ELEARNING AND INTERCULTURAL PEDAGOGY: MAXIMISING STUDY ABROAD

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Abstract

This article centers on a research-based, fully online course that has been created to maximise the intercultural learning and engagement of international exchange students while they are in the host country. Guided critical reflection and meaning-making are core elements in this interactive intercultural intervention. After providing an overview of the theoretical and pedagogical foundation, the remainder of the paper focuses on an evaluative, mixed-method case study of one of the offerings. The findings draw attention to the challenges and benefits of designing and implementing a course of this nature, and suggest aspects to improve in subsequent offerings. The case study highlights the constructive impact that eLearning and intercultural mentoring can have on international educational experience.

Key words: *Study abroad, eLearning, intercultural education, mentoring, critical reflection*

1. INTRODUCTION

The number of students in higher education who are gaining some form of international educational experience continues to rise as institutions develop implicit or explicit internationalisation policies that promote the academic mobility of students (Brooks and Waters, 2011; Larsen, 2016). In the past ten years, rapid advances in information and communications technology (e.g., the Internet, social media, Skype, WeChat) have brought about significant changes in the quality of study abroad experience (Coleman and Chafer, 2010; Donatelli, 2010). During their stay abroad, it is now much easier for students to remain in close contact with family and friends from home; in some cases, this may reduce their willingness to step out of their comfort zone and become involved in the host environment, which, in turn, reduces opportunities for language and intercultural enhancement (e.g., Knight and Schmidt-Reinhart, 2002). While some study abroad educators bemoan this development, it is also important to recognise and harness the potential benefits of technology to bolster study abroad programming and maximise intercultural learning. eLearning platforms (e.g., Blackboard, Moodle), for example, can facilitate impactful pedagogical interventions in study abroad programming and make a significant difference in the way sojourns unfold.

This article centers on a fully online intercultural transitions course that has been designed to deepen the intercultural learning of international exchange students while they are in the host environment. After providing an overview of *Intercultural communication and engagement abroad*, discussion centers on an evaluation of one of the offerings to facilitate a better understanding of the benefits and challenges of offering a course of this nature. While this interactive, credit-bearing course was designed with Asian international exchange students in mind, the approach and the lessons learned are apt to be relevant to educators in other parts of the world who seek to enhance the intercultural development of study abroad participants.

2. THE DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE ONLINE COURSE

2.1 Justification for an intercultural intervention

Since 1990 I have been investigating the intercultural learning, second language identities, and cross-cultural adjustment of study abroad students from Greater China (e.g., ethnographies of short-term sojourners in the U.K., mixed-method studies of semester- and yearlong international exchange students in diverse host countries) (Jackson, 2010, 2015a, 2016, 2017). Similar to many other researchers who have examined the developmental trajectories of student sojourners (e.g., Paige and

Vande Berg, 2012), my findings challenge the immersion assumption and highlight the idiosyncratic, complex nature of study abroad experience. Many internal and external variables can lead to different sojourn outcomes. In the host environment, some study abroad participants cultivate meaningful intercultural relationships, enhance their foreign language proficiency, gain ample access to local communities of practice, and develop a more open mindset. In stark contrast, however, many others spend most of their free time with co-nationals and return home with little or no growth in language proficiency or intercultural sensitivity (Jackson, 2012, 2014a, 2015b, 2017; Paige and Vande Berg, 2012). The findings of many contemporary study abroad investigations underscore the need for theory-driven, research-based pedagogical interventions to foster intercultural competence building and the diversification of social networks in the host environment (e.g., the cultivation of meaningful multicultural relationships) (Jackson 2014a, 2015b, 2015c; Jackson and Oguro, 2017). Hence, with recent research findings in view, at my university in Hong Kong I developed an online course to deepen the intercultural learning of our outgoing international exchange students.

2.2 Theoretical and pedagogical foundation

Culture is a difficult construct to pin down and the literature is replete with dozens of conceptions that emphasize different, sometimes conflicting, elements (Deardorff, 2008, 2009a, 2015; Jackson, 2014b, 2015c). As one's understanding of culture influences how one designs and implements intercultural interventions, intercultural scholars stress the need to carefully consider this element when creating pedagogical interventions that seek to enhance intercultural learning (Dervin, 2016; Jackson and Dervin, 2017; Jackson and Oguro, 2017). The online course drew on the critical cosmopolitan paradigm in sociology, which conceives of 'culture' as a social, imaginary construction influenced by ideology, power relations, and politics (Holliday, 2011, 2012). Consequently, in this pedagogical intervention I aimed to prompt course participants to question essentialist, reductionist notions of culture which overlook diversity within groups and promote Otherisation (e.g., 'them vs us' discourse) and stereotyping (Jackson, in press).

The course design process was influenced by Kolb's (1984) experiential learning cycle and notions of intercultural competence development as a continuous, lifelong process (Deardorff, 2008, 2009, 2015; Dervin, 2016; 15; Jackson 2014b, 2015b; Jackson and Dervin 2017; Jackson and Oguro 2017). To optimise study abroad experience, Passarelli and Kolb (2012) maintain that participants must consider their own intercultural interactions, engage in reflective observation, develop the ability to carry out abstract conceptualisation, and then try out their new ideas and understandings of intercultural communication in 'real world' situations. Without reflection, deep learning may not occur. In accord with learner-centered approaches to education and a social constructivist orientation to online pedagogy (Bryant and Bates, 2015; Jackson, in press), I aimed to reduce the teacher-student divide and act as a facilitator or mentor in the course rather than position myself as an expert or 'sage on the stage' who transmits knowledge.

A central element in the pedagogy would be cultural mentoring, that is, 'an intercultural pedagogy in which the mentor provides ongoing support for and facilitation of intercultural learning and development' (Paige, 2013, p. 6). Before a course gets underway, educators who assume this role usually develop detailed profiles of learners so that the guidance they provide is appropriate and meaningful. To build up these profiles, intercultural educators may draw on multiple types of qualitative and quantitative data such as intercultural journals, sojourn diaries, in-depth interviews, reflective essays, portfolios, and survey questionnaire responses, among others. They may also administer psychometric tests to measure intercultural sensitivity. For example, in this course, I opted to employ the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI), a cross-culturally validated psychometric tool linked to the Intercultural Development Continuum (Hammer, 2011, 2012, 2013). This instrument, which is widely used in study abroad research, can help provide direction for individualized or group-oriented feedback, especially when triangulated with rich qualitative data.

In the mentoring process, the facilitator or mentor continuously encourages the participants to reflect more deeply and critically on their intercultural attitudes and actions, and prompts them to set realistic

aims for future intercultural interactions. Lou, Vande Berg and Paige (2012) explain that the mentor strives to 'support students through intentional mentoring and guidance that is designed to help them learn to reflect on themselves as cultural beings, and to become aware of the ways that they characteristically respond to and make meaning within different cultural contexts' (p. 415). Seasoned intercultural educators contend that students may acquire a more open, intercultural mindset as a consequence of experiential learning and guided, critical reflection by a competent mentor (Jackson and Oguro, 2017; Moon, 2000; Paige, 2015; Passarelli and Kolb, 2012). This notion of personal expansion fits well with poststructuralist views of identities (Baxter, 2016; Block, 2007), which recognize that individuals may broaden their sense of self when intercultural experience is systematically 'unpacked' through the process of cultural mentoring.

2.3 Learning aims

In an outcomes-based approach to curriculum design and learning, it is important to set specific learning targets for participants early in the process. By the end of the 13-week semester, I expected the participants in this three-credit course to be able to:

- identify and explain core elements in intercultural communication;
- describe theories and models of cross-cultural adjustment, identity expansion, and intercultural competence, and test these ideas using their own and others' international/intercultural experiences;
- interact more appropriately and effectively with individuals who have been socialized in a different linguistic and cultural context;
- set realistic aims for further intercultural experience and the enhancement of their language and intercultural communication skills.

2.4 Theme-based, research-driven content

Drawing on a review of the literature and my own study abroad research, I identified the following themes and issues to address in the course: conceptions of culture and intercultural communicative competence, enculturation and acculturation, adjusting to differing cultures of teaching and learning, stereotyping and Otherisation, multicultural relationship-building and the diversification of social networks, intercultural conflict mediation, intercultural experience and identity expansion, language and culture learning strategies, reentry/reverse culture shock, global identity/citizenship, and the marketing of study abroad experience. Throughout the course, students would also be encouraged to discuss other concerns and issues of relevance to their language and intercultural learning and study abroad experience.

2.5 Learning materials and activities

After identifying the pedagogical approach, learning outcomes, and themes for the course, I selected the core text (Jackson, 2014b) and excerpts from my study abroad research database (e.g., reflective essays, interview transcripts) to provide students with authentic material to digest and discuss in the online Forum (discussion board). For example, in the week that centered on divergent 'cultures of learning' (Jackson 2014b, 2016), relevant excerpts from interviews with study abroad returnees (e.g., the challenges of adjusting to discussion-based pedagogy) were uploaded to our eLearning platform so that the course participants would be able to analyze and discuss them in relation to their own experience in their host institution.

Drawing on the core text and resource materials, I designed learning activities to further support the development of the students' critical language and intercultural awareness and encourage active engagement in the host environment. I formulated prompts for the Forums and fieldwork tasks (e.g.,

observations of local scenes, informal conversations with other international students about identity or adjustment issues), and also prepared detailed guidelines for online posts and the writing of the reflective essays. After developing PowerPoint files for each weekly theme, I selected YouTube links to enhance the students' understanding of the material.

2.6 eLearning course management system

For this fully online course, Blackboard, our eLearning platform (web-based course management system), would be employed for: i) course announcements, ii) the organisation and dissemination of all course materials, including PPT files, YouTube links, and any supplementary readings; iii) the presentation of guidelines for all tasks and activities, iv) the full-class Forum; v) small-group fieldwork groups (reports, discussion and debriefings); vi) student work submission, vii) assessment/feedback on course work; and viii) the administration of course survey questionnaires (e.g., midterm, end-of-term).

2.7 Formative and summative assessment

Assessment may be classified as formative or summative. The former is used to gather information about how students are performing to provide direction for changes within a programme or course (e.g., an intercultural intervention) (Angelo and Cross, 1993; Deardorff, 2015), whereas the latter is implemented to evaluate the final outcomes of a programme or intercultural intervention (e.g., grades in an intercultural communication course, a comparison of pre- and post- intercultural sensitivity scores for research/evaluation purposes) (Deardorff, 2015). Assessment scholars maintain that it is important for study abroad professionals to incorporate both modes of assessment in their assessment plan.

Following an outcomes-based approach to curriculum design and development, the forms of assessment in the online course would be closely linked to the learning objectives and, more broadly, the philosophy, methodology and course activities. 30% of the grade would be for the Forum (discussion board for the full cohort), 40% for fieldwork (activities and posts within small groups), and 30% for two reflective essays (one in the middle of the course and one near the end). All work would be submitted online. For each assignment/activity, the Blackboard site would include detailed rubrics to provide students with a clear idea about what constitutes acceptable and unacceptable work (Brookhart, 2013; Stevens and Levi, 2012). All feedback and grades would be provided online. The assessment of student work throughout the semester would facilitate the mentoring process and offer direction for the shaping of future offerings of the course.

3. AN EVALUATIVE CASE STUDY OF THE ONLINE COURSE

3.1 Research aims and design

To develop a deeper understanding of course elements that worked well and also identify elements that should be improved, I carried out a mixed-method evaluative case study (Yin, 2014) of one of the offerings. The following questions guided my review:

1. What is the intercultural awareness and sensitivity of the course participants before, during, and after the online intervention?
2. What factors appear to influence their intercultural developmental trajectories?
3. What are the implications of the findings for future offerings of the course?

3.2 NVivo database

To aid the preparation of a full-group profile and facilitate the tracking of individual developmental trajectories, I set up an NVivo database just before the course got underway. This software programme enables the amassing, organisation, and analysis of mixed-method data and is particularly useful for the processing of unstructured, qualitative data such as online Forum posts, reflective essays, interview transcripts, and digital images (Bazeley and Jackson, 2013). For this evaluative case study, the NVivo database consisted of varied types of qualitative and quantitative data that had been collected before, during, and after the course: application forms for the international exchange programme, pre-course questionnaire survey, in-depth pre- and post- course transcriptions of interviews that were conducted in either Chinese or English depending on the preference of the participants; midterm and post-course survey questionnaire responses; Forum posts; fieldwork reports and related discussion posts; digital images; reflective essays; pre- and post- IDI reports; and my detailed fieldnotes.

3.3 Participants and informed consent

Following the research ethics review procedures at my institution, the permission of the participants was secured before any of the material was coded, triangulated, or analyzed. Anonymity was guaranteed and assurances were given that (non)participation would not impact grades. All of the participants indicated their willing to participate and none withdrew during the study.

In the offering of the course that is the focus of this paper, there were twenty-two international exchange students (eighteen females and four males). Seventeen of them spoke Cantonese as a first language, three Mandarin, one Korean, and one both Putonghua and Cantonese in the home environment. Most had grown up in Hong Kong; as for the rest, five were from Mainland China and one was from South Korea. When they joined the course, they had an average score of 7.34 on the IELTS (~TOEFL 101-102) (Educational Testing Service 2010).

The participants were quite diverse in terms of their primary area of study. Nine were from the Faculty of Arts (Chinese, English, Japanese studies, music, and translation majors), eight from Business Administration (professional accountancy majors, international business, international finance, hotel and tourism management), two from Education (English language educatio), and one each from Medicine (public health administration), Science (biochemistry), and Social Science (economics). All of them were undergraduates and in terms of their year of study, the majority were in their third year; only two were in their second year of a four-year programme of studies.

Prior to joining their international exchange programme and the online course, only three had had study abroad experience and this primarily consisted of a summer programme (e.g., an intensive English language immersion course). The majority (seventeen) had travelled abroad. Among them, most had been abroad for one month or less and most had visited countries in Asia.

The majority had never taken a course in intercultural communication before; only six had completed modules that dealt with related issues (e.g., an international business course). Most of the students had had limited intercultural contact, especially in informal situations, even though their home campus hosts around 1,000 international exchange students annually. Using a scale of 1 = poor to 5 = excellent, in a pre-sojourn questionnaire, the participants assessed their ability to communicate appropriately and effectively with people who had a different cultural background. Three rated their intercultural competence as ‘excellent’, six as ‘very good’, 11 as ‘good’, and two as ‘fair’.

More than half of the participants (twelve) were taking part in a year-long international exchange programme; ten were semester-long sojourners. The host countries for this cohort were varied: Canada, the United States, Japan, Australia, Belgium, Finland, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, Singapore, South Africa, and the U.K. Those who sojourned in Japan and Germany enrolled in language enhancement courses in the host language in addition to English-medium content courses. All of the others took all of their courses in English.

3.4 Instrumentation and data collection

Shortly before the course started, the participants filled in a questionnaire and were interviewed by a bilingual research assistant in Chinese or English, depending on their preference. The students were encouraged to divulge information about their background, sojourn goals, and aspirations for the online course and their stay abroad. With their written permission, following the University' ethics requirements, I reviewed their international exchange application form, which included a short essay about their sojourn aims and study plan. Before the first week of the course, I administered the IDI to gather further information about their intercultural competence. I then met with each student individually (face-to-face or on Skype) to discuss their intercultural learning and become better acquainted. This groundwork was essential to develop detailed profiles of each participant to facilitate the mentoring process.

As the course unfolded, the students divulged details about their intercultural competence development through various means (e.g., posts in the weekly Forum, fieldwork reports and commentary, reflective essays, digital images of their sojourn experience with commentary, responses to questionnaire surveys). Near the end of the semester, they again completed the IDI, which provided a post-course measure of their level of intercultural competence.

After the semester-long course concluded, the students filled in a questionnaire survey and were interviewed individually by a research assistant in English or Chinese, which furnished more details about their sojourn learning and perceptions of course elements. Throughout the course, all of the data was submitted to the NVivo database for processing as soon as it was available.

3.5 Data analysis

To more fully grasp the unique developmental trajectories of each course participant and gain a sense of the impact of specific course features, all of the pre-sojourn, sojourn, and post-sojourn data that had been entered into the NVivo database was subjected to open coding (Creswell, 2013; Grbich, 2012). In this way, the rich and varied qualitative data was triangulated with quantitative measures, including questionnaire survey data in Excel files, and the pre- and post-course IDI results, which were processed by IDI, LLC (See https://idiinventory.com/). The pre-course results were then compared with the post-course findings, and the developmental trajectories of individual participants were examined in detail. As well as developing full cohort profiles, narrativized accounts of individual course participants were prepared to help identify internal and external elements that led to differing outcomes (e.g., variations in intercultural engagement in the host country and intercultural competence development). Student perceptions of the course were also collected and analysed. Due to space limitations, only a small amount of the rich qualitative data is presented in this article.

3.6 Discussion of findings

In this section we begin by reviewing the pre- and post-course measures of intercultural competence and then take a look at some of the varied qualitative data which helped to make sense of these results. The triangulation of the quantitative and qualitative data helped to provide a fuller picture of the intercultural learning of the course participants and drew attention to the effects of various course elements.

3.6.1 Pre-course IDI results

The pre-course administration of the IDI (Hammer, 2012) provided a measure of the cohort's level of intercultural competence before the course got underway. In this psychometric instrument, the Perceived Orientation (PO) indicates where the group as a whole 'places itself' along the Intercultural Development Continuum (IDC) (Denial, Polarization (Defence/Reversal), Minimization, Acceptance,

or Adaptation) (Hammer, 2012). The Perceived Orientation (PO) for the cohort was 118.79 (Acceptance). In their estimation, they had an advanced level of intercultural competence.

In addition to the PO, the IDI measures 'the group's primary orientation toward cultural differences and commonalities along the continuum *as assessed by the IDI'* (Hammer, 2009b: 5). The Developmental Orientation (DO) is the perspective that the group is most apt to draw on in intercultural encounters. Like the PO, the DO can be Denial, Polarization (Defense/Reversal), Minimization, Acceptance, or Adaptation (Hammer 2009a: 5). When the course began, the full cohort's DO was 84.52 in Polarization: Defense/Reversal, an ethnocentric phase. At this stage, they were nearing Minimization, a transitional phase of intercultural development.

In the IDI, the Orientation Gap (OG) refers to the difference between the PO and DO, that is, the gap between perceived and actual measures of intercultural competence. Hammer (2009a) explains that an OG of 7 points or higher indicates a meaningful gap. At this early stage, the OG for the full cohort was 34.27, indicating a significant overestimation of intercultural competence.

IDI reports also identify what Hammer (2009b: 5) refers to as Trailing Orientations (TO), that is, "orientations that are 'in back of' the group's Developmental Orientation (DO) on the intercultural continuum *not 'resolved'".* For instance, if individuals are suffering from 'transition malaise' or are constantly embroiled in intercultural conflict situations, trailing issues can draw them back to a more ethnocentric phase of development. The analysis of the group's TO on entry showed that their Denial, Defense, and Reversal orientations were not yet fully resolved.

Leading Orientations (LO) indicates the 'next step to take in the enhancement of intercultural competence, in relation to the IDC (Hammer, 2012, 2013). As this stage, the group's DO was near the end of the Polarization: Defense/Reversal stage; therefore, the LO for the cohort was Minimization, Acceptance, and Adaptation.

Distinct from measures of intercultural competence, the IDI also assesses the respondents' degree of cultural disengagement or disconnection from their primary cultural group (Hammer 2013: 26). On entry, the cohort's cultural disengagement score was 3.81, indicating that they felt some detachment from their primary cultural group. Nearly half felt some confusion about their sense of self.

3.6.2 Post-course IDI results

The IDI was re-administered at the end of the course, and the findings were compared with the pre-sojourn results, and then triangulated with other types of data. After the course, the PO of the cohort was 123.19 (Acceptance), their DO was 95.93 (Minimization), while the OG was 27.26. With regard to TO, all trailing issues were resolved, except for Defense, and Reversal, and they were nearing resolution. On average, their Leading Orientations (LO) were Acceptance, and Adaptation. Finally, the cohort's level of cultural disengagement was 4.21 by the end of the course, an increase of 0.4 points, indicating that most felt more connected to their primary cultural group and less confused about their place in the world by the end of this pedagogical intervention.

3.6.3 A comparison of pre- and post-course IDI data

A comparison of the pre- and post-course IDI results found that the cohort had attained a higher degree of intercultural competence, gaining 11.41 points. They had progressed from 'Polarization: Defense/Reversal' to the mid-point of 'Minimization', the transitional phase. The IDI results also indicated that some of the trailing issues that were evident when they entered the course had been resolved after this intense period of international experience and guided reflection. By the end of the semester, the group as a whole still possessed a very inflated assessment of their level of intercultural competence, again perceiving themselves to be in the Acceptance phase. To put these findings in perspective, a cohort of 134 international exchange students from the same home university who were abroad for a semester without intervention gained only 0.33 points on the IDI (Jackson 2015d)

3.7 Qualitative data

The qualitative data that was amassed before, during, and after the intercultural intervention helped to make sense of the IDI results. A thematic, content analysis of the participants' oral and written narratives found that most of the participants had become more aware of Self and Other, and more mindful of the ways in which their own attitudes and actions can influence how intercultural interactions unfold. A critical discourse analysis of the Forum which addressed stereotyping and Otherisation issues revealed that most of the students had taken steps towards a more empathetic mindset and were making more of an effort to cultivate meaningful multicultural relationships (Jackson, in press). A careful review and coding of the post-course interview and questionnaire survey data furnished further evidence of the enhancement of their intercultural sensitivity. For example, many of the participants were able to provide detailed descriptions of successful intercultural interactions in local communities of practice and offer candid accounts of intercultural encounters that did not go well with an indication of the factors that may have brought about the unsatisfactory results. The post-course oral and written data also revealed that many of the participants had concrete plans to try out specific language and culture learning strategies, and aimed to continue to diversify their social networks.

In addition to becoming more knowledgeable about core elements in intercultural communication, the course participants appeared to have become more open to unfamiliar practices and worldviews, and more willing to try new things. Their online posts and reflective essays indicated that they were initiating more intercultural interactions and had become more confident when using the host language in social situations. Significantly, in their posts and essays, most demonstrated more familiarity with strategies to employ to enhance intercultural communication and nurture multicultural friendships. A female participant, for example, revealed that she was slightly adjusting her communication style to enhance intercultural relations: 'I tend to change my speech styles a bit according to who I'm talking to and try to choose topics that are also of interest to the addressee.' She also believed that she had become better equipped to deal with intercultural conflict situations. 'I've also learned how to deal with intercultural conflicts in a more positive way. When I read about other's experiences I tried to relate them to mine and think more about what I would do if I were in their shoes.'

Compared with the first few weeks of the course, there was much less 'us vs. them' discourse by the end of the semester. Most of the participants maintained that they were making an effort to push past stereotypes and make an effort to get to know people as individuals rather than simply regard them as representatives of a particular cultural group. The following sojourner, for example, began to position herself as an intercultural mediator who was willing to challenge herself in unfamiliar situations.

Through continuous learning and reflection on my status and intercultural relationships, I understand that new ways need to be found to interact with others if the old method fails. Extra efforts need to be made to make extraordinary friends and I need to mediate some place in between my own and others' culture… The ashes of the sojourn will be the nutrients to build a brighter self.

With online support and encouragement, the course participants gradually honed a greater tolerance for ambiguity and a positive approach to cultural difference. They made more of an effort to refrain from making snap judgments about unfamiliar practices and become more willing to engage in 'cultural exploration'. A male sojourner explained what he had discovered about intercultural transitions:

Only with a positive attitude can we control the things out of our control. Only with an open mindset can we allow the unexpected to shed light on our routine life, and appreciate the beauty around us. This journey will end soon but it shall not be the end of my exploration of cultures and self.

The qualitative data, which was generally in accord with the IDI findings, suggested that the process of guided, critical reflection (Bennett, 2008; Moon 2000; Paige 2015) had helped the participants to become more interculturally competent and engaged in the host environment. The pre- and post- IDI results and questionnaire survey findings were generally in accord with the qualitative data, providing additional evidence of the merits of the intercultural intervention. A review of the course feedback forms also revealed that the participants were generally very positive about the course.

4. LESSONS LEARNED AND PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

As well as furnishing evidence of student growth, the systematic review of the case study data helped to identify particular course elements that worked well and also aspects that should be revamped in subsequent offerings (e.g., a reduction in the number of Forums and more time for postings, elements to include in a pre-course workshop). This evaluative exercise heightened my awareness of the critical, multi-faceted roles of the cultural mentor or facilitator who provides direction for the intercultural learning process in pedagogical interventions. A great deal of work must be carried out before the students log on to the eLearning platform in the first week of class. In addition to setting realistic learning targets, it is imperative for educators to develop a solid understanding of the backgrounds of course participants (e.g., degree of intercultural awareness on entry) and their learning goals in order to prepare and appropriately sequence learning resources. Preparing detailed student profiles early on will be invaluable (e.g., facilitate the placement of students into fieldwork groups, help enable the provision of meaningful feedback). Throughout the semester, facilitators also need to be observant and notice changes in the students as they gain international, intercultural experience and engage in reflective tasks that deepen their understanding of intercultural communication.

Considerable effort must be expended by the course facilitator to create a welcoming, supportive environment in which students feel safe to share their thoughts and intercultural experiences. This effort must be on-going throughout the semester. One of the challenges of online courses like this is the asynchronous nature of the Forums (full class discussion, small fieldwork debriefings). As students are on different time zones in different parts of the world, it is not feasible to be online at the same time. While a pre-course workshop in the home country can enable participants to meet each other and the facilitator before the course gets underway, the reality is that most contact in the course will be via the eLearning platform. Periodic Skype sessions may help to strengthen interpersonal connections. Even with these steps and a clear explanation about the nature of a fully online course before this elective course got underway, some students will hesitate to divulge their ideas online and continue to prefer face-to-face contact in a regular classroom setting. Procrastinators, especially those who are used to doing most of their work near the end of a course, may also find it difficult to post before deadlines, which can be very frustrating for their peers and instructor. Mindful of these challenges, it is imperative for course instructors to provide ongoing support and encouragement. From the onset, it is essential to recognize the intensive format of interventions like this. Having a realistic grasp of the challenges and benefits of eLearning can help educators prepare and shape courses that will meet the needs of their students.

Another benefit of conducting this review is that it helped to draw my attention to the mentoring process and elements that could be tweaked to enhance its effectiveness. When I closely examined the exchanges in the Forum and fieldwork discussions, I became more aware of the need to pay attention to how and when I intervened. While facilitators should not dominate the discussion, it is important to strategically intervene to foster critical intercultural perspectives and a deeper level of engagement. Periodic reviews of online interactions can raise awareness of the frequency of one's interventions, the type and variety of questions that are used, the quality of the comments, and the ways in which students respond to posts (e.g., feedback, suggestions). This process can draw attention to missed opportunities and facilitate the professional development of the intercultural facilitator by singling out areas to work on.

Contemporary study abroad research, including my own work, has called into question the common assumption of the automatic transformation of student sojourners (Jackson, 2012, 2015c, 2015d, 2017; Paige and Vande Berg, 2012); accordingly, research-based pedagogical interventions are recommended to deepen the intercultural learning and engagement of student sojourners (Jackson and Oguro, 2017; Vande Berg, Paige, and Lou, 2012). Designing and teaching a course like the one described in this article is much more time-consuming and labor-intensive than a traditional face-to-face or blended course, but, in my estimation, it is well worth it. I hope that this article will motivate other educators to develop innovative pedagogical interventions that will enhance the intercultural learning and engagement of study abroad students and prompt meaningful dialogue between domestic and international students.

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