Ethnographic Inquiry: Reframing the Learning Core of Education Abroad

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Introduction

Growth in US education abroad has been consistently strong for the past decade, surpassing 9 percent annually (IIE, 2005). In 2003–4, over 190,000 US students studied abroad. According to projections made by Mitch Leventhal Strategies, at present rates, more than one million Americans will be studying abroad by 2023. Even at a more conservative rate of 5 percent, more than 500,000 students would study overseas by that same year. Within the field of education abroad, this growth is both exciting and alarming.

The field is anticipating growth in student enrollment by developing new institutional linkages, strengthening international partnerships and expanding consortia agreements ultimately to allow students to study virtually any subject in any part of the world, and for any length of time. Furthermore, we are giving greater importance to improved data collection and outcomes assessment. We are developing and implementing clear standards of good practice, establishing models for health and safety in education abroad and harnessing new technology to link students to the world in ways never before imagined. We are striving for diversification of destinations, greater participation of underrepresented groups, and to secure private and public resources for financial assistance. Curriculum integration, parental involvement, and visa regulations are among other key areas in which the field of education abroad is actively engaged.

As we welcome growth and development in the field, our greatest challenge may be preserving the fundamental mission of education abroad which is, in part, to engage our students in meaningful intellectual and intercultural experiences. Already, we struggle with significant external forces that are compromising or watering down the student experience. For example, education abroad has not been immune to the pervasive consumerism seen in US higher education today. As a result, programs are increasingly structured to allow, even encourage, students to remain within their comfort zones. Familiar amenities, such as the Internet and cellular phones, are often also readily available overseas.

Programs hire American faculty or train local professors to offer courses that are conducted and subsequently graded to meet US student expectations, thus removing students a step further from having a culturally authentic academic experience. The heightened litigiousness of US society has similarly influenced all aspects of the education abroad experience, from topics covered in pre-departure orientation to how programs are implemented on site. Worries that the Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act of 1986 may be extended to study abroad programming prevent program leaders from allowing students to take part in cultural activities that involve alcohol consumption. Program leaders are instructed to make special group travel arrangements as public transportation may not be convenient or comply with minimum insurance standards.

Increased emphasis on program logistics and administration has made it progressively more difficult for international educators to remain focused on how programs engage students in cultural learning and exploration. In consequence, students find themselves in closely regulated, "US ghettos" abroad and are often ill-equipped with the social skills or confidence necessary to break away and form relationships within the host culture. The "Flock" or the "One hundred-legged American" are metaphors regularly applied to US students abroad these days, as students move about in groups, seemingly one body with multiple legs. These descriptions should come as no surprise, especially during a time when education abroad programs are restructuring to accommodate even larger numbers of students and redesigning program offerings to meet student expectations. As a result, we find more programs that isolate students in English-only classrooms, house students in shared apartments, and arrange program schedules to coincide with the US academic year, which often means that our students are on deserted campuses for several weeks of the semester. The situation is further complicated when students do not consciously recognize their unwitting participation in this "American bubble," and, moreover, when the program does not effectively guide students toward deeper levels of intercultural exploration and meaning-making.

Growth in education abroad will no doubt remain strong. As the field matures and explores new areas of research and program development, it is imperative that increased enrollment, logistical demands, liability concerns and consumer expectations and other external forces not compromise the transformative role of an international educational experience. This article will seek to reexamine the student experience in education abroad today and will propose the integration of ethnographic inquiry into education abroad programming, not as a supplemental program component, but as a paradigm through which we can engage students in meaningful cultural learning and exploration.

Education Abroad and Intercultural Learning

It is a false assumption that some international experience is better than none and that even a brief education abroad experience will somehow lead to intercultural competence. To illustrate, consider the following fictional scenario:

> Jason is a third-year undergraduate student from a large, east-coast institution. Though he had never been out of the country before and did not speak Japanese, he chose to study in Tokyo for six weeks the previous summer. He was fascinated by Japanese *anime* and *manga* and looked forward to exploring Japanese popular culture. His program was structured to allow him to study basic Japanese and take one area-studies course with other US students. While in Japan, Jason lived with a homestay family, ate mostly Japanese food, climbed Mt. Fuji, traveled on the *shinkansen*, enjoyed a Kabuki performance, toured the temples and shrines of Kyoto, bathed in an outdoor hot spring and had an otherwise very enjoyable experience. When Jason returned to the US, he would happily describe his experiences, answering most questions about Japan and Japanese society.

Jason's education abroad experience is rather typical, and, at first glance it appears that his time in Japan was enjoyable and by most accounts successful. However, did Jason become more knowledgeable of Japan beyond the observable, objective aspects of the culture? Was the program structured in a way to encourage him to reflect on his experiences and to explore his cultural interpretations in more depth? When answering questions about Japan, would Jason be aware of gaps in his understanding of Japanese culture or would he, like so many other students, begin to fill in the cultural blanks with interpretations that may or may not be accurate?

Consider if Jason had gone to Japan having previously been told that Japanese women are oppressed and openly discriminated against in society. Would he have been inclined to seek out other perspectives on the treatment of women? He might have found evidence to support his preconceived notion which would consequently reinforced an understanding of Japanese women that may or may not have been accurate. Unless the student is guided toward pursuing a more accurate interpretation of his observations and experiences, he may never learn or consider an alternate viewpoint. Essentially, this student could be in the presence of a significant intercultural experience which presents a different reality on the treatment of Japanese women, but not be open or receptive to the experience, thus remaining oblivious to any learning potential. As such,

Jason might have returned from his program in Japan having only reinforced his preconceived notions of gender equality in Japan.

In *Democracy and Education*, John Dewey asserts that experiences are the basis of learning and can be both educative and "mis-educative." "An educative experience is one that broadens the field of experience and knowledge, brings awareness to bear, and leads in a constructive direction, toward intelligent action. A mis-educative experience is one that arrests or distorts growth and can lead one into routine action, thus narrowing the field of further experience. One is therefore closed to the impact that the environment might have on him/her" (Rodgers, 2002). Consider these statements in reference to Jason's experiences in Japan:

> As part of a course related field trip, Jason and his classmates visit a medium-sized Japanese organization. During the visit, he observed the section chief direct two women to prepare and serve tea to the visiting group. Jason was surprised because these two women appeared to be regular employees and had desks alongside the men in the office. Jason was embarrassed by having these two women serve the group and he was disappointed that the section chief would treat his colleagues in this way. At the end of the visit, he expressed his regrets to the two women and thanked them profusely for the delicious tea.

Jason had a concrete experience that generated a response, in this case a negative one directed toward the section chief and the organization in general. With limited experience in Japan, he had no cultural reference in which to understand the context of this experience. This observation confirmed his pre-conceived notions of the treatment of Japanese women and, satisfied with this interpretation, he failed to seek other, possibly more accurate, interpretations of the experience. Had he done so, Jason might have learned that serving tea may not be considered a subordinate task within Japanese social organization. He may have learned that this may not be an activity that Japanese women consider demeaning. It is possible that neither these two women nor their male colleagues would view this as anything more than a collective effort to welcome the visiting group. To have reflected on this experience in a different manner would have advanced Jason's cultural knowledge in a way that would have broadened his field of experience and knowledge of the Japanese perceptions of gender equality. The obvious question, then, is how could this mis-educative experience been avoided?

Education abroad helps students change learning structures, learn new paradigms and become more complex individuals. If a student's structures are

not ready to be opened, the student then has only one mono-cultural frame in which to encounter experiences. Similarly, people in every culture around the world can be described as naïve realists, meaning that they believe that everyone sees the world and interprets events as they do (LaBrack, 1994). When (or if) they discover that others do not share those views, the tendency is to denigrate those who are different and to reaffirm that the group one belongs to "has it right." When stressed, during periods of cultural adjustment, for example, students often return to this mono-cultural, dichotomous way of thinking.

It is the openness to the unknown and the recognition of difference, however, which makes intercultural learning possible. As one begins to think less in dualistic terms of right or wrong, he/she becomes more multiplistic in his/her thinking and seeks to imagine what things might look like from the viewpoint of an insider from another culture (Jurasek, 1991). This movement towards multiplistic or contextual thinking underlies Milton Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity, in which learners move through a series of ethnocentric stages toward ethnorelativity (1993). Similarly, cultural anthropologists formulated the concept known as cultural relativism. This implies that one must understand that all cultures are adequate to meet the needs of the people who live by their rules and that it is inappropriate to pass moral judgment on another culture on the basis of what is deemed correct in one's own (Crane, 1984). If the goal of education abroad is to support students in becoming more ethnorelative, or interculturally competent, we must revisit which competencies are necessary to develop in order to achieve this goal.

Competencies are deep and enduring personal characteristics that are demonstrated through behaviors: the manner in which students use knowledge, the attitudes with which they approach a situation and the skills they choose to master. As model pre-departure orientations demonstrate, competencies can be developed through intercultural training and through individual effort. In Bridging Differences, William Gundykunst identifies five specific competencies that are particularly well-suited to the goals of education abroad (1991):

> ***Mindfulness*** — A student can be taught to be more mindful or cognitively aware of his/her own communication. Successful intercultural interactions require a meta-level awareness of the process of communication rather than solely focusing on the outcomes. (Example: Jason was not aware that his reaction to the section chief's request of the two women obscured his willingness to learn about and appreciate the organization he was visiting.)

Cognitive Flexibility — A student needs to be open to new information and aware of multiple perspectives. One needs to create new categories rather than sort new experiences and information into pre-set categories of understanding. (Example: Jason had only one category in which to understand acceptable patterns of gender equality. He was not able to consider other, less judgmental perspectives on serving tea.)

Behavioral Flexibility — A student can be guided when to adapt and accommodate his/her behavior to people from other groups. (Example: Jason was unaware that his visible embarrassment by having the two women serve him tea was culturally inappropriate in this context.)

Cross-Cultural Empathy — A student can make an effort to participate in another person's experience, in the attempt to understand and emotionally feel other perspectives. (Example Jason did not seek to understand the perspective of the Japanese women or the section chief, but rather judged and reacted to the situation based on his own set of values.)

Tolerance for Ambiguity — Perhaps the most important competency for education abroad students today is to have the ability to be in an unscripted or ambiguous situation and not become overly anxious, but instead patiently determine what is appropriate given the context. Students with a low tolerance for ambiguity tend to seek information that supports their own beliefs. (Example: Jason's reaction reinforced his belief that women are not treated equally within the Japanese workplace.)

As we take steps toward articulating the basic intercultural competencies we want our students to develop through education abroad, we must also determine how our programs support students in developing these competencies. Then, to revise the question above, how can an education abroad experience be enhanced to enable students to more actively learn about culture, focusing not just on the host culture, but also on themselves and their interactions with and within the new culture? How can they become more fully present to each experience or rather, more mindful of how their values and ways of thinking and believing impact his interpretations of experiences? How can education abroad support students in developing deeper and more accurate interpretations of new experiences, and to reflect on each experience so that it better serves their intercultural learning? These questions are not new for education abroad. As the field matures and student enrollment increases, our approach to answering these questions is more critical than ever before.

Examples of Ethnographic Inquiry in Education Abroad

Ethnography has a long history within the field of cultural anthropology, beginning with the early fieldwork of such notable scholars as Margaret Mead, Bronislaw Malinoski, and Clifford Geertz. As a qualitative research method, ethnography seeks to describe and to understand another way of life from the native point of view. The goal of ethnography, as Malinowski put it, is "to grasp the native's point of view, his relation to life, to realize his vision of his world" (1922). According to James Spradley, "ethnography offers us the chance to step outside of our narrow cultural backgrounds, to set aside our socially inherited ethnocentrism, if only for a brief period, and to apprehend the world from the viewpoint of other human beings who live by different meaning systems" (1979, 1980).

The central aim of ethnography is to discover the cultural knowledge people are using to organize their behavior and interpret their experience. In other words, ethnography is concerned with the meaning of actions and events to the people we seek to understand. Rather than manipulate variables or proceed from a research hypothesis, both questions and answers must be discovered in the social setting being studied. The key element of ethnography is extended, systematic, and detailed observation of a setting. As such, ethnographic field work characteristically involves living among the members of the culture being studied in order to obtain a more complete view of that culture. Though used in varying degrees, fieldwork includes observation, interviewing informants, note-taking, making maps, collecting life histories, analyzing folklore, charting kinship, keeping a diary, audio- and video taping, collection of relevant materials and documents, keeping a field journal, and taking photographs.

The method used is often participant observation, which involves interacting within a setting while simultaneously observing it. Spradley (1980) suggests that the participant-observer has two goals: to engage in activities appropriate to the situation and to observe the activities, people, and physical aspects of the situation. A major goal of participant observation is to discover the insider's understanding of things, or rather to gain an 'emic' perspective. The participant-observer seeks to understand the worldviews of those from whom they are learning, putting aside one's own predetermined classification systems and models. He/she must be mindful of his/her own input and cultural biases and how one's mere physical presence may impact the environment and interpretation of experiences.

An ethnography, or written analysis of the fieldwork, seeks to provide a description of what people do in a setting, the outcome of their interactions, and the way they understand what they are doing, the meaning the interactions have for them. 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 cultures are by definition perpetually transforming, the written ethnography is received as a snapshot or glimpse into the culture at the time of the fieldwork.

Though ethnographic fieldwork may be the hallmark of cultural anthropology, its principles and methodologies can and have been readily adapted to further support the goals of undergraduate education abroad. During the late 1970s, Earlham College began to rethink and redefine its international education efforts, by focusing on education abroad. Earlham sought to enhance the learning that takes place during an education abroad experience, to create components in their programs that would lead to deeper levels of cultural understanding. Their institutional response to this challenge was to integrate ethnographic field components based on participant observation and reflection into their education abroad programs, and to design a pre-departure orientation program that introduces the methods and issues of ethnographic exploration and inquiry (Jurasek, Lamson, & O'Maley, 1996). Fifteen years of field data collection eventually led Earlham to conclude that ethnographic learning leads students to an enriched language experience, greater insight into the complexity of cultures and societies, more involvement and investment in the cultural learning process, meaningful interaction with members of other cultures, and increased flexibility of thought, reflection, and self reflection (Jurasek, Lamson, & O'Maley, 1996). Earlham's pioneering approach in utilizing ethnographic methods as a cultural learning and teaching tool during education abroad significantly changed the curricular shape and substance of their programming.

The Tokyo Center of the Institute for the International Education of Students (IES) illustrates a successful program-specific model for incorporating ethnographic methods into education abroad programming. The program offers a unique, three-credit seminar course called "Social Organization of Japan," which places students in Japanese organizations where they work as participant-observers for one day each week.[1] In the seminar, students learn basic skills of ethnographic inquiry, how to describe interactions within a social setting and the outcome of these interactions, and how to discover the meanings these interactions have for the people in the organizations where they work. The six goals of the program emphasize how ethnographic principals guide the seminar and implementation of the program.

1) To encourage students to collectively share and reflect on field placement experiences as a basis for developing a greater understanding of Japanese social organization through a facilitated seminar format.

2) To develop a basic understanding of the fundamental concepts of Japanese social organization and to explore various theoretical approaches applied in the anthropological research of Japan.

3) To develop basic skills of ethnographic inquiry through conducting weekly participant observation, journal writing, and analytical writing.

4) To learn through weekly field research how to describe interactions within a social setting, the outcome of these interactions and how the people under study understand what they are doing, and the meaning the interactions have for them.

5) To develop a greater understanding of one's self and home culture so as to become more aware of ethnocentric tendencies. In this aim, to become more interculturally competent.

6) To encourage students to be more patient, objective, and introspective cultural explorers, developing a kind of empathic understanding of Japanese culture that could not be attained in the classroom. (Source: internal publication, IES Tokyo Center, with permission)

Over the course of the semester, each student compiles a portfolio that serves as a framework to organize, reflect, assess, document, and link course content with individual field placement experiences. Among other documents, students produce a topic-oriented ethnography and a "Culture Learning Journal." The Journal is designed to capture a process of culture learning organized around experience and reflection. Each journal entry consists of two parts, with Part I submitted to the course professor for comments on the themes students seem to be exploring and suggestions for additional approaches concerning data collection and interpretation. The structure of the Culture Learning Journal is as follows:

Part I

1. Record an interesting, puzzling, irritating, or otherwise significant occurrence at your field placement. Keep in mind that you are doing more than merely recording events, but are engaging in a form of ethnographic research that will ultimately open a channel for more systematic engagement with Japanese culture.

2. As a participant observer engaged in ethnographic research, record initial analyses of cultural meanings, interpretations and insights into the culture studied. You are encouraged to analyze the experience in terms of your current level of understanding Japanese social organization and offer interpretations for the cultural forces shaping those events. What cultural assumptions are people in your field placement using to organize their behavior and interpret their experience? What meanings do the interactions have for them?

Part II

Re-examine the experience at least two weeks later and/or after you've received feedback from the course instructor. Has your interpretation changed? Record the changes. What helped you to learn more about the experience? This second reflection allows you to move from focusing on particular events towards reviewing your reasons for thinking, feeling, and believing in responses to significant new experiences. This process will also allow you to take into account the personal biases and feelings that filter your understanding of Japanese social organization. You are strongly encouraged to use outside sources when completing Part II, which may include library research and course readings, post-experiences, ethnographic interviews, cultural informants, etc. (Source: internal publication, IES Tokyo Center, with permission)

Based in Mérida, México, the Open School of Ethnography & Anthropology (OSEA) has designed an intensive, education abroad program for undergraduate students that focuses exclusively on training students in the anthropological research methods of ethnography. Students live with families in the Maya community of Pisté where they conduct ethnographic research.[2] The program combines classroom teaching of basic anthropological concepts, approaches, linguistic and cultural tools, substantive knowledge of the cultural setting (Maya communities of Yucatán, México), and ethnographic methods with independent, but closely supervised, ethnographic fieldwork. The OSEA program combines four types of learning: 1) seminars provide traditional classroom learning; 2) field study excursions provide on-site experiential learning; 3) independent research provides field experience and interactive learning; and 4) cultural and linguistic immersion based in research and homestay living facilitates personal and professional growth. The

combination of these types of learning experiences makes the OSEA program one of the few ethnography field schools in anthropology for undergraduate education abroad.

Field-based learning is the cornerstone of SIT Study Abroad.[3] In both semester and summer programs, students integrate classroom study with field and research experience, creating synergies that enrich both their time abroad and their future studies. In addition to formally structured coursework, students undertake a month-long Independent Study Project. Before students begin their projects, however, SIT prepares them to learn effectively in the field and excel in independent research by training them in observational, interviewing, and data-analysis techniques. Students learn cross-cultural adaptation and skills building; project selection and refinement; appropriate methodologies; field study ethics; developing contacts and finding resources; gathering, organizing and communicating data; and maintaining a work journal. Students are taught to be aware of the effect of informants' biases-and their own-on the design of field study projects and the interpretation of data. Each student selects a project advisor and works closely with this person and other key contacts before and during the independent study period. The culmination of the project is typically a 20- to 40-page paper that students present to colleagues, the academic directors, and, often, their advisors and other interested host-country individuals. For many students, the International Study Project marks the beginning of an academic journey that affects their career choices and alters the way they interact with the world.

As the Earlham, OSEA, IES Tokyo, and SIT examples show, ethnographic research methods can be fundamental to an institutional philosophy, a central focus of an education abroad program, integrated within an academic program, or employed to better enable students to meet their academic and intercultural learning goals while abroad. The ethnographic procedures and goals summarized above can be adapted to match the needs, interests and capabilities of nearly all undergraduate students and fit the structural realities of almost all program types, irrespective of location or duration. To be clear, it is not the assumption of this article that education abroad students can and should become apprentice ethnographers engaged in carrying out significant fieldwork. Rather, ethnography at its most fundamental level of inquiry can be reframed as the learning core or paradigm through which the field of education abroad will be better positioned to guide students toward becoming autonomous cultural learners and explorers who can describe, understand, analyze, appreciate, and enjoy intercultural differences.

Ethnography as the Learning Core of Education Abroad

Ethnographic inquiry is about cultural discovery. Ethnographers learn through systematic observation in the field how to carefully record what they see and hear, as well as how things are done, while learning the meanings that people attribute to what they make and do (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999). The ethnographer observes what people actually do and the reasons they give for doing it before assigning interpretations drawn from personal experience or professional or academic disciplines. The ethnographer must be mindful that one's presence and interactions in the field, further complicated by personal preconceptions and cultural background, may bias results and lead to inaccurate interpretations. At its finest, ethnography generates explanations of how people think, believe and behave and it is through ethnography that theories of culture are built.

While ethnography is more of a cognitive, descriptive process for learning about culture, interculturalists advocate that achieving intercultural competence minimizes, though not completely, the need to be knowledgeable about any one culture in particular. Instead, the learner has to become more aware of how his/her own values, assumptions and beliefs are understood in relation to other cultures, or to be ethnorelative. Becoming interculturally competent is as much learning about "the self" as it is learning about "the other." As the learner observes and questions "the other," he/she begins the process of unlearning, or unpacking his/her own self knowledge and culture (Richard, 2001). Unlike the ethnographer, the sojourner into another culture must learn how to assimilate into the new culture, adding to his/her repertoire of experience and behavior. Eventually, the sojourner learns how to style-switch behaviors and responses as the cultural context deems appropriate. After many years of cultural immersion the learner may internalize the new behaviors, becoming bi-cultural, completely fluent in the host language and at ease in the new cultural system.

Unlike the ethnographer engaged in serious research but not necessarily transformed by it, or the sojourner learning how to assimilate into a new culture, the education abroad student is present in the new culture for a predetermined period of time, is often not fluent in the host language, and is engaged in a structured program that may minimize cultural contact. The typical education abroad student, however, is eager to learn as much about the new culture as possible, to obtain a level of functional day-to-day competence, and to learn the native language. At this time in their lives, students are more interested in acquiring new knowledge, gaining practical career experience, personal growth, and having an experience of a lifetime.

Education abroad students trying to live and study in cultures other than their own are challenged constantly to understand and cope successfully with difference. Each new experience presents opportunities for learning yet also runs the risk of defaulting to interpretation through stereotyping. When students are met with too much complexity without interpretive skills, they may attempt to negotiate complex meanings by falling back on superficial or stereotypical interpretations, dismissing or demeaning the "other" as irrelevant or insignificant, or deferring to authorities who tell them what to think (Jurasek, 1995). When students are challenged beyond their comfort zones but are not panicked, the results can be transformative. In an overly-challenging situation, students may retreat to the foreign student bubble and close themselves off to future encounters with cultural difference (Citron, 2001). The student is then closed to the impact that the environment might have on him/her and thus, would have a "mis-educative experience."

Ethnographic inquiry can help inoculate students against monocultural defense mechanisms by raising issues of cultural difference and appreciation. Ethnography can help students develop tools to learn about culture, to make careful observations and to generate less biased, more accurate interpretations of the culture. When students are taught to interact with a new culture in the attempt to learn about the new culture, they learn in a reflexive way about their own core values, assumptions, and beliefs. In this way, students gradually develop cross-cultural empathy as they begin to recognize what things might look like from the viewpoint of members of another culture. Slowly moving toward the insider's perspective, the student develops the ability to deal more intelligently and sensitively with complex cultural issues. Students are therefore more open to receiving new information and less likely to leap to judgmental or stereotypical inferences. Through an ethnographic learning paradigm, students become mindful of acceptable behavior and ways of interaction. At this point, students can choose to recognize this cognitively or adapt to newly-expanded behavioral repertoires. It is this ability to navigate successfully unscripted situations and to alter behavior and thinking when necessary that makes intercultural competency possible.

Reconsider these comments in regard to Gundykunst's five intercultural competencies — mindfulness, cognitive flexibility, behavioral flexibility, cross-cultural empathy, and tolerance for ambiguity. Through an ethnographic learning paradigm, students learn to be mindful of how their mere physical presence and communication style impacts their observations and interactions with the host culture and how not doing so can potentially lead to inaccurate interpretations. An education abroad student, who is not taught to observe himself during each

interaction, or to have a meta-level awareness of interactions, may be oblivious of other's reactions to him/her. Similarly, ethnographic interviewing and informal conversations promote the development of cognitive flexibility by encouraging students to be open to new information and being aware of multiple perspectives. Students learn to set aside their own views and to consider the viewpoint of others who live by different meaning systems. Rather than sort new experiences and information into existing categories of understanding, thereby reinforcing preexisting stereotypes, students create new categories of understanding.

Through participant-observation students interact within a setting while simultaneously observing it. By becoming more sensitive to the importance of adapting and accommodating one's behavior to what is acceptable to people from other groups, students develop behavioral flexibility. In effect, students become skilled at modifying their behavior so as to participate appropriately in different cultural contexts. As students are taught to interact with a new culture in the attempt to learn about the new culture, they gradually develop cross-cultural empathy by beginning to recognize what things might look like from the viewpoint of those from whom they are learning.

Perhaps the most challenging intercultural competency for education abroad students to develop is tolerance for ambiguity. The central aim of ethnography is to discover the cultural knowledge people are using to organize their behavior and interpret their experience, and therefore an ethnographer must learn to be open to ambiguous situations and approach each by patiently determining what is appropriate given the context. As students become familiar with ethnographic learning they become more resilient and open to ambiguous situations, and are thus less likely to retreat to the perceived safety of the "American bubble."

Education abroad involves helping students change structures, learn new ways of thinking, and become more complex, interculturally-competent individuals. Ethnographic inquiry offers the field of education abroad a learning paradigm in which we can achieve this by engaging students in serious cultural and intercultural learning. Because ethnography is at its most basic a culture learning approach, it can be integrated within all forms of education abroad programming, regardless of program type, location or duration.

Integrating Ethnographic Inquiry into Education Abroad Programming

The utilization of ethnographic inquiry can be integrated into all aspects of education abroad programming, from what topics are covered in an on-going orientation and how academic and language programs are developed and

implemented to how student services and accommodation are arranged and facilitated. To do so effectively will require that international education professionals understand the basic concepts of ethnography and be encouraged to consider new ways of incorporating ethnographic inquiry into aspects of existing programming. Although the essentials of ethnographic research methods have long been established, effectively integrating ethnography within education abroad may require that training and educational programs be designed and readily employed.

Training initiatives in this respect will require education abroad professionals, both faculty and program staff, to review and reshape the central goals of their courses and programming. If education abroad were an academic course, it would be natural to review periodically and adjust the course description, its requirements, outline and so on. In the same way, training should draw attention to the importance of demonstrating to faculty and program staff the need to explore ways to integrate the basic ideas of ethnographic inquiry into existing courses and programming. Presenting best practices, case studies, and student work would be productive ways of articulating the benefits and expected outcomes of an ethnographic learning approach.

Delivering an academic course within the context of an international education program is simply not the same as doing so domestically. It requires familiarity with the host culture and willingness on the part of the professor to incorporate aspects of the host culture and student experiences into classroom discussions. Within education abroad, the role of the professor can become that of an intellectual and cultural guide engaging students with new knowledge and cultural experiences and then helping them make sense of it through theoretical constructs that advance more insightful scholarship. Perhaps best facilitated by the program director, faculty should be encouraged to explore an expanded role within the education abroad context and be shown how to integrate ethnographic learning into the academic experience. As will be explained in the next section, engaging students in field study opportunities, primary research initiatives, and analytical writing exercises are just some ways that the faculty member can be instrumental in guiding students in observational, interviewing, and data-analysis techniques.

On both the home campus and abroad, program staff are instrumental in establishing an environment for ethnographic learning. Through ongoing orientation, student services and accommodation, program staff work closely with students throughout all phases of the education abroad learning process. And because of this, providing training to program staff for integrating ethnographic

inquiry in education abroad is as critical to them as it is for the faculty. Program staff may likely perceive this as a request for additional programming rather than as an approach through which all education abroad programming can be enriched. It is critical that such training demonstrate in what ways integrating ethnographic learning can impact education abroad programming, how it is conceived, developed and implemented. Suggestions for how ethnographic inquiry can be utilized by program staff to enrich ongoing orientation, student services and accommodation will be offered in the following sections.

Through formal ethnographic training like the SIT field study seminar or through an academic course like that offered at IES Tokyo, students can be trained in the basic ideas of ethnographic learning. However, this is not to imply that education abroad students can or should become apprentice ethnographers engaged in carrying out significant fieldwork. Rather, students can be exposed to the basic ideas of ethnographic inquiry and through subsequent academic course work and education abroad programming be guided in exploring and ultimately adapting to this cultural learning approach. Because ethnographic learning can be daunting for students, at least initially, with adequate preparation and support, even the most reticent student can develop the confidence and skills needed to explore unfamiliar environments. In doing so, students will inevitably become better able to describe, understand, analyze, and appreciate their intercultural experiences.

What follows is a brief description of the major components of most education abroad programs and how ethnographic inquiry can be utilized to enrich the potential learning outcomes of each.

Academic Program

Learning in and about a different system of higher education can be a puzzling and frustrating experience. Students struggle with navigating the local academic system and university culture, understanding professor expectations, and grappling with a different degree of accessibility to learning resources and technology. Although exposure to different educational systems can be enlightening and worthwhile, students regularly complain, often denigrating the local system and devaluing the usefulness of their courses and effectiveness of their professors. The field of education abroad has often responded to such student feedback by striving harder to meet expectations, as a failure to do so could tarnish a program's reputation, and result in decreased enrollment. This response often takes the form of hiring American faculty on site, restructuring grading systems to place a greater value o class participation or to award only

partial credit to a course, customizing programs for US students only, or intensifying the dependent learning approach to teaching that is so characteristic of US higher education today.

Offering an overview of the local educational system during orientation can certainly go a long way in helping students to appreciate more fully the educational pedagogy and philosophy within the academic program. Additional topics might include classroom format and style, the approach to discussion and interaction with the professor, the degree to which feedback is given, and independent versus dependent learning. Increasingly, orientation programs have allotted time to administer a learning style inventory as a way of generating a discussion about individual academic needs and expectations and to segue into a culture-specific discussion of different teaching styles and approaches.

Through ethnographic inquiry students can be taught to recognize academic or formal learning as a vehicle to learn more about their new society — its language, history, politics, and culture. In a sense, the academic program can be reframed as a means through which students can take the new culture and society as a subject of serious study and to explore other ways of knowing. Requiring students to engage in primary research to support secondary resources when completing course papers and assignments is one way of doing this. For example, a student taking a course on the contemporary politics and society of Ireland could be required to conduct an interview with a local politician. A student taking a regional economics course might visit two local businesses, a corporation and a non-profit, for example. The faculty role then is expanded beyond that of being the resident scholar of a specific discipline, to assume nuances of a cultural guide, helping students conduct their research and introducing theoretical constructs that can advance more insightful scholarship.

Analytical writing and course-related field study are other areas in which ethnographic inquiry can be utilized to enhance intellectual and cultural learning. Through field study, students are given exposure to real-life extensions of what is being discussed in the classroom. Courses can integrate field study excursions to institutions associated with class topics, such as visits to businesses, museums, theatres, and community centers. Assigning reflection papers based on the field study experience and other forms of analytical writing can further enhance students understanding of the subject matter and their connection to it. T. Magistrale and K. Wagner (1997) expand on the importance of analytical writing during the study abroad process in their groundbreaking book, Writing Across Culture: An Introduction to Study Abroad and the Writing Process. The authors emphasize the need for

continual improvement of writing skills and advocate that writing is not just a tool for displaying knowledge but also for acquiring knowledge (Wagner & Magistrale, 1997). By writing about day-to-day observations, students can deepen their understanding of the underlying cultural system that gives sense to those events. Because writing involves cognitive processes more rigorous than are common in conversation, students can use analytical writing to push past the limits of their current understanding to grasp new insights, and transcend the discomforts of cultural learning and culture shock (Wagner & Magistrale, 1997). Writing therefore becomes a mode to learning culture and personal discovery.

Language Program

Effortless communication within a new culture will require far more than a high level of linguistic proficiency in the local language. Because effective intercultural communication is more complex than just having an exchange of words, education abroad participants, regardless of destination, must become more in tune with how language is used in the new culture and should be able to identify barriers to effective communication. This will involve understanding that communication contains both verbal and non-verbal elements, including listening and silence. Communicating across cultures requires one to develop or refine skill areas that will promote effective communication, such as understanding how pace, stress, and vocabulary are used to convey implicit meaning. Focusing on language use and communication are important research themes within cultural anthropology. In a similar fashion, students who are learning a new language should also focus on how the language is constructed and how meaning is conveyed within the new culture.

Within the United States, language instruction primarily emphasizes linguistic competence. Students learn sentence and discourse structures, vocabulary, pronunciation and patterns of speech. In education abroad, however, programs can be designed to introduce students to the host language at the different levels necessary to communicate effectively with native speakers. In addition to linguistic competence, students can be taught sociolinguistic and socio-cultural competence. Sociolinguistic competence involves using the language according to local communication norms, such as knowing what is polite in context, typical first-contact topics, and strategies for handling expression and comprehension problems. Socio-cultural competence requires learners to know how to present themselves as members of the local society, to show knowledge of the local culture such as cycles of daily life, entertainment patterns, and hierarchies in the fam-

ily and work domains. Going beyond linguistic-focused instruction to include the sociolinguistic and socio-cultural learning potential that education abroad presents can lead students to achieving greater communicative competence and a heightened awareness of the layers of culture.

The arrival orientation can be the best time to begin the discussion of how language is used within the host culture and to foster an environment in which students begin to understand that language use is also key to understanding the culture.

Ongoing Orientation

When preparing to study abroad, students anticipate that by living in a new country and culture they will encounter different ways of thinking and living and that the experience will require of them significant changes in their lifestyle. Orientation presents a forum in which to explore these expectations and to prepare students in ways that will ultimately maximize their overall education abroad experience. Orientation programs are generally designed to provide an overview of the academic program, housing options, regional geography and transportation systems, health services, safety measures, and general issues on getting started and living in the new country. Multi-phase, ongoing orientation programs are more holistically designed to support students over the course of the study abroad experience. As students encounter different challenges and related needs at varying stages of their intercultural adjustment, ongoing orientation can help students navigate difficult situations more successfully and to process experiences in ways that will lead to deeper and more meaningful intercultural learning.

Perhaps best designed as an intercultural training, as opposed to a series of lectures highlighting the "do's and don'ts" of international travel, orientation at its finest launches students on a developmental learning trajectory that has students practicing early on to distinguish what they see from what they think and feel. Students need to become more aware of how their own ethnocentric tendencies, values and culturally-laden ways of thinking influence how they perceive, interpret and react to events. Ongoing orientation can integrate activities that engage students in this kind of self-learning through culture-specific role-playing, cultural adjustment simulations (e.g. Barnga, Bafa Bafa, Playeros & Wizardos etc.), critical incidents, and self-awareness inventories (e.g., Kolb's Learning Style Inventory, Cross-Cultural Adaptability Inventory, etc.).

Orientation should also engage students early on in activities that enable them to become more patient, objective and introspective cultural explorers. At Earlham College, students are asked to generate mini-ethnographies that are shared in pre-departure orientation sessions (Jurasek, 1995). In order to

make students more aware of cultural frames of reference, students are asked to observe and describe the patterns of behavior typical for a familiar microculture, such as the campus snack bar or dormitory. Through facilitation and guidance, students come to realize that shared attitudes and expectations inform social behavior and that members of a culture share an implicit understanding of these expectations. Moreover, such assignments can help students refine their powers of observation and description and when done in small groups, to begin to recognize their own natural tendencies to compare, contrast and judge things in terms of their own worldviews.

Orientation also provides an excellent opportunity to encourage students to begin reflecting on and questioning their culturally-based ideas and definitions of multicultural diversity. Students will encounter a significant range of attitudes regarding diversity and need to understand that these cultural differences may influence how others perceive and interact with them. Cultural anthropologists engaged in ethnographic research are similarly concerned with how the mere physical presence of a cultural outsider can impact the environment in which they are studying, and therefore, the authenticity of their interpretations. This heightened awareness of self can naturally lead students to reflect on their own self-identities and their appreciation of cultural diversity. In Pathways to Cultural Awareness, George and Louise Spindler state that an anthropologist must reflect on his/her own culture in order to understand cultural diversity (Spindler & Spindler, 1994). Similarly, a student needs to become more aware of the periodic dissonance between his/her enduring-self, or how one was socialized culturally, and his/her situated-self, or identity as manifested in context (Spindler & Spindler, 1994; Davidson, 1994). In doing so, the student becomes more conscious of how he/she is expected to maneuver within the culture and the impact that not doing so may have on their role as learner and participant-observer.

With the integration of ethnographic inquiry, orientation can be enhanced to help students learn something more about their own cultural assumptions, become more informed on the workings of culture, and improve their powers of observation and unbiased description. When effective and ongoing, orientation can move students further along the developmental learning trajectory toward becoming more patient, objective and introspective cultural explorers.

Student Services

The learning that takes place outside of the classroom can be among the most rewarding and empowering experiences that a student will have during

an education abroad experience. Student services and extracurricular activities can be designed to further assist students in adapting to and exploring aspects of the host culture that they may not be willing or able to do on their own, interacting with persons of different backgrounds, and gaining a better understanding and acceptance of their own values and capacities. Student service activities can be enhanced by incorporating ethnographic principals, particularly with regard to nurturing student interaction and when facilitating volunteer and community service.

Engagement within the local community presents students with opportunities to interact with people they might not otherwise meet on a daily basis, or the "hidden populations" within mainstream society. Such activities can offer students exposure to a range of groups such as the elderly, disabled, homeless, or minority sub-cultures. Rather than focusing on social change and activism, the emphasis here is better placed on engaging students in learning from these people, to be taught by them, so as to develop a more holistic, subjective understanding of the host culture. By presenting students opportunities to seek relationships outside of the foreign student population, community engagement can work against the natural formation of the "American Ghetto" or "American Flock" so often seen in education abroad.

The value placed upon friendship and interpersonal relationships varies across cultures. Short-term, casual acquaintances may be less common and what may appear to be a casual outing to an American student, could imply the beginning of a romantic relationship to a person of another culture. Student services can support students in recognizing acceptable patterns of socialization and interpersonal relationship building within a host culture. Oblivious to these cultural differences, students may find themselves trapped in their American bubble, unmotivated or unable to develop meaningful friendships with local students. In his pioneering work, Public and Private Self in Japan and the United States, Dean Barnlund examined the interactions and patterns of communication among Japanese and US American university students (Barnlund, 1975). His research highlighted how the choice of topics and subject areas influenced the interactions between the two cultures, emphasizing what may be appropriate in one culture may be intrusive and proscribed for the other. By understanding friendship norms and acceptable patterns of socialization, students develop culturally appropriate strategies for developing meaningful relationships within the host culture. In doing so, students become more aware of their own values and develop an appreciation for interpersonal relationships.

Student Accommodation

To integrate ethnographic inquiry into education abroad housing would require a shift in how accommodation is viewed by both students and those that coordinate and facilitate it. All too often student accommodation is understood as that has only a trivial impact on the overall educational abroad experience. As such, students are frequently permitted to choose housing based on location, cost, convenience and, more frequently these days, on the availability of amenities, such as wireless internet, cable, and telephone. Programs that offer the opportunity to live with local families also give students ample choice, frequently asking their preferences on the desired family size, the presence of pets and children, and whether the household is a smoking one or not. The intent here is to ensure a successful match between student and family so as to minimize problems over the course of the program. Unfortunately, the prioritization given to such logistical and practical arrangements tend to overshadow the fundamental learning potential of student accommodation.

Few would disagree that through active reflection and experimentation the learning that takes place in housing assignments can be the key to understanding 'real life' societal norms, values, and expectations. Education abroad programs can be instrumental in supporting students throughout this learning process by providing follow-up housing orientation and opportunities which encourage active processing and interpretation of their housing-related experiences. If offered approximately two weeks after students enter their housing placements, a follow-up housing workshop can provide students with the opportunity to discuss in a large group setting their first experiences with housing and to ask lingering questions about living with local families or interacting with local students in dormitories. Discussions may include issues relating to family life, communication styles, intercultural conflict resolution, private/public issues, and developing relationships with family members and within the community. Students with homestay placements can, in particular, benefit from activities designed to promote significant dialogue between the student and family. For example, the student and family could each draw floor plans of their homes and then talk about the use of space across cultures. Similarly, each could draw and present their family trees toward the goal of understanding generational family structures. Over time, more complex activities could engage the students and their host families in discussions of parenting, relationships, communication styles, cultural value differences, race and gender relations, and conflict resolution.

With the integration of ethnographic inquiry, students can be taught to view their accommodation as a subject of cultural study, requiring them to

assume the ethnographic role of participant-observer attempting to gain an insider's view into the host culture. Students would then be able to realize the learning potential of their housing placements more fully and become more willing to test out new behaviors and attitudes. Additionally, students can be taught to use their hosts as cultural informants, seeking their insider's knowledge of the culture and checking in with them as an ethnographer might do when testing interpretations through respondent checks.

Summary and Conclusion

As the field of education abroad positions itself for dramatic enrollment growth, it is important to consider in what directions it should develop. Liability concerns, heightened consumer expectations, and mounting logistical and administrative burdens are already impacting the very nature of education abroad from how programs are structured to the fundamental education students receive. During this time of rapid growth and change, it is important to know more than what learning outcomes result from participation in education abroad, to understand what it is we truly want students to learn through this experience and how we can effectively support them in achieving it.

Living and learning alongside people in other cultures in an attempt to understand a culture is at the very core of cultural anthropology. Ethnographers seek to understand and describe culture, and so too can students. In the course of an education abroad experience, students can be taught basic skills of ethnographic inquiry as a learning paradigm through which they can take all aspects of their new culture as subject of serious study. This kind of inquiry can lead students beyond simply becoming more knowledgeable about a particular culture, to becoming more insightful, patient and introspective cultural explorers. When students are shown how to be empathetic to the perspectives of the insider, they become more sensitive to complex cultural issues. Gradually students move away from making quick judgments or stereotypical inferences based on their own understanding of what is good and right in a culture toward understanding that cultures are relative to one another, each with a different set of values, assumptions and beliefs. As students become more competent, they will be more likely to respond to uncertain or ambiguous situations as an opportunity for cultural exploration rather than to retreat from or to dismiss the learning situation altogether. Through the ethnographic paradigm, students learn advanced tools for cultural learning and exploration and, with time and experience, they become better observers who are aware of their own culture and respectful of other cultural systems.

Ethnographic inquiry offers the field of education abroad a learning paradigm that is readily adaptable and appropriate. As this article has shown, we can enhance student learning by integrating ethnographic perspectives into existing program components without requiring a significant structural overhaul in the process. For example, the faculty role can be reframed as an intellectual and intercultural guide to better enable students to take the culture as focus of serious academic study. The language program can be reframed to include sociolinguistics and socio-cultural aspects of the language to enable students to be more effective in communicating across cultures. Orientation presents the opportunity to introduce students to conceptual frameworks for understanding culture, the principles of ethnographic inquiry, and to initiate a discussion of cultural identity development. Student accommodation can be reframed into a core cultural learning opportunity rather than being a supplemental, often disregarded component of education abroad. Finally, engaging students in contact situations outside of the mainstream culture through student services will promote a deeper and perhaps more meaningful connection to the culture. All in all, ethnography at its most fundamental level of inquiry offers the field of education abroad a learning paradigm that has the potential to engage students in profound cultural and intercultural learning.

Notes

[1]The author was the director for the IES Tokyo Center from 1998-2003, during which time he developed and taught the seminar course AN392, as explained. More information about IES and its Tokyo program can be found at, http://www.iesabroad.org.

[2]For more information on the Open School of Ethnography & Anthropology (OSEA), please see http://www.osea-cite.org/

[3]For more information on SIT Study Abroad, please see http://www.sit.edu/studyabroad/index.html.

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