

**Studying Abroad, is it Relevant if Students
Don't Know or Can't Articulate What They've Learned?**

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Abstract

Studying abroad provides the opportunity to develop relevant knowledge, skills, and attitudes, yet if students fail to articulate what they learned from their experience, it may be reduced to a line on a résumé. This study focuses on the final exams of post-study abroad students who had enrolled in a three-credit course based on intercultural communication and competence, and an online survey completed by students who had returned from studying abroad who had not enrolled in such a course. A frequency analysis uncovered that the word “culture” was the most regularly used word by both groups. The intercultural reflection rubric (Williams, 2017) was used to assess levels of learning in student work and sociocultural theory clarified how course students used concepts in intercultural communication to mediate and communicate their experiences, while those who had not enrolled in the course described their learning in vague, everyday concepts.

Keywords: study abroad, reentry, articulation, intercultural competence, sociocultural theory

The skills students can acquire abroad are relevant not only for employability but also in our increasingly diverse communities. While studying abroad can be a catalyst for learning a range of skills, the reality of student learning outcomes in study abroad programs is not a given (cf. Vande Berg, 2012). Montrose (2002) wrote, "... it is not the activity of leaving one's homeland that creates learning, but the subsequent analysis of that activity where the real learning begins" (p. 6-7). If higher education wishes to promote study abroad to acquire the skills required of an internationalized workforce and diverse communities, it must be held accountable for the quality of learning. While it is important to prepare students for studying abroad and to support them abroad with well-designed programming, it is equally important to help them unpack their experiences in a systematic, organized manner upon return. This study examines how two groups of post-study abroad students articulated what they had learned abroad; one enrolled in a three-credit course focused on intercultural competence and the other group did not.

Literature Review

Studying abroad can be the catalyst for a host of learning opportunities, including intercultural competence (ICC). Deardorff (2006) attempted to define the difficult-to-pinpoint nature of ICC finding that the top definition with 80-100% agreement among intercultural experts was an "[a]bility to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one's intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes" (p. 239). ICC is not necessarily context- or culture-specific but, rather, is a skill that is relevant across various disciplinary applications, the workplace, and society at large.

While studying abroad holds much potential, it cannot be seen as an osmosis experience that guarantees students will acquire the knowledge, skills, and attitudes demanded of them. Incredible diversity in student background and program variables present an experience that is

“unique and dynamic, shaped through myriad personal backgrounds, opportunities and choices” (Wilkinson, 2000). A continually growing body of research has focused on supporting various student learning outcomes before, during, and after study abroad through intervention strategies (cf. Anderson, 2005; Brewer & Cunningham, 2009; Jackson & Oguro, 2018; Sanz & Morales-Front, 2018; Vande Berg, 2012). However, fewer studies have specifically focused on the re-entry phase.

A course offered at Kalamazoo College concluded that post-study abroad students didn't need an additional intercultural experience, “...they need a different kind of course – one that is more focused on processing and extracting the learning from the experience they just had” (Anderson & Cunningham, 2009, p. 80-81). Root and Ngampornchai (2012) examined 18 reflective papers from students who had returned from studying abroad concluding that, “...we are also concerned that many of the participants' accounts reflect only superficial levels of intercultural understanding” (p. 12). Kortegast & Boisfontaine (2015) found that students' post-processing was limited by relying on family and friends which didn't provide opportunities for in-depth reflection. Their reflections utilized catchphrases and remained descriptive, “rather than negotiating the meaning of the knowledge, skills, and competencies students developed during their experience” (p. 817). Students could, “identify, label, and name particular learning outcomes commonly associated with study abroad. However, when pushed to discuss what learning outcomes such as ‘experiencing culture’ or ‘being more independent’ meant to them, they at times struggled to provide descriptions” (p. 822). The authors concluded that “more attention needs to be paid to assisting students in developing, negotiating, and understanding what they learned while living and studying abroad” (p. 823).

Paras et al. (2019) echoed this sentiment, noting that pre-departure intercultural training provided students with “a bigger toolbox of concepts that students used to understand and interpret their experiences abroad” (p. 41). While this toolbox of concepts is fundamental to the findings of this paper, Kruse & Brubaker (2007) remind us that if studying abroad is a process and not just a stand-alone occurrence, it is not just the pre-departure and abroad phases that garner meaning, but that students “should be supported after their return” (p. 147). Peterson (2002) noted that an experience can be transformative yet, “[i]t can reinforce stereotypes, exacerbate prejudices, or lend itself to hypotheses that are never subjected to systematic reflection” and perhaps experiences can only be “the best teacher” when combined with critical analysis and reflection on the part of the learner (p. 167). The return phase allows for a particularly nuanced angle of reflection.

While it is imperative to prepare students going abroad to make the most out of their experiences, in the absence of a cultural mentor (Vande Berg, 2009), they may come to conclusions that are not critically reflected upon (Peterson, 2002) or are limited to sharing their experiences in superficial ways upon return with friends or family who, “did not necessarily have the cultural or educational backgrounds to know what questions to ask or how to relate to the experience of traveling and living abroad” (Kortegast & Boisfontaine, 2015, p. 824). Myer-Lee (2005) noted that reentry courses have the capability to serve as scaffolding deeper intercultural reflection and integration of the experience abroad into the home curriculum. Lee (2018) used a telecollaboration project with returnees to exchange cultural perspectives with L1 Spanish speakers to develop their learning abroad and found that “students became more aware of their own beliefs and attitudes toward their own and others’ cultures as they took part in the course” (p. 151). It is important to recognize that each stage can provide additional benefit in the process

of becoming interculturally competent. The return phase has not received as much attention as the preparatory or in-program intervention strategies, yet it can be tremendously important as students can use them as the basis of critical intercultural inquiry. The guiding question in this study was: *How are post-study abroad students, who enroll in a course designed to foster the development of intercultural competence, and post-study abroad students, who did not enroll in such a course, articulating what they learned?*

Intercultural Reflection Rubric and Sociocultural Theory

An intercultural reflection rubric (Williams, 2017) and sociocultural theory were best-suited to examine post-study abroad students' reflections on how they were conceptualizing and articulating cultural learning. Williams' (2017) intercultural reflection rubric allows a succinct assessment of intercultural learning based on description, and contextual and critical reflection. Drawing from various models from experiential and intercultural learning, and reflection-based writing, "[t]his [five-stage] rubric identifies and validates the steps in between and provides some explanation of the variance between each. As such, we can better describe and identify reflective work that demonstrates development in intercultural competence" (p. 23). The author notes that simply "putting thoughts into words does not necessarily mean that students are learning," but rather that it is the element of reflection that "leads to meaningful connections, new schemas, or models, and thoughtful critiques" (p. 20). This rubric was selected as an echo of the research above that it is neither the experience nor reflection alone but construing meaning as a result of critical reflection that fosters intercultural learning.

Sociocultural theory encapsulates how students can take knowledge and concepts learned to facilitate new ways of seeing the world around them. This study focused on the use of signs and tools in sociocultural theory. Describing Vygotsky's view of the human mind, Lantolf (2000)

wrote that humans do not simply “act directly on the physical world” but, instead, use symbolic tools and signs to “mediate and regulate [their] relationships with others and with [themselves] and thus change the nature of these relationships” (p. 1). In the same volume, Kramsch (2000) noted that “tools serve to master nature; signs serve to influence others, then to master oneself” (p. 137). This translates succinctly to a course based on ICC. A student may learn about a new concept, e.g. conflict styles, and in the process of completing an assignment about an intercultural conflict that the student has experienced, they may use a specific conflict style to describe their reaction in the midst of the conflict. The student is using this conflict style as a tool to complete the assignment and as a sign to convey meaning to the reader. In the process, however, they may internalize this concept to the degree that they may even alter the way they view the world or their behavior in future conflicts. Kramsch (2000) noted that, “[m]aking students conscious of their motivated semiotic choices is precisely what, according to Vygotsky, leads learners to higher forms of mental development” (p. 141). The academic setting can introduce students to concepts of ICC which serve as tools to help them mediate their experiences, which are then available to them as a communicative sign to articulate what they have learned.

Method

This study analyzed data from two groups of post-study abroad students; one who enrolled in a three-credit course designed to foster ICC and one group who did not enroll in such a course. Data was examined with the intercultural reflection rubric and probed through the lens of sociocultural theory.

Intercultural Communication Course

The course, “Becoming Transcultural: Maximizing Study Abroad,” which followed the textbook *Experiencing Intercultural Communication* (Martin & Nakayama, 2011) was intended to prepare students for studying abroad by familiarizing them with the theoretical underpinnings and practical applications of intercultural communication to foster intercultural competence. However, students who had previously studied abroad also enrolled in the course.

Course design allowed many opportunities for students to critically reflect upon and examine cultural differences in their lives at home and while abroad in the weekly classroom and weekly to bi-weekly online discussions. Cultural simulations provided students with the opportunity to experience how it can feel to be in a different culture where the rules may be different than expected (e.g. Barnaga/5-tricks). Critical reflection papers required students to compare and contrast theories presented in readings; address any ambiguities, inconsistencies, or lack of clarity; extend ideas from the readings to their own experiences and identify connections between readings and in-class or online activities. The midterm prompted students to demonstrate content knowledge, whereas the final exam, which served as data in this study (Appendix A), asked students to discuss what they learned throughout the course and how they could apply this to their future lives.

Course Participant Selection

33 out of 54 students who enrolled in the course over two semesters consented to participate in a larger study examining ICC (Author, 2018). Of the 33 students who consented to participation, six had previously studied abroad. Post-study abroad students were considered to be those who had studied abroad in a credit-bearing program abroad after beginning at the university. These six students' final exams were selected for further examination.

Non-course Participant Selection

In order to reach students outside of the class, an email was sent to a post-study abroad listserv stating the general goal of the study and, if students consented to participate and completed the section on demographic information, they were prompted to discuss what they learned while abroad and how they could apply this to their future lives (Appendix B). 85 students began the survey, however, only 34 were completed and used for initial analysis.

Data Analysis

Course participants wrote an average of 1408 words per student, and the non-course participants wrote an average of approximately 160 words per student with a disparity from as few as 40 words to as many as 542. Following Creswell (2007, p. 185), an initial read-through of data highlighted that all students had learned something while abroad whether in regards to language, culture, self-growth, logistics, etc. In order to explore what students were discussing and potentially highlight a focus for inquiry, a frequency analysis was run on the two groups' responses with AntConc¹. The frequency analysis uncovered that "culture" was the most frequently used word by both groups. This was not an unexpected outcome given the frequency with which cultural learning is used to encourage students to study abroad (Paras et al., 2019), the topic of the course, and the phrasing of the question. Five of the 34 students in the non-course group discussed culture in each of the three questions posed, and all six students in the course group discussed culture throughout their final exams. Two layers of analysis of the eleven reflections became the subject of this study. A summative data analysis (Creswell, 2016; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) generated understandings about how students were using the word "culture" through the lens of sociocultural theory and the intercultural reflection rubric was used to assess the presence of ICC development in the reflections. It was hypothesized that course students

¹ AntConc is a freeware concordance program available at: http://www.antlab.sci.waseda.ac.jp/antconc_index.html

would score higher on the intercultural reflection rubric and be able to articulate their learning abroad more concretely as a result of having more tools and signs at their disposal to mediate and discuss their experiences.

Results

The five non-course student reflections scored on the lower end of the five-point rubric (two students earned scores of 1, two students earned scores of 2, and one student earned a score of 3). Course student reflections scored on the higher end of the five-point rubric (four students earned scores of 4, and two students earned scores of 5). The main difference in the usage of “culture” between the two groups was that those who did not enroll in the course used “culture” to name a vague notion of what they learned while abroad, often in trite catch phrases, whereas students who were enrolled in the course utilized more specific notions of “culture” in reference to the variety of aspects of culture covered in the course. The course students had a repertoire of terms at their disposal that could serve both as a tool to describe what they learned while abroad and as a more poignant sign to communicate what they learned to the reader.

Student Examples

In the tables below, each of the five levels of the intercultural reflection rubric (Williams, 2017) are outlined and include a selection from the results of assessing non-course and course students’ responses to the prompts.

Intercultural Reflection Rubric Score 1 Breakdown with Example

Score	Rubric Criteria	Student Response
1	Observation: The reflection is simply descriptive; does not attempt to understand, explore, or make meaning of experiences or observations. The	Non-course student: My fluency in the Italian language was fulfilled in Italy. . . . I learned about the Italian culinary art and how to cook several different Italian dishes as well as the ability to take care of myself not only in a living situation but amongst a very different culture and life style. . . . I have spent nearly a year outside of this country and am still not satisfied with my travels. My next study abroad experience should hopefully be in Spain. Each experience that I've

reflection does not recognize other points of view, is unable to suspend judgement of others, or may be critical or negative toward the other.

had has held its own unique qualities and challenges that I have had to overcome. Each time I've been, I bring home a more open mind and cultured heart. I know I have applied my knowledge of foreign cultures to accept some of the faults in my culture and the differences of the people around me in general. I use the cooking skills I acquired everyday [*sic*] and continue to practice the Italian language with the friends I keep in touch with.

In this reflection, this non-course student describes what she learned on a very factual and descriptive level. At the time of the survey, she was a senior reflecting back on a three-month study abroad in Italy three years prior. While she notes that she had studied abroad multiple times, she relies on catch phrases such as “overcoming challenges” and having an “open mind and cultured heart” without giving a clear sense of what these meant to her. She has learned to take care of herself in a “very different culture,” but makes no attempt to explore what that means. Although she is not critical towards other cultures and she actually appears open to critiquing her own culture, she reverts back to the tangible cooking and language skills that she acquired. There is no clear sense that she has tried to understand, explore, or make meaning of her experiences.

Intercultural Reflection Rubric Score 2 Breakdown with Example

Score	Rubric Criteria	Student Response
2	<p>Growing Awareness: The reflection is mostly descriptive and may show basic attempts to understand or learn more about observations. The reflection begins to recognize other points of view but in simplistic and superficial ways; prefers own perspective or does</p>	<p>Non-course student: My program was really good but now I can see what sort of a program would be a better fit for me. I realize how much trouble and frustration I have not being able to communicate as well as I want to and being underestimated because I am white and blond and having certain stereotypes applied to me solely based on that however I do the same to other people even if I try not to, its [<i>sic</i>] a part of culture that needs to be overcome. I realize how much trouble I have living in such a macho society and accepting that sort of culture as simply another way of life coming from my background which is very much in education and open-minded ideas just makes me want to scream. Education-wise I learned a lot that makes you ashamed to be America [<i>sic</i>], learning the extent of our actions in other countries and the ways in which they affects [<i>sic</i>] are still being felt. The political power the US has and the</p>

not know how else to interpret or act. abuse it makes or [*sic*] it. Also though, I learned that there are always people while traveling who are willing to help or just talk on the bus and that is what makes traveling such an excellent experience.

In this example, this non-course sophomore student has just returned from a three-month study abroad program in Guatemala. Her response has elements of a score of 1, 2, and 3, but her response more aptly earned a score of 2. While she is critical towards the other culture (1), she also recognizes that there could be other points of view in that stereotypes could be invalid (2). Nevertheless, her awareness is simplistic and she prefers her own perspective (2). Her reflection has some elements of a score of 3 in that she is attempting to understand the larger context of the way that America's geo-politics have affected the region. While she seems to be balancing some negative experiences encountered with other interpretations, her awareness is not developed further, and she strongly prefers her own culture and self-proclaimed "open-mindedness".

Intercultural Reflection Rubric Score 3 Breakdown with Example

Score	Rubric Criteria	Student Response
3	<p>Appreciation and Eagerness: The reflection begins to make simple interpretations. The reflection may list simple new understandings or simplistic personal growth and change. The reflection demonstrates an emerging desire to learn or a sense of wonder to find answers to questions. The reflection shows increasing recognition of other points of view and shows growing respect for differences. The reflection begins to validate differences or attempts simple explanations of differences.</p>	<p>Non-course student: I've learned to be flexible and be open minded about different beliefs from various cultures. . . . I've also learned that there are numerous ways to look at problems. . . . I've also learned to have an open heart and that there are many people out there who are in the same situation as I am. . . . My goal is to fill up my passport with as much [<i>sic</i>] visas as possible before it expires. I think studying abroad has caused me to really embrace another's cultures and to just to experience with an open mind. Another culture can feel awkward to another and feel that it's not right. It's different and that's what makes it a beautiful thing to experience. . . . The goal is to put yourself into someone else's shoes and walk in them without any judgement or any comparison to where you're from.</p>

This non-course student studied abroad for five months at the end of her junior year in Australia and is reflecting back on her experiences six months after return. She is demonstrating

a desire to value otherness and validate difference, yet there is nothing in her response to give the reader a sense of what that entails. This student is certainly expressing a desire to understand and travel more. However, her response is vague and uses idiomatic, largely superficial expressions such as “flexible and open minded,” “embrace another’s culture,” and “put yourself into someone else’s shoes”. Her use of culture presents as a reductionist catch-all phrase to encapsulate the differences she felt.

Intercultural Reflection Rubric Score 4 Breakdown with Example

Score	Rubric Criteria	Student Response
4	<p>Emerging Comprehension: The reflection attempts to articulate more in-depth interpretations though it may reveal inconsistency. The reflection demonstrates an increasing desire to learn and may list ways knowledge is incomplete. The reflection describes and respects other perspectives but may not reach level 5. The reflection attempts to explain differences in more depth, or draw connections and conclusions without fully exploring them.</p>	<p>Course student: When I returned from my time in Costa Rica and Panama, I felt as though I had learned more about other cultures and myself (self-reflexivity). . . . I feel [that being in an intercultural encounter] is the situation that I need to improve on the most and that I will try my best to incorporate into my life and my traveling experiences. Sometimes picking up on new things can be easy. However, this situation will be much more difficult. Instead of being able to focus on one or two ideas at a time, I need to read into many ideas at once including, but not limited to—direct and indirect styles, gestures, and power. When speaking English, I can acknowledge all these aspects easily and simultaneously. I feel the best preparation I can do when trying to improve is simply introduce myself to unknown situations and cultures. In order to fully understand what I am doing I will need to learn the language as well. Because it is unlikely that I will be able to speak the language of every country I visit, learning about the cultures before I travel would be the best way to reduce the number of mistakes I make. . . . One thing I realized in this class, however, is that traveling could be more difficult that [<i>sic</i>] I had previously thought. I plan on meeting some friends in certain locations and now because I am more aware of cultural differences, I may have to plan who I meet where depending on their cultural awareness.</p>

This course student had spent six weeks on a service-learning study abroad program in Costa Rica and Panama the summer before enrolling in the course. He is attempting to understand how speaking a foreign language in a foreign environment is different from speaking his native language in his native culture. He is cognizant that adaptation is difficult and, much

like the student who scored a 3, requires taking in multiple perspectives. However, he elaborates on what those communicative differences could be: direct and indirect styles, gestures, and power (dynamics). While he recognizes that he may not need these at home, he doesn't fully elaborate on this nor does he fully explore the larger context of cultural or linguistic difference within the US. Nevertheless, he is aware that there is an onus upon him to learn as much as he can before traveling, especially if he cannot speak the language. Additionally, he is keen to seek out friends who can serve as cultural mediators. Overall, his response validates difference and highlights an awareness of what is still left to learn.

Intercultural Reflection Rubric Score 5 Breakdown with Example

Score	Rubric Criteria	Student Response
5	<p>Intercultural Consciousness: The reflection shows complex interpretations and thoughtful insights about self and culture and discusses how to apply learning. The reflections show a strong desire to learn more and may offer ideas for gaining more knowledge. The reflection describes other perspectives in depth and recognizes and respects the complexity of culture. The reflection explains differences in depth and/or describes incidents through the other's point of view.</p>	<p>Course student: Recognizing and being open to the notion that there are various learned cultural rules for various societies is a pivotal step toward true cultural enlightenment. However, to claim that something is learned, implies the duty of one to not only continue learning, but also perhaps to even re-learn one's culture and fix one's educational mistakes. . . . For example, two summers ago I studied abroad at the University of Westminster in London, England. I falsely believed that since we spoke a similar language, our culture would be alike and our communication would be flawlessly and easily achievable. However, after completing my first pub visit and attempting to speak with the natives I realized I couldn't have been more incorrect. After being teased and (I felt) attacked by all the pub goers, I was ready to call it quits and go home safely away from all of the "mean" Brits. Seeing my friends and I distress, one woman kindly explained that British men flirted with "unkind" humor. She explained in general the British tended to not shy away from negative aspects in life and didn't allow it to affect them the way it affected our group. This proved true throughout the remainder of the trip. For instance, my native British teacher described my group project (that by the way received full marks and achieved only 100% in the class) as "not horrible at all". I was about to "throw in the towel" on my London experience due to my inability to relearn my American culture that I had so rigidly subscribed to and embrace the British way of life. In London, I unknowingly discovered that if culture is learned, it can be relearned and developed according to the addition of educational material. Furthermore, by practicing self-reflexivity and truly examining the my [<i>sic</i>] study abroad occurrence, true merit can be drawn from the situation that may be utilized later on in my life.</p>

This last student had studied abroad twice before enrolling in the course as a senior. She had spent five weeks in England two years prior and five weeks in Italy the summer prior to enrolling in the course. In this student's response, she describes an encounter at a pub that was unfamiliar to her and that she initially misinterpreted. Although it was someone else who provided the explanation, she was able to extend the learning to the situation with her British teacher describing their group project. While she does use the clichéd "cultural enlightenment," she goes on to illustrate what she means using a concept from the course that "culture is learned." She grapples with the meaning of this concept, ultimately coming to the conclusion that she had to unlearn her own American culture in order to acculturate to the British way of life. Her response explains the incident through another's point of view, has thoughtful insights about both self and culture, and she is aware that the lessons gleaned can be applied to future learning.

Discussion & Implications

As noted above, students enrolled in the course provided lengthier responses as required in their final exam than non-course participants. It is also clear that there is a level of formality in the course students' responses likely as a result of writing for a final exam versus an online survey. Nevertheless, there is a clear difference between how the two groups articulated what they had learned abroad. For example, speaking of differences in values between India and the U.S., the second course student whose response earned a score of 5 wrote that he, "was unable to determine why this difference in orientation existed prior to taking [this] class. Learning about Geert Hofstede's theory of value dimensions in [this] class has allowed me to better understand why these differences in values occur between cultures." In contrast, a non-course student whose response earned a score of 2 wrote, "I learned a lot about what makes American culture different

as well as a lot about myself.” From a sociocultural perspective, the examples analyzed highlight how concepts introduced helped students mediate their experiences abroad. Interestingly, both course students’ responses highlighted the importance of having someone help them understand culture from an emic perspective. Vande Berg (2009) found that a cultural mentor on-site, someone who understands students’ home as well as the foreign culture, during the study abroad experience could be an effective strategy to help students overcome cultural differences. A cultural mentor may have been able to help the student who earned a score of 2 processes the cultural differences she described as “macho” to such an extent that she could have potentially adapted while still in-country, ultimately preventing her from “want[ing] to scream.” Similarly, providing students with a “toolbox of concepts” (Paras et al., 2019) to interpret their experience whether prior to, during, or after the experience can help students “master nature” (Kramsch, 2000). By mastering nature, students are mediating their experiences which leads to “higher forms of mental development” (p. 141). The findings of this study echo those of Kortegast & Boisfontaine (2015):

By not having opportunities to discuss their experiences and to negotiate meaning making, students engage in practices that minimize and reduce culture, cultural learning, and development to superficial examples. The lack of intentional opportunities to develop more complex meanings could reduce study abroad to cultural tourism and reduce cultural learning to superficial differences. (p. 824-825)

These authors found that students wanted to discuss their experiences and wished that friends and family could have done this more, and, as a result, the authors hypothesize that students’ experiences were limited to reductionist catchphrases. From a sociocultural perspective, catchphrases were the only tools at students’ disposal and by using them as a sign to express a

certain meaning to their audience, their experiences are limited to the tools and signs available in everyday speech. "... [T]hus, they potentially undermined the purpose of their study abroad experiences to develop more expansive and complex understandings of other cultures and cultural practices" (p. 824). Williams (2017) came to a similar conclusion:

If the goal is to help students develop knowledge and skills to adapt to future intercultural interactions and to have truly transformational experiences, we have to help students connect everyday experiences to deeper insights. To use reflection in that manner – in other words, to develop intercultural competency – students need enough fluidity to have natural and organic experiences and interactions as well as enough structure to help them make sense of their experiences. (p. 24)

Once students have connected their experiences to deeper insights, it is important to extend the discussion to the context of why it is relevant outside of the academic context.

Ripmeester & Deardorff's (2019) work discusses the importance of ICC as a bridge across differences relevant to both the workplace and society noting that differences could be "generational, gender, religious, racial, ethnic, national, or socio-economic" (p. 215). Studying abroad can certainly be the catalyst for developing ICC, however Paras et al. (2019) note that higher education often relies on the ability to cite intercultural skills in the form of study abroad on students' resumes without necessarily incorporating those skills into the program itself (p. 41). Thereby, the onus falls on the student. This study adds to the body of literature that students may not always be able to articulate what they learned, let alone apply learning to future contexts, particularly the workplace. "[G]raduating seniors have flunked one of their most important exams – the hiring interview because they were not prepared with appropriate examples of skills required from their international experiences." (Gardner et al., 2008, p. 1).

Training students in how to bring up the intercultural skills they acquired abroad that align with what employers seek (Trooboff et al., 2007) empowers students to shape their own narrative to articulate the knowledge, skills, and attitudes they acquired abroad. As educators, we must consider how to integrate intercultural learning from study abroad experience across the curriculum and into our diverse communities.

Limitations and Future Directions

While this study concluded that post-study abroad students who enrolled in a three-credit course were better able to articulate what they had learned abroad than students who had not enrolled in this course, there are a number of limitations that must be addressed. Firstly, the non-course and course students' responses were crafted in different contexts and students may have altered their responses for a different audience. Future studies should examine these groups of post-study abroad students by eliciting answers in the same context for both groups. To that end, a further implication of this study is that students who enrolled in the course may be more capable of articulating what they learned in a job interview. Without following these two groups of students through the interviewing process, it is impossible to surmise how they would actually fare. As such, future studies should not only focus on training students to articulate what they learned abroad in a job interview, but also on how students use the scientific concepts associated with intercultural communication as a sign to create meaning for their audience. This could be done by recording job interviews or following up with students or employers after job interviews. Of note, the student who scored a 1 on the intercultural reflection rubric had studied abroad three years prior. It is possible that the farther away from the experience a student is, the more difficult it becomes to pinpoint learning. Williams' (2017) finding that essays that had higher scores in

her study had a critical incident to analyze was similar in this study and, thus, specific prompting of a critical incident may be required to elicit answers reflective of the skills on the higher end of the rubric. Lastly, Kortegast & Boisfontaine (2015) noted that students “used photographs as prompts to help explain, demonstrate, and broker their experiences” (p. 816). In light of the ubiquity of camera phones and students reifying their experiences without more in-depth reflection, it may be of interest to examine how posting on social media affects students’ choices to engage with host cultures and their understandings of the experiences.

Conclusion

In this study, without the benefit of guided instruction that contributes to the use of more scientific concepts, non-course students relied on the usage of more everyday concepts of culture that reduced their experiences to vague catchphrases. Scientific concepts associated with intercultural communication allowed course students to unpack their experience in ways that are not only meaningful, but applicable to personal, professional, and societal contexts.

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Appendix A

Final Exam Question

1. Please discuss what you learned specifically in this course. Focus on tangible and intangible skills and capabilities you gained through this course and how you could apply them to your professional, personal, and educational pursuits. Be sure to apply concepts, ideas, and vocabulary that you have learned.
2. Has this class increased your desire or willingness to travel or study abroad? If you have already studied abroad, how did the class allow you to process your experience in new ways?
3. How would you use the skills that you have learned in this course in traveling or studying abroad, or even at home in your interaction with other cultures (note: culture need not be limited to “foreign” cultures)?

Appendix B

Non-course Student Prompts

1. Please discuss what you learned while studying abroad. If possible, focus on tangible and intangible skills and capabilities you gained through studying abroad and how you could apply them to your professional, personal, and educational pursuits. Be sure to apply any concepts, ideas, and vocabulary that you might be familiar with.
2. Has studying abroad increased your desire or willingness to travel or study abroad again in the future? How does your experience studying abroad allow you to process your experience in new ways?
3. How would you use the skills that you have learned studying abroad in future travels, study, or work abroad, or even at home in your interaction with other cultures (note: culture need not be limited to “foreign” cultures)?