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Cultural and Cognitive Syntheses after Short-Term Music Study Abroad

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Abstract

The purpose of this focused qualitative study was to examine two urban high school students' perceptions of a study-abroad experience, five years after the fact, with the intention of assessing long-term effects on increased global competency and awareness. The interviewees, selected from 11 participants, brought an already rich intercultural perspective and as such, their experiences illuminated the profound benefits of short-term study abroad experiences. Interviews were designed to elicit whether the principle of global competency could be discerned along two basic criteria, acquisition of cultural knowledge, and capacity/desire for close observation and self-reflection. Viewed through the theories of experiential learning, this paper will explore related pedagogical themes as well as point to the cognitive issues at stake in a longitudinal approach to qualitative research.

Abstract in Spanish

El propósito de este estudio cualitativo estuvo enfocado en examinar las percepciones de dos estudiantes de una escuela secundaria urbana sobre sus experiencias de estudio en el extranjero, cinco años después de ocurridas las mismas, con la intención de evaluar los efectos a largo plazo sobre una mayor competencia y conciencia global (global competency). Los entrevistados, seleccionados de entre 11 participantes, ya contaban con una perspectiva intercultural enriquecida y, como tal, sus experiencias iluminaron los profundos beneficios de las experiencias de estudios de corta duración en el extranjero. Las

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entrevistas fueron diseñadas para determinar si el principio de competencia global podía discernirse mediante dos criterios básicos: adquisición de conocimientos culturales y capacidad/deseo de observación minuciosa y de autorreflexión. Visto a través de las teorías de aprendizaje experiencial (experiential learning), este artículo explorará temas pedagógicos relacionados y destacará las cuestiones cognitivas en juego en un enfoque longitudinal de la investigación cualitativa.

Abstract in German

Ziel dieser fokussiert-qualitativen Studie war es, die Wahrnehmung von zwei städtischen Gymnasiasten über einen Studienaufenthalt im Ausland fünf Jahre später in der Rückschau zu erfassen, um so die langfristigen Auswirkungen einer solchen Erfahrung auf die Ausprägung globaler Kompetenz (global competency) und interkulturellen Bewusstseins zu bewerten. Die Befragten, die aus 11 TeilnehmerInnen ausgewählt wurden, verfügten bereits über eine vertiefte interkulturelle Perspektive. Ihre in dieser Studie beschriebenen Erfahrungen verdeutlichen die tiefgreifenden Vorteile von kurzen Studienaufenthalten im Ausland. Die Interviews wurden so gestaltet, dass bestimmt werden konnte, ob das Konzept der globalen Kompetenz anhand zweier grundlegender Kriterien - dem Erwerb kulturellen Wissens und der Fähigkeit zur genauen Beobachtung und Selbstreflexion - erkannt werden kann. Ausgehend von den Theorien des erfahrungsorientierten Lernens (experiential learning) untersucht dieser Artikel verwandte pädagogische Themen und weist auf eine Reihe kognitiver Fragen hin, die bei einem längsschnittigen Ansatz in der qualitativen Forschung von Relevanz sind.

Keywords:

Cross-cultural education, experiential education, global citizenship, music education, study abroad

Introduction

Several years ago, I organized a study abroad trip to France, Italy, and Switzerland for 11 general music students from a New York City public high school. I wanted to examine how this experience complemented students' perceptions of a range of cultures and subcultures and whether a notion of "global citizenship" might have emerged as a result of their experiences. This study was conceived in the context of pressing questions that educators of diverse student groups often ask: Can a shorter experience (due to restricted resources) still result in significant and long-lasting gains in motivation, sense of community, as well as other benefits as outlined by theorists of experiential

learning? Can “global awareness” or “global competency” be among the desirable outcomes? On the methodological side, can gains be better assessed after students have had a significant amount of time to synthesize their experiences?

The idea of travel as a means of enhancing extra-cultural awareness for the young has been a component of pedagogy for centuries. In classical and modern studies of education, philosophers have noted its effectiveness in the acquisition of long-term memory, to mention only one dimension, in which the cognitive and the somatic combine. If we consider travel and study a form of enhanced or multi-modal experience, in the category of “comprehensible input,” modern theories can help explore whether these experiences lead to more permanent acquisition of knowledge (Patrick, 2019). For John Dewey, experience and education are two sides of a coin: “[E]ducation must be conceived as a continuing reconstruction of experience” (in Kolb & Kolb, 2005, p. 194). For Dewey, experience is not merely a starting point on the path to a fuller education – it is indispensable. We can extrapolate from this that travel, and in this case making music with others in a study-abroad program, is a rich and dense category of experience. Furthermore, in this case, to consider music-making as part of a study abroad experience is at the very least to explore another channel of interaction with people of other cultures, not to mention the special categories of sensory, emotional, and cognitive dimensions of engagement available in this medium. The issue in this case is how these recognized advantages can be assessed, even if the experience abroad is relatively brief.

Literature on the educative impact of student travel, especially within the field of arts and music education, is vibrant and in constant expansion (Dessoff, 2006; Dwyer, 2004; Loveland & Morris, 2018; Paige et al., 2009; Stone & Petrick, 2013; SYTA, 2017; Wanner, 2009). Another portion of the existing literature reports on the mechanics of travel preparation, fundraising, and logistics (Olsen, 2010; Robinson, 2011). In my qualitative study, both of these elements contributed to the results. To turn to the social dimension of study-abroad experiences, we ought to reconsider terms such as “global citizenship” and “global awareness,” which require careful definition as both are under constant evolution and remain current in the literature. Gaudelli and Laverty (2015) describe “global awareness” as an “experience standing out as an enduring memorial of an encounter with others” (p. 13). And what of global

citizenship? Is it a traceable dimension of identity? Perhaps we can understand it as a form of greater inclusion where future professionals can adopt a set of attitudes and practices in increasingly interconnected social contexts. Hansen (2011) defines global citizenship as a commitment to a broader moral purpose that goes beyond geographical borders. More recently, scholars have considered a redefinition of these attributes as “global competency” (Byker & Putnam, 2019; Parmigiani, et al., 2022). Gaudelli (2016) argues that if indeed the aim is to foster a sense of global awareness and lay the groundwork for a broader understanding of identity, educators should implement programmatic efforts to prepare young people to live in an interdependent, complex, and fragile world. Naturally, study abroad opportunities of varying lengths and types would be part of any school program which values the priorities set out by Hansen, Gaudelli, and many others. I argue that the benefits of even short-term experiences have powerful effects, and that these can be identified to a degree of certainty that would allow curriculum designers, administrators, and educators to plan study abroad experiences with the expectation of desirable outcomes.

Pedagogy that includes travel abroad and other multicultural experiences is a form of experiential learning. We see the roots of this approach in Dewey’s writings, and it becomes fully articulated in the foundational work of David Kolb (1984), whose model presents a combination of experience, perception, cognition, and behavior combining to create learning. It is the educator’s task to structure experiences that encourage the learner to take initiative, make decisions, and assume some responsibility for the results. A crucial phase is the subsequent deep reflection, critical analysis, and the conceptualization of the learned experience, but it is also a phase that is challenging to assess in the short term.

To bridge this gap, this study examines descriptions of spontaneous reactions during study/travel and also interviews taken five years after the participants’ experience. For the latter, I posed a set of questions that could produce insights into the extent and nature of the learning that the participants experienced. These questions are a refinement and refocusing of the more general questions which open this essay:

1. How were these students’ beliefs about both their own and another culture impacted by actively participating in a guided educational trip abroad?

2. In what ways did these students perceive the study abroad program to be beneficial, specifically in the area of educational engagement and in their stated hopes for future growth?
3. What lingered in these students' minds – which could be expressed in the spoken word – and in what ways were the newly considered values associated with global citizenship – diversity, interconnectivity, multiculturalism – either enlarged or diminished through these experiences?

This study seeks answers to these questions through the perceptions and memories of the students themselves, shedding light on the way a small set of participants perceived their cross-cultural experience abroad. My interview sample is small, two students, but these were carefully chosen among 11 participants in the study abroad experience in 2014 to reflect overlap in quality and category of response. The sample size in qualitative studies has been a subject of discussion for some time, with perhaps the most unequivocal statement coming from Crouch and McKenzie (2006):

Since such a research project scrutinizes the dynamic qualities of a situation (rather than elucidating the proportionate relationships among its constituents), the issue of sample size - as well as representativeness - has little bearing on the project's basic logic.

While first effects and impressions are part of the testimony, usually as a basis of self-reflection and comparison, I hope to illuminate the long-term effects of the study abroad experience on memory, academic engagement, and ultimately professional life.

Synergies of Experience and Reflection

In the U.S., study abroad at the secondary and postsecondary educational levels has increased remarkably in recent decades (Gaudelli & Laverty, 2015; Gaudelli, 2016; Paige, et al., 2009). Educational commentators and organizations assert that experiencing a foreign culture is fundamental to building cultural awareness (Palmer, 2015; SYTA, 2017). Stone and Petrick (2013) argue that all travel is educational because it broadens the mind as people first story and then interpret experiences. The Student Youth Travel Association of the United States (2017) conducted a study on the impact of student group travel on young people aged 10-18, their teachers, and the school community in general (p. 2) and found that 60% of teachers report a positive impact of travel on students' academic work in subsequent terms. In addition, more than half of student-participants

perceive academic improvement as well as an increase of intellectual curiosity as a result of their travel (Dwyer, 2004, Stone & Petrick, 2013). Many studies in educational travel literature suggest that travel impacts cognitive skills such as problem solving and communication (Dwyer, 2004; Stone & Petrick, 2013; SYTA, 2017; Wanner, 2009).

The issue of program length is also crucial for schools in which funds are limited and for curriculum designers, among others, who must make hard choices about resources and schedule management. A number of studies (Dwyer, 2004; Ingraham & Peterson, 2004) have shown that stays of six months or more result in measurable improvement in academic performance and cultural awareness. In 2004, Dwyer found that participants who engaged in short-term travel experiences of fewer than eight weeks also exhibited lasting educational benefits, increased self-confidence, and a better understanding of their own cultural values, a conclusion that has been further affirmed in the decades since (Donnelly-Smith, 2009; Goldstein, 2022). Wanner (2009) states that “an overarching aim of study abroad is the discovery of the individual’s self through the other and better understanding of the conditions surrounding our existence through contrast with other realities” (p. 81). However, to control for variables, Wanner warns that although the benefits and outcomes of study abroad have been researched, it is often unclear whether these are due to travel, interaction with other cultures, formal classroom education, or a combination and thus creates “difficulty to attributing the desired (vague) effects to a single (precise) cause” (p. 88).

My interviews were structured to look at memory and personal reflection in a way that better isolates particular study-abroad experiences as attributable causes. Given the lapse of time between the experience and the interviews, the study was also a test case for enduring effects and indications of memory retention. In arguing for a wide-ranging examination of the expected benefits from educational travel, Gaudelli and Laverty (2015, p. 18) posit that “a global experience ... has pedagogical value if it extends beyond the momentary to the continuous”. They also emphasize that higher education excursions are often defined – or confined – by objective conditions such as differences in architecture, being in a geographically distant location, sensory overload, and cuisine, and that travel organizers might too optimistically assume that students automatically engage in careful observation when confronted with such new or unknown circumstances. Dewey (1938) cautions that educators should consider

how these objective conditions might interact with the students' internal conditions, a caution that remains relevant in today's thinking and planning for student experiences abroad. As Gaudelli and Laverty (2015, p. 22) argue, while global education is generally conceived as broadening and deepening students' experiences, for this to happen, it is not enough that students are simply exposed to culturally diverse "others" but that "we must consider how the experience will live on in the student's future experience and recognize that how it lives on is partly a function of his or her past experience". Sustained reflection (Gaudelli & Laverty, 2015; Southcott, 2004) should be an integral part of study abroad, for it is through reflection, as an experience in and of itself, that insights are drawn, and future activities conceptualized.

The Europe 2014 Program

Motivated by the diverse student population of the school where I taught, and my vision of a globally-aware classroom, I took 11 of my music students at the Global Learning High School, an urban public high school in New York City on a trip to Europe¹. These students had never been on a multi-week international trip. We visited France, Italy, and Switzerland. The trip, which I will call Europe 2014, was open to all current and former students grades 9 through 12 who were enrolled in general music as part of their state-mandated art credit requirement. The idea was for students to expand their cultural horizon and deepen their level of intellectual and cultural engagement, while being ambassadors of their own values, heritages, and positionality. As both researcher and music teacher of the student-participants, I designed the itinerary to include experiences that required them to actively engage with and be challenged by new situations.

The program involved extensive pre-departure preparation, including coordination with the school director, school leadership, parents, and teachers at the home school, and as well as administration and teachers at the host high school in Switzerland. The plan was to spend time in Paris, Rome, and on to Switzerland, with meetings, sightseeing, and collaborative experiences woven into the schedule. I had previously traveled to all three locations and was familiar with the schools and cultural institutions that we were going to visit. Prior to the trip, students met regularly with the program leaders to discuss

¹ All identifying information of the school and students was changed and replaced with pseudonyms to protect the school's and the students' confidentiality.

travel protocols, expectations (including their daily reflections), and the planned itinerary. Students were taught basic language skills in Italian and French. During pre-trip preparations, students studied the French Revolution in global history class, as well as the history of the Roman Empire and were primed for site visits of historical locations in Paris and Rome. The 11 participating students were accompanied by three faculty members from their home school and a fourth non-affiliated adult, a nurse.

Once in Paris, the group participated in sightseeing, collaborative work, and journal writing. In addition, the student-participants recorded a rap song with a French theme based on rhyme schemes we distilled from Shakespearean sonnets in a unit in our general music class. These recordings would figure into their experience in the Swiss high school later in the trip. We went next to Rome, where students were briefed on the educational experience for each day and given a short lesson on Roman history. We then toured the city extensively, including the Roman Forum and the Vatican. Aligned with the curriculum the students had had in global history, we took guided tours, each followed by a debrief and exchange of impressions. Upon returning to our apartment, students engaged in their daily journal writing and group discussion and were given an additional writing assignment.

We then traveled to our third and final destination: Switzerland. After packing, a light breakfast, and a last cappuccino, we returned to Rome's Fiumicino airport and boarded our plane to Basel. At the hostel, students took a lesson on the history of Switzerland and its linguistic diversity followed by journal writing and time to settle in. We then traveled to Gymnasium Liestal high school. The assistant principal gave us a campus tour and an overview of the Swiss education system. Following warm reception, students visited an English class where the teacher created small working groups, pairing the New York visitors with Swiss students. This language class engaged with comparative texts, which provided a beautiful opportunity for peer teaching among the student groups.

Our next experience was in a music class taught in English. The Swiss students were doing a unit on 1960s protest songs and shared their knowledge as well as questions with the New York visitors. In return, our students performed their original rap songs and shared their knowledge of the development of the genre in the States, while the Swiss students shared their

thoughts and knowledge as well. The exchange sparked thought-provoking conversations among the two student groups.

During the trip, we prompted the students to engage with at least two local people daily and to try to start a conversation. And shortly after returning to the United States, students were asked to use their journals and experiences to write a reflective essay.

As detailed in more depth below, this short study abroad experience has had a lasting impact. Above all, the students interviewed for this study described its impact on them as an opening outwards, a shift in self-regard. As one put it:

Studying abroad is one of the best things you can do for yourself because there's a new culture, some people go through a culture shock, but you know, it's okay. It's happened to me before, but the point is you learn to adjust and adapt to your new environment and that's important because then, like I said, you're more of an open person, you know, you're able to do this now. Oh, I tried this, you experienced new things.

A key phrase here is "it's happened to me before." In the school these students were attending, there is already an awareness of a dense intercultural atmosphere, and the student herself is a first-generation U.S. high schooler. Despite this background, the students felt they had grown even more, as evidenced by another comment:

I feel like we're being brainwashed more than we can ever imagine. So seeing [things] firsthand and experiencing everything, I mean it's, it's inexplicable what it does for your mind and your perspective.

Whatever the term "brainwashed" refers to here, this statement indicates a sense of transcendence of previous notions of identity. It is a testament to the study abroad experience, recalled five years after the fact, indicating a growth in "global awareness and constituting an early step towards "global competency".

Methodology

Data analysis of the 11 series of interviews took place after all interviews and field notes were transcribed, following Creswell's (2018) five-step process: data collection; data managing; reading and memoing; describing, classifying,

and interpreting; and representing and visualizing. Informed by the research questions, data was organized into three broad categories. 1) The ways in which the cross-cultural experience impacted students' understanding about global citizenship. 2) Students' perceptions of the educational and other benefits associated with a cross-cultural experience. 3) Students' reflection on the long-term impact of the cross-cultural experience. The interviews with two of the students were then selected as particularly rich for learning about these categories (and as allowing student voices to emerge and guide our understanding).

A qualitative methodology was used to capture meaning-making for these two students in interactional contexts. This paradigm defines shared constructs as being circumstantially situated and affected by culture, ethnicity, generational knowledge, and contextual difference. Kelly et al. (2018) have pointed out that in interactional contexts we must take into account the "multiple realities" that exist within "lived experience" (p. 11). I interviewed participants before as well as during the trip abroad, keeping in mind the principle of "guided conversations" rather than "structured queries" (Yin, 2018, p. 118). Interview questions were not limited to the protocol generated prior to interviews, and our discussions prompted additional questioning and dialogue: "A good qualitative researcher gets people to talk about things they would otherwise keep hidden or never think to mention" (Taylor et al., 2016, pp. 189-190).

While all 11 students were interviewed in 2014, for the longitudinal portion of the study, I used purposeful sampling and chose two for more detailed follow-up. As stated above, I pondered the efficacy of using a small sample here but was persuaded that the quality and detail of the resulting data would be helpful to fellow educators as well as administrators (Crouch & McKenzie, 2014; Vasileiou et al., 2018). The two participants already brought complex cultural backgrounds. Both participants were aware of the aims of the study, and both were enthusiastic about participating and welcomed the opportunity to reflect deeply after a lapse of time.

Although they had been my students five years prior at the Global Learning High School, neither participant had in the intervening time had any institutional or vocational affiliation with me. Interviews were 60 minutes in length and research questions were operationalized through the use of semi-

structured interview questions, observations, and fieldnotes, collected in 2014. Prior to conducting the interviews, I tested the interview protocol with colleagues to ensure that questions were clear and non-leading. Participants were given an informed consent form previous to the interviews. I encouraged the participants to describe as precisely as possible what they experienced and felt during Europe 2014, recalling specific events by showing them photographs taken during the trip. I attempted to catalyze a process of reflection that would lead both the interviewee and the interviewer to greater self-understanding, which included uncovering assumptions they had held previous to the trip.

Trinity

At the time of the interview, Trinity was a 21-year-old woman. Trinity was born in the United States to African American and Trinidadian parents. Studious, and energetic, Trinity is an only child and now lives outside of the city with her parents. She has recently graduated from college with a Bachelor of Science in criminal justice. In 2014, as a student in the city's public-school system, Trinity attended the urban high school at which I taught. She loved music class and ranked at the top of her class. Since graduating from college, she has been working full time at her job and is currently preparing for the GRE. Trinity's first recollections of the study abroad experience were sense memories. Then come notions of transcending assumptions, and comparisons with flat, two-dimensional depictions began to arise.

Sebastian

At the time of this study, Sebastián was a 22-year-old United States-born man whose family emigrated from the Dominican Republic. He stated that he identifies with U.S. culture. He is currently pursuing a Bachelor's degree in International Communications at a local college. As an avocational musician, he is a rapper and lyricist. Sebastián is a first-generation college student and lives in New York City with his older brother, younger half-sister, and mother. He is intellectually curious, an artful writer, and expressed a love/hate relationship with music class. Having dropped out of high school in his junior year, Sebastián returned to school as a senior, enrolled in the Europe 2014 trip, and eventually graduated that same year. Aside from experiences traveling between the US and the Dominican Republic as a child, Sebastián had not traveled outside the US before that. During the Swiss portion of the trip, Sebastian really enjoyed the exchange with his counterparts, which changed his preconceived notions about Switzerland being "totally different," realizing that suffering adolescence across

the pond might not be so dissimilar. At one point he got lost in the neighborhood of Saint Peter's Square in Rome at sunset, which he says awakened his problem-solving skills, and sharpened his sense of observation. Like Trinity, Sebastián's testimony begins with sensation and goes quickly to comparison:

The Coliseum is just something so different from what we now know is entertainment. I mean we have our stadium and stuff, but we don't feed people to like lions and stuff, you know what I mean? It made me realize like our idea of entertainment now is different. We still like the violence and going and stuff, but it's not as terrible. I would say I feel like we've gotten a little better.

Sebastián's visit to the Coliseum reminded him how entertainment is different today compared to 2,000 years ago. Stereotyped images of the violence of the Roman spectacles lead to some thinking about what has changed and what has not.

Selected Testimony

To probe whether there was long-lasting impact from this experience, I wanted to explore what lingered in their memories and what insights they gained from "grasping and transforming the[ir] experience" (Kolb, 1984). Interacting with peers their age from a different continent prompted both Trinity and Sebastian to draw analogies and contemplate possible divergences to their experiences as young adolescents. Moreover, the feeling of independence, away from family and the "known" provided a space for wonder and exploration of both the self and the cultures the participants were confronted with.

In participating in the musical activities at the public school in Switzerland, Sebastián raised critical issues such as accessibility and support:

You know, like with the DOE [New York City Department of Education], we've cut a lot of the music stuff out, a lot of the art stuff out unfortunately, so to see such space applied to just music and all these instruments and everyone's singing together and everyone has a copy of the lyrics, it's like the only time everyone has a copy of the lyrics in America I feel like is when it's time for graduation, you know what I mean?

In this bit of commentary, Sebastián is taking on agency. To note that something has been missing back home is not merely to criticize but to think about all the

things “out there” that are possible, and to feel that you can see this and potentially do something about it as a citizen, even perhaps as a “global citizen.” Observation and comparison are evident here, in this case bringing out an awareness of access to resources. Where this sort of criticism of the lack of funding might as easily have been made in the domestic context, Sebastian’s study abroad experience has brought the issue to surface.

Most of the testimony is remarkable for its thoughtfulness and self-realization. In response to a question about considering cultures other than their own, Trinity responded:

To be honest, I don’t think I really ever had an idea of those cultures, but at least going gave me something and I’ll always say the biggest thing for me was that all three of those countries are very welcoming.

Trinity further elaborated that:

Traveling allows me to see, you know, this country does this, in another country you don’t prefer to do things like this or will pronounce something one way and them another way. So, kind of like comparing but more like realizing. Exactly, you know, what each culture has that personifies it. What makes it itself, the little trades though, characteristics, that just, you know, in retrospect, make up who or what it is.

In doing qualitative analysis, there is the risk of reading into the testimony of an individual, but it does seem that Trinity has held onto (even after five years) an awareness of the uniqueness of other cultures. Further, Trinity is grappling with analogies between not only the pronunciation of words but perhaps of the basis of identity. The slight malapropism, “little trades” perhaps meaning “tradeoffs,” but perhaps a neologism that suggests that to truly “know” other cultures, we must think of all the details that go into identity, some verbal, some geographical, and some interpersonal (the “welcoming”). Rather than analyze Trinity’s speech for a particular ideological position, what is most valuable here is an apparent enhancement in observation and reflection. Even within this short passage, there is some adjustment, self-editing, and awareness. Trinity backs off from “comparing” in favor of “realizing.” Again, what has survived in consciousness after five years is a commitment to respectful observation and inward reflection.

Here is how Sebastián answered a question about how his perception of other cultures changed after the Europe 2014 trip:

You realize that your idea of [a] culture before actually seeing it firsthand, may be manipulated by media or our own bias ... Switzerland was just like, it was so different than anything I've ever experienced. I feel like that's why I liked it so much because it literally felt like another world, it felt like its own little world.

The intrusion of media in the perception of other cultures was noticed and there is a discourse of independent perception here, again (hopefully) the establishment of agency and a sense of responsibility beyond mere criticism. Noting the effect of the media upon notions of cultural difference, Sebastián seems to be harking to a sense of the independent observer, a sense that he can build a more nuanced understanding of others through this process of comparison and of separating experience from media representation. In a follow up question on whether the experience changed their perceptions of their own culture, Sebastián commented:

Yeah, Italy made me want to inquire about my own culture. My own interest in other cultures made me realize, hey, I'm so wrapped up in these guys' culture, why am I not as passionate about learning about my own?

Sebastian points to the importance of experiencing foreign cultures firsthand as opposed to the sometimes distorted portrayal of other cultures through mass media. Through the discovery of the other, Sebastian indicates a desire to inquire more about his own heritage, a sort of dual investigation of both self and world that has been sparked (in part) by experiences of this kind.

Perceptions of Benefits of Study Abroad Programs

For these two participants, the benefits of the study abroad program were evident and manifested on a wide spectrum. Trinity mentioned academic advantages insofar that being able to list a travel abroad experience on her resume brought positive attention to her applications. She explained that it shows a sense of adventure, of openness to trying new things and experiencing new places, which is something people are looking for.

A lot of people look for that sense of when you are open and you're adventurous or you know, you're open to trying new things and going places and traveling. A lot of people will look for that. And so, I

see a lot of positive impact coming from that. You know, if I put it in my resume or if I talk to somebody, yeah you know this is what I thought of the culture, this is what I obtained from my trip; people look into that, they find interest in that.

Trinity alludes to both the positive impact such an experience can have academically and in the working environment as well as the association with love of adventure and openness that results from partaking in study abroad travel. When asked whether Europe 2014 affected him in broader ways, Sebastián responded that it opened up his mind not only to other cultures but also to his own.

Taking a liking to other people's culture. I feel like... it opens up your mind to other things...like you notice things about yourself that you wouldn't have noticed had you been stuck in the city all the time... just learning about other people's culture, learning, like seeing the world. It makes you optimistic. Me personally, like it made me feel like I'll go to Africa too, I'll go to South America. You know, it's almost like a check off my list and it's satisfying...it inspires you and motivates you.

Sebastián indicated that learning about others and the unknown made him both optimistic and wanting to explore the world further. Another benefit from these encounters for Sebastián was the face-to-face experience as opposed to a "social media interaction," which he so vividly and whole-heartedly reminisced about:

We met these kids for the day and sure we got their emails or their text messages, their Facebook or their Instagram, but texting them or emailing them, that's different than just being face to face, you know, to see how comfortable we were automatically with them. Like when we first walked in the music room and how welcoming they were, it made us feel so welcome and warm inside. And these were strangers, you know, ...I haven't experienced that welcoming in the city. People are very standoffish I feel like, it's very competitive, but we walked in that music room and it was just automatically love. It was automatically like calm, like, please come in, it wasn't like, who are these guys? Who are these Americans? They brought us in with open arms, which is cool.

It appears that Sebastián appreciated the face-to-face interaction as opposed to virtual communication acted out through social media. I noticed students were barely on their phones during this trip. There was some feeling

of empathy and sharing between the students that took place apart from social media. There are many more defining (or vital) nuances such as facial expressions and body language that occur in face-to-face encounters as opposed to virtual communication on social media platforms. Details and messages that can be read between the lines, the immediacy and “warmth” that Sebastian alluded to, distinctions and a certain complexity that put direct encounter arguably above the superficiality of social media “dialogue.” It is these lived experiences of encounters with others that stand out as “enduring memorial[s]” that Gaudelli and Laverty (2015) suggest, which can serve as catalysts to wanting to explore such rendezvous with “others” in the future.

Global Citizenship

The term “global citizenship” was not used in the interviews when addressing the third research question with participants. Rather, I approached the concept with open-ended questions hoping that through their own stories they might shed light on this paradigm. Perhaps the most insightful moment during one of the interviews was when I asked Sebastián whether he thought that partaking in study abroad programs and exploring other cultures is important:

Of course it's important! ...it just made me realize that [it's important] for different cultures to get to know each other. I don't think there's anything to be afraid of and it's opened my mind to just speaking with people and trying to find a common ground no matter what because I feel like I went out there... and we met people at the Swiss high school. I feel like that was probably the highlight of the trip for me because it was like people our age as if I'm looking in the mirror almost, but it was like another, like almost another dimension. I don't know, it was weird, and just being out there and seeing kids my age was just so mind blowing.

Touching on the notion of broadening one's horizons, particularly with regards to multicultural awareness, he further elaborated that:

Switzerland was very welcoming. I felt like, I mean I'm in Switzerland, like, I'm from New York City, so as much as I did feel out of place because this is not where I live, you know, this is not where I know, but I didn't feel like a tourist for some reason.

Perhaps this quote illustrates what some parameter of global awareness or a global identity could look like: an open mind, a common ground across all

cultures. Finally, a remarkable quotation when I prompted him again as to whether this experience had sparked an interest in him to travel and inquire about the world further, he enthusiastically responded:

Yes, it definitely has and it's important because we have a certain idea of other places. Like I feel like when, when people talk about Africa in America, it's not usually in a positive light and it only makes me wanting to go see Africa more and almost like debunking those stereotypes, you know? So we saw Europe, it was amazing. I want to see Africa; I want to see South America, Antarctica! I feel like nobody goes there.

This statement touches on a crucial concept – more specifically the awareness, the openness, and eventually the understanding of other cultures, thus making the notion of multicultural awareness and global citizenship more concrete. The findings further contributed to the overarching theme of global experiences. Europe 2014 provided room for spontaneous experiences and encounters concurring with the principle of experiential education (Luckmann, 1996), as well as Gaudelli and Lavery's (2015) premise that a global experience “should be planned to allow for spontaneous activities, events, and encounters” (p. 20).

Lasting Impacts

One of the most salient criteria of successful cross-cultural educational experiences is the long-lasting impact of the experience (Gaudelli & Lavery, 2015; Dwyer, 2004; Ingraham & Peterson, 2004; Dewey, 1938). Given that this experience occurred more than five years before the interviews were conducted, this study allowed the researcher to examine and provide a concrete example of the long-term impact such study abroad programs can have, or as discussed above, how such programs “live on in the student's future experience” (Gaudelli & Lavery 2015, p. 22).

Five years after Europe 2014, Trinity and Sebastián spoke strongly about the continuing impact of the program in terms of opening them to other worlds and reflecting on their own identities and cultural values. This aligns with the benefits noted in literature on study abroad programs (Dwyer, 2004; Ingraham & Peterson, 2004). Wanner (2009) argues that “an overarching aim of study abroad is the discovery of the individual's self through the other and better understanding of the conditions surrounding our existence through contrast with other realities,” which is what Sebastián pointed to with the face-to-face

experience and the sparking to inquire about the individual's self when interacting with "another world." Engaging with the foreign seemed to have provided a mirror for self-reflection. The benefits of face-to-face experiences finds further support in the literature in Luckman's (1996) paradigm of experiential education, which he defines as a "process through which a learner constructs knowledge, skill and value from direct experience" (p. 7) as seen in Sebastián's case. The benefits of personal growth, cultural awareness as well as the understanding of own cultural values as described in the findings of Dwyer (2004), and Ingraham and Peterson's study (2004) were confirmed with the ways in which both Trinity considered this experience to have helped with her college application process as well as Sebastián's deeper awareness of other cultures (Dwyer, 2004; Montaigne, 1877).

The students in this study described how Europe 2014 helped them have expanded views of the world and an awareness of how experiences with otherness led to further insights (Hansen, 2011). In particular, Sebastian's realization of the importance of getting to know people from disparate cultures and trying to find common ground demonstrates his steps toward conceptualizing a global identity and committing to a broader moral purpose (Hansen 2011). The program may have been short but the impact continues to grow and develop. While Europe 2014 had specific pedagogical aims for the semester in which it was held, its ultimate value may well be the way it lives on in students.

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