure Base

The concept of secure base comes from work on child development, first put forward by the psychoanalyst John Bowlby in 1969. Bowlby (2005) was interested in how early relationships between a child and her carers impact on the child's capacity to form relationships outside the immediate familial surroundings, to go to places—sometimes unfamiliar ones—and to play. He established that consistent physical and emotional care by an interested carer allows the establishment of a secure base that gives the child the security to begin to take risks and explore the world—or herself in the world—by engaging with others and in new activities. From this secure base, the child can make sorties into the outside world knowing that she will be welcomed back when she returns, nourished physically and emotionally, comforted if distressed and reassured if frightened (Bowlby, 2005, p. 12). In essence, the role of a secure base is one of being available, ready to respond when called upon to encourage and perhaps assist, but to intervene actively only when necessary. By internalizing the secure base, that is, by taking in again and again the experience of being held through having her needs and anxieties named, kept in mind and survived, the child gains enough sense of security to begin exploring what is different or less known, and to continue doing so in the physical absence of the secure base, for example in loss or separation. With his theory, Bowlby linked attachment and exploration, the familiar and the unfamiliar, certainty and uncertainty, that is, the capacity to step into new territory and remain secure in the face of what is less known.

Bowlby located this process in early infancy. However, he also considered it as a lifelong process. Throughout our lives when we are confronted with the unknown, we revisit the need for a secure base, looking for it in our significant others, friends, partners, teachers, and even in organisations, places, and objects:

All of us, from the cradle to the grave, are happiest when life is organized as a series of excursions, long or short, from the secure base provided by our attachment figures (Bowlby, 2005, p. 69).

Holding, Transitional Space and Transitional Object

Bowlby (2005) identified some resonance between the role of the secure base and that of holding as it was earlier established by Winnicott (2002), who wrote of the significant role of a holding environment for human development. Winnicott (2002) discussed how being physically held, as well as held in mind, allows the infant a growing security in her own being; her body, frustrations and needs. Physical and emotional holding allows the self to experience the growing sense of being alive during significant developmental stages and changes. He acknowledged the importance of the continuation of reliable holding in relation to ever-widening circles of family, school and social life. Building on Winnicott, Ogden (2004) proposed that physical and emotional holding allows the individual a sense of 'going-on-being' in the passing of time and the changes that come with it, including the growing separation from the familiar and the simultaneous openness to what is less known.

Winnicott (2005) spoke of the intermediate area between the self and the other as a transitional or a potential space, which emerges from the infant's growing sense of separateness and autonomy in relation to her carer. Winnicott (2005) developed the concept of the 'transitional object', which creates a bridge between the secure base and the encounter with the less known. While Winnicott conceptualized this as an object mediating between a sense of oneness with the carer and an emerging sense of separateness, transitional objects (which are often embodied in concrete physical things) may also serve as links in subsequent relationships during various transitions in adulthood.

As we will demonstrate below, our students experienced 3rdSP as a liminal space between here and there, coming and going, the familiar and the unfamiliar. One of the authors, Simopoulou, has training in psychoanalytic observation and reflexive practice, which has enabled us to make connections between our participants' experiences and psychodynamic theory. We found these psychodynamic concepts particularly useful in understanding what was helpful in our support provision and what could be refined. We hope that our analysis through a psychodynamic theory lens with an emphasis on relationality and intersubjectivity may be helpful to colleagues in the field of intercultural education and enrich their practices.

Methods

We recruited 40 undergraduate students who were going on a study or work abroad experience from across the University. Students were invited to apply to 3rdSP by submitting a cover letter discussing their understanding of

the value of this program and the impact they anticipated it would have on their experience abroad. In our evaluation of 3rdSP, we collected data from all three phases (Table 1):

Phase	Methods of Collection
Pre-departure: Weekend Retreat	Questionnaires, Interviews
Sojourner: Toolbox	Blog entries, 'Award' submissions
Re-entry: Welcome Home Conference	World Café event, Evaluation sheets, Focus Group with a sub-group of students who trained to become facilitators for the next Third Space

TABLE (1): DATA COLLECTION PROCESS

We loaded transcripts, notes and reflexive pieces into NVIVO and analyzed them thematically (Joffe, 2012) looking for patterns in the data that spoke to the processes underlying increased intercultural engagement. It was through this close reading that a link between belonging and risking began to emerge inductively from the data (Figure 1).

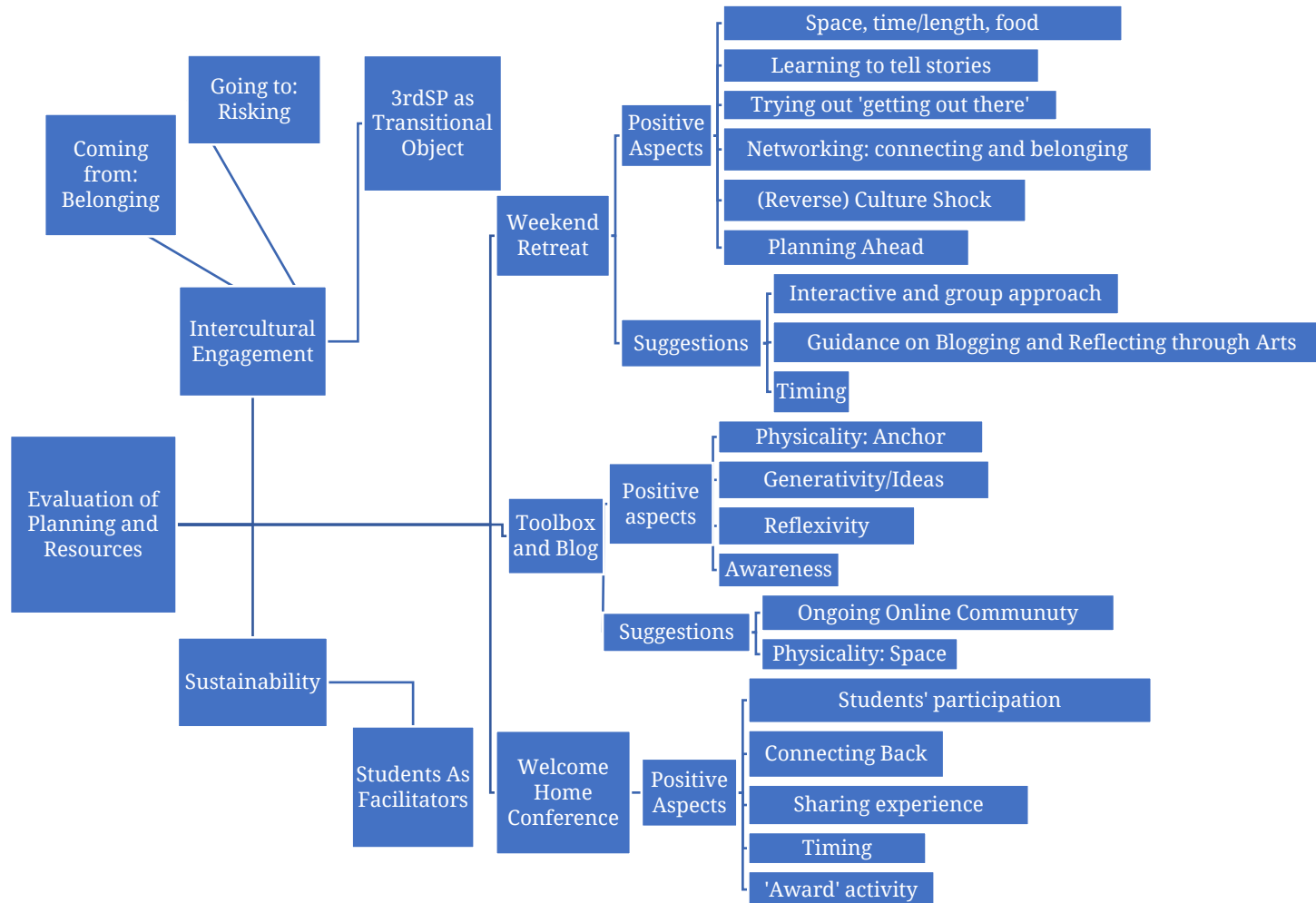


FIGURE (1): ILLUSTRATION OF ANALYTIC THEMES EMERGING FROM THE PROJECT EVALUATION

The closer we worked with this emerging link, the more the psychodynamic concepts of the secure base and the transitional object became relevant, providing a useful conceptual framework for our analysis. In what follows, we trace such connections to psychodynamic theory across the three phases of 3rdSP.

Pre-Departure Phase: Creating a Holding Environment

During the pre-departure phase, we provided a weekend retreat that aimed to address students' educative and practical needs in relation to intercultural engagement and to facilitate community building. Students experienced this weekend as a holding environment and their purposeful explorations of their current city as first steps into the possible unknown, as we detail below.

Starting with the educational aspect of 3rdSP, the preparatory workshops seem to have been experienced as emotionally holding, providing a sense of safety to participants. For example, discussing the session on culture shock, one student expressed her relief in 'being taught more about it and the ways to embrace it and express myself instead of worrying'. Retrospectively, another student observed 'maybe we had less culture shock because we knew it was going to happen'.

Emotional holding in psychodynamic thinking grows out of the attunement to the other's needs and distresses; held in mind, they are acknowledged as real prior to being responded to (Britton, 1998). Bringing these observations into the present project enables us to think of the learning provided by 3rdSP (e.g. about culture shock) in relation to its content but also as an act of providing students with a sense of having their actual or potential concerns named and thought about and, therefore, of being held.

Winnicott's theories about the holding environment emphasize meeting individuals' basic needs, such as nutrition and physical safety. Although we had not particularly thought about these aspects, several students commented on the venue and food without being asked to. For example, one student observed 'the food was great and the venue was really nice' when asked if there is anything to add in their evaluation of the Retreat. This can be understood as an acknowledgment of the accommodation of a primary need, contributing to the creation of a sense of a secure base, and suggests the importance of considering basic aspects of existence when planning pre-departure events.

Students also emphasized the opportunities that the retreat offered in developing a sense of belonging with others, which supported them in their preparations for departure and their actual travels abroad:

It was also really good to know that there were other students doing the same thing as me, and many feeling the same emotions I was feeling. [...] the community of 3rdSP helped a lot.

This student points to a holding quality of 3rdSP as a community of people that share something in common. Similarly, another student described the retreat as 'comforting' in that there were 'a lot of unprepared people in the same situation'. Other students made direct links between the 3rdSP community formed at the Retreat with feeling more prepared to meet new and different people abroad:

A good process in helping me get ready to leave. To know that there were many people in the same situation felt nice, and that we could talk to each other about this. I feel it prepared me with confidence in being able to not be shy and speak to new people, make new friends - such as doing this at the weekend retreat had an impact on my confidence

On the second day of the Retreat, students were invited to explore the city using activities suggested on the Toolbox cards. Students disclosed that these activities, coupled with the physical and psychological holding of the retreat center and the developing community, encouraged and enabled them to explore the unknown by taking small steps into unknown parts of their current city in preparation for the longer journey they expected to take for their studies, slowly expanding their geographies of engagement. A student spoke of 'noticing things on your doorstep you don't even think about', and another commented:

It was nice that the retreat was in the centre of the city, and I actually found new places which I have not been around before. Since then, I have gone back

Both kinds of holding - the physical attending to basic needs and the emotional acknowledgment of needs, including the need to belong - are vital in ensuring the development of a secure base and the space for the person in development to begin to foster a healthy sense of a separate self. In the context of 3rdSP, at this stage this evolving self is a departing self.

We now turn to look at the internalization of the secure base as traced in students' responses about their time away from home and their encounters with the new and the different.

Sojourner Phase: Internalization of the Secure Base

As demonstrated above, 3rdSP created a sense of community and secure base through the pre-departure Weekend Retreat. For the most part, students involved in 3rdSP did not know anyone in the places they went to prior to their sojourn. Winnicott (1958) writes of a person developing the capacity to be alone through internalizing a holding other or even a holding community. In other words, by taking in again and again the availability of the other, the person develops a solid and protected base which enables in turn a growing sense of separateness and individuality. By developing the capacity to hold one's self during a state of aloneness, the person begins to gradually open up to otherness (Ogden, 2004).

The analysis that follows shows that delivering programs that focus on building community, encouraging exploration and advocating reflection as a 'transitional space in-between the self and the other' (Winnicott, 2005) enable students to internalize a secure base established pre-departure. Specifically, we explore online aspects of community and student experiences of writing as transitional spaces while they were abroad and the toolbox as a transitional object in that space.

Virtual and Writing Spaces as Transitional Spaces

The utility of virtual and writing spaces as transitional spaces was pointed to by our analysis, even though it was not fully realized through 3rdSP. Students who wished to have their participation in 3rdSP recognized on their transcript were required to write 12 blog posts over the course of their experience. We also created a Facebook group for participants, facilitated by one staff member. For some students, this online community, underpinned by the pre-departure community-building process, represented a virtual space of holding and belonging located between reality and imagination, the self and the other:

Thanks to 3rdSP I felt like part of a community. Knowing that there were so many other people who might live through the same anxieties and feel the same excitement was relieving. Not only did this help me feel more relaxed, but it also served as a source of inspiration. Just by reading others' posts on the blog I would start feeling the urge to go out, explore, try traditional food or just wander the streets in search of new places and experiences to write about and give back to the community.

However, it only worked to the extent that students felt held in the awareness and knowledge of others. There was not much engagement with the Facebook group and some students spoke of feeling like 'posting to an empty space' and looking out for responses to their blog posts. Observations like these point to a need to be responded to directly by an other, in order to feel held in a virtual community. This was not always achieved in our pilot and is a learning that we carry forward. Nevertheless, for other participants simply reading what their peers wrote invoked a sense of belonging to an international group of everyday explorers and a connection with 'home'.

One of the foundations of 3rdSP was to encourage students to observe themselves experiencing intercultural engagements and then to reflect on these experiences through narrative. This was underpinned by research demonstrating the significance of 'guided reflection and introspective writing' in developing intercultural competence (Jackson, 2012, p. 457). Psychodynamic theory recognizes that as a creative, even artistic, act, writing itself can create a potential space located between reality and imagination (Winnicott, 2005). The symbolization of experience by means of language can turn writing into an 'other' space wherefrom a person becomes reflexively aware of her own experience being also an observer to it. The activities in the toolbox (discussed below) invite observation and reflection as well as exploration, with prompts to notice and question the taken-for-granted ordinary.

Some students pointed to a retrospective quality in writing, speaking of it as a space of 'thinking back', a kind of a reflection that is fostered by writing about the experience of the activity rather than simply doing it. Writing is also a space where new or different images of self are storied into existence. When writing reflectively, one occupies and moves between different selves while also opening up to encompass a view of self as reciprocally present in the world: taking the world in while being changed by it. This process emerged in students' reflections as they contemplated on their experiences: 'I opened up a new side to life which I had never seen before'; and 'I just felt free'.

Some students expressed a preference to document and reflect on their experience by means of pictures and videos which they found less prescriptive and allowing of a freer, more playful space for expression: 'I am arty', or 'I don't like writing – I am not good at grammar', and 'I would use art if I could'. In subsequent deliveries of 3rdSP, we incorporated workshops on various ways of capturing, reflecting on and sharing experiences, including picture and video-essays. Winnicott (2005) maintains that creative aspects of artistic practice create transitional spaces, which leads us to propose that inviting students to

reflect and communicate about international experiences must be kept separate from academic assessments that could shut down creativity.

Toolbox: An Invitation to Openness

The invitation to explore is another key component to 3rdSP and was mainly manifested through a box of cards (toolbox) suggesting everyday activities with an ethnographic flavor. Students' discussion of doing these activities as well as the actual blogposts evidence their openness to intercultural engagement and the role of curiosity. As argued above, the internalization of the secure base, that is, of the experience of holding an emotional situation over time, allows one the safety to begin to risk some separateness from the secure while opening up to the unfamiliar and new (Ogden, 2004; Winnicott, 1958). Taking this to 3rdSP offers another way of thinking about students' narratives of their experiences abroad. A number of students convey such openness to otherness using words that carry an active, almost rebellious, quality and point to a going out or a breaking of a pattern, of something old, or somehow familiar. Discussing the toolbox, students reported that it enabled them to go beyond their comfort zones:

I have definitely done activities and gone outside my comfort zone more than if I hadn't have had the ideas from the toolbox - they've been really useful.

The 3rdSP Toolbox has helped me hugely - it has made me get out of my comfort zone and has also made me more aware of my surroundings.

It has made me branch out and try new things, but also find a new perspective on things I was already doing.

An openness to otherness as newness can be further observed in students' choice of activities. For example, in response to the 'Go Team' card which encouraged students to watch a sports event with locals, engage with them by asking questions and show interest and support for the team one student commented: 'I normally hate football, although I had fun doing it'. Importantly, students went beyond the specific activities that we provided, revealing an internalization of this attitude of curiosity and openness. One student joined the ski team of their host university which:

opened up a wide array of opportunities to make the most of the -30 winter conditions, see new parts of the world, and get fit too!

Similarly, for another student:

the craziest thing I did was cycle from London to Paris. It was mad! It took us 4 days. Really spontaneous - we had a map and that was it

Our students found inspiration and motivation to engage with difference and try out new things, but they also reported an openness to relating to others during those adventures. Put simply by one participant: 'I spoke to people I don't normally'. Such an other-oriented attitude was linked to a new-found sense of self and confidence by another student: 'I came out of my shell; I was a lot shyer in my country'; and another one: 'I grew up a lot. It sounds cheesy but I felt like I found myself'.

Through activities, reflection and expression within the holding space of the broader 3rdSP community, the invitation of the toolbox and the transitional space of writing, the leaving-self of the departure phase developed into the culturally competent and confident self of the student abroad.

Toolbox as Transitional Object

Before moving on to discuss the return phase, we wish to highlight some of the most interesting feedback we received, which had to do with the physical container (box) of the activity cards. A significant minority of students who took their box with them (most used the online version) spoke of it warmly, observing its distinctive physical characteristics: the design, its white color and its concreteness. Some referred to it as 'aesthetically pleasing', an object they were keen to show: 'I had it on display – I loved it'; their words carry an almost idealizing quality, 'it is too clean, too nice'. Another student, when reflecting on the 'Personalise your box' card, turned it into something almost untouchable: 'didn't want to decorate the box, it was so nice!'. Others readily engaged or played with it, filling it with objects, storing photos in it, or decorating it. In doing so, they felt supported and connected:

I really liked the box – it became a memory box – I kept there all the things I did not want to lose.

It is a documentation, something that will stay with us and will always be there.

It was my box, a memento.

Drawing on psychodynamic concepts, we came to understand these responses as evidence of the box acting as a transitional object, something that came to represent the holding nature of 3rdSP and thus contributed to a sense of security, enabling participants to open to the unknown. As discussed, a

transitional object is a physical thing that reminds the developing person of the holding other, while accommodating a continuity of being in that other's absence and during times of development and change (Winnicott, 2005).

Storing treasured memories in or on the box provided students' developing selves with a sense of continuity across the passing of time. In these ways, 3rdSP, through its box, became an anchor for the self in movement who is challenged by new places, cultures and meanings.

Moreover, the box afforded some students with a personal space that they, in turn, shared with others through their interpersonal connections:

A friend doing an internship in Germany came over to visit...she found the box and she thought it was amazing, she took the activities on board while returning to her internship lab.

Another student recalled an evening when a friend who visited her was feeling low and found the cards and began to play with them. Overall, participants enjoyed the physical proximity of the box as distinctive to the virtual community of online spaces: 'having a physical reminder of 3rdSP ... an object to pick up, read and show to friends'.

The role that the box played as a concrete, transitional object raises interesting questions about the continuing utility of the tangible over the virtual in enabling students to move from a secure base into the unknown of an experience abroad.

Returning Phase: Detachment from and Facilitation of a Secure Base for Others

The Welcome Home conference, which included a World Café event and a reflective story-crafting session, aimed to provide a space of connection and re-connection and an opportunity to share and consolidate experiences. Overall, attendance was high (70%), with many staying past the end of the event to continue their conversations.

At the end of the conference, students were invited to become 3rdSP Workshop Facilitators (ambassadors) for future cohorts. Our aim was to foster a sense of student-led sustainability for future 3rdSP deliveries. Five students volunteered and received relevant training. After their first workshop delivery as facilitators, we held a focus group to explore the ambassadors' experiences and needs, which we recorded and analyzed thematically (Joffe, 2012).

In talking about their experience, ambassadors saw the facilitation of 3rdSP workshops as an opportunity to revisit and reflect on their time abroad while also connecting with others and meeting departing students' needs. In the focus group discussion, we traced evidence of an internalized secure base through students' willingness to offer a similar sense of safety to others. The ambassadors' capacity to identify the new students' needs for a holding community can be thought in the light of their experience of having their own needs identified and met by 3rdSP in their own pre-departure stage.

Part of the ambassador role required students to select, craft and share a story from their experience abroad with the next cohort of pre-departure students. In reflecting on their experience of sharing and listening to each other's stories in this forum, ambassadors discussed forming a sense of connectedness between the old and the new but also the past and the future, reinforcing the sense of community that grew around the act of storytelling:

I was very happy when you actually said let's just form a big circle and sit and talk, when there's five of us that are open to tell our story, ...if you just said ... you only have one facilitator and you make them stand in front of a lot of people, the story might not come through the same way...it was nice having a circle, like a story time

The image of a circle also emerged in students' reflections in the form of circular movement, an ongoing mutual offering and receiving, informing the relationship between new students and themselves.

What became explicit in the focus group discussion was their recognition of their own development and their willingness to be facilitative and supportive of other students:

S1: hearing about the departing students, their fears and expectations as well, it was funny to think... I have the same expectations, it was interesting to see whether you'd kind of fulfilled them on your year abroad, so it was useful to kind of reflect in that way as well...

S2: to see how excited they – there was a boy talking to me and he just seems so excited about going away and you forget that we also were so excited, telling everybody, oh I am going away, I am going away, and it's nice to see, it is quite refreshing... Was quite interesting to think about what other people might find useful so thinking about your experiences and then thinking how can this help someone else who will be facing the same problems, which story to tell so that would be helpful for them

Getting in touch with their own experiences enabled them to realize their growing separateness from them. Equally, in preparing new students, ambassadors left their state of exclusive unity with the secure base of 3rdSP. In this way, facilitation embodied a process of detachment. However, with this detachment, students also experienced loss, which came through beautifully in the words of a student responding to a suggestion by her peer to turn the blog into a shared space between the two cohorts:

Because otherwise our space is probably – I’ve not actually looked at it recently but maybe it’s kind of dead now, I can’t imagine many people are contributing ... now that we are all here, so it will just now disappear into the internet, ...which should be a shame because for our year it was quite, we were on it a lot writing and reading things, it would be a shame to see it all disappear

Drawing on literature that supports a longitudinal approach to intercultural education we suggest that the Welcome Home Conference and the opportunity to facilitate the new cohort of participants allowed students a smoother transition by re-storying their experiences, re-visiting their holding community, beginning to acknowledge its loss and their gradual detachment from it, and risking yet again an openness to a new unknown. This acknowledgment of loss demonstrates once more how precious the support they received from 3rdSP was for them in making them feel secure and held in their international endeavors.

Concluding Thoughts

The present paper explored the support and facilitation of students’ intercultural engagement in their travels abroad in the light of the psychodynamic concepts of the secure base, holding environment, the transitional object and transitional space. Drawing on our evaluation of 3rdSP, we considered how the provision of a longitudinal support to students informed by a relational and reflexive approach throughout the different stages of international sojourns promoted meaningful intercultural engagement. We discussed each travel stage in the light of psychodynamic theory and argued that students’ internalization of a secure base provided them sufficient safety to begin to risk some of it and welcome less familiar and more unknown encounters. It also allowed them to be supportive of others in similar situations, consolidating their learning and intercultural competence. With the present argument, we contribute to ongoing discussions in the field in favour of a relational approach that is attentive to students’ relationships with both the

home and the host institution and their communities, as significant for the development of openness to difference.

Although our program and approach were positively received by our students, we do not suggest that this is the only or correct way of supporting students. We add to the growing literature that encourages longitudinal approaches where the home institution is continuously present (Arthur, 2003; Messelink et al., 2015; Penman & Ratz, 2015; Thompson & Christofi, 2006) providing a sense of security. We transform Holmes' et al. (2015) metaphor of a 'safety rope' to represent institutional support provision into an 'umbilical cord' and discuss students' relationship with the home university in parallel with early forms of intersubjective relating theorized in psychodynamic literature. We hope that the psychodynamic framework we used to think our findings may shed some light onto why some (longitudinal) provisions are experienced as supportive, and how a relational and reflexive approach allows the safety and the space that in turn enable meaningful intercultural engagements in the course of students' sojourns.

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