Chapter 68

Describing Undergraduate Students' Intercultural Learning Through Study Abroad in Terms of Their 'Cultural Responsiveness'

Susan Oguro
University of Technology Sydney, Australia

Angela Giovanangeli
University of Technology Sydney, Australia

ABSTRACT

Although student international exchange programs commonly claim to facilitate participants' intercultural competence, questions remain as to how this competence might be adequately and validly assessed. In this article, the notion of Cultural Responsiveness is used to assist in interpreting and categorizing students' experiences and intercultural learning through study abroad programs. Data on the Australian undergraduate student participants' unique backgrounds, experiences and perceptions was collected after they had completed an exchange program in Switzerland or France. Using the Cultural Responsiveness categorization developed through this study, three parameters of students' intercultural experiences emerged: Awareness, Engagement and Bringing Knowledge Home. Using these three parameters, this article proposes that the notion of Cultural Responsiveness provides a useful method for identification of students' responses to the experiences of study abroad programs.

INTRODUCTION

One aspect of internationalization in higher education has been the increasing numbers of students participating in exchange programs at institutions abroad. These exchange or study abroad experiences are valued, not just for the experience afforded students to live and study abroad but also as an attractive addition to the profile of graduates seeking work in increasingly globally connected workplaces. While

there are a wide range of study abroad models, they typically include the goal of providing students with international experiences to foster students' interculturality. However, if interculturality is one objective of study abroad programs, then the question naturally arises of how this might be evaluated, particularly by higher education institutions charged with grading student performance. Researchers (for example: Byram, 1997; Cabau, 2015; Deardorff, 2009b; Fantini, 2009; Odağ, Wallin & Kedzior, 2015; Trede, Bowles & Bridges, 2013; Williams, 2009; Witte & Harden, 2011) continue to explore issues around teaching and assessing students in terms of their intercultural 'competence'. However, there is a lack of consensus regarding the term 'intercultural' itself (Dunne, 2011; Fantini, 2009; Witte & Harden, 2011) while the appropriateness of the notion of intercultural competence has also been challenged with arguments that it is not precisely measureable or assessable (Dervin, 2011a; Trede et al., 2013; Witte & Harden, 2011). The evaluation and assessment of student interculturality is therefore obviously not a straightforward endeavor.

The research findings reported in this paper grew from our experiences as educators of students who undertake study abroad program as part of their undergraduate studies. We sought to evaluate our own teaching and in particular to find an appropriate method for identifying the intercultural understandings of our students upon their return from year of exchange study at a partner university abroad. Our approach in interpreting our students' intercultural learning focuses on their engagement with languages and cultures, acknowledging that these are influenced by continual experiences and are therefore dynamic and constantly shifting. The definition we have adopted acknowledges the importance of cumulative life experiences which are continually "reconsidered and re-articulated" (Scarino, 2009). Our definition also highlights the importance of encounters which allow students to compare and contrast cultures as proposed by Deardorff (2009b) and Fantini (2009).

Through analysis of student narrative data, we have developed a framework for identifying aspects of our students' intercultural experiences which we have termed 'Cultural Responsiveness'. This term has been previously used in the fields of education and health to describe approaches to policy and professional practice which acknowledge the individual cultural diversity of groups of students or patients. However, we use the notion of Cultural Responsiveness in the international education context to identify the ways in which our students responded to the situations they experienced through study abroad and how this might frame evidence of their intercultural learning. We have chosen the concept of responsiveness as it implies a dynamic process and presupposes an action or a sense of responding to what has been experienced. In this article we therefore offer a way to identify and describe student interculturality in study abroad contexts in response to calls to re-consider how we construct and describe interculturality (Dervin, 2014).

OUR STUDENTS AND THE STUDY ABROAD PROGRAM

Our starting point for identifying how our students experience interculturality through study abroad, is the narratives of students completing Francophone studies at our large urban Australian university. The fifteen students participating in this research had completed one academic year of exchange study at a university in either France or Switzerland and the primary aim of this project was to find an appropriate method for identifying their intercultural understandings in their narrated experiences. The students' program of study before they commenced their year abroad included subjects in French language and

9 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage: www.igi-global.com/chapter/describing-undergraduate-students-intercultural-learning-through-study-abroad-in-terms-of-their-cultural-responsiveness/231407

Related Content

Supporting and Sustaining the Indigenous Intangible Cultural Heritage (IICH) of Zimbabwe
Constance Nhambura (2024). *Evaluating Indigenous African Tradition for Cultural Reconstruction and Mind Decolonization (pp. 1-9).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/supporting-and-sustaining-the-indigenous-intangible-cultural-heritage-iich-of-zimbabwe/354745

The Relentless Memorial: Environmental Melancholia and Collective Social Mania
Regan Suzanne Rosburg (2017). *International Journal of Civic Engagement and Social Change (pp. 23-44).*
www.irma-international.org/article/the-relentless-memorial/183699

A Computational Perspective of Knowledge Empowerment for Healthcare Decision Making: Computational Perspective of Knowledge Empowerment
Timothy Jay Carney (2016). *International Journal of Civic Engagement and Social Change (pp. 16-35).*
www.irma-international.org/article/a-computational-perspective-of-knowledge-empowerment-for-healthcare-decision-making/175636

Influencing Sacred Spaces: The Impact of Social Media Influencers on Pilgrimage Sites
Vaishali Singhand Anjan Bhuyan (2025). *Modern Social Challenges Impacting Tourism: Ethics, Societal Disruption, and Intimacy (pp. 175-204).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/influencing-sacred-spaces/371976

Social Media Influencers, the New Advertising Agency?: Examining the Impact of Social Media Influencer Marketing on the Cosmetics Industry
Summer Stevenson, Dieu Hack-Polayand Shehnaz Tehseen (2022). *International Journal of Public Sociology and Sociotherapy (pp. 1-21).*
www.irma-international.org/article/social-media-influencers-new-advertising/297201