



## Ethnographic Learning While Studying Abroad

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### Introduction

EARLHAM COLLEGE is a small (one thousand students) liberal arts Quaker College in Indiana with a long tradition of international/global education. Nearly 60 percent of each graduating class at Earlham participates in a study abroad program designed and operated by Earlham in Japan, Jerusalem, Kenya, Northern Ireland, Mexico, Germany, Austria, Spain, France, and Martinique, or through programs offered by the Great Lakes Colleges Association (GLCA).

In the late 1970s, Earlham began to rethink and redefine all of its programmatic efforts in global education. These efforts in educational revitalization sought to develop more intentional and integrated on- and off-campus curricula and to strengthen the linkages between on- and off-campus learning. Study abroad became an important focus of this process.

The three major questions that Earlham College faculty began to ask as we thought about ways that our study abroad programs could be restructured to help students gain deeper insights into the culture and communities where they were living were the following:

How can we enhance the learning that takes place during study abroad programs?

How can we create components in our programs that will lead to deeper levels of understanding, providing avenues for students to gain insights into the complex societies in which they live and study?

How can we strengthen the connection between on-campus and off campus learning?

Faculty from various disciplines such as languages, anthropology, politics, history, peace studies, and biology who had led study abroad programs worked with the International Programs Office to rethink and reconfigure, the off-campus study learning experience. An overarching question in, discussions was, How can we introduce pedagogical approaches in all of our programs that will be flexible enough to work in different cultural settings in many different areas of the world? That is, what approaches could be incorporated into our programming in urban as well as rural settings, in more familiar as well as less familiar areas of the world, in areas where languages other than English are spoken as well as places where English is the common language?

Our institutional response to these challenges was to institute ethnographic field components based on participant observation and reflect, journals in our programs, and to design a predeparture orientation program that would introduce the methods and issues of ethnographic exploration a cultural reflection. If we view Earlham study abroad programs as learning laboratories, then the field data that we have gathered in the last fifteen years tell us that

ethnographic learning leads the students to  
an enriched language experience  
insight into the complexity of cultures and societies  
involvement and investment in the cultural learning  
process meaningful interaction with members of other cultures  
increased flexibility of thought, reflection, and self-reflection

The introduction of this educational approach has significantly changed the curricular shape and the substance of study abroad experiences in the last fifteen years. Earlham's programs now typically include the following components: an extensive predeparture orientation (approximately twenty contact hours), the on-site program, and integration to campus following return. The field or on-site program is built on three mutually reinforcing parts: the academic courses, the ethnographic and reflective components, and the "life experience" component, which includes homestays and other experience, within the community where students are living. Each of these elements, informs the others as students learn to interact and communicate within new cultural contexts.

This article outlines the theories and applications of ethnography on study abroad programs in an exploration of student learning processes throughout the experience. The first section presents an overview of ethnographic approaches and discusses ethnography as a learning and teaching tool on study abroad. The second section analyzes three student ethnographic projects carried out over a ten-week period in Mexico and in Austria. Finally, the last section emphasizes the importance of ethnographic projects as an intensified experience by which students develop insights through an ongoing reflective and interactive process.

### Ethnographic Principles

Ethnography has a long history within the field of anthropology, and in the last fifteen years ethnographic frameworks and methodologies have been successfully adapted to language acquisition and classroom research. As a methodology, ethnography has been described in different ways, as it has grown and evolved through time and in different contexts.

Ethnography seeks to describe the "way of living" of a social group in its naturally occurring and ongoing setting (Watson-Gegeo, 1988, p.575). It is more than a retelling of observed behavior, however, for it also aims to cite and sort the values, attitudes, and assumptions that inform that behavior. As knowledge it is a protocol as well as an interpretive and explanatory rendering of the observed "way of living." Watson-Gegeo (1988) suggests the following goals:

The ethnographer's goal is to provide a description of what people do in  
a setting (such as a classroom, neighborhood, or community), the outcome  
of their interactions, and the way they understand what they are doing  
(the meaning the interactions have for them.) (p.576)

Spindler and Spindler (1987), anthropologists who, in the 1950s, began to apply the concepts of anthropology to education, have identified ten criteria for a "good ethnography" based on their own field experience. The first five criteria are the most important for our purposes:

Criterion I. Observations are contextualized, both in the immediate setting in which behavior is observed and in further contexts beyond that context, as relevant.

Criterion II. Hypotheses emerge in situ, as the study goes on in the setting selected for observation. Judgment on what may be significant to study in depth is deferred until the orienting phase of the field study has been completed.

Criterion III. Observation is prolonged and repetitive. Chains Of events are observed more than once to establish the reliability of observations.

Criterion IV. The native view of reality is attended through inferences from observation and through the various forms of ethnographic inquiry (including interviews and other eliciting procedures).

Criterion V. Sociocultural knowledge held by social participants make social behavior and communication sensible. Therefore, a major part of the ethnographic task is to elicit that knowledge from informant-participants in as systematic a fashion as possible. (Spindler and Spindler, 1987, pp. 18-19)

Ethnography is naturalistic in the way that it does not manipulate variables or proceed from an experimental hypothesis, and Johnson(1992) stresses the dynamic nature of ethnographic research questions: they evolve as the research evolves. Most of the topics for further investigation cannot be predetermined or precategorized, but rather come to the surface research progresses and the researcher becomes more familiar with the actors and the setting.

Until one is immersed in the setting, the issues are not self-evident: instead, these questions and directions for investigation emerge as the study progresses.

The key element of an ethnographic paradigm, for most, is extended, systematic, and detailed observation of a setting. The observation is often participant observation, which involves interacting while observing. That is, the participant observer both observes and participates in the setting being studied, which requires that the participant observer spend time in the field. Spradley (1980) suggests that the participant observer has two goals: (1) to engage in activities appropriate to the situation and (2) to observe the activities, people, and physical aspects of the situation (p. 54). Researchers in this framework are therefore alternating between the participant and the observer roles, yet experiencing both simultaneously (Spradley, 1980, p. 57).

A major goal of participant observation in an ethnographic framework is to discover the insider's point of view or to gain an "emic" perspective. Agar (1980) speaks of ethnography as a paraphrase of someone else's "cultural text." In fact, Spindler and Spindler (1987) maintain that explaining behavior from the insider's point of view is the most important requirement for an ethnographic approach. Therefore, participant observers seek to understand the worldviews of those they are learning from and to do this they must spend prolonged periods in the field, putting aside predetermined classification systems and models. To gain an understanding of how the subjects perceive their own activities, Cox (1986) maintains that participant observers "must enter into their social world as they conceive it" (p. 72.) He continues:

I speak here of entering into a world, rather than merely of observing it at length because much of the understanding that provides the context for such holistic meaning is not the sort that can be simply stated in propositions and reported by observers. (p. 72)

Cox (1986) emphasizes the importance of the joint nature of the inquiry relationship between the participant observer and the subject in which both parties benefit from the interaction. He suggests:

The subject brings the activity to be understood. The researcher brings a new or different perspective which raises questions the subject might never have asked or which suggests answers the subject might never have thought of proposing. (p. 83)

Indeed, insight into someone else's cultural "texts" is a negotiated meaning, a meaning that is generated in a careful process of participation, observation, reflection, analysis, questioning, discovery, and self-reflection.

#### The Dimensions of Ethnography as Teaching and Learning Tools in Study Abroad

It is not our assumption that the methods and products of our study abroad participants will approximate the rigor and scope of professional ethnographers. Indeed, we borrow from

ethnography in the spirit of Spradley and McCurdy (1972), who argue that undergraduates in all fields can be taught how to conduct meaningful ethnographic inquiry. See also Robinson (1985), Byram, Esarte-Sarries, and Taylor (1991), and Roberts (1993) for additional versions of similar ethnographic models.

Based on this literature and our own experiences, we have designed an ethnographic teaching and learning paradigm in our study abroad programs that helps to develop a pluralistic way of looking at the world. We have adopted and adapted it because of its character as an in-the-field teaching, learning paradigm that enables students. The ethnographic process promotes a kind of flexibility of thinking that enables students to connect a world other than their own in a meaningful way, providing avenues students to "enter into" a new world. Ethnographic inquiry, we have covered, is a way to guide students to become autonomous cross-cultural, learners and explorers who can describe, understand, analyze, appreciate, and enjoy cross-cultural difference. We have become firmly convinced ethnography is indeed a potent and flexible teaching and learning paradigm during the study abroad experience.

A supervised ethnographic project, expanded into field placements in many cases, has now become a key learning experience in all of our programs. They are fully integrated into and complementary with all aspects of the educational program, which allows students to relate theory to practice and practice to theory throughout the study abroad experience. Students spend considerable amounts of time in sites such as an integrated school large reconciliation center in Northern Ireland; an Afro-Colombian Rights Organization or a Center for Differently-Abled Children in Bogota, Colombia; an ecological/environmental organization or a preschool in Cuautla Mexico; or a women's basket weaving cooperative or a hospital in Kaimosi, Kenya. The students observe, participate, and engage in meaningful, conversations in which the complexities and contradictions of individuals and cultures are constantly in play on both sides-which is so critical in cultural interactions. Views and perspectives must constantly be reworked meaning must constantly be negotiated and renegotiated, and language must constantly be refined for understanding to occur. A more profound experience, we believe, is the result. Indeed, students and faculty alike consistently point out in interviews, evaluations, and reports that these projects, combined with the entire program, are often the most rewarding and meaningful components of the students' experience abroad, as well as the most difficult and the most challenging.

See Appendix I for more detail on our curriculum and on our teaching and learning praxis, and Appendix II for a representative list of the, kinds of ethnographic projects Earlham students have completed in recent years.

## II. The Data: An Examination of Three Student Ethnographic Projects

It is our assumption that ethnographic field learning is a matter of processes as much as it is about outcomes. If this is our curricular planning premise, then what can students' ethnographies tell us about the learning processes in which the students are engaged?

We have evaluated student ethnographic projects from the years 1986 to 1994. The data that we will present in this paper is derived from two Earlham. study abroad programs: Germany/Austria and Mexico. The first one is a study of Base Communities and Liberation Theology in Mexico; the second is a study of a nightclub setting in Austria; and the third is the study of a tortilla factory in Mexico. All three of these supervised ethnographic projects were carried out as part of a complete educational offering that included coursework in language,

literature, history, and culture, as well as homestay living experiences.

*Base Communities and Liberation Theology in Mexico*

The following student, Chris, chose Liberation Theology and Base Communities in Cuautla, Mexico, as his ethnographic project. We placed him with a family who was very involved in Base Community work. We excerpt here several parts of his final paper to illustrate the five categories derived from ethnographic research undertaken by Earlham students.

Chris begins by stating how his project relates to his on campus interests. He wants to experience one version of the reality he had only studied theoretically in class.

*I chose to study Ecclesiastical Base Communities because I have an interest in politics and religion. Also, last year I took a course on Liberation Theology in Central America.*

He then describes his contacts and involvement in the project, committing himself to spend many days and hours in meetings and interviews. Fortunately, his Mexican host parents were very accepting of having him join them in almost all their activities related to Base Communities.

*I learned a lot from my mother, Elvira, and my father, Jon, beginning the first night when Jon asked me what people in the United States thought about Liberation Theology. Besides my conversations with my "parents," I had two interviews with a woman in Cuernavaca, I attended meetings of the local Base Community, and I had one interview with the ex-Bishop of Cuernavaca, Sergio Mendez Arceo who lent a great deal of support to the Communities.*

Bishop Mendez Arceo was an extraordinary leader of the progressive wing of the Church. His articulate and forceful commentary on social problems, provided a propitious environment for the development of Base Communities. Chris tape-recorded his interview with him and spent many hours transcribing the text.

In his very first Base Community meetings Chris is forced to and reevaluate his expectations. At this moment the meetings do not seem to match what Chris has heard.

*In theory they get together to read the Bible and to better understand their lives. They try to analyze the reasons for their poverty with the objective of transforming society. This description, however, is ideal. The meetings I have seen are less spectacular. Usually they begin with one or two songs. Then they read passages from the Bible, a special edition from Latin America, with commentaries by "liberationists" and photos of Martin Luther King, Dom Helder Camara from Brasil and the Virgin of Guadalupe.*

After a detailed description and history of the movement, Chris records his own insights and conclusions. He is aware that he arrived in this setting with certain beliefs that had not yet been

tested. Spending time with the people helps him to achieve a more profound understanding.

*My own thoughts have not changed much because before I came here I had ideas similar to theirs. But my beliefs are stronger now, My experiences have given me a lot of inspiration because there is a great deal of difference*

*between reading about something and living it. I have reaffirmed my pacifistic ideals.*

The experience leaves Chris with many questions to be answered, and he speculates now on what he would do if he had more time to continue the project. By this time his perspective has been broadened and deepened, allowing him to rethink and reevaluate what he has learned. He is ready to ask new questions and face new issues which he outlines in his final comments.

*In spite of having learned a lot, I still have many questions. If I had more*

*time, I would like to spend more time with members of the Base Communities. I want to know how their beliefs have changed by their participation in the groups. I would like to talk to more priests who practice Liberation Theology to learn what this means to them. I am interested in seeing how the Catholic Church has changed since the Second Vatican, Medellin and Puebla. Maybe I could learn from people who do not agree with Base Communities and Liberation Theology.*

The last sentence above is expressed by a person who has evidently come some distance in understanding the world he has been studying. Not only is he ready to hear new perspectives, but he is also willing to hear them from people who are critical of liberation theology. He has reached a point where he is willing to be challenged further, to raise questions that he was not ready to ask earlier in the project. Chris realizes that he needs to learn more about the broader historical context of the movement.

#### *Discotheque Culture in Vienna*

Amy chose to investigate discotheque culture in Vienna. In fact, the project encompassed a single club, the Titanic, and the focus was limited to a single theme in the club-as-micro-culture: namely, the character of insidership at the club—who fits, who doesn't. The choice of this topic was easy, reveals Amy, for her hobby is nightclubbing and dancing in her hometown of Indianapolis. Additional motivation came from Amy's general interest in the cultural connotations of the word *Stammgäste*. In German there is a distinction between general patrons at a restaurant, tavern, or club and the *Stammgäste* or regular patrons—the insiders who often come in to join friends at the *Stammtisch*, the table reserved for regular customers. Exactly how one made the transition from outsider to insider was the cultural process that Amy wanted to understand.

The object of study, the Titanic, was the most exclusive discotheque in Vienna, says Amy. On her first visit, in spite of a personal invitation from the owner, whom Amy had met elsewhere, to come to the club, Amy is refused admittance by the doorkeeper. She persists and is admitted. Barkeepers and employees in general are unfriendly, cold, and businesslike toward Amy. Amy confesses she had had "hopes and expectations for a "FUN" ethnographic project that initially turned into "disappointments."

But Amy is savvy enough as an explorer to brush away unpleasantness and personal

disappointment to make some observations about deeper patterns at the club: "They took my order without smiling or small-talk. I noticed that, for the most part, the clients at the club were treated with minimal respect by the workers. There were a few clients who seemed be 'insiders,' otherwise the clients seemed to defer to the employees." The coolness" of the club is in fact its coolness. Patrons on the lower rung of insiders clearly have a long way to go, and Amy indicate contrary to all of her hometown experience. Other apprentice in this ambiance might have aborted this project, but Amy persists. Her persistence, however, is not without method:

*I made it a point to learn every worker's name and to use them at all possible opportunities. Then came an evening where I was accepted (even*

*befriended by the pair of bartenders who worked up front - Andreas and Martin.) That seemed to break the ice; as these two became friendlier (they invited me to stay after the bar closed and to go out to another club afterwards) the others fell slowly, one-by-one, until I was greeted with smiles at the door, received prompt service, was included in the "local" jokes, and if I missed a night they would comment on my absence when I next saw them. I became friendly with each and every employee.*

The intentionality suggests Amy's ability to self-manage and to lever her way closer to an inside perspective. The degree to which Amy is methodical is suggested in another quote: "It was fairly impossible to 'take notes' at the club, so I recorded my observations in a personal journal about four times a week or whenever something particularly interesting came up."

Amy notes that some regular clients "had been even less welcoming than the employees." Indeed, Amy's transition to *Stammgast* is not without some tension:

*Of course, I did get a lot of stares (due to a distinct "American" style of dress and dance that stood out at the Titanic) and I was not always so blasé about it. Once I complained to Andreas and Eddie that I felt like a circus sideshow. Andreas said, "You're so American it's painful. Every-*

*one here knows that you don't belong to Vienna. Everyone can recognize that the minute you walk through the door. " Eddie said, they resent that you are a "regular" here when they have to wait in lines to get in. You are an American and you don't. They find that obnoxious.*

Having achieved a kind of status as an insider, Amy seems vaguely uncomfortable with the privilege associated with that status. Amy is soon included in private parties limited to regular guests only. She is troubled:

*The Viennese patrons didn't find this practice of excluding/belonging the least bit unusual, When they were rejected, they seemed disappointed but not especially offended, On the other hand, once achieving "belonging", they were very proud. Andreas explained to me that it was "normal; why not?" he said that "Austrians are a closed people" and everyone at the table agreed. He added, "you shouldn't complain. You're not having any problems, are you?"*

Amy puzzles over the character of social distance and inclusiveness:

*Andreas pointed to his own personal relationship with me. He said, "this is an exception to the rule. I usually don't make friends so quickly with strangers." Andreas added, "We have only a couple of friends, people who we really care about and spend a lot of time with." Other people, it seems, can be greeted and you can have fun with them, but they are merely "Bekanntler."*

Amy's commentary on the exchange suggests that her informants are helping her peel layer upon layer of the character of social interaction in German speaking Europe. Her initial perception was that non- *Stammgäste* have every right to be irritated and feel rejected, a perception that has been corrected with the help of her informants.

Accepted, Amy reflects on what might motivate her Viennese counterparts to want to become insiders. From clients and employees she learns of the sense of belongingness that accrues to *Stammgäste*, a membership feeling. So motivated, clients put up with rejection and long waits at the door and indifference and coolness inside. Persistence, concludes Amy, is a marker for a kind of group loyalty that is ultimately rewarded by insiderness. Doggedness by outsiders is rewarded by insiderness and the ritual cycle is completed, concludes Amy.

Throughout, Amy weaves reflections about the stereotype of the Viennese as being urban and indifferent, cool and unfriendly. In spite of the initial icy sophistication of club patrons and workers, Amy concludes with a correction of the initial version:

*Once the initial ice is broken they seem to become friendly quickly on an individual basis. Also, if I reached out with a smile or was the first to begin a conversation, I was often met with a friendly response. Once I made the effort and once I became a "regular," I was treated with exceptional warmth. The entire staff pitched in to throw a farewell party for me. Addresses were exchanged and even a few tears were shed. The loyalty and friendships made through the club is amazing.*

In her ethnography Amy compares and contrasts, reflects and sizes. She is actively involved in her "work" and has an insatiable appetite for more information, for more clarity. She has delimited a single phenomenon, insiderness, and has managed her inquiry in a single-minded way. She has indeed done her best in answering the key ethnographic questions: "What do I see these people doing?" and "What do they see themselves doing?" Although she has confined her research to the parameters club, she also derived a number of corollary insights into the nature of social space and friendship among Austrians. Amy's ethnography of a microculture also led to parallel insights into her own values and attitudes. She concludes that the project was one "from which I hope to continue to reap the benefits for a lifetime."

#### *The Study of a Tortilla-Making Factory in Cuautla, Mexico*

Jesse had an interest in corn and the tortilla in the history of Mexico, and, being a hands-on learner, elected to work in three sites where tortillas were made in order to try to understand its significance in Mexican life today. He worked for a week in a village setting where the tortilla was made from scratch in a home: from growing their own corn, to storage, to grinding and soaking the corn, to the actual preparation of the tortillas. He then worked in a small neighborhood

*tortilleria* and finally in the largest commercial tortilla making plant in the city. Jesse's ethnographic learning agenda was self-designed and self-directed.

He describes his contacts and his involvement in the project. He demonstrates an awareness that he has to work at establishing a relationship of trust with the people in this setting as well as the importance of participating in the setting.

*I made tortillas in the village, and after returning to Cuautla I spent two hours daily working in the neighborhood tortilleria and in Paredes, the biggest one in Cuautla where I worked for the "King of Tortillas" (as he called himself). By working I gained the trust of the workers and many insights which I couldn't have by just observing. In this paper I want to show how each tortilleria reflects the life of the place where it is located: the appearance, the behavior of the workers, the behavior of people waiting in line to purchase tortillas and the kind of people.*

As he begins to work in Paredes, Jesse observes how people's behavior changed toward him, increasing his sense of entering their world to begin to understand it from the insider's perspective:

*Before starting to work no one spoke with me except the owner ("The King of Tortillas"). If someone said something to me they used the "usted"*

*(formal) and it seemed as if they didn't trust me. After observing for half a day the "King" asked me, "What do you want to do? Do you want to do something or what? ("Que es la onda?"). With this I started working. While I was working everyone began to smile and to talk with me. I was able to approach the workers and listen to what they had to say.*

Jesse wanted to describe his work in detail to make sense out of it. The work was physically demanding, and as he gradually discovered through repeated observation, the culture of the tortilla factory became a mirror of the larger outside culture with all of its complexity. He felt compelled to work as hard as he could to gain membership and consequently, a certain status in that microculture. Succeeding in this rite enables him to achieve a deeper level of interaction with the other workers.

*I had the worst job along with two twelve year-olds. A job which required*

*little strength nor thought. I took the hot tortillas off the conveyer belt. The tortillas were very hot and they burned my fingers. It was hot and I was sweating a great deal The girl who was mixing the dough threw water in my face every five minutes.... After two and a half hours without a break my fingers felt raw as if they had no skin. I had to stop.... Everyone laughed when they saw my blisters on each fingertip. They said I wouldn't feel the heat after four days of work.*

After an initial period of participation relationships evolve. One worker asks him to accompany him on deliveries, and the "King" takes time to show and explain every aspect of the operation. Jesse's respect for him grows as can be seen in the following description:

*He (The King) controls everything. At 5:00 in the morning he goes to the altar (in the factory) and makes the sign of the Cross on his chest and then turns on the machines.*

As Jesse explains later, there is a kind of reverence and fear of the machines because so many workers have been injured, losing fingers, an arm, and receiving bad burns.

*He tells everyone what they need to do and when they have to work faster. He is very nice and it seems as if the workers like him. He lives on the upper floor of the factory with his wife and two children. Seven workers also live with him. One of his hands doesn't function. It's crushed with bones sticking out of it; some time ago it got caught in a machine.*

Developing and shaping insights into a cultural setting is a primary goal of the ethnographer. As stated above, Jesse wanted to see how each tortilleria reflects the life surrounding it. He has made a tentative hypothesis about tortilleria culture, and now sets out to describe in detail the daily rhythm and behavior of patrons who come there to purchase tortillas, concluding that representatives from all walks of life perform the daily ritual of buying tortillas. However, within this large setting, the act appears to be relatively impersonal, lacking in symbolic meaning as the tortilla's commercialized existence has distanced it from its once sacred position in Mexican society.

*There are a lot of different people who wait in line and it is interesting to see when different people come. At 5:30 A.M. many farm workers (campesinos) come to get tortillas and water to take to the fields. After them at 6:00 A.M. soldiers and restaurant workers arrive. Then students come. The most active hours are from 1:00 P.M. to 4:00 P.M. when the "normal" people come. Their behavior in line is reserved and impersonal. They all await their turn without speaking or greeting each other.*

This setting contrasts with the neighborhood tortilleria, where people waiting in line use it as a social event. And if needed, they will help the owner take tortillas off the belt and stack them up. On Jesse's first day at this tortilleria, a helper did not arrive and Jesse was asked to work on the conveyer belt.

*At the beginning I was very nervous because there were a lot of people in line watching me. After a few minutes I got in a groove. As I was taking off the tortillas I went off in my own world in the clouds and I couldn't talk or do anything else. The rhythm of removing the tortillas is like a dance with your hands and your mind becomes enraptured.*

Since his early experience making tortillas in the village and studying the importance of corn in ancient Mexico, Jesse's perspective has evolved to a different level. He tries to deal with each setting on its own terms, developing insights that allow him to begin to understand those settings from the insider's point of view. He has engaged in the kind of reflection and

selfreflection we admire in our students' work. Moreover, he has done this all in the language of his host culture. He ends his final paper on a somewhat poetic note that underscores his new consciousness and his gradual entry into the world he chose to study:

*The fact that they don't have special feelings for the corn doesn't mean that they don't like working there. In the beginning of my study I didn't understand why the workers said that they like working there and that it is nice working the machine. It seemed boring to me at first. But now, I'm in love with the machine ... I can look at it for hours, the many*

*wheels turning and the constant line of tortillas which travel in pairs in their trip inside the oven on the magic belt. The go in raw and come out toasted with pretty designs burnt into them. It's like being a child again with electric trains. I always want to take off more tortillas. When it's really moving, it's so smooth, as if it were flying, and it doesn't matter if you burn your fingers, It's work for the soul, for the spirit because one has to rise above the material body when you're working.*

The three ethnographies and interpretations testify to the power of ethnographic research as a learning tool during study abroad that leads to an enriched language experience, insight into the complexity of cultures and societies, involvement and investment in the cultural learning process, meaningful interaction with members of other cultures, and increased flexibility of thought, reflection, and self-reflection.

#### *Final Comments*

After many years of watching students engaged in participant-observer ethnographic projects, talking with them, studying taped interviews of students done on site by Earlham faculty, and reading their final papers, we have come to understand more about the key aspects of this learning process. Students often tell us that the project enables them to become learners in the best sense of the word. They take on a kind of pride and ownership of the experience that leads to an intense involvement in their education. The kinds of relationships that are developed lead to a sense of entering into and integrating with a new culture. Gradually moving toward the insider's perspective promotes a flexibility of thinking, an ability to deal more intelligently and sensitively with complex issues and with the inevitable ambiguity of meanings and behaviors encountered.

Poignant testimony to the reflective and self-reflective nature of the experience is provided by a student who also worked with the Base Community groups in Mexico. After several weeks with a child-care group, she evaluates the meaning of this experience for her:

*Along the way I learned a lot about myself. I couldn't fix things the way I wanted. I had to decide which things I wanted to confront and which things I had to accept, I learned that life experiences are not always chock full of the significance I want them to be, and that I need to take out of each experience what I can.*

Many of our student ethnographies display similar reflection on experience, and a need to evaluate and weigh one's personal beliefs with respect to the values that inform each cultural setting. Yet another student in Mexico comments on her work with a rural health team:

*At the beginning what was hard for me was that I felt wealthy and privileged, and I felt pity for these people. I knew that this wasn't a very helpful sentiment to have. As time went by I started to feel less pity, and realized that these people didn't feel sorry for themselves, so why should I.*

Reflection on one's own value system during the exploration of the new microculture is a repeating theme throughout the ethnographic project. Over and over again students are challenged to test and revise their perceptions leading to what we have called flexibility of thought.

Although we observe this kind of thinking throughout the project, this willingness to question and reevaluate one's perceptions is most evident in the final written ethnography. Taking stock of the entire experience to unravel its meaning in this final stage is a crucial step toward processing, personalizing, and internalizing insights gained during the study. Moreover, students must capture the subtleties of the experience in the language of the host culture, making them refine their ability to communicate in a second language.

Living, learning, and working alongside people from the host culture in an attempt to understand a setting enhances the willingness to reserve judgment, to test hypotheses, and to reevaluate what one has observed. Most important, this change in the way one perceives a microculture also affects the way students deal with the entire experience abroad. Rather than defensively shying away from meaningful encounters with members of the culture, this feeling of connectedness to the other, developed during the ethnography, makes study abroad a much deeper experience than simply inhabiting the space of that culture.

Even though we conclude with a degree of research certainty, analysis has revealed to us that there is much more work to be done in exploring the learning processes of our students on study abroad programs. We are confident that we have uncovered key areas for further research, areas that are at the very heart of good undergraduate education.

We conclude with a postscript. We recently contacted Jesse, whose ethnography we cite in this paper, to ask him if he had any further thoughts on the project that he undertook eight years ago. His response was fascinating. Jesse is now teaching in a bilingual school in Austin, Texas, and just last summer he participated in a creative writing workshop for teachers. One of their tasks was to write a story from their memories, and Jesse informed us that the title of his work was "Recollections of the Tortilla Trade." He went on to tell us that his ethnographic project in Mexico was one of his most meaningful college learning experiences, and that since doing his project he views everyday reality quite differently. Everything around him, he states, has a deeper meaning to be discovered.

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### ***Appendix 1: Ethnographic Teaching and Learning: Orientation, Fieldwork, and Return to Campus***

The term *ethnography* encompasses the three different ways our students carry out fieldwork abroad: internships, participant-observation, and reflective journals. All require similar training during our required twenty hours of predeparture orientation. In these weekly meetings we draw heavily on the techniques developed by practitioners in the area of cross-cultural training, we invite previous student participants to share their experiences in ethnographic research, and we include faculty who discuss with students the theoretical and practical aspects of doing these kinds of projects.

In the learning capstone of each orientation we move beyond the classroom by asking students to go into the Richmond community to carry out a "mini-ethnographic" project. We want them to begin to enter the culture of the other, so we intentionally give a list of options that will take them to somewhat unfamiliar territory: a police cruiser, social service agencies, a local psychic, a

bowling alley, the local farmers' market, for example. Although only a few hours are spent in exploring these slices of local culture, at least some of the determinants of human action are revealed and students begin to understand how the seemingly superficial is layered and complex. During this experience we ask them to seek out that one person who can most help them understand this microcosm, explaining to these people that they want to learn as much as they can about their work. These mini-projects are subsequently presented and debriefed in a following orientation session.

Building on the orientation, the study abroad curriculum assumes ethnographic learning in addition to other academic courses studied at the program site. Both types of learning complement and reinforce one another. We want students to reflect not only on classroom material but also on their personal encounter with the culture. Our aim is to encourage students to be more patient, objective, and introspective cultural explorers, developing a kind of empathic understanding of the culture that could not be attained in the classroom.

As students launch their project in the field, we ask them to frame their study using questions from Spradley (1980, 8) and Crane and Angrosino (1984, 61): What do I see these people doing? What do these people see themselves doing? And how do they view their work within the larger framework of their society? Students then seek out those people within that setting who can best teach them about it. Students devote time to developing those relationships, building trust, and in most ethnographic project work side by side with the people they are learning from. Project duration varies from three to twelve weeks depending on the program.

Students returning from off-campus study bring back and build on their experiences in many ways. In a growing number of programs such as Women's Studies, Peace and Global Studies, Japanese Studies, Human Development and Social Relations, and Latin American Studies, a field study is a required part of the major. There are, therefore, structured opportunities for the presentation of student projects and field placements that are shared with other members of the college community. The process of planning the presentation has been an important one for our students as they must define, this time from a new perspective, the cultural setting, their roles within it, their relationships, and their analyses and interpretations, to an audience that did not participate in their off-campus program. It causes them to reflect in a very serious manner and to locate their individual studies in a broader academic context. For the students in the audience, these Presentations open a window to a new culture and to individuals that populate that culture. In many instances students build on their linguistic skills and new knowledge and perspectives in class papers and group projects across the disciplines, and some students build their senior thesis on the initial ethnographic projects and internships.

Typically, a large number of students return to serve as assistant language teachers in lower-level language courses. This allows them to refine their language skills, but more important, they serve as role models and teachers of culture for beginning language learners.

Many students become very involved in off-campus programming for the following year. They are instrumental in selecting students for upcoming programs, and take an important role in the design and the carrying out of the orientation programs. Not only is their input beneficial for us and for the group, but the process of reflection a year later is important them.

Today, these innovations-an extensive predeparture orientation, an offcampus experience combining academic courses with a structured ethnographic project, and avenues to apply new skills and to test new knowledge following return-have been institutionalized.

***Appendix 11: Sample of Student Ethnographies,  
Earlham College Programs, 1988-1995: Northern  
Ireland, Mexico, Spain, England, France, Japan,  
Kenya, Austria, Colombia.***

Save the Children Youth Farm, Northern Ireland  
An Integrated (Protestant and Catholic) School, Northern Ireland

The Belfast Women's Center, Northern Ireland  
The Derry Peace and Reconciliation Group, Northern Ireland  
A Government-sponsored Daycare Center, Mexico  
Kitchen Culture, Mexico  
A Homeopathic Medical Practice, Mexico  
A Traditional Dairy Farm, Mexico  
A Local Political Campaign, Mexico  
A Mariachi Band, Cuautla, Mexico  
The Mormon Church, Cuautla, Mexico  
Community Theater, Cuautla, Mexico  
Health Food Stores, La Caruna, Galicia  
A Religious Order of Nuns, Galicia  
A Tuna Fishing Business, Galicia  
Street Vendors, Valencia, Spain  
An Apartment Complex and Its Concierge, Valencia, Spain  
An Ethnography of Fire Fighters, Valencia, Spain  
The Central Youth Hostel, Valencia, Spain  
St. Martin's Youth Project, London, England  
A Music Cooperative, London, England  
A Training Center for Religious Leadership, London, England  
A Resettlement Center for the Homeless, London, England  
A Support Center for Street Kids, London, England  
Public Transportation, Nantes, France  
Vegetable and Fruit Markets, Nantes, France  
A Neighborhood Patisserie, Nantes, France  
Subway Musicians, Paris  
Montparnasse, an Area and Its People in Transition, Paris  
Bureaux de Tabac, Paris  
A Ballet Studio, Paris  
SOS Racisme, a Multicultural Education Center, Paris  
A Martial Arts Club, Morioka, Japan  
Punk Rocker Culture, Morioka, Japan  
A Home for the Elderly, Sapporo, Japan  
A Small-town Junior High School, Sapporo, Japan  
A Funeral in Kaimosi, Kenya  
Cows: Care, Beliefs, Costs, Functions, Kenya  
Storytelling in the Host Family, Kenya  
Women's Sales Activities on Market Days, Kenya  
Building a Traditional House, Kenya  
A Jewish Students Organization, Vienna

**A Cultural Center for Turkish Children, Vienna**  
**Street Musicians, Vienna**  
**An Ice Skating Club, Vienna**  
**A Paramedic Unit, Vienna**  
**A Fitness Center, Vienna**  
**A Gay and Lesbian Rights Organization, Bogota**  
**A Children's Theater, Bogota**  
**An Afro-Colombian Organization, Bogota**  
**Women's Support Group, Bogota**

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