Learning from a small state's experience: Acknowledging the importance of context in implementing learner-centred pedagogy

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The challenges of implementing learner-centred pedagogies have been well documented, noting that many reform efforts fail to consider important contextual factors. With attention to the disparity between policy and practice, this study investigated the conditions under which teachers can enact learner-centred pedagogy in the Maldives using design-based research; a theoretically oriented, participatory methodology exploring practical solutions in real-world settings. Working collaboratively with teachers from an island school, a pedagogical intervention based on learner-centred principles, was designed to fit the Maldivian context. This article discusses the process of implementing the intervention, the challenges influencing its use, and the particular contextual factors impacting on learner-centred reform. Analyses of the research data and the reflection on the research process, highlight the importance of addressing the particularities of small states in the development of educational interventions and reinforces the need for close attention to contextual factors within reform efforts.

Keywords: design-based research; participatory research; learner-centred pedagogy; implementation; context; education reform

INTRODUCTION

Living on a tropical island in the Maldives, known for its beautiful beaches and luxury resorts, would likely conjure up images of paradise. Yet island living, whilst appealing to tourists, poses particular challenges for Maldivian island communities. Isolation, insularity, and access to services are challenges faced by island populations (Royle, 2010). Small islands have few benefits except perhaps exclusivity—which becomes a commodity in its appeal to tourists (Royle, 2001). In the Maldives, there is a dramatic contrast between life on the resort islands and local fishing islands. This paper highlights my experience of living on a local fishing island and working within a school community as part of a doctoral research project on educational reform in the Maldives.

The seeds for this research project were sown during an earlier period of work in the capital, Malé, as part of a post-tsunami aid project. I worked with local educators to support pedagogical reform in local schools. The reform efforts and related challenges shaped this research project that sought to investigate how teachers learn and enact active learning in the Maldivian education system. I used design-based research (DBR), which is a theoretically oriented, participatory methodology that explores practical solutions in real world settings, and immersed myself in the

field for eight months. During this time I lived on a local island working collaboratively with teachers in the school on the design and use of a pedagogical intervention. I came to know intimately the context in which the teachers worked, and I experienced the circumstances of living on a small island and working within the Maldivian education system.

This paper draws on critical accounts of my day-to-day experiences on the island, with attention to the interplay between pedagogical reform and island life. First I provide an outline of the context—the naturalistic setting being central to DBR where understanding "the messiness of real world practice" is critical to the study (O'Toole & Beckett, 2009, p. 72)—before presenting an overview of the overarching DBR methodology. I then explore the factors I encountered that impacted on the process of pedagogical reform within the Maldives education system during the process of living on the island and working in the school. I conclude with a reflective analysis of my experiences and a discussion around the characteristics of small island states.

My experiences offer unique perspectives and insights into on-the-ground complexities that influence learner-centred reform within the Maldivian education system and other contexts where tensions between reforms at the national level and implementation at the school level are evident. In particular I explore the particularities of small states and how these characteristics influence the process of implementing the pedagogical intervention. The importance of sensitivity to context during reform is central to this study and is a key theme throughout this paper.

LEARNER-CENTRED PEDAGOGIES

I discuss "learner-centred education" (LCE) in this paper but recognise there are a variety of similar terms used in the literature: active learning; student-centred learning; child-centred learning; and learner-centred pedagogy. In this paper, I use the term "active learning" in recognition of its use in Maldivian schools. Discussions of the process of pedagogical reform are often polarised as teacher-transmission versus student-centred pedagogies (Ginsburg, 2010). This dichotomy presents an oversimplification of a complex process and is unhelpful in the reform process, as both approaches are needed at different times in the teaching and learning process (O'Sullivan, 2004; Schweisfurth, 2011). Schweisfurth (2011), elaborating on the notion of "learning-centred" proposed by O'Sullivan (2004), suggests this focus helps take us beyond the crude binary of simply contrasting teacher-centred and student-centred pedagogies.

Both LCE and active learning are based on constructivist approaches to education in which the learner has an active role in the learning process. Some key aspects of LCE are that knowledge is a mentally active process which builds on prior knowledge and experience (Chisholm & Leyendecker, 2008). The emphasis is on helping students to develop conceptual understanding and critical thinking skills rather than rote learning and passively receiving information transmitted by the teacher.

THE MALDIVES: A SMALL ISLAND DEVELOPING STATE

The Maldives is an archipelago of 1190 coral islands located in the Indian Ocean. It is a highly dispersed country with a population of approximately 350,000 living on 197 inhabited local islands spanning 800 kilometres in length. Malé is one of the most densely populated capital cities in the world with a third of the country's population living within two square kilometres. In contrast, 72 inhabited islands have populations of less than 1000. Despite the geographical diversity the Maldivian people are connected through bonds of language and religion (Mohamed,

2013). The national language is Dhivehi and the official religion is Islam, which plays a central role in family life.

A key contextual feature of the Maldives is that it is a nation of islands. Royle (2001) distinguishes two features of islands: isolation and boundedness. The islands are, paradoxically, both the appeal of the Maldives—especially for tourists—yet a constraint because of their insularity and access difficulties to resources and services (Royle, 2001). The appeal of tropical islands has driven the development of tourism in the Maldives, leading to strong economic growth over the past two decades. The Maldives transitioned from developing country status to a middle-income country in 2011 through this expansion in tourism. Yet, there are some significant economic challenges facing the country. The overdependence on tourism, which accounts for 30 percent of GDP, and an over reliance on imports for goods and services (50% of GDP) are major barriers for sustainable development (Sareer, 2013). Crossley (2010) contends that small states have an ecology of their own with distinctive priorities and dilemmas. Geographical remoteness, small populations and a narrow resource base make them particularly vulnerable to global forces. Yet, due to their size small states tend to be more outward looking, seeking innovative approaches beyond their own borders to help exploit the slender resources they do have (Bacchus, 2008).

Figure 1: Maldivian islands

Figure 2: Inhabited Maldivian island

Consequently, education systems have a major role in helping build human resource capacity in small states (Bacchus, 2008). However, small states face distinctive challenges in delivering education to a small number of students from a restricted institutional base, across a geographically dispersed region (Crossley, Bray, & Packer, 2011, p. 8). Essentially the need is to educate students to contribute to technologically advanced knowledge economies (Bacchus, 2008; Crossley, et al., 2011) so that small states can interact in the international arena. The need for educational innovations is seen as critical to the development of small states. Yet, as Crossley et al. (2011, p. 32) argue, it is not uncommon to see tension between curricular and pedagogic reform at the national level and implementation at the school level. They state that international agendas have often dominated educational policy formation at the expense of local input and appropriate sensitivity to contextual factors at national, provincial and school levels. Therefore care is needed to ensure that curriculum and pedagogic reforms are consistent with local cultural, contextual and professional realities when striving for successful implementation (Crossley et al., 2011, p. 31).

The Maldives education system is organised into four stages: pre-primary, primary, lower secondary and higher secondary. Primary education is based on a national curriculum while secondary education is subject to international examinations, as illustrated in Figure 1. Expansion

of educational services means access to schooling has improved, with the provision of at least a primary school in each inhabited island. Schools in the capital, Malé, and on the larger islands also offer higher secondary schooling. Many schools operate double sessions (morning and afternoon) due to a lack of classrooms. Of the 70,000 students, most attend government schools. The medium of instruction is English, which was adopted across the country in the late 1990s (Mohamed, 2013).
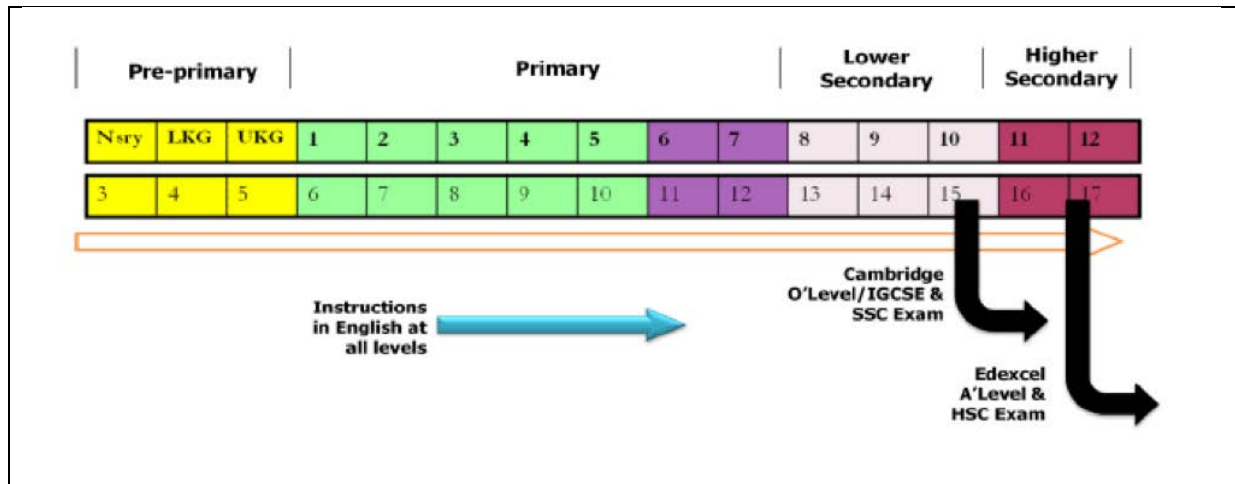

Figure 3: Organisation of the Maldivian Education System (Source: *Ministry of Education, Maldives 2010*)

As in other small states, the Maldivian education system faces particular challenges. A limited resource base, in terms of manpower, means there is a lack of trained teachers. This has resulted in a reliance on foreign workers, mostly expatriate teachers from other South Asian countries who generally teach in secondary schools. The particular geographical and demographic features of the Maldives poses further challenges for providing equitable education resources across the country. Services are heavily concentrated in the capital. Malé schools, therefore, have better teaching resources and higher numbers of trained teachers compared to island schools, which typically face a higher concentration of untrained teachers. The insularity of island living also means in-service training is provided to teachers in short, intensive blocks—often by visiting trainers—thereby limiting opportunities for ongoing in-school support.

With the expansion of schools across the country, universal primary enrolment was achieved by 2002. Focus has since shifted to improving the quality of education through a number of initiatives, including the Child Friendly Schools (CFS) project that promotes LCE and the new National Curriculum Framework (NCF). The CFS project began in 2002, addressing the needs of the most disadvantaged schools in the country. Implicit in CFS is the pedagogy of active learning, based on constructivist approaches to learning. Therefore, CFS has become a major driver of pedagogical reform in the country. Active learning principles are embedded in the new CFS Quality Schools Indicators, a quality assurance framework and the NCF, which is currently being piloted.

IMPLEMENTING LEARNER-CENTRED PEDAGOGIES

The experiences of implementing LCE have been well documented as a challenging process, particularly when teacher-centred pedagogy remains embedded practice. Government and

international development efforts may promote such reforms, yet practice at the classroom level remains largely unchanged. In a review of 72 LCE projects in developing countries, Schweisfurth (2011) writes "that implementation of LCE in different contexts is riddled with stories of failure grand and small" (p. 425). In her analysis of barriers associated with LCE reform Schweisfurth (2011; 2013) offers the following explanations: the nature of the reform and how it is implemented; limited material and human resources; interaction of divergent cultures; and questions of teacher power and agency. Other factors include: how students respond to the new pedagogy (Altinyelken, 2011; O'Sullivan, 2004); and the contradictory demands arising from within the system. With teachers having to complete content-intensive syllabi, the accountability arising from exam pressure may be a disincentive for using active learning methods (Casale, 2010; Chisholm & Leyendecker, 2008; Leu & Price-rom, 2006). Taking into consideration failures in implementation, Mohammed, and Harlech-Jones (2008) contend that the practical and professional realities of the teachers are often ignored and the focus is typically on a kind of utopianism, which leads to defective implementation.

Compounding these implementation issues are challenges around the professional development (PD) needed for teachers for such reform to take place. Hope is invested in various modes of training but these are often inadequate or inappropriate (Schweisfurth, 2011; Schwille, Dembele, & Schubert, 2007). Pedagogical renewal "is a challenging endeavour because it is inseparable from teacher professional development" (Dembele & Lefoka, 2007, p. 534). But not all forms of teacher development are equally effective (Schwille et al., 2007). The dominant form of the one-off workshop is unlikely to change teachers' behaviour (Schwille et al., 2007). In fact Schweisfurth (2012) notes that traditional teacher training methods are rarely effective in replacing the traditional teaching methods teachers have experienced as learners. This raises the necessity of exploring and challenging teachers' beliefs as part of any PD, because these beliefs act as a filter for learning new ideas and changing practice (Schwille et al., 2007). In particular teachers need to see, experience and try new teaching methods (Schwille et al., 2007). Teachers are also learners. Therefore, active learning methods need to be modelled by trainers so teachers can experience constructivist pedagogy and the message and the medium are consistent (Schweisfurth, 2011). What has been shown to work is sustained support in contrast to the one-off PD. Where success has been reported, teachers have been scaffolded to learn new practices within their capacities and circumstances (Schweisfurth, 2011, p. 428). This includes school-based support providing mentoring and guidance to teachers to trial new practices (Hardman, Abd-Kadir, & Smith, 2008). A further dimension is the need to start with teachers' current practices, taking into account the realities of the classroom and the environment in which teachers work (O'Sullivan, 2004; Schwille et al., 2007; Hardman et al., 2008).

The implementation of CFS in the Maldives has not been without issues. A UNICEF report (2010) identified a lack of coherency and consistency in the implementation of CFS. They found that CFS had been mostly organised around physical and organisational features. McNair (2009, p. 3) found that "no-one discussed the merits of CFS pedagogy for engaging children in all grades, in higher-level thinking, meta-cognition and stronger self-efficacy" and that physical classroom changes had been the most notable effect of the introduction of CFS. With the goal of providing better teacher education opportunities for teachers, UNICEF funded the building of Teacher Resource Centres, in each atoll. This was an attempt to provide more localised teacher education opportunities for island schools.

DESIGN-BASED RESEARCH: DESIGNING A PEDAGOGICAL INTERVENTION

The central question of this qualitative study is: how can teachers enact active learning pedagogy within the Maldivian education system? It was conceived using design-based research (DBR), which is an interventionist methodology. The essential feature of DBR is developing practical solutions to real-world problems. Therefore, interventions are implemented in authentic settings and the researcher often embraces various roles in the complex enterprise of DBR (McKenney & Reeves, 2012).

In DBR, the context is critical to the study and is richly delineated (O'Toole & Beckett, 2009, p. 72). Chisholm and Leyendecker (2008) call for more research on the gap between policy and practice and the conditions needed in different contexts for successful implementation of LCE. Acknowledging the call for better attention to context in reform efforts, DBR, with its attention to context and focus on real-world problems, provided an appropriate methodology for this study. Van den Akker (2002) advocates the use of DBR for educational development in developing countries because of its specific acknowledgement of context, its flexibility and potential for capacity building. Numerous studies (e.g. Johnson, Hodges, & Monk, 2000; O'Sullivan, 2004) outline the necessity of acknowledging, explicitly, the realities of the context in developing countries. Therefore DBR in responding to 'the messiness of real-world practice' (O'Toole & Beckett, 2009, p.71) provided the avenue through which to design a contextually relevant pedagogical intervention.

This study was designed on participatory principles in order to harness non-academic local knowledge to better understand issues of importance within the community (Ozerdem & Bowd, 2010) and identify local needs. Underpinning the decision to frame the research in participatory terms is the belief that the participatory approach seeks "to increase local ownership, local capacity and local control" (Pamphilon, 2006, p. 1). The Humanities and Applied Science Committee at the University of Melbourne granted ethical clearance for the implementation of the study, and written permission was also provided by the Maldives Governments.

Site and participants

The site for the study was a small island, in a northern atoll, with a population of almost 2000 people living on approximately one square kilometre. The school, with 412 students from grades 1-12, was selected as offering optimum conditions for implementing a pedagogical intervention. The school is well known for its enthusiastic uptake of CFS, adopted since 2005. CFS has been the vehicle for introducing new ideas about pedagogy into the school, currently focused on lower primary grades, but with a desire to increase the use of active learning methods across the school. The school, managed by a principal, an assistant principal, and a number of leading teachers, had 43 teachers; 26 were Maldivian and 17 were Indian expatriate teachers. Students attended morning or afternoon sessions with one class each of grades 1-3, grade 4 and secondary classes being offered in the morning (6.45 – 12.30) and the other classes of grades 1-3 and the primary grades (5-7) being conducted in the afternoon (12.55 – 5.30).

The study took place within the school over an eight-month period in 2012 and was structured in two phases: a contextual analysis phase; and an intervention phase. Stakeholder groups—teachers, parents and the leadership team—were participants in the contextual analysis using The World Café (Brown & Isaacs, 2005), a participatory approach to data collection. Data were collected through a series of visual and graphic elicitation activities, illustrated in Figure 4 (next page), designed to document local perspectives and priorities on active learning.
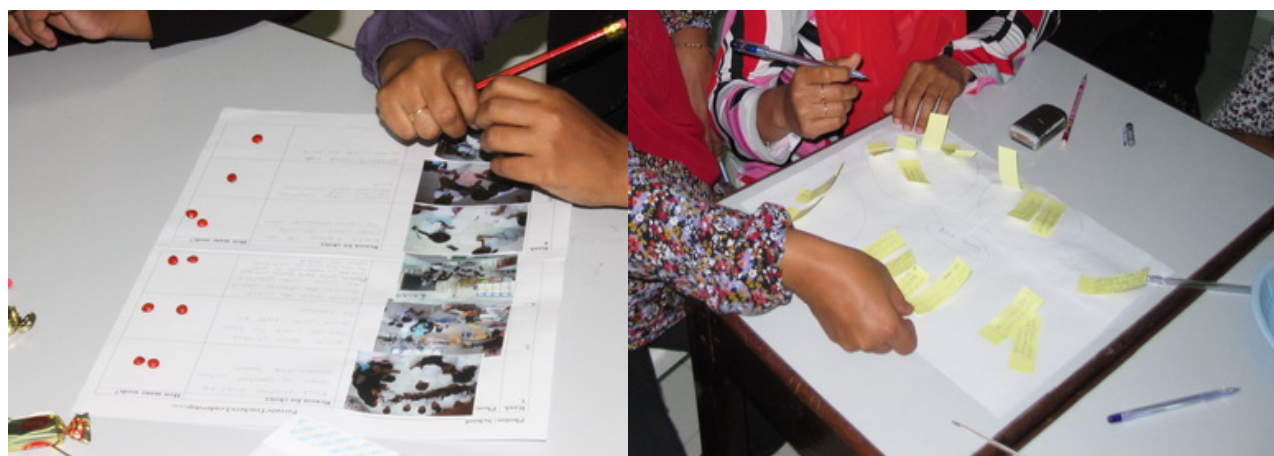
Figure 4: The World Café activities: Photo and graphic elicitation activities

Fourteen teachers participated in the intervention phase of the study: 7 CFS class teachers (Grades 1-4); and 7 primary subject teachers (Grades 5-7). Multiple data collection methods, which included questionnaires, classroom observations, semi-structured interviews and teacher reflection booklets, were used during the intervention phase with the two groups of teachers. Table 2 (below) gives an overview of participants and data collection tools for the two study phases. Further data sources included my field notes, which was a log of activities, daily reflections, and notes from meetings (both planned and incidental) within the school.

Table 2: Data collection tools that were used in different phases of the study

Study phase	Participants	Data collection tools
Contextual Analysis phase	Parents, teachers, leadership team	The World Café: • Photo elicitation activity • Graphic elicitation activity
Intervention phase	7 Group A teachers – Grades 1-3 (**CFS classes** – Generalist teachers) 7 Group B teachers – Grades 5-7 (**Primary grades**– Subject teachers)	• Teacher questionnaire • Semi-structured interviews • Classroom observations • Teacher recording booklets

The Intervention: A pedagogical innovation

The aim of this project was to design and operationalize a contextually relevant pedagogical intervention. Typically in DBR, the design of the intervention responds to needs arising from the literature and the local context (McKenney & Reeves, 2012). The pedagogical intervention evolved from the findings of The World Café, embracing the priorities of active learning identified by stakeholders as important in active learning. The intervention design also drew on previous research, seeking to learn from the successes and recommendations of implementing LCE in other relevant contexts. Specifically, the UNESCO Global Monitoring Report (UNESCO, 2004) acknowledges challenges with the implementation of learner-centred, discovery-based

approaches in contexts where there are limited resources and traditionally held views about learning, suggesting a more structured approach may be a more pragmatic option to help overcome these issues. Other studies reporting on LCE reform also advocate forms of direct instruction as a promising alternative (Altinyelken, 2011; Dimmock, 2000; O'Sullivan, 2004).

What evolved was an adaption of an instructional model known as the "gradual release of responsibility" (GROR) model (Fisher & Frey, 2008). This model was initially chosen as offering a pragmatic framework for encouraging student participation within a structured teaching model, building on current practice, without losing sight of constructivist principles. The GROR model was introduced to teachers through two school-wide workshops in which the core features of the GROR model—I do, We do, You do—were modelled through the workshop activities. A decision was subsequently made within the school to design a planning template adapting the Fisher and Frey model to the needs of their school. This planning template (Figure 5, below) was adopted across the school and encouraged teachers to consider their lessons in three parts:

- I do (teacher direct instruction);
- We do (incorporating elements of co-operative learning); and
- You do (independent student work).

Figure 5: Adaptation of Gradual Release of Responsibility model

The teachers participating in the study then chose the "we do" component of the model for in-depth focus during the intervention phase, highlighting this as an area in which they felt they had the least expertise. As a result a number of explicit co-operative learning approaches (Think-pair-share, Numbered Heads, Jigsaw and Placemat) were selected as offering clear strategies in promoting cooperative learning, whilst also building on teachers' receptivity to using group work. In this phase the aim was to support teachers in their use of the strategies in small, incremental steps with classroom-based support.

CHALLENGES OF USING ACTIVE LEARNING METHODS IN MALDIVIAN CLASSROOMS

Through the contextual analysis, a number of factors were identified as barriers to using active learning methods in this school. Table 3 summarises these challenges.

Table 3: Articulated challenges in implementing active learning in the island school

Lesson planning	Lack of time to adequately prepare lessons
Resources	Limited resources
Teaching	Increased noise Giving clear instructions difficult Language level of students Different level of students Longer time to complete activities
Parents	Increased parent awareness needed
Syllabus	Required to cover syllabus (active learning takes longer)

The contextual analysis data also revealed that attitudes to active learning were overwhelmingly positive with the teachers being very receptive to this change. Therefore teachers' motivation, or lack of, was not a barrier to using active learning methods.

Moving to the intervention phase, this paper now seeks to explore the enabling and inhibiting factors in enacting the model of active learning within the professional and contextual realities of the island school context. It also makes explicit the changing nature of my role through the intervention phase. Within DBR, the researcher may take on multiple roles (McKenney & Reeves, 2012). While approaching the intervention through a teacher education role I also came to adopt a teaching role within the school. The analysis that follows focuses on my teaching experiences within the intervention phase and the insights this provided into the particular contextual factors that influenced my use of the active learning model. Within DBR the processes of adoption and enactment of an intervention are strongly influenced by the immediate context (McKenney & Reeves, 2012) and my experience attests to this. The reflective analysis of these contextual challenges is based on my field notes that detail the story of how the nature of the collaboration with teachers changed in the field. These notes helped me to better understand the contextual factors that influence reform in this setting.

LIVING THE CHALLENGES OF USING ACTIVE LEARNING METHODS IN MALDIVIAN CLASSROOMS

A personal perspective

Through the participatory underpinnings of the study, I set out to establish myself and teachers as equal partners in the research process. The goal was for teachers to have an explicit voice in defining their needs and have direct input into the intervention design. However, it quickly became clear that the teachers had positioned me as the expert and, therefore, for the intervention to gain impetus, I was expected to lead the process. Once I had adjusted to this expectation, the collaboration took on a new form. At the request of the teachers this involved team teaching a series of lessons. Teachers strongly advocated their need to see the new strategies enacted in their classroom. Stuart, Akyeampong, and Croft (2009, p. 26), writing about teacher education in developing countries, state that teachers "need to see and understand alternative methods and concepts demonstrated". While I was initially hesitant that accepting a team teaching role would reinforce my role as expert, I found, instead, that by embracing this unplanned aspect to my role, the process of team teaching and co-planning created an opportunity for me to be privy to additional insights. The collaboration between us provided openings for me to question teachers on their existing practices and their reasoning in the ideas they use, thereby enabling me to explore their beliefs during the process. So I was afforded an eight-month immersion in the school and in teachers' classrooms, working closely with teachers to support the use of the pedagogical intervention within the realities of their classrooms and in the island setting. What follows is an analysis of factors that I experienced through my teaching role within the DBR process, of attempting to enact the model. Reports in the literature about similar reform efforts along with data from The World Café provided the starting point. These were elaborated upon during my eight-month immersion in the school through my day-to-day teaching activities.

Syllabus/schemes of work

The current school syllabus, created in 1992, is focused on discrete objectives and specific content. A number of issues arose for me in working from this planning document:

1. Schemes of work, written against the syllabus document, are presented as discrete objectives and dictate the content and objectives for each lesson over the week including when the formative assessment (typically pen and paper tests) should be conducted. In retaining the schemes, each lesson tended to take a narrow objective focus, often on discreet skills, leading to individual textbook exercises or worksheets to practise these skills.
2. Consistent with the findings of Schweisfurth (2011), teachers often communicated that they felt pressured to "cover the syllabus" in preparation for unit assessments or term tests. Consequently, some teachers felt less inclination to use the active learning strategies, which were seen to take more time.

In working with the syllabus and moving beyond teaching discrete skills, my approach was to look for opportunities to combine objectives, thereby allowing for more in-depth study of a topic while still following the schemes of work. The new NCF, with a broader perspective than the current syllabus, is currently being piloted. Its roll out has been stalled several times.

Textbooks

Textbooks, aligned to the syllabus, offer easily accessible student activities consistent with the schemes of work. Yet an analysis suggests that their general structure runs contrary to active

learning (Di Biase, 2010). Established procedures in how textbooks have typically been used make it difficult to break these routines. The textbooks tend to emphasis drill and practise exercises but they also include pictures, explanations, and activities that can be used to promote active learning depending on how they are used (see Mohammed & Harlech-Jones, 2008 for discussion on textbook use in Pakistan). Therefore I was able to demonstrate how the textbook could be used in new ways to compensate for a lack of reference materials. The teachers reported limited resources as a barrier to active learning and, since all students have textbooks, the textbook provides an easily accessible resource that could be used as a source for active learning if used in innovative ways. Two examples follow of how the textbooks were used to support the use of active learning strategies where students were involved in structured investigations rather than the transmission of knowledge through traditional methods.

Scenario 1: Social Studies—World War 1

(Grade 7 Scheme of work—Relate the causes which led to the First World War)

The textbook was the main source of information for the lesson. Explanation of the causes of World War 1 (WW1) and information on World War 2 was provided although there were no guiding questions or activities. In taking a more constructivist approach to this lesson there were a number of constraints to confront:

- The traditional way in which the lesson had typically been taught;
- The textbook offering dense information without explicit exploration of broader concepts; and
- Only two lessons could be spent on the topic with term tests approaching and a need to complete the syllabus.

Therefore, we used the textbook information as a reference on WW1 for a co-operative learning jigsaw activity (Aronson, 1978). The four headings of WW1 became the topics for four expert groups. Students worked in groups to locate key information about WW1 from the textbook and then reported their findings to another group. Although the students were new to this type of activity, they were observed as being energized and engaged in the task. Difficult vocabulary was an issue, which was exacerbated by the lack of pre-teaching of key terms. This is a common issue when a lesson is typically conducted using rote methods. However, if students are to be active participants in the learning process then pre-teaching of key vocabulary is a necessity.

Scenario 2: Environmental Studies—Maldivian food

(Grade 1 Scheme of work—To identify our basic foods and to describe Maldivian food).

Initially the two Grade 1 teachers had been hesitant about trying the jigsaw activity given the age and reading ability of grade 1 students but decided they would trial it if an opportunity arose. Pictures of Maldivian food in the textbook presented an opportunity and were used as a reference for the jigsaw activity. Students worked in groups to ascertain typical Maldivian food from the pictures and each group investigated the ingredients of one meal. Students then shared their answers on the ingredients of their particular Maldivian meal, and each group created a poster on Maldivian meals. The textbook provided an easily available reference for the activity. The jigsaw activity provided the process in which students ultimately did the work in identifying and describing Maldivian food, and their posters were a product of this co-operative process.

Teaching resources

Internet

People in small states who have access to the Internet are potentially able to gain the same information as their counterparts in larger states (Crossley et al., 2011, p. 46). Given the insularity of island life, the Internet was an important link to the outside world and a source of new teaching ideas. It provided opportunities to promote active learning when used strategically in lessons.

In a number of lessons, we used Internet resources that provided an engaging and stimulating introduction. These included:

- A film showing a storm as an introduction to a creative writing activity;
- A film of an octopus camouflaging against coral as an introduction to a research activity on sea creatures; and
- Several CFS teachers found online stories corresponding with class books that they could use for reading activities.

Although the Internet can be an enabling opportunity for teachers, it can also be a barrier to reform when teachers download material and do not contextualise it for their students. When PowerPoint presentations, designed for American students, were sourced on the Internet and used to teach topics without modifying examples or language, their relevance for Maldivian students was often minimal. In effect, these presentations substituted one method of knowledge transmission for another when used in this way. The Internet was also a barrier with ongoing connectivity issues. Many times we went to plan a lesson only to find there was no connection. We found ways around some of these issues by downloading files when the Internet was working, or when speed was best, like early morning. In teachers' daily work this unreliability is an ongoing barrier.

Library

The need for more library books was noted by teachers in The World Café data as necessary for active learning. Yet, in the school, there are resources in the library that are rarely used. Van der Werd et al. (2000, p. 351) found, in Indonesia, that the issues around resources were not straightforward. Some schools had ample resources they did not use and others found ways to manage with few resources. I found several useful books in the library, such as professional resources, children stories, and reference books. However, local teachers were generally not making use of these resources. Attempts to ascertain the reasons for this were not fruitful, although the extra time required for finding resources and planning lessons using different resources is one experienced by teachers regardless of context.

Generating new teaching materials/resources

With the shortage of teaching resources noted as a barrier in both the literature (Altinyelken, 2011; Ginsburg, 2010; Schweisfurth, 2013) and the contextual analysis data, my goal was to work with teachers so they could experience how resources could be made and reused in contrast to spending time making one-off resources. Courtney (2008) found this tendency to use resources in a one-off way with Cambodian teachers. She reported that "resources were often enlarged pictures from the textbook, or materials appropriate for only one lesson" (p. 551). This resonates with my observations of Maldivian teachers, as I, likewise, found that teachers typically do not file resources for re-use. I attempted to model how to create resources that could be reused by

organising a session to create coloured grouping cards so these cards could be reused during group work.

Classroom physical environment

Johnson et al. (2000, p. 185) argue that the physical environment has a strong bearing on what teachers can do. I was able to experience the difference in teaching in the physical environment of CFS and primary classrooms. CFS classrooms were generally inviting classroom environments. UNICEF had initially supported schools implementing CFS by providing tiles for the floor and an array of classroom resources. Tiled floors enabled floor activities to take place, whereas the dusty concrete floors of non-CFS classrooms inhibited floor activities. Extra furniture also meant there was greater flexibility as to where CFS students could work.

Figure 6: Traditional classroom

Figure 7: CFS classroom

In the non-CFS classrooms, the desks were arranged in rows and arranging group work activities could be time consuming. There were no books or extra materials in these classrooms and limited displays, which can be attributed to the sharing of classrooms with other grades in the double school session. In team teaching sessions, the local teachers were always responsible for forming the groups given their familiarity with the students. One primary teacher, with an established routine in his classes, asked students to form groups of four by having the front row turn around and directly face the students behind, thus creating instant groups, and we were able to quickly proceed with the lesson. In contrast, another teacher allowed students to walk around the room with their books and bags to form groups, resulting in a much slower start to the lesson. These two examples show how, in the same physical environment, lessons can be conducted with different arrangements and degrees of efficiency. While the limited resources in primary classrooms did provide some challenges, this example does highlight that how resources are used is also important.

Time

Teachers cited time as a barrier to planning lessons that incorporated active learning; noting LCE required extra preparation time and that they were not given extra time for preparing such lessons. They perceived that, on top of an already busy schedule, they were being asked to do more. It is acknowledged that LCE places more, not less, demands on teachers (Nykiel-Herbert, 2004; O'Sullivan, 2004). I also observed the out-of-class activities, such as weekly planning meetings,

that teachers were required to attend. Given the double-session school day, evening and weekends were the only times teachers could be called together. Some weekend activities I observed were; civil service training, PD sessions, and whole school activities, such as English Day. While established as normative behaviour within the school and island life, in practical terms it meant there were fewer hours available for meeting and planning. In arranging time to meet with teachers to co-plan lessons, working around these events was a major constraint I faced. Working around extra commitments became part of the norm of my scheduling but it did highlight the demands made on teachers as part of their jobs. The effect these practices had on day-to-day teaching was not the focus of this study, but from the perspective of working around these activities, it certainly impacted on planning collaboratively with teachers of the same grade or subject.

Students and learner-centred education

LCE puts more responsibility on students because they need to be more actively involved in their learning. Altinyelken (2011), reporting on a study in Turkey, maintains that not all students are prepared or willing for this extra responsibly, some preferring to remain in a more passive role. In my teaching role, I experienced how students responded to the active learning strategies we used. My overall observation was that students were eager to engage productively in the class when they understood what was expected. The change in teaching/learning activities was challenging for some but, over a number of classes, students generally reacted positively when the task had clarity. It was not my experience that students preferred the rote teaching approaches. From my classroom observations, they appeared visibly engaged with learning. Supporting my observations, teachers reported improvement in the quality and standard of their students' ideas when active learning methods were used.

Group work

Group work was discussed favourably in The World Café data, and presented as a means of involving students more actively in their learning, increasing student motivation and improving learning outcomes. Group work was well-established as a routine in CFS grades and using more group work to improve the quality of instruction was an aspiration for the primary teachers. However, teachers raised several issues about the use of group work:

- They were concerned that not all students contributed equally in a group task and wanted to learn how to encourage all students to participate equally.
- In the primary classes, the physical environment was less conducive to group work.
- In primary classes, mixed gender grouping was more challenging because traditional grouping was gender-based, making group allocations problematic at times.
- Questions were raised on how to manage students who were not compliant in the group activities.

Added to this were my observations that students were often put in a group to complete tasks that could easily be completed individually, and the formation of groups was done without attention to the suitability of the task or how group work structures could be used to improve learning opportunities. This is a well-documented issue with group work (Johnson & Johnson, 1999). The co-operative learning strategies that formed part of the intervention were chosen to address the teachers' concerns. The specific strategies were selected as structures to enhance individual student's accountability in groups and to help facilitate co-operative learning by providing clear procedures for all students. The following examples reveal some of the difficulties along with potential solutions.

Example 1: Giving instructions

As noted earlier, a lack of clarity in giving instructions was an issue when students did not know what was expected of them, especially when new responsibilities were added. In using specific co-operative learning strategies, teachers would sometimes give instructions that did not present clear instructional steps. However, after a team teaching lesson, in which I modelled the steps for giving instructions for Numbered Heads, the teacher concerned taught a class independently and demonstrated more confidence in giving instructions and applying ideas from our team teaching session. One of her colleagues had created PowerPoint slides for his students that visually showed the steps for three strategies. He presented his work at a staff meeting and I subsequently observed that some other teachers created their own slides to use in their classes.

Example 2: Gender issues in group formation

It initially appeared problematic to form mixed gender groups in class work in primary classes. In the CFS classes, boys and girls worked together without issue. The issue around mixing gender seems to first arise in Grade 5 and become entrenched by Grades 6 and 7. One teacher informed me this was a cultural issue. However another teacher did not confront these same problems. In our team teaching sessions he stated to the class that girls and boys would be required to work together and, despite some initial hesitation, they did work together and successfully completed the task. During final interviews, I was told by several teachers that boys and girls were now willing to work in the same group. It seems that by challenging their own expectations of what students could do, the students had responded accordingly and the initial obstacle eased over time.

Overview of team teaching

The team teaching situations embodied the participatory notion put forth by Maguire (1987) that while all of us know some things none of us knows everything. Teachers brought local knowledge to the process and I brought constructivist ideas about teaching and, together, we crafted lessons as part of the pedagogical intervention. In this nexus of my teaching and teacher education roles I could provide opportunities to scaffold the teachers to trial new practices that were feasible within their classroom context. Experiencing the circumstances of the Maldivian teachers highlighted some of the challenges they face in using active learning methods. In some lessons our combined effort allowed us to overcome some of the stated difficulties while, at other times, I simply experienced the problem myself without finding a solution. These experiences certainly allowed me new ways of seeing and experiencing the Maldivian education system (see McLaughlin, 2011, for a related discussion in Papua New Guinea).

A REFLECTIVE ANALYSIS OF THE ISLAND EXPERIENCE

While the participatory intentions of the study were modified in response to circumstances in the field, the unintended consequences were beneficial in providing me with authentic perspectives on the conditions and realities in which teachers work. This rendered a better understanding of the particular contextual factors that impact on teachers' use of active learning within this setting. Despite my background experiences with constructivist teaching, I was confronted by very real constraints in attempting to use active learning methods within the Maldivian island context. These are challenges that teachers also struggle with, particularly in light of contradictory messages and inconsistencies within the system (Chisholm & Leyendecker, 2008). Through my initial participatory focus, my plans were centred on teachers and myself as equal partners bringing different sets of knowledge to the research process. It was necessary to adapt to the

circumstances where I was clearly positioned as the expert and I needed to acknowledge that equal partnership with the teachers would be problematic. The conclusions of Mdee (2010), based on her work in Tanzania, resonate with my own experience. She questions whether absolute equality is possible given imbalances in knowledge, power and resources. It was immediately obvious that my broader knowledge and experience with constructivist pedagogies would position me as an expert. This was made all the more acute by the insularity of island living, where access to outside resources and expertise was limited for teachers due in part to the difficulties with travel and unreliable Internet access.

Elaborating on the notion of partnership in the research process, Mdee (2010) points to the limits of "handing over the stick" (p. 41) to participants who may not want the stick, feel it is not appropriate they should have the stick or have resources to use the stick. The equivalence of the "stick" in this case, was expecting teachers to direct the form that the pedagogical intervention would take. They were reluctant to accept this role and the corresponding responsibilities. Yet, over time, the Maldivian teachers were increasingly willing to make explicit requests around operationalizing the active learning model, thereby becoming more active participants and developing a voice in the process. Participation came through a process that evolved, rather than one that was planned. Dale (2005, p. 184) distinguishes between participation as contribution and participation as empowerment. Participation in this study shifted from participants contributing to the process of innovation in the early stages to one in which participants took greater responsibility for their own decision-making and involvement. It also allowed participants to accept decision-making responsibilities for their learning on their terms rather than according to my timeline. My acceptance of the "expert" role enabled the empowerment nature of teachers' participation to evolve, and provided me with access to teachers' classrooms and experience of the circumstances in which teachers work.

Consequently, this is not only a discussion of the contextual factors I experienced that impacted on using the active learning model, it also serves as an account of DBR in action and how my role changed in the field and the insights arising from this. Initially I was not only "expert" but also an outsider to the island, albeit with some insider knowledge of the Maldivian education system from my earlier work. While this background was known in the school, I would also learn the importance of establishing personal relationships on the island. I experienced first-hand the advantages of the particular social ecology of small states and the highly personalised nature of relationships (Farrugia & Attard, 1989). The smallness allowed things to happen through personal connections. This opened doors in having access to people for a range of research activities, both on the island and within the country. In the particular circumstances of the island, this meant that, as personal relationships developed in the school over time, the teachers responded more openly, actively and explicitly. Despite my assigned role as expert, a familiarity grew through our daily interactions. Through the professional responsibilities of team teaching, the interactions, from my perspective, became less hierarchical and expanded my opportunities to delve and ask questions about classes and explore teachers' beliefs in a more relaxed environment. This was an unanticipated contextual factor which eventually played a critical role in the intervention process.

Through my extended stay on the island, I became increasingly part of the island community and achieved some insider status as I came to understand the day-to-day workings of the school as well as the ebbs and flows of island life. Moreover, by living on the island, I also felt my own world shrink as I focused on the daily routines of island life. I acutely felt the insularity of island living and understood the value of being able to access new ideas in order to move beyond entrenched patterns of behaviour. Johnson et al. (2000) contend that normative expectations are set up within the teachers' work environment (physical, symbolic and normative) and determine

how actions should be carried out. From my personal experience I suggest the normative expectations, given the smallness of the island community, very strongly influence how teachers carry out their work.

Over time, I came to the see the characteristic of small island states as both a barrier and an enabler in the DBR research process. The isolation was real yet the smallness afforded unique opportunities. Through my immersion in the field, I came to experience some of the contextual factors and barriers first hand. I came to understand the central role of the school on the island, the routines of island life and the tyranny of distance; the island was far away from the capital and there was a feeling of isolation due to irregular transport and the vagaries of the weather. The reflections on my fieldwork and on-the-ground realities are intended to present a critical account of my experience and specifically the understandings arising from being an active participant within the DBR process. Crossley (2010) laments how rarely "the findings of educational research seemed to reflect the lived experience of educational practitioners" (p. 422). By living on the island for an extended period, I was better able to stand in the teachers' shoes and understand the daily challenges they faced, as well as report on ways in which we were collaboratively able to confront some of these constraints.

CONCLUSION

The isolation and insularity of small islands accords personal relationships a special place. These evolving relationships on the island opened up dialogue throughout the research process and a genuine participatory partnership developed. Yet they also highlighted the particular contextual characteristics of small islands that are indicative of the Maldives. My experience in the classroom provides some insights into understanding the conditions that both support and inhibit teachers' enactment of active learning in the Maldivian system. These experiences and insights reinforce the importance of identifying the local conditions needed for successful implementation of educational reforms in order to better understand the gap between policy and practice.

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Chinese international students in Australia: An insight into their help and information seeking manners

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Understanding the ways that international students seek information and help in the host country is essential for improving academic, social, cultural, and welfare support for this student cohort. However, there is a dearth of literature that documents how international students in the vocational education and training (VET) sector do so. This paper aims to fill this gap. Based on in-depth interviews with 30 Chinese international students undertaking diploma and associate degree programs in Australia, this research shows that the ways in which Chinese international students seek help prior to their departure and after their arrival at the host country, largely depends on the nature of the issues they confront. The data also reveals that students' use of education agents is not limited to the pre-departure stage, as is indicated in the existing literature, but throughout their journey in the host country. Notably, the role of agents has become increasingly important in Chinese international students' decision-making processes during their transition from diploma to associate degree and higher education programs.

Keywords: international students; Chinese students, vocational education; diploma, help seeking; information seeking.

INTRODUCTION

Academic and social support from host institutions along with international students' help and information-seeking mechanisms significantly affect their overseas study experiences and welfare. In spite of many studies on academic adaptation and the challenges international students encounter, little has been documented about the ways international students seek and use information related to their courses (Chang, Alzougool, Berry, Gomes, & Smith, 2012). There are insufficient literature concerning the formal and informal help-seeking sources and networks upon which international students rely when dealing with issues related to their study, government departments, accommodation and employment, finance, visa and health insurance.

This paper reports the findings from a study that aimed to investigate the information-seeking and help-seeking behaviours of Chinese international students in vocational education and training (VET) programs. In Australia, tertiary education involves two sectors: higher education (HE) and VET. Public VET colleges are often referred to as technical and further education (TAFE) institutes. Currently, there are more international students enrolled in the Australian HE sector than the VET sector. Most studies on international students' experiences tend to focus exclusively on the HE sector (Tran, 2013, 2013a; Tran & Nguyen, 2013). Nevertheless, in July 2014, there were 118,388 international student enrolments in the VET sector (Australian Education International, 2014).

The study draws on in-depth interviews with 30 Chinese international students. In terms of the formality of help-seeking resources, the research indicates that agents, teachers and course coordinators appear to be the formal sources that this cohort of students turns to for consultation. Peers from the same national background, parents and relatives act as the informal and private help-seeking sources. The existing literature highlights the role of agents as providing advice to students at, mainly, the pre-departure stage of their overseas study (Chang et al., 2012; Dempsey, 2010; Yang, 2007; Zhang & Hagedorn, 2011). This research reveals that agents are, actually, a common source of information and advice for Chinese international students in vocational education not only during their pre-departure stage but also throughout their study journey in the host country.

This paper begins with a discussion of the literature relating to the common approaches that international students use when seeking information and help during their pre-departure and study stages in the host country. It then discusses the methodology used in this research before addressing the main themes emerging from this research. The themes include the role of agents, parents and relatives, teachers, course coordinators and friends. The paper concludes by highlighting the need for better recognition of the extent to which international students turn to agents for information and help at both the pre-departure stage and at critical periods of their study in the host country.

INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS' APPROACHES TO SEEKING INFORMATION AND HELP

Despite significant efforts of host institutions to provide information for international students to support their study and life in a new culture, little is known about how the students search for, access or use such information (Chang et al, 2012, p. 2). Recent studies have highlighted the significance of acknowledging the role of social networks of international students in shaping their information-seeking and use behaviours (Chang et al., 2012; Kashima & Loh, 2006; Sakurai, McCall-Wolf, & Kasima, 2010). Chang et al.'s (2012) research, in particular, calls for an examination of international students' ways of accessing, using and sharing information based on the classification of their social network groupings rather than the traditional way based on their national identity. The authors argue, "international students are complex individuals with differing identities and information needs that are not solely located in the country/region where they are born in" (p. 1). Chang et al.'s study showed that international students–regardless of country of origin–whose social networks are dominated by those from their own home countries and by a mixed group of students obtain information about prospective courses and institutions prior to their pre-departure from agents, family and websites for overseas studies in their home country. However, international students whose social networks are dominated by those from various countries and by Australian domestic students relied mainly on agents and relatives–in the same way as the previous group–but also relied upon their institutions' websites and home country embassies (p. 9). Importantly, students from all social network groupings draw on international websites for information and turn to staff within their department for support to deal with academic issues.

Personal recommendations or word-of-mouth referrals of former alumni, peers, and relatives have been identified as key sources of information for international students when making decisions about their study destinations (Chen, 2006; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Prugsamatz, Pentecost, & Ofstad, 2006). Prugsamatz et al.'s (2006) finding revealed that word-of-mouth is an important source of information for students to when choosing international education providers. Pre-departure word-of-mouth information is also sought by international students to help them become more informed about how to effectively adjust to the new environment. Chen's (2006) study identifies three common types of word-of-mouth messages of shared by international students:

service information, personal experience, and personal advice. Notably, the nature and role of word-of-mouth as an influential source of information for prospective and existing international students may change due to international students' increasing engagement with social media, especially Facebook, in recent years.

The important role of agents in providing information for international students prior to their departure has been addressed in recent literature (Chang et al., 2012; Dempsey, 2010; Yang, 2007). In a report titled *Best practice in education agent management*, Dempsey (2010, p. 15) indicated that agents–categorized as providing basics services–are expected to offer the following to prospective students:

- Easily accessible promotional materials
- Basic information about market features
- Course counselling
- Advice on student educational application processes
- Assistance with visa applications
- Pre-departure orientation
- Evidence that the institution is reciprocally represented by the agent.

These are pre-departure stage services; agents are not expected to provide assistance and counselling beyond this stage (Dempsey, 2010; Yang, 2007).

Peers, staff and family appear to be important sources of help and support for international students in the host culture. A survey (Fallon, 2006) of 314 international students from Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Hong Kong and mainland China in a pre-tertiary program in Australia shows that 157 out of 284 students who needed help and sought further information about their study relied on their friends (55.3%), college professionals (23.2%) and family (18.3%). The finding from this study indicates that universities need to develop peer networks and student mentoring to enable newly arrived international students to quickly establish friendship with enrolled students.

In a study of international students at a Queensland university Hambrecht (2006) also found that all participants turned to friends and relatives for support and those who were studying in Australia for the first time were unaware of welfare, student equity, financial and counselling support services The majority of students were aware of accommodation, employment and health-support services, but were less willing to draw on face-to-face support services due to the embarrassment and anxiety associated with their identity not being kept anonymous.

In terms of seeking psychological help, some American studies indicate that Asian and Latino international students' underutilisation of professional mental help seems to result from common practices and traditional beliefs in their cultures (White, 1982; Wilton & Constantine, 2003). International students who did use counselling tended to give up midway rather than relied on the service to their full treatment (Mori, 2000). Several Chinese and Japanese international students in a study by Flum (1998) reported they were unfamiliar with mental health counselling, which is an underdeveloped service in their home countries. The association of shame with need for support with emotional and personal problems is often cited as the major reason for international students' negative attitudes towards relying on professional help (Flum, 1998; Zhang & Dixon, 2003). Other related beliefs, which may explain students' avoidance of formal mental health resources, include the assumption that it is individual's responsibility to deal with those problems on one's own (Yoo & Skovholt, 2001).

In dealing with academic aspects, Asian international students have been portrayed as passive learners and, thus, hesitant to seek help with academic concerns (Ballard & Clanchy, 1991; Samuelowicz, 1987). Yet, studies by Tran (2008), and Prescott and Hellstén (2005) offer a different lens on this aspect by elaborating on international students' initiatives in seeking help from their lecturers and other sources. These studies also reveal that the ways academics respond to international students' initial attempts play an important role in making students feel invited or reluctant to seek further support. Based on case studies of Chinese international students in Management and Education at an Australian University, Tran (2008) identified common methods used by students for seeking help and unpacking disciplinary requirements. These include interaction with academics and utilisation of support services at different institutional levels. In particular, Chinese international students in Tran's study appear to be capable of adopting self-help strategies along with seeking help through interaction and dialogue with their lecturers through face-to-face consultation with the lecturers, emails to the lecturers, and discussion with the lecturers in class.

While Tran's (2008) participants showed their willingness to seek further help when in need because their efforts were positively met by the academics, Prescott and Hellstén (2005) reported that newly-enrolled international students felt discouraged in approaching their lecturers for help to deal with their study issues after an embarrassing encounter with their lecturers. For instance, one respondent described her experience:

The thing is they know that I'm struggling because obviously I go to them for help. But in the way they answer my questions or in the way they put it, it just makes me feel like, oh I shouldn't ask them again . . . So basically, even if I am struggling I know I'm not going to go there again because I embarrassed myself one time and I don't want to embarrass myself again. (p. 82)

Another international student in the Prescott and Hellstén study recalled how he lost his confidence in raising his concerns and asking the academics for help when one of his lecturers responded to his request after class by "holds the bag and goes quickly out of the classroom" (p. 82). Remarkably, as indicated in the Prescott and Hellstén's study, the notion of "independent learning" in Western institutions can be misunderstood by newly-enrolled Asian international students and linked to the need to learn by one self rather than asking questions and relying on the teacher and peers for help. So, misunderstanding of "independent learning" may lead to the tendency by international students to avoid seeking help when in need.

The discussion above reveals that there is a significant body of literature that examines the varied help-seeking and information-seeking mechanisms international students, particularly Asian international students, utilise in the higher education setting. However, the manners in which Chinese international students in the vocational education context–with their different aspirations and concerns–seek help and information regarding their distinct educational pathways seem to be overlooked. This study is an attempt to address this gap in the literature.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The qualitative study reported on in this paper draws on data gained from semi-structured, open-ended (Merriam, 1998), in-depth interviews with 30 Chinese international students studying at three TAFE schools located in a dual-sector University. Students studied for Business, Design or Engineering qualifications. The TAFEs were chosen because of the large number of Chinese international students enrolled in them.

Table 1 shows that of the 30 participants, 12 were female and 18 are male; and 27 of the participants were between 18 and 22 years old–only one student was under 18 and two above 22. Ten of the 30 participants have been in Australia for more than two years; 17 for one to two years; two for less than one year, and one for less than one month.

Table 1: Demographic data of the participants

Data	No of participants	Data	No of participants
Age		**Discipline**	
Under 18	1	Business	9
18 to 22	27	Design	7
Above 22	2	Engineering	14
Time in Australia		**Level of study**	
Less than 1 month	1	Associate Degree	11
Less than 12months	2	Advanced Diploma	5
12 to 24 months	17	Diploma	12
24 to 48 months	10	Certificate IV	2

Table 2 shows that two study participants were undertaking Certificate IV studies, 12 were engaged in diploma studies, five in advanced diploma studies and 11 in associate degree studies.

Table 2: Demographic profile of each student and their courses

No.	Gender	Course	Level
		School of Business	
1	F	Accounting	Certificate IV
2	M	Commerce	Diploma
3	M	Commerce	Diploma
4	M	Commerce	Diploma
5	F	International Business	Diploma
6	M	International Business	Diploma
7	F	Commerce	Diploma
8	M	International Business	Advanced Diploma
9	M	Accounting	Diploma
		School of Design	
10	F	Design	Diploma
11	F	Interior Design	Diploma
12	M	Design	Diploma
13	F	Design and Interior decoration	Advanced Diploma
14	F	Design and Interior decoration	Advanced Diploma
15	F	Certificate IV	Certificate IV
16	F	Design	Diploma

		School of Engineering	
17	F	Engineering	Diploma
18	M	Electronics Engineering	Advanced Diploma
19	M	Civil Engineering	Associate Degree
20	M	Electronics Engineering	Associate Degree
21	M	Electronics Engineering	Associate Degree
22	M	Electronics Engineering	Associate Degree
23	M	Electronics Engineering	Associate Degree
24	M	Mecanical Engineering	Associate Degree
25	M	Mecanical Engineering	Associate Degree
26	F	Mechanical Engineering	Associate Degree
27	M	Mechanical Engineering	Associate Degree
28	M	Civil Engineering	Associate Degree
29	M	Civil Engineering	Associate Degree
30	*F*	Electronics Engineering	Advanced Diploma
Total	**30**		

The interview topic was centred on Chinese international VET students' views on their study aims, their help seeking behaviours and their transitional pathways. Key interview questions were: Where do you seek for information prior to your departure and during your study in Australia? What kind of information and help do you seek? Does the different sources provide relevant information? How different sources influence your application process?

Ethics approval was gained prior to data collection. The recruitment of Chinese international students to participate in the research was assisted by the international student coordinators of the TAFE schools. Participants were requested to sign a Consent Form and read the interview questions before the interview. Participants' names are kept anonymous in order to protect their identity. Data collected from interviews with Chinese international students were translated from Chinese to English–most Chinese students preferred to conduct the interviews in their mother tongue (which was also the native language of the first author) because it made them feel more free and comfortable to express their views.

All the collected data was in the form of anonymously notes taken throughout each interview. The analysis was inductive and aimed to identify emergent themes and patterns (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The researchers read the interview transcripts several times and then coded interview data, linking the themes to the relevant issues suggested in the literature. The researchers then located these factors in the broader context of international VET in Australia.

The emergent themes show that Chinese international students in vocational education and associate degree programs seek help and information from diverse sources. The following discussion is ordered according to frequency of sources of help mentioned by respondents.

EDUCATION AGENT AS THE MAIN SOURCE OF INFORMATION AND SUPPORT

Education agents appear to be the main source of information and support for Chinese international students enrolled in VET and associate degree programs throughout their overseas study journey. Twenty of the 30 participants shared their experiences of relying on agents for information about the study destination, program selection, and transition.

Prior to their departure, students turned to agents for general information pertaining to the destination countries, reputation of the institutions, entry requirements, and tuition fees. Most often, agents first evaluate individual student's academic transcripts, language competency, and personal information. Based on their evaluation of these factors, agents then suggested different options to accommodate students' needs. After deciding upon their study plans, Chinese international students rely on agents for assistance with the application process. For example:

When I decided to study in Australia, education agent assessed my overall performance in high school and advised me to study foundation courses first then apply for university. (Female, Associate Degree in Mechanical Engineering)

I came to Australia without finishing high school. The agent suggested and helped me to study foundation courses for one year. (Male, Diploma of commerce)

I studied foundation course in Chengdu, China before I came to study TAFE courses in Australia because the agent told me to (study foundation course). (Male, Previously studied Advanced Diploma in Electronics Engineering)

Agents often recommend that a student studies a foundation course when they believe a student is not ready for tertiary education or not qualified to gain a direct entry to a program in Australian tertiary education; for example, students who have not finished secondary school and those who intend studying programs with high requirements in mathematics. Students' interview accounts indicate that course counselling based on assessment of students' academic records is regarded as one of the major services that education agents offer for international students. This echoes Dempsey's (2010) finding concerning the role of agents at the pre-departure stage.

Students are most concerned with how to engage in study for a degree and will seek advice on the path for achieving this aim. If students' initial purpose of applying for degree study cannot be achieved, the agent often recommends a vocational or associate degree program as an alternative pathway. The articulated path influences their choice of the country of education and institution.

Yes, I applied with the help of agent . . . I am studying Certificate IV now. The agent helps me apply because there are some changes in Australia's international study policies, students under eighteen cannot apply for bachelor degree directly . . . I don't want to spend time studying English. The agent advised me to apply for certificate first, then . . . Diploma, then transfer to bachelor study . . . I think it's easier to transfer from TAFE to Bachelor study in the same Uni. (Female, Certificate IV in Accounting)

I have been studying Diploma of Interior Design in this university for one-and-a-half years. Next year I will begin my study for a bachelor degree . . . I came to study in TAFE of this university because the agent–I mean the overseas study agent–they advised me to take this pathway in Australia . . . It will only take me three years to get a bachelor degree in the same university. I can get two internationally recognized certificates from this Uni when I graduate. (Female, Diploma in Interior Design).

The above excerpts reveal that agents keep Chinese international students informed of the program duration and transitional process. The student in the first excerpt, for example, graduated from a secondary school in China and the agent explained to her that she could not apply for degree study directly because she was under eighteen years old. The agent suggested that she should study VET courses first and then transfer to degree study to avoid delay. Students welcomed the recommendation for pathways in a relevant discipline to be undertaken in the same institution as well as the ability to attain two internationally recognized certificates.

After their arrival, students gradually become accustomed to life and study in Australia. Compared with their peers who started directly in degree studies, VET students start at a relatively lower standard in terms of academic requirements and often have to undertake more transitional steps. While they seek information from multiple sources, they still trust agents for advice on the transitional process and options and study plans. For example:

The agent helps me plan my study in Australia, I was told the duration of each program. It will take me six months to finish (certificate IV), then I can study Diploma course for another one year, then I can transit to HE to study for a bachelor degree in another one and half years. So it takes me three years to get a bachelor degree. (Female, Certificate IV in Accounting)

I study information technology in this university, it's a bachelor program . . . No, I studied in foundation courses first then Diploma. The agent helped me to study foundation courses first. After that, the agent advised me to study a Diploma first then another two years for a bachelor degree. (Female, Previously studied Diploma in Engineering)

After foundation course, they (agent) advised me to study associate degree then Bachelor. The agent will help arrange my transition. (Male, Associate Degree in Mechanical Engineering)

Interview data in this research reveals that students seek advice from agents to help formulate their study plans and transitional issues. This contrasts with Zhang and Hagedorn's (2011) research findings, which indicate that agents' support in transitional periods is rare in the US. However, it supports their findings that agents play an important role in assisting Chinese international undergraduate students to apply to US higher education institutions. Chinese international students undertaking VET studies tend to rely more on agents for their transitional issues than their counterparts in the HE sector. They feel comfortable with communicating with agents who speak their language and are familiar with individual cases. Notably, agents provided advice throughout students' learning journey in Australia, particularly in relation to the transition from VET to HE. The finding of this study challenges the commonly-held assumption in the literature about the role of agents which is centred on the provision of assistance and counselling concerning the selection of institution and course, visa application and orientation, which occurs predominantly during international students' the pre-departure stages (Yang, 2007; Dempsey, 2010; Chang et al., 2012).

This finding differs from the previous study by Yang (2007), which found that education agents' recommendations and consultation are the least important for students in the higher education sector. Zhang and Hagedorn (2011) indicate that students who are younger and rank lower in senior secondary school are less prepared for academic study, especially overseas study. Since international students in VET programs at dual sector Universities are less prepared for undertaking degree study straightforward, they seek help from education agents to deal with the complexity of and the transitional pathways in the host country. The findings from this study confirm Chang et al.'s (2012) findings that education agents are an important source of pre-arrival information and for help with applications for universities. This study complements Chang et al.'s research and adds to the existing literature about the role of agents in influencing international students' decision-making about their study destinations and courses throughout their learning journey. The finding of this study shows that agents indeed provide services for international students beyond the pre-departure stage. That is, Chinese international students in vocational education also turn to agents for advice about transitional issues and study plans during their study in the host country. Notably, they turn to agents for different kinds of service and counselling at different stages of their journey.

PARENTS AND RELATIVES AS IMPORTANT SOURCES OF ADVICE AND INFORMATION

The concept of family in Chinese traditional Confucian culture is different from Western culture. In an extended family with parents, children and other relatives, such as grandparents, aunts and uncles, collective information is offered by members of the big family. Bodycott (2009) discusses the concept of filial piety in mainland Chinese parent-child relationships. Parents are often the first source students use to seek advice and discuss their intention to study abroad. If the chance to undertake a degree study through passing the competitive university-entrance examination in China is slim for secondary school graduates, parents will expect their children to obtain a University

education abroad. The initial idea of studying abroad often arises from an interaction between parents and children. Parents are often concerned about quality of education in the destination country and of immigration opportunity. For example, a student expresses her parents' view:

My parents want me to get bachelor degree in Australia. You know, if I only get an Associate Degree, there's no equivalent one in China, how can I explain to my parents. Associate Degree is like a college Diploma in China, it's not a university degree. I want to get a degree, so I prefer to study in university. (Female, Associate Degree in Mechanical Engineering)

Influenced by Confucian thought and the one-child policy, most Chinese parents expect their children to create a good future for themselves by obtaining a good education; a degree-oriented education is always favoured by both students and their parents. This desire motivates students who initially cannot meet the requirements for enrolment in a higher education course to seek education in an institution that can provide a path from VET courses to higher education.

Immigration opportunities rank as an important factor motivating Chinese international students to study in Australia (Yang, 2007). Interviews in this study further support other studies that indicate seeking immigration opportunities in the host country is also a common expectation from parents of international students (Tran & Nyland, 2011). However, parents are not well informed regarding immigration requirements and policies. Their desire is not always satisfied. For example, the following student reveals:

My family wants me to immigrate after finishing my study. They think it's better to immigrate to Australia. They wanted me to study in Australia, so . . . But I think it's not easy to immigrate with only Diploma. And design is not an immigration occupation, but I like it, so I study it. I hope I can get a degree then decide. (Female, Diploma in Interior Design)

The discussion and interaction between students and their parents can help students better understand their desires and clarify their long-term plans. However, sometimes, due to inadequate information, parents have a high expectation for their children to migrate to Australia after their study there. They often regard the study plan and financial support of their children as parental responsibility and a good investment for their children's future. However, not all programs align with immigration opportunities. Students often pay more attention to the internationally recognised quality of the program and the institution when making their study decisions in the host country. In the above excerpt, the student who is studying a Diploma in Design expresses her understanding of the recent change to the immigration policy and the skilled occupation list (SOL). She has the intention of undertaking her course to better prepare herself for her future. Therefore, students' future plans do not always agree with parents' expectations. Echoing previous research by Bodycott (2009), the finding of this study indicates that improved employment and immigration prospects are the most important push factors for parents to decide their children's overseas study while students tend to be more concerned with educational quality and international experience.

Relatives living or studying overseas also often provide word-of-mouth information related to life and study in the host country, the reputation of host institutions and job prospects.

I have a relative living nearby, I prefer to study and live near him. My relative suggests that this University is in the city center; it's very convenient to study in a University that is not far from his house. (Male, Associate Degree in Civil Engineering)

Because my sister studied in this University, now she has graduated and works in China. I learned some information about this university from her. It's a highly internationally recognized university. She told me that I could study TAFE courses then in University. (Female, Certificate IV in Accounting)

As these students expressed, recommendations from relatives act as word-of-mouth referrals and influence their choice of the study destination and institution. For international students who have

not had previous overseas living and studying experience, information and advice from reliable people around them is often important. Others' positive attitudes and experiences with host institutions will enhance international students' possibility of choosing a certain host city and institution. Parents, siblings and relatives graduating from a particular institution are likely to recommend it to their children, other family members or friends. This finding matches that of Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) that personal recommendations or word-of-mouth referrals of former alumni is one of the key sources of information on the reputation of the host country and its institutions. Additionally, pre-departure word-of-mouth information helps to ease international students' anxiety about adjusting to the new environment. This is consistent with Prugsamatz et al.'s (2006) finding that word-of-mouth is an influential source of information for students pursuing international education.

TEACHERS AND COURSE COORDINATORS AS A SOURCE OF SUPPORT AND ADVICE

Senior secondary school teachers in China often help students increase their knowledge of studying abroad. However, the role of secondary school teachers in shaping students' expectations and plans for international education has not been addressed in the related literature. In interviews for this study, some students mentioned that they sought help from their teachers, mainly during their transitional period from either their foundation course to VET study or from VET to associate degree study. A student, for example, revealed that her secondary school teacher helped her with the application for studying in Australia:

Before coming to Australia, my senior secondary school teacher helped me to apply for study here. I am not quite clear. He (the teacher) said that I could study step by step in this university. I just finished studying work education–it's a certificate. Now I begin the study of diploma in commerce. (Male, Diploma in Commerce)

After settling down in their new learning environment, course teachers and coordinators are the direct sources of help with academic problems, assessment, and transitional issues. Chinese international students in this study share their experiences when turning to their teachers and coordinators for assistance:

Usually our course teacher in foundation class will introduce something about the study. You know, the steps, yeah, the pathways to University (HE). But now in the Diploma course, teachers don't say too much. If we have any questions about transitional pathways, we can contact course coordinator for help. Course teacher will also introduce some information in class. (Female, Diploma in Interior design)

I studied half year in an Australian secondary school and studied foundation courses for one year. Then the teacher (of foundation courses) advised me to apply for associate degree study first. So long as your score can meet the requirement, you can talk to course-coordinator and the person will tell you the pathway from associate degree to bachelor degree and arrange the application process. (Male, Associate Degree in Civil Engineering)

After my studying of foundation, the teacher advised me to study associate degree first because my English was merely above the requirement. Of course I can study for bachelor degree directly, but the teacher said it would be a little harder for students without a rather solid foundation and the courses in bachelor study will be more difficult than associate degree. It's better to start from an easier one. (Female, Associate Degree in Mechanical Engineering)

The excerpts reveal that foundation course teachers often provide more information about transitional steps to tertiary education than VET and Associate Degree teachers. On the one hand, this reflects the fact that students in foundation programs are usually newcomers in Australia and need more help and expect more information about existing academic requirements and pathways within their institutions. Thus, course teachers are a handy source for them to consult. On the other hand, since foundation courses act as the stepping stone for students who want to apply for tertiary

education, it is natural that foundation course teachers are ready to provide more information compared with those teaching VET programs.

Five students expressed concern about the course review, assessment, and transitional duration, which is common at commencing and transitional periods. For example, one student in only the third week of her study of certificate IV in accounting is worried about the assessment:

The class began in 2 July, but I missed two weeks . . .If the course teachers can tell us more about the instructions and format of exam, you know, about quiz by email, it will be better. Or which part should we prepare before the exam. I think it will be better for some new students. (Female, Certificate IV in Accounting)

As a newcomer in Australian tertiary education, this student is particularly in need of learning support. However, she is worried because she could not get support from the course teacher.

The findings from this study support the findings by Prescott and Hellstén (2005) and Tran (2008) that students often seek help from course teachers and course coordinators on academic and transition-related issues once they feel comfortable with and have good interactions with their teachers.

PEER INFLUENCE AND SUPPORT

In their daily lives, students often exchange information on academic issues as well as transitional plans with their peers. Observations in three classes and interviews with nine students show that they prefer to talk with, share information and seek advice from students from the same cultural background. For example:

The classmates are all friendly; some of them are from China and other Asian countries. A few locals are rather older than me, looks like in their 30s or 40's. Usually I have more chat with peer classmates. Only when I cannot understand what the teachers said, I always asked for their (local students') help. You know, their listening and speaking are better. (Female, Certificate IV in Accounting)

Yes we are a group (of three). We feel free to chat with Chinese classmates. It seems that Australian classmates don't like to talk with us; we don't want to talk with them too. (Male, Associate Degree in Mechanical Engineering)

In an in-class interview, the first-named author observed that there were only three Chinese international students in that class and they sat together all the time. Even during the break time, they still preferred to mainly communicate with each other. This phenomenon may indicate their lack of confidence to socialise with peers outside their network or from another country. They had the feeling of being isolated from their Australian peers and did not want to exchange and share information with domestic students. They appear to feel more comfortable to discuss their transitional plans with friends from the same cultural background. This finding supports the view that universities need to develop peer networks and student mentoring to better help international students integrate into the class and institutional community (Fallon, 2006).

The preference to associate with peers from the same background is also quite common among other Chinese international students, as the first-named author observed in other VET courses. This may be partly because of Chinese international students' English communicative skills and the collectivism tradition in Confucius culture. Matthews (1996, p. 6, cited in Kenway & Bullen, 2003, p. 17) refers to the tendency for international students to socialise among themselves and fellows from the same home country as "a pragmatic, practical survival strategy" in the foreign country. Although international student communities are diverse, international residential colleges, international student-targeted curricula, associations and services as "contact zone" of comfort create spaces for shared trust, mutual cognition and "a temporary protection from the legacies of outsider status" for international students (Kenway & Bullen, 2003, p. 17).

Peer influence is also reflected in students' plans for future study. Degree-inclination is a common topic for Chinese international students in their daily communication. For example, students expressed this preference:

Yes, I will continue my study to get a degree. I think this is quite common among Chinese international students. If possible, most of my classmates from China want to get bachelor degree before going back to China. (Diploma in International Business)

In my opinion, the purpose of Chinese international students studying Diploma of design is transferring to HE later. Because our scores cannot meet the requirement of degree study, we chose to study Diplomas first. For me, if my score is good enough when I finish the Diploma study, I think I will possibly study for a degree. My classmates and I all have been approved of a 4 to 5 years' student visa. You know, this program is not in the immigrating lists, and the tuition is rather high, usually we want to get a degree before going back to China. (Diploma in Interior Design)

Like one of the significant groups of international students in Chang et al.'s (2012) research, this cohort of Chinese international students in VET prefer to socialise with international students from mainland China. They are more willing to discuss and consult with each other rather than with domestic students on academic and future transition issues. Poyrazli and Grahame (2007) suggest that while some internationals are more likely to become involved in and have a positive intercultural experience with domestic students and the host institution, others may feel negative and become distant with domestic students and the host culture. Apart from communication skill and the influence of the collective culture, perhaps the aspiration and concern regarding the transitional pathway (Cao & Tran, 2014) is the common grounding for international students from mainland China to share and seek one another's advice as "insiders" in the transition process. Transferring from diploma study to higher education is a common choice for most of Chinese international students in VET and associate degree study.

CONCLUSION

The manners in which Chinese international students in diploma and associate degree programs seek information and support are varied prior to their departure and after their arrival in Australia. Education agents' services are not limited to the pre-departure stage for this cohort of students, but used throughout students' overseas study journeys. For Chinese international students, the role of agents has become increasingly important during their transition from vocational education to associate degree and higher education programs. This study, thus, indicates that there should be a better recognition of the extent to which international students may turn to agents for information and help during this critical period of their study in a host country. This increasing dependence of international students on agents also raises the critical question of how the international education sector and related bodies implement effective measures of quality assurance for agents as well as institutions in partnership with agents.This study highlights key support and information resources for Chinese international students in vocational education, such as family members, word-of-mouth recommendations from relatives and friends, Chinese high school teachers' advice and Australian teachers' suggestions. Enhancing our understanding of how Chinese international students in vocational and associate degree studies seek information and help is essential to enable vocational institutions to effectively cater for students' study needs.

The finding of this study also indicates the need for VET institutions to acknowledge that international students need advice, assistance, and information to make important study decisions, and to facilitate their adaptation prior to their departure, at the beginning of their studies, at transition from foundation to diploma study, or from vocational study to associate degree or HE programs. In addition, given the increasingly influential role of the education agents at different stages of international students' overseas study, there is a critical need for VET institutions to

develop closer partnership with the agents and to work towards a coherent, coordinated approach to provide support and consultancy services to international students beyond the pre-departure stage.

This study provides important insights into the help-seeking manners of Chinese international students in vocational education. Yet the scope of this study is limited to 30 Chinese international students in an Australian dual sector University. It would be valuable to conduct more research into the help-seeking mechanisms of international students in different educational sectors in different stages of their study, including pre-departure, arrival and settling in and during their overseas study. More research into how gender, age, and length of stay in the host countries may influence international students' help-seeking behaviours compared to those of domestic students are also needed. Finally, international students' perceived barriers to seeking assistance and approaches to helping them overcome those barriers would also be a useful topic for further research.

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Revisiting the literature on study abroad participation in adult and higher education: Moving beyond two decades and two percent

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The purpose of this literature review is to critically examine over two decades of research concerned with study abroad participation in the United States. Research questions framing the investigation are: 1) What methodological shortcomings can be identified in assessing influences on study abroad participation for adult and higher education learners in the last 20 years of research? and 2) What tentative solutions can be offered to encourage study abroad participation for adult and higher education learners in the US and globally? To answer the research questions, seminal and key studies contributing to understanding study abroad participation are synthesized to deduce what is needed and important to increase participation rates in study abroad programs for adults in higher education. Tentative solutions and conclusions are made with special attention to perceptions of and motivations to participate in study abroad programs. These suggestions seek to carve new paths and understanding in factors influencing study abroad participation.

Keywords: study abroad, participation; motivation to study abroad; international education; intent to study abroad; perceptions of study abroad; barriers and influences to study abroad.

INTRODUCTION

Academic institutions across the world recognize that the workplace is more dynamic and global than ever before. Sison and Brennan (2012) note, "universities globally are increasingly seeking to improve the international mobility of their students" (p. 167). The most recent Institute of International Education's (IIE) 2013 *Open Doors* report reveals that there has been a national average increase of US students participating in study abroad programs from 2 percent to 3 precent of outgoing American students, and a 40 percent increase in international students studying in the US this decade. The question is why the increase in US students studying abroad is slight while numbers of incoming international students is rising. Sison and Brennan (2012) indicate that the disparity between incoming/outgoing students is not unique to the US, but is also experienced in Australia. US and Australian universities, like other institutions of higher education around the world, showcase globalization and other international institutional initiatives as central themes in their missions, values, and goals (Simon & Brennan, 2012). These institutions self-identify as leaders at the forefront of global education. However, both Australia and the US have yet to send even ten percent of the total adult and higher education (AHE) learner population abroad in one academic year (Simon & Brennan, 2012, p. 167). Hackney et al. (2013) notes that available scholarship about participation in study abroad has historically been limited to the US context as either a destination or as a point of departure. However, the increased presence of developing nations in higher education, as well as growth of higher education in general, creates a need to understand why most students never choose to participate in study abroad (Hackney et al., 2013).

Scholars concerned with study abroad participation agree that the choice to go abroad is influenced by a variety of situational and individual factors. The last two decades of research show a complex spectrum of individual student (personal-based) and institutional-based factors as the greatest influences on participation in international education/study abroad (Brux & Fry, 2010; Carter, 1991; Dessoff, 2006; Dolby, 2004; Hackney, Boggs, Kathawala, & Hayes, 2013;Hembroff & Rusz, 1993; Institute of International Education, 2013; Lincoln Commission, 2005; NAFSA 2004; Salisbury, Umbach, & Paulsen, 2009). Even so, apart from revealing the complexity, the research has not developed a framework that can be used to encourage greater study abroad participation.

The study reported on in this article uses the abundance of US studies and aims to develop a theoretical model that describes the problems and issues confronting study abroad participation, and enables the formulation of new directions for the future of AHE.

Thus, the research questions guiding this literature review asks:

1) What methodological shortcomings can be identified in assessing influences on study abroad participation for adult and higher education learners in the last 20 years of research?
2) What tentative solutions can be offered to encourage study abroad participation by adult and higher education learners in the US and globally?

METHODOLOGY

To answer the research questions, literature was collected from a wide range of sources including: dissertations/theses; government and non-government agency reports; institutional reports/publication; journal articles; books and book chapters; conference papers; and not for profit publications. Database searches focused on publications from 1991-2011. The literature was analysed using a narrative, or traditional, approach to reveal the evolution of understanding (Bem, 1995) on the topic of AHE participation in study abroad programs. In this approach, the emphasis is not on examining an exhaustive list of research on the topic but more examining seminal or major research pieces that build on each other over time (Baumeister & Leary, 1997).

Baumeister and Leary (1997) suggest literature review research, while not operational in a traditional sense of participant data collection, functions within and across disciplines as bridges between "the vast and scattered assortment of articles on a topic" (p. 311). In this type of research, data is collected from existing discourse inviting relevant insight on the topic. Further, literature reviews can serve a specific purpose in revealing "problems, weaknesses, contradictions, or controversies in a particular area of investigation" with attention to broad or specific research questions that may or may not offer "tentative solutions to the problems" (Baumeister & Leary, 1997, p. 312).

To identify the major methodological issues concerning study abroad participation, approaches and assumptions related to the problem of low participation need to be identified. To do so, the researcher, first, offers a chronological review of the literature concerned with study abroad participation and identifies incongruences among the findings, and questions yet to be answered by the current state of research concerned with study abroad participation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Educators, legislators, and higher education institutions have long recognized benefits and the positive impact of participation in study abroad programs. Study abroad can "help students develop practical skills that complement classroom learning, improve problem solving, analytical skills, tolerance for ambiguity, and cross-cultural competence" (NAFSA, 2004, p. 17). AHE learners around the world

become more employable (Teichler & Janson, 2007); have a better sense of self and identity (Dolby, 2004); enhance career development/advancement (Norris & Gillespie, 2008); and transform their perspectives/worldviews (Sanders & Morgan, 2001) through participation in study abroad programs. But, alas, participation rates still flounder.

Findings from that research are presented and organized under the following headers: initial studies; other approaches following/informed by initial studies; and current relevant literature. This section concludes with a summary of deductions from the collection of research concerned with study abroad participation to connect previous understandings to new paths of inquiry. To identify possible solutions to encourage study abroad participation, novel paths of inquiry are used, examining literature that reframes the question and focusing on new, sparsely explored directions, such as perceptions of and motivations to study abroad for AHE learners.

Initial studies

Early research efforts asked students from different institutions why they elected not to study abroad. The research aim was to identify predictive variables explaining why some students did not study abroad. Research concerned with study abroad participation in the early 1990's underscored particular qualities present in the "typical" study abroad participant. Resultant profile sketches of the typical student going abroad showed that those who had interest in study abroad were in their first-year, fairly affluent, Caucasian, and female (Carlson, Burn, Useem & Yachimowicz, 1991; Cloughly, 1991). Researchers' early efforts placed emphasis on both pre-departure and post-departure aspects of education abroad in institution-wide evaluations (Carlson & Widaman, 1988; Carlson, Burns, Useem, & Yachimowicz 1991). Mixed method approaches were utilized to study who participates in study abroad and how those individuals differ from those who choose to stay at the home campus; what sorts of differences occurred over time; what individual influences contributed to changes observed; and what the long-term effects were (Carlson et al., 1991, p. 1). Carlson et al's. (1991) study showed that only students who had an interest in global issues typically participated; those not having such interest were not likely to participate in a study abroad course. Students who went abroad also reported significantly different self-rated academic performance than students who did not go abroad. Thus, the researchers concluded that those students who expressed an interest in a number of global issues and a desire for intercultural interactions, as well as students who perceived themselves to be high academic achievers were more likely to go abroad than students who did not exhibit these traits.

Other significant research efforts in this decade stressed the importance of the institution as a key influential factor (Cloughly, 1991). While less than one percent of students enrolled in AHE studied abroad in the early 1990s, some academic intuitions reported having 60 per cent of all students study abroad at some point in their academic journey (Cloughly, 1991). Evaluating responses from students who did not go abroad revealed: a lack of personal interest relating to the experience and/or destination; already having been to the destination; academic limitations; uncertainty concerns regarding safety and language; lack of planning; health and contextually bound limitations, such as missing social activities with friends; and lack of familial support (Cloughly, 1991).

Other researchers in the 1990's identified major demographic trends, which are still reflected in participations rates today. These trends emphasized that low-income minorities and male students were not likely to ever consider studying abroad (Carter, 1991; Cole, 1991). Influences on participation for minority and male AHE learners manifested differently than those for higher-income female counterparts. Carter (1991) and Cole (1991) related conversations about financial considerations, and the idea that study abroad was not a reality for many of the minority students because of lack of awareness, support (institutionally and socially), employment and monetary limitations. Other scholars, such as Hembroff and Rusz (1993, p. 31), suggested low study abroad participation rates among

minorities could be attributed to higher dropout rates for minority students in the junior and senior years of college.

Synthesizing this early research work, it is possible to derive five emergent themes centred on student-based and institutional-based influences.

1. Personal: Interest is one of the key factors. Essentially, if a student bears a personal obstacle related to health (limited mobility) or sees no value, has already been abroad, or has no desire for intercultural interaction they are most likely not to want to participate in study abroad (Albers-Miller, Prenshaw & Straughan, 1999; Carlson & Widaman, 1988; Carlson et al., 1991; Cloughly, 1991).
2. Academic: Educational concerns related to academic major, graduation and perceived achievement plays into interest as well. Study abroad course credit options and available programs across a diversity of majors have been named as one of the primary influences on study abroad participation (Paul & Mukhopadhyay, 1991; Salisbury, Paulsen, & Pascarella, 2009; Schmoll, 2007; Toncar, Reid & Anderson, 2005).
3. Institutional: Additionally, institutional/organizational context, including the university, department, agents with the university, or program, together influence participation in study abroad. Institutions that do not offer study abroad courses, or do not raise awareness about those opportunities (via campus initiatives, department initiatives, or other international program initiatives) influence study abroad participation (Albers-Miller et al., 1999; Kitsantas, 2004; Miller, 2004; Peterson, 2003).
4. Social: Socially bound/constructed perceptions formed through social interactions influence participation in study abroad programs. Students can be influenced by their social networks to study abroad or, conversely not to study abroad because of limited knowledge or exposure from individuals who have studied abroad (Carter, 1991; Chieffo, 2000; Cole, 1991; Jackson, 2005; Nyaupane, Paris, & Teye, 2011).
5. Financial: Perceived and real financial concerns exist for learners, especially minorities and low-income groups (Brux & Fry, 2010; Carter, 1991; Cole, 1991; Hembroff & Rusz, 1993).

These influences can be highly interconnected, and a students' decision to study abroad could be impacted by one or all of these influences. Likely, influences to study abroad participation do not exist in singular absolute states. For example, a student could suggest limited financial mobility influenced his/her decision to not go abroad in addition to not knowing anyone who studied abroad before. This suggests social influences compounded by financial issues could limit a students' access to information about scholarships, funding opportunities, and financial aid to go abroad.

In the early 2000's, researchers continued to utilize mostly quantitative methodologies to examine reasons why some students were going abroad while others were not. However, the research placed more focus on the primary influences in the choice process rather than simply sketching a profile or offering descriptive data about the average student abroad. Chieffo's (2000) researcher-designed questionnaire was administered to 1060 mostly upper-classmen students and sought to identify the spectrum of influences and information participants were accessing to explain what in particular contributed to motivations to participate, or not to participate. Findings yielded from this investigation revealed that less than 30 percent of the sample at a large research university reported to know more than just the fundamental basics about any particular study abroad program (Chieffo, 2000).

Research in the early 2000s drew attention to the academic year as a component influencing an individual's decision to participate in a study abroad course. While entry-level students were likely to express a greater total percentage of interest, it was not until later in the academic career that the individual actually began to actively seek information about a specific study abroad course (Booker,

2001; Cheiffo, 2000). These findings contributed to previous research in the 1990's that suggested motivation changed based on academic performance and academic year (Chieffo, 2000). Scholars noted that motivations to study abroad could remain high regardless of academic year, but were mostly acted upon in the junior and senior year (Booker, 2001; Cheiffo, 2000). Further, Chieffo's (2000) dissertation research highlights that motivation to study abroad could be mediated by peer networks. Friends acted as a resource to find out more and form perceptions about what study abroad has to offer. Students who lacked peer resources or other social networks to provide information about study abroad were unacknowledged by researchers and in scholarship at that time.

Research in the 2000's began to use more individualized approaches to understanding personal constraints by underscoring social and financial issues influencing participation (Booker, 2001). A comparison between groups based on demographic, personal background characteristics, study abroad program preferences, and perceptions of institutional support, as well as perceived outcomes, perceived social influences and perceived obstacles were evaluated (Booker, 2001, p. 57). Again, however, this research served as summative numerical data describing the type of student who most typically goes abroad, quantitatively identifying only their issues and concerns. Collective findings from factor analyses ran parallel with previous efforts sketching a rough profile of the probable type of student most likely to take part in studying abroad: non-minority females of the middle-class (Booker, 2001, p. 57).

Booker's (2001) research emphasized that narratives in social interactions are important for perception-formation encouraging students who have the resources in their social networks to take up the opportunities they have heard about. However, Booker's research fails to explain why male and minority/multicultural students in the US are so dramatically underrepresented in the total number students abroad, and why these students do not consider studying abroad even at the start of their time in higher education. Again, Booker's (2001) work affirmed that fairly affluent, non-Caucasian females are most likely to connect to narratives about study abroad from within their social networks, but his research does not examine male or minority/multicultural students who lack social network support. Additionally, this research did not explain those individuals who do not have peers and other social resources who previously participated in a study abroad course.

Both Chieffo (2000) and Booker (2001) carried out quantitative studies to identify the determinants of student participation in study abroad programs, but they the variables were operationalized differently. In addition, the studies were limited by the types of institutions and populations evaluated. The focused was on students between the ages of 18-23 and recent high school graduates. While Chieffo (2000) noted level of degree completion introduces variation in participation rates because of attrition, there is no follow up to establish differences between the varied AHE learners. Further, research favouring academic level of completion as an influence to participation would focus more on course options, graduation and impending employment opportunities than on drop out and enrolment statistics. Chieffo's research was descriptive. It offered a profile of the student who would typically study abroad, but did not offer insights into why non-Caucasian or male students do not consider studying abroad as an option available to them.

Institutional considerations warrant further explanation as well. As noted by Cloughly (1991), organizational buy-in plays an important role in influencing participation for small liberal arts institutions; however, by sheer volume, big research universities comprise most of the participation numbers (IIE, 2010). While small liberal arts colleges may not comprise the bulk of participation in numbers, there is still a need to examine institutional strategies for communicating messages regarding study abroad and the influence this has on individuals to participate in study abroad programs.

Overall, much of the research during the 1990s failed to operationalize an individualized frame to understand how social, personal, academic, financial, and/or institutional factors interact and manifest in any one student.

Other approaches following/informed by the initial studies

The early 2000's generated new thinking on measuring and evaluating study abroad participation. Large-scale evaluation studies replaced with more individual approaches, looking at how social influences manifested personally for AHE learners (Dolby, 2004; Kitsantas, 2004; Miller, 2004; Peterson, 2003). The resources accessed by students and how these shaped thinking about participation in study abroad were especially important considerations. Peterson (2003) posited both real and perceived barriers could be overcome and remedied by the types of social interactions a student engages in, even when the student perceived it was too costly, or would not fit within a structured degree plan. Research findings from this study were key in uncovering the value that academic and peer social networks provided to students who expressed interest in study abroad but did not initially feel like it was something attainable.

While findings from novel research at this time identified the importance of resources accessed within the social network, inside and outside the institution, it also revealed the importance of institutional social network support. Miller's (2004) research noted that international or domestic travel exposure prior to the study abroad decision as well as ease of access to information through the institution influenced a student to say "yes" to study abroad versus other learning-through-doing opportunities (Miller, 2004). A higher education institution whose faculty and staff encourage, support, and communicate a positive position regarding participation in studying abroad to their students could likely find they serve as a social network resource influencing more information seeking, and more peer to peer sharing.

Not only were peer resources important for providing information and support about study abroad, they also provided ulterior motivation for students who wanted to simply use study abroad to engage socially with friends (Dolby, 2004; Kitsantas, 2004; Opper, Teicher, & Carlson, 1991). Kitsantas' (2004) studies showed that students desire to engage in social interactions and gatherings, to cultivate their own skills in cross-cultural settings, and to develop increased proficiencies and interest in the subject enrolled abroad. The desire to engage socially with other students was an incidental finding in Kitsantas' study, but useful in highlighting a core source of influence shaping perceptions and motivations. In spite of revealing more information about motivations to participate in study abroad programs, the studies by Kitsantas and Opper, et al., were again limited because their samples were predominantly Caucasian and female. A sample that a great deal was already known about.

Kitsantas (2004), Miller (2004), and Peterson (2003) studied the interaction of institutional and peer social network influences, and examined the individual's ability to navigate these influences. Both goals and interests played a part in decision-making concerning study-abroad participation but the studies do not clarify what part the factors played. Both Kitsantas' (2004) and Peterson's (2003) work, employing quantitative measures, warrant further investigation using qualitative methods that can capture a clearer understanding of individual, socio-cultural, perspectives.

Collaboratively, Kitsantas (2004), Miller 2004 and Peterson (2003) identified resources accessed by the student emphasizing social and institutional networks, such as family members and faculty. Studies showed that these influences are at work even before students attend university (Kitsantas, 2004). Studies further found that students access information, form perceptions about what study abroad could mean for them, and negotiate how study abroad could potentially enrich their academic/professional goals within the context of their personal and social lives before going to university and at university

(Kitsantas, 2004; Miller; 2004; Peterson, 2003). Although the studies identified the importance of networks, how students use these networks was not studied (Salisbury, et al., 2010).

Current relevant literature

In 2009, BailyShea (2009) and Salisbury et al. (2010) began to explore dimensions of intent/motivation, and how various social and cultural influences mediate the desire and choice process to study abroad. Other major research efforts were revisiting why participation rates reflected mostly Caucasian females, and excluded minority/multicultural and male AHE learners. The most current research places greater emphasis on gender disparities and what specifically contributes to reasons why more Caucasians and females go abroad than males and minorities (Brux & Fry, 2010; Nguyen, 2014; Simon & Ainsworth, 2012; Stroud, 2010). Brux and Fry (2010) examined how influences manifested across minorities within a more individualized methodological frame using qualitative focus group data collection and survey data. While the sample size was small, 29 responses via survey and 42 participants in various multicultural student organizations, results provided a powerful indication of the real and perceived influences minority students face when thinking about study abroad participation. Financial barriers, academic concerns and fit, family and work obligations, types of programs available, and safety were among the prominent concerns (Brux & Fry, 2010). Similarly, Simon and Ainsworth (2012) found that many African-American students reported disinterest in study abroad, suggesting it was not something widely practiced or encouraged for AHE learners. While influences for participating by minority groups contained some thematic similarities, it is evident from the research that each minority group internalizes obstacles and influences specific to their own lives.

Recent research reveals that interest in study abroad is relatively high across all groups in the university (Salisbury et al., 2010). Connecting early studies to current research on the topic highlights many social considerations. Early research discusses prior travel exposure as a resource of social capital, increasing motivation and likelihood of participation (Miller, 2004). More recent investigations exploring minority/multicultural group perspectives asserts that if minority students believe they will be more welcomed in other countries (more so than they are in the US) they may be interested in study abroad opportunities, even if they do not know an individual within their own social networks who has taken part in study abroad (Brux and Fry, 2010). Essentially, while previous travel exposure influences some Caucasian students, it may not be applicable to all students. Further, research reveals that the idea of living further from home is dependent on the personal predisposition, suggesting, again, a dynamic between personal/individual and social factors of AHE learners' participation in study abroad.

Deductions to encourage participation

Researchers in the past few decades have identified a number of factors to account for low participation rates in study abroad opportunities. However, much of the research does not distinguish between individual and situational (institutional and contextual) influences. Salisbury et al. (2009) highlighted the complexities of disaggregating external (institutional-based) and internal (student-based) influences and the relationship these influences have on the decision to go abroad. In addition, most research on study abroad participation delineate between students who go abroad and students who do not go abroad (Thomas, 2013). Thomas (2013) remark that the historic trend whereby researchers categorize students who go/do not has effectively problematized study abroad for minority/multicultural AHE learners, creating hierarchies between racial groups and lumping all minority interests into one category. Nguyen's (2014) research showed that individual influences manifest uniquely within cultural groups and sub-groups, emphasizing that study abroad participation is not a two-sided coin.

Even research efforts in the last decade that seek to account for individual dispositions place little emphasis on the actual messages and sources of social and cultural capital and the influence those

messages have on perceptions of and motivations to participate in a study abroad course. Further, Salisbury et al. (2011) contend the choice process associated with study abroad is almost identical to the process of deciding where to go to college where "a range of decisions based on affordability, cultural accessibility, intellectual and professional applicability, and curricular viability" are assessed by the individual (Salisbury et al., 2009, p. 123). The core assumptions underpinning Salisbury et al.'s research compare an often four-week or less commitment decision (identified as the most popular duration period for study abroad) to a much longer four-year, or more, commitment and decision.

Comparisons drawn between general college enrolment and study abroad participation, while not completely unwarranted, place a wide lens on what influences participation in study abroad. Using a theoretical understanding about general college enrolment to examine reasons for study abroad participation can make approaches to isolating specific influences to study abroad participation for AHE learners difficult. For example, Salisbury et al's. (2009) positioning of intent to study abroad and enrolment into college as comparatively the same decision-making process is problematic in that it does not draw connections between messages negotiated from cultural and social capital formation and actual participation in study abroad. More importantly, Salisbury et al's. (2009) research neglects a critical perspective accounting for how socio-cultural influences serve to motivate or encourage increased capital to some groups, while serving to deter other groups. Additionally, the comparisons position the research in a perspective based on traditional higher education student entry and neglect some of the more complex issues facing adult learners and populations who do not enter higher education in a traditional fashion.

Desoff (2006) also argues that higher education enrolment and study abroad participation do not model the same decision-making processes and do not encounter the same influences. Desoff (2006) notes that capacity to finance study abroad is not the only issue: "if it were, the percentage of minority students in the study abroad population would match their percentage in the student body as a whole" (p. 21).

Overall, the past two decades of research on the topic of study abroad participation across AHE agree on factors that influences study abroad participation, but only few researchers have studied the nature of the factors themselves. Most researchers employ quantitative measures to make deductions and offer descriptions about a profile they already know a great deal about. The following section particularly focuses on the social and cultural capital influences, paying particular attention to how individual perceptions of and motivations to study abroad for AHE learners interact with social, institutional, personal, academic, and financial influences.

TENTATIVE SOLUTIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Authors generally position motivation in terms of an array of factors contributing to the decision to participate in study abroad (BailyShea, 2009; Booker, 2001; Miller, 2004; Peterson, 2003; Salisbury et al., 2009). Additionally, researchers examining motivations to study abroad question individuals who have expressed interest in wanting to go and individuals who have no interest in going abroad. Essentially, this leaves the current state of research with knowledge about how to predict the highest probability of studying abroad but fails to explain the sources serving as motivational influences.

Perceptions

Previous approaches to operationalizing influences on study abroad participation have implicitly included perception and motivation, little scholarship exists on distinguishing the independent/interdependent functions of each. Smith-Sebasto (2007) made the distinction in his research on teachers' motivations and perceptions to participate in a Residential Environmental

Education (REE) program. He used a grounded theory approach to explore the reasons why teachers chose to participate in a given study abroad program, and what or who influenced that. This study stresses AHE learners' prior experience and capability to connect their role in educational settings to their own knowledge bases.

The research carried out by Hackney, Boggs, and Borazan (2012) and Toncar et al. (2005) highlight the role that perception plays in terms of students' motivation to participate in a study abroad course. Students credited particular sources of social capital (someone they know who has participated in study abroad, the university offering information about study abroad opportunities, and advisors) as resources utilized in forming perceptions about what study abroad is and what programs are available (Albers-Miller et al., 1999). Further, this line of research demonstrates real and perceived concerns related to study abroad participation stem from a complex decision-making process influenced by employability, academic deadlines, and goals as well as financial issues. Business students' expressed concerns and perceptions of study abroad opportunities are situated within an adult-centred approach whereby an individual must negotiate multiple complex cognitions in order to feel motivated to participate in that opportunity (Hackney et al., 2012; Toncar et al., 2005).

As discussed earlier, both social and cultural capital are negotiated through an individual's personal context via family, friends, school, home life, work life, etc. Salisbury et al's. (2009, 2011) research drew a link between the construct of student-choice and the decision to participate in education abroad as both a model of cost versus benefits, as well as a model of perceived social and cultural capital. Salisbury et al. (2011) established that perceptions play a role in how AHE learners' understand their own competencies and abilities (i.e., capital) in order to navigate their social and cultural world. This internalization then becomes a way to decide whether or not study abroad is feasible, attainable and desirable.

While research in the early 2000s was placing new focus on resources students used to learn more about study abroad, subsequent research did not dig deeply into those conversations. Students identify that study abroad would be beneficial, fun, an overall good experience, useful for employment because of what they had heard from their peers, family, faculty, and staff at the academic institution (Albers-Miller et al., 1999). Albers-Miller et al. (1999) found that students perceived study abroad in a positive light, regardless of major. However, the researchers did not identify what conversations or specific messages contributed to positive perception formation. The researchers make it clear that sources of social and cultural capital are integral in perception formation, but do not place a lot of importance on what those conversation exchanges sound like for the student in a social interaction.

Motivation

Generating positive perceptions about study abroad has been used as a marketing tool to encourage motivation since the early 1930's. Integrating insights from perception formation into consequential motivation provides a way for researchers to elucidate the particular sources/messages serving as cultural and social capital and the influences they bear on AHE learners' ultimate decision to study abroad. Perceptions, additionally, become a tool used to draw AHE learners into participation in study abroad programs (Meras, 1932).

While expressed goals of a given study abroad program play a part in an individual's positive perception of that particular study abroad program, the ultimate motivation to act lies at the intersection of a more dynamic interplay of cognitions. Kitsantas (2004) found goals related to cross-cultural development, and desire to engage socially with peers were among the most significant findings in evaluating motivation to participate in courses abroad. Weirs-Jenseen (2003) highlighted academic competition, and family heritage can also motivate AHE learners. Goals and family heritage varies

from student to student and is, therefore, an important and individualised determining factor. Griner and Sobol (2014) indicate that studying abroad must be considered within the cultural context. For Chinese and Indian AHE learners, motivations may lie in perceptions of a US education, since it is the most popular destination to study abroad (Griner & Sobol, 2014). Together, these findings lend support to the idea that social and cultural capital, accessed via interactions with friends, family and faculty play a relatively powerful role in terms of encouraging motivation.

Jarvis and Peel (2008) further addressed issues related to motivation suggesting AHE learners' motives and perceptions extend further than goals established by the study abroad program. They found that students use study abroad courses to engage in novel and exciting experiences, get to know new people (from the home campus), and to escape the mundane. Further, perceptions of and motivations to participate in a particular study abroad program can be reconciled through multiple socially and culturally bound influences. Nyaupane et al., (2011) extended discussions about motivations to study abroad for university students noting social capital not only plays a role in encouraging participation, but it could also motivate the student to study abroad in a specific destination:

> An individual's social ties, in this case, close friends who live in a foreign country, can influence the value placed upon certain destinations. Further, the importance of academic motivations for the population under examination, university study abroad students, in choosing a destination region to travel can be a reflection of the norms and values of the reference group for these students. (p. 213).

Together, approaches to evaluating motivations to study abroad emphasize message production within social and cultural ties, especially when considering the low percentage of AHE learners who participate in study abroad each year. Establishing a new direction for research concerned with study abroad participation provides new avenues to increase participation across groups who have been historically underrepresented in the US and around the globe. Identifying resources contributing to perception formation, specifically from social networks and cultural interactions, may serve to produce meaning about what study abroad is, what it offers, and how AHE learners become motivated by those messages.

One thing researchers concerned with study abroad participation can agree upon is the influence of social networks on perceptions of and motivations to study abroad (BailyShea, 2009; Miller, 2004; Peterson, 2003; Salisbury et al., 2009). Further, including socio-cultural considerations on perceptions of and motivations to study abroad for AHE learners holds potential to reveal new perspectives and bridge gaps in previous research concerned with study abroad participation. However, it is clear that challenges persist. Salisbury et al. (2009) suggest: "there is little indication of the degree to which these responses were evidence of an active barrier to participation or a retroactive justification for the decision not to participate" (p. 121). Scholars in study abroad research are challenged by a multidimensional issue convoluted by both actual and perceived influences to participation.

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The international student's experience: An exploratory study of students from Vietnam

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International students are an important part of today's global university sector. This paper explores, through 10 in-depth interviews, the perceptions of Vietnamese international students studying with regard to their experience of teaching and learning in Australia. The findings indicate that Vietnamese students struggle with language, assessment, and Western teaching and learning styles. Many interviewees felt that local students often lumped them together with other international students, who sometimes had no desire to befriend or work with them. The paper provides recommendations on how to improve students' experiences and adds to the current debate on international students' satisfaction, with general implications for international education.

Keywords: international students; student satisfaction; Vietnamese students; student experience; higher education; student voice;

INTRODUCTION

Where university students were once overwhelmingly local young men and women straight out of school, there are now significant minorities of students who do not fit this stereotype. Universities have realised the financial and social benefits to be gained by offering more flexible options to older students who might not be able to study during business hours, to those who are unable to access the campus due to distance, and to a wide range of students from overseas who know employers would value a degree from particular foreign countries.

There is now a growing body of research on the experiences of international students. The research, however, often sacrifices specificity for generalizability. While it is indeed true that many aspects of the university experience are similar for all international students, studies of the international student experience have progressed to the point at which it is useful to consider the experiences of students from particular regions and countries, and within particular contexts. Such research could inform policy and marketing aimed at international students from that country at an institutional or, even, federal level. The present study undertakes this endeavour by using an exploratory research methodology focusing on postgraduate Vietnamese international students studying abroad, on campus at a university in Australia.

Many studies of international students have tended to be quantitative in nature; for example using data gathered from course evaluation surveys most students administered upon completion of a subject. Gunawardena and Wilson (2012, p. 4) have drawn attention to the comparative drought of qualitative, or mixed method, material in the literature, and emphasised the benefits qualitative data, which could bring to the study of the student experience a sensitivity to culture and ability to elicit otherwise unknown concerns.

As of July 2012, 10,676 Vietnamese students were enrolled at Australian universities. Although this accounted for only 4.8 percent of international students, Vietnam was still the fourth highest source of students for the Australian international higher education market after China (41%), Malaysia (7.2%) and India (5.2%) (Australian Education International, 2013, p. 5). As the Vietnamese economy develops, and the Vietnamese government further invests in education, the demand for greater numbers of Vietnamese students to study overseas will likely increase (Le, 2014). Evidently, the enrolment of Vietnamese students in the Australian higher education sector increased to 12,300 as of November 2014 (Department of Education, 2014). In addition, the education service exports from Australia to Vietnam are on the increase. In 2009-10, the export revenue stood at $800 million compared to $400 million in 2007-08 (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2011). After the US and UK, Australia is the third most popular destination for international students. In the arena of international education, Australia is 'punching well above its weight'. Education and training contributed 4.5 percent of Australia's GDP, making it the ninth highest contributor (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012, p. 511), and the export of higher education was priced at $9.4 billion for the 2010-11 financial year (p. 454).

A recent study focussing on push-and-pull factors for international students studying in Australia showed that even though Vietnamese migration agents tended to rate Australia as less desirable than the US and UK on a number of indicators, students and alumni still consider it to be more desirable than either (Lawson, 2011). Given the increasing numbers of Vietnamese students studying in Australia, there has been surprisingly little research dedicated to them. Even internationally, Vietnamese students have received little attention (Brisset, Safdar, Lewis & Sabatier, 2010; Tran, 2009). Tran (2009), and Brisset and colleagues (2010) recently examined issues concerning acculturation and psychological adjustment. However, in general, the educational experiences of Vietnamese students are unexamined. As such, this paper will explore, through series of qualitative interviews, the perceptions of Vietnamese international students with regard to their experiences with teaching and learning in Australia. The paper provides recommendations on how to improve students' experiences as consumers of higher education. The paper also adds to the current discussion on international students' satisfaction and international education generally.

BACKGROUND LITERATURE

The literature review will concentrate on East/Southeast Asian students, especially those from nations steeped heavily in the Confucian culture. The paper focuses particularly on the literature related to socio-cultural adjustment, language, and teaching and learning experiences of international students. The paper's perspective is that socio-cultural adjustment is an important aspect which requires attention because it may influence students' experiences of teaching and learning.

Given the economic importance of the international student, their experience should be considered as an issue of customer satisfaction. In this sense, non-academic experiences of international students should also be considered as having a significant effect on the students'

evaluations of their investments in education. Arambewela (2010, pp. 158-159) treats this issue in the context of globalisation theory, and the "massificiation" of higher education. In this view, universities are seen as now being geared toward providing workers for the global "knowledge economy," as opposed to a more traditional model where they sought to develop the student and community both socially and culturally (Rizvi, 2005). Students from developing countries, especially in Asia, are the "users" of the knowledge economy, while those in the West are the "producers" (Arambewela, 2010, p. 160). The further ramification of this is that while these students are studying overseas they are exposed to a plethora of new experiences and are subject to a shift in self-identity to a more "mobile identity" (Rizvi, 2005).

As one might expect, international students differ from local students as to what they look for in a university (Sherry, Bhat, Beaver, & Ling, 2004). Arambewela, Hall, and Zuhair (2005) found that the main factors influencing the satisfaction of international students are quality of education, facilities, the reputation of institution and their degree, possibility for better careers, and 'the overall customer value'. Customer satisfaction operates within a "zone of tolerance" (Berry & Parasuraman, 1991, p. 58; East, 2001). In this model, there is a range of performance that customers are willing to accept. However, this zone is limited by customers' assumptions or "passive expectations" (Oliver & DeSarbo, 1988). This was the case in a 1992 study of international students at three South Australian universities who were prepared to recommend a university even when their view of its teaching quality was unsatisfactory (Mullins, Quintrell, & Hancock, 1995, p. 209).

Some scholars have repented giving special attention to international students. Biggs and Tang (2007) prefer to consider them more holistically as part of "constructively aligned teaching and assessment" (p. xviii). Biggs (2003) divides the perceived problems international students face into three main categories: socio-cultural adjustment, language (which he leaves more or less to one side), and learning/teaching problems due to "culture". Campbell and Li's 2005 study of Asian students at a New Zealand university reflect this with their identification of the problems facing international students; including language and cultural differences, which creating communication barriers; unfamiliar classroom behaviours; a lack of knowledge regarding academic conventions; a lack of learning support; difficulties making friends with local students; and a lack of a sense of belonging (Campbell & Li, 2008; see also Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007). As these align, somewhat, with Biggs' three areas, it may be useful to discuss the issues surrounding international student's experiences with these areas in mind.

Socio-cultural adjustment

It stands to reason that anyone studying in another country will take some time to acculturate to the local environment. Arambewela and Hall (2007) concluded that the international student experience was decided not only by their satisfaction with their study "but also by their home life, job, relationships, security and meaningful community engagement" (p. 12), so this is a matter of no small concern. Even between relatively similar countries, such as Australia and the US, there are a myriad of tiny differences that serve to unsettle the student and help contribute to culture shock. How much larger the difference, then, when a culture is markedly different from one's own and the language is other than your mother tongue? Hellstén (2002) found that even though international students had some notion of the Australian way of life before travelling here, they often suffered severe culture-shock upon arrival; the main cause being when behaviour contradicted that "sanctioned" back home, including such seemingly harmless behaviours as speaking in class or acting in a familiar manner with teachers.

Biggs (1996) indicates that the culture shock so often ascribed to Asian international students is based on stereotypes with assumed Confucian rote-learning styles and idol-worship of academics. In partial support of Biggs' assertion is Pyvis and Chapman's 2005 study of Singaporeans studying at an Australian university on their own soil. Even though they never left Singapore, these students studied in English and experienced Western teaching methods, and they experienced significant measures of culture shock. Focussing specifically upon Vietnamese students, a French study found that students' socio-cultural adaption could be predicted by attachment intimacy and ethnic identification (Brisset et al, 2010), but an earlier study of Vietnamese in Canada found weaker ethnic identification (Chow, 2006).

There is also a concern that international students do not mix with local students. These perceptions were subject to change after exposure to one another, however. Biggs (2003) suggests that, at least as far as in-class group work is concerned, this is a point where teachers can facilitate interaction. In the case of Vietnamese students at several universities in Australia, Tran (2009) found that, while students invariably stated their preference for integrating with local students, their behaviours usually reflected an actual orientation of remaining separate from them. They mostly associated with those of their own nationality or other international students.

Language

Prior studies also discuss the relationship between international students' levels of English fluency and their academic performance, choice of courses and the level of homesickness. For example, Gunawardena and Wilson (2012) note that, even though Australian universities require international students to complete some form of language assessment to a satisfactory level before successful enrolment—such as the International English Language Teaching System (IELTS)—students often lack confidence in fluency, for spoken class participation and written expression in 'academic English'. Some have even suggested that poor confidence with language is a factor in international students choosing to study degrees where facility with English is less of a concern, such as IT, economics or science (Chan, 1999).

Beyond simple, testable English proficiency, some students find it difficult to understand Australian idiom. This was the case for students at a university in Sydney, who received little benefit from note-taking classes beyond anecdotal evidence of a continued relationship with the facilitator which they later utilised to fend off isolation (Shea, Fisher, & Turner, 2001). An earlier study of overseas students at a UK university found that among the eight statistically significant factors influencing their concerns, the strongest correlation was between English facility and homesickness (Li & Kaye, 1998).

Learning/teaching problems due to "culture"

Marginson (2011, p. 587) notes the four pillars of a modern, Confucian "knowledge economy" being: 1) strong direction from the state; 2) universal participation in tertiary education "sustained by a private duty, grounded in Confucian values, to invest in education"; 3) one-shot entry exams; and 4) intense public investment in research and universities. There is a large body of literature that juxtaposes Western pedagogy with "Confucian" systems of learning prevalent in East Asia. This often leads to stereotypes of East Asian students as "surface" or "rote learners" (Ballard & Clanchy, 1991; Kaputin 1988; Samuelowicz, 1987). Biggs (1996) and others (e.g. Helmke & Vo, 1999; Lee, 1996) have sought to dispel this misconception, and a number of studies have pointed to the academic success which East Asian students have in the West. Marton, Dall'Alba and Tse (1993) suggested that East Asian students may have different memorising habits than Westerners but, of the two methods, they identified, "mechanical

memorising" and "memorising with understanding," they suggested that Asian students engaged with the latter.

Nguyen (1988, 1997) identified two possible issues Vietnamese students face when studying in the West: a lack of familiarity with teamwork and a generally passive attitude. These are based on cultural issues and not necessarily due to lack of proficiency in English (Yates & Nguyen, 2012). The esteem given to education and teachers in Vietnamese culture influences traditional Vietnamese teaching and learning methods; these, in turn, contribute to the behaviour of Vietnamese students wherever they study. Phan (2001) found that Vietnamese students lacked training in critical thinking and were unwilling to question published information. The latter negates, of course, one reason for referencing sources: it would be rude to say, 'such and such *claims* this to be the case'; it is assumed that if they said so, it must *be* the case.

It is also often asserted that international students, especially those from Confucian cultures, have difficulties understanding plagiarism and comprehending the Western system of referencing sources. It is believed that Asian cultures subjugate their own voices to those of experts so much that they would rather just use the words of those experts verbatim (Ballard & Clanchy, 1991). Of course, local students at many Western universities can exhibit a similarly poor understanding of plagiarism, and Franklyn-Stokes and Newstead (1995) found that over 50 percent of students surveyed admitted to some form of plagiarism.

Mapping diversity among international students

Much of the above literature refers to international students as a single group and assumes homogeneity. The relevance of this literature to Vietnamese international students remains unclear. Recently, there have been more studies examining students' experience and customer satisfaction issues in relation to different national groups (Abdullah, 2011; Abukhattala, 2013; Bonazzo & Wong, 2007; Caluya, Probyn & Vas, 2011; Gunawardena, Wilson, Georgakis, Bagnall, 2010), particularly Chinese students (Dyer & Lu, 2010; Wang, Taplin & Brown, 2011; Clemes, Cohen & Wang, 2013).

As one might expect, these studies have highlighted considerable variation in relation to different cultural groups' perspectives of teaching and learning, English language study and cultural adaption to study abroad. For example Gunawardena and Wilson (2012) showed that Indian sub-continent students were highly competent in English academic writing and, although English was often not their mother tongue. They felt frustrated when grouped with other non-English speaking international students, with staff had often assuming that they were weak in English.

Cultural groups of international students are naturally characterised by the strengths and weaknesses of their home education systems, by their range of competencies in English, and by their cultural values, all which impact upon how they adjust to foreign education. However, these factors are rapidly changing. Take English language proficiency, for example, which has profound influence on students' experience in navigating university education in western countries (Biggs, 2003). Globalisation has significantly impacted the local cultures and traditions of all Asian countries, including their English language education. The high value placed on education is common to all Confucian cultures and the acquisition of English language knowledge is considered important to the economic, social and technological progress of the countries. However, the countries differ in their goals and the mechanisms followed in developing English as a second language. In her study on the impact of globalisation on English language programs in Vietnam, Hall (2008) found that the primary aim of English language proficiency amongst Vietnamese students was to gain access to information technology. This

stands in contrast to English education in, for example, South Korea, where policy and cultural values highlight the value of English for employment and economic opportunity (Song, 2011). The teaching and delivery mechanisms in Vietnam were designed to "minimise cultural intrusion in the process of second language acquisition" (Hall, 2008, p. 35) in that the curriculum, language teaching methodology, and classroom procedures were developed within the Vietnamese context. One could argue that, despite commonalities with other Confucian cultural expectations, differences can exist in how children learn and use the English language during their early years, which could have a diverse impact on their student experiences in later years. In this context, Vietnamese students demonstrate one difference from other Confucian cultures; there may be others.

The specific experiences of Vietnamese students remain largely unexamined (Tran, 2009; Brisset et al, 2010). In the remainder of this paper, we go on to consider, in detail, this group's experiences at an Australian university.

METHODOLOGY

This study is a survey of the experiences of postgraduate Vietnamese students at a single university in Australia, using qualitative, semi-structured interviews. The study is part of a larger project collecting in-depth qualitative information on the experiences of different international student cohorts so as to map the variation in international student experiences according to nationality and cultural background.

Sample and data collection

A purposive sample (Deming, 1990) was used so that each interview could be analysed in depth and lead to "thick" descriptions for each of the concepts under study. As this was an exploratory study, a small sample size of 10 Vietnamese postgraduate international students, in a range of policy, economic and business degrees at an Australian university was obtained (n=10: eight females, two males). See Table 1 for detail on the courses that the students were enrolled in. The sample's gender balance may reflect the observation made by some researchers that female students are more likely to participate in research projects than males (Crawford, Couper, & Lamias, 2001; Dey, 1997; Sax, Gilmartin, & Bryant, 2003).

Half of students were interviewed face-to-face (a 30-40 minute interview) and another half of the students were interviewed by email (according to considerations laid out by Burns, 2010) due to participants' preferred choice. Basic demographic data was collected first. The interviewer then asked 15 open-ended questions concerning the international student experience, their expectations prior to arriving at the University, their actual experiences and suggestions for improvement. All interviews were recorded with the participant's permission; recordings were then transcribed for analysis.

Data analysis

Given that a key aim of the study was to capture international students' own voices, and given the qualitative, anecdotal nature of the data, it was deemed that a thematic analysis technique would best serve the study. The notion of giving voice to participants takes much of its impetus from postcolonial theory, in which the "empire writes back" to its colonial overseers, to borrow the title of the seminal 1989 work on postcolonial literature (Ashcroft et al, 2002).

Thematic codes were determined for the responses given to each question, with sometimes multiple codes being given to a response. These were then collated and examined for overlaps, before the interviews were again reviewed with these codes in mind to see if any further data revealed themselves. Any new codes that arose were noted and reviewed in the same manner, and these make up the themes, as discussed in the results section below, illustrated with quotes. This method is in line with that outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Certain clear themes recurred throughout the participants' narratives. These themes were generated inductively from the interviews and are presented below, with the main focus being on students' teaching and learning related experience.

The findings reveal that international these students are more experienced higher education customers than was assumed. Most of the participants had prior experience of international study, and constantly drew comparisons between them and the present university (See Table 1 for details of students' profile). These comparisons were not always favourable. Participants noted their current university's venerable age, buildings and grounds as an asset, and some described it as exemplifying, for them, what a university is supposed to look like. Others noted that these factors allowed them to relax during down times, and suggested they contributed to improving their mental health. Nearly all students referred to Australia, and Sydney's climate and beautiful environment as attractions.

Table 1: Participants' profiles

ID	Gender	Age	Prior study	Current study	Scholarship
S1	F	31	Bachelor in International Finance (Vietnam) Master of Business Administration in Thailand	PhD (Business)	Yes
S2	F	30	Bachelor in Banking and Finance (Vietnam). Masters (Public Policy), (Fulbright Economics Teaching Program, Vietnam).	MCommerce (Banking and Finance, Management)	Yes
S3	F	33	Bachelor of Commerce (RMIT, Vietnam)	MEconomics	Yes
S4	F	28	Bachelor in International Society (Japan).	MPublic Policy	Yes
S5	F	36	Bachelor of Foreign Trade (Vietnam).	MInterational Business	Yes
S6	M	22	Bachelor of Commerce (Accounting) (RMIT, Vietnam).	MCommerce (Banking and Finance)	No
S7	F	25	Bachelor of Science in Banking and Finance, University of London, (Singapore campus).	MCommerce (Accounting)	No
S8	F	26	Bachelor of Foreign Trade (Vietnam).	MCommerce (Finance and Project Management)	Yes
S9	M	25	Bachelor of Economics, National Economics University (Vietnam)	MCommerce (Finance)	No
S10	F	29	Bachelor in International Economic	MEconomics	Yes

ID	Gender	Age	Prior study	Current study	Scholarship
			Relations Post-graduate Certificate of Applied Economics and Public Policy (Fulbright Economics Teaching Program, Vietnam).		

Language

All participants noted concerns, to some degree, about their facility with English, and expressed the expectation that study in Australia would improve it significantly. All had, at the very least, had it assessed through the IELTS to gain admission, with the exception of one student who had studied at RMIT Vietnam (an Australian university off-shore campus). That same student expressed a genuine commitment to improving his English during study at the University. While lessons at RMIT Vietnam had been conducted in English, outside the lecture theatre he and his friends had not spoken English. He worried that the same would happen here in Australia:

> Most of my friends, they study in Melbourne, but when I decided on Sydney I think that I don't want to study with my friends because when I study with them I think I would use Vietnamese a lot, and I want to use English in my daily life. So that's why I chose Sydney (S6)

Studying at the University, he felt like this anxiety was ameliorated after a few months. Not all the students took their difficulties so in their stride, however. One student wished that recordings of his lectures were available online so that he could review them at his own pace. Many participants utilised the University's various English-teaching programs, either by requirement to meet standards, as in one case, or by their own initiative. These included courses in academic writing and presentation, as well as facility with speaking more generally. The student who had studied in Japan recounted that one course helped her understand plagiarism: "referencing and citing are unfamiliar with me before" (S4).

Several students registered surprise at the extra time it took to get used to the Australian accent: "The second difficulty was my listening ability to Australian accent. I did not think that would be a barrier at first as I was quite confident about my English skill" (S7). Another student expressed the difficulties of studying Public Policy in Australia:

> Unlike other courses (Economics, Business, Finance, Media), most students in my course are native English speakers. I know that I will have a lot of difficulties to study with them especially in a course that required a lot of readings and wide understanding about complex things like this one (legislative, law, international relations, politics, social welfare, leadership, public opinion). (S4)

She also expressed great frustration at the emphasis on participation marks: "I understand the problem but I cannot express it clearly before class and it's part of my personal characteristic, I don't talk much" (S4). Although she was engaged, she found active participation difficult and considered it unfair for international students to be judged to that standard. Another student was even more affected by trying to cope with studying in English: "I was so stressed that I just wanted to throw books away whenever I saw them" (S10). Students developed different ways of coping with language difficulties. By her second semester, the student just mentioned had learnt to complete course readings as soon as the list was announced, and a growing familiarity with academic terminology lead to an increased reading speed.

Another student had been fortunate to travel to English-speaking countries throughout her life, and so had had many opportunities to practice her English. She had developed the ability to not only read and speak in English but to also think in English:

> Because normally, when Vietnamese students are reading, they always translate from English to Vietnamese, but I never do that, I translate English to English. So I can talk to you very well, but I don't know how to translate it into Vietnamese because I understand it, I don't know how to say it in Vietnamese. Especially academic words, I know them in English, but I don't know them in Vietnamese. (S7)

The above finding demonstrates that those students with good English facility were able to overcome their difficulties with English quite quickly. This reflects Barker, Child, Gallois, Jones and Callan's (1991) discovery that international students display good—sometimes better than local students—problem-solving abilities when it comes to personal problems such as these.

That language is an issue is not surprising. Biggs (2003) confirms that language is the most common challenge among international students, especially those from Asia. However, these Vietnamese students' experience contrasts substantially with the experience of other international groups; for example, as compared to Chinese students, the wide range of English language ability among Chinese students is influential and a strong predictor of academic achievement and social adjustment (Andrade, 2012). However Indian sub-continent students, experience much of their early education in English do not report such concerns but are more likely to feel their language abilities are underestimated by staff (Gunawardena & Wilson, 2012).

Teaching and learning experience

The students in our sample seemed to be aware of Western notions about Asian students' learning styles, and some explicitly referred to these. One student noted that:

> Style of study is far different from my country and even Japan's. It encourages students to take part in class more though I was too used to passive style of studying . . . especially in seminars, an interactive style of studying. I am not so confident in class discussion in seminars. (S4)

Another student had high expectations with regard to learning Western methods of study:

> I expect that the way they are teaching is different to Vietnam, because in Vietnam we are passive students, not active students. They can provide us the way to self-study and how to get new knowledge, because not only what we study here is for our future, but in our future we have to self-study day-by-day. (S2)

However, not all students were satisfied with the teaching styles they discovered at the University. One student, who had no previous experience of international education but had already studied at a postgraduate level in Vietnam, noted:

> The lecturer covered content very fast and not as deeply as I expected. Different from the study method that I was used to, at Master level. I studied almost everything by myself and lecturers were there just to guide, not to explain in details. (S8)

Another student was bored with the delivery of some of his lectures: "I had some units of study where the professionals hardly use their body or eye contact, or they just read the slides" (S9).

This finding challenges the stereotype of East Asian students expecting and valuing traditional transmission teaching methods, as many of the students in this study seemed to expect and prefer the more active teaching style; while one participant was surprised at how boring and superficial some lectures were. Our findings question the view that *transmission* type teaching is dominant in Asian, Confucian heritage countries, while *constructivist* teaching is dominant in the West. The OECD Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) suggests that, at school level at least, teachers in Confucian heritage Korea, for example, show similar values to those of Australian teachers in relation to direct transmission and constructivist beliefs about the nature of teaching and learning (TALIS OECD, 2009, p. 99).

Furthermore, rather than the expectation that Asian students would not wish to approach or question lecturers, some Vietnamese student participants complained they were often unable to reach lecturers outside of set consultation hours.

The findings above reflect negative student experiences, which, unfortunately, can affect the possibility of either repeat business such as further study at the same institution or another institution in the country or recommendations to their acquaintances (Arambewela, 2010, p. 156). They also highlight that if Australia is to deliver high quality, progressive education, some teaching and learning practices could be revised; it is not wise to rely on assumptions in relation to home country education experiences given the dramatic shifts in education occurring across Asia and elsewhere.

Assessment

When asked about assessment, most participants fixated on group assessments, perhaps indicating their anxiety surrounding having to co-operate with others in an unfamiliar language––although most study participants seemed to have had previous experience with group work itself. When asked what they thought markers valued in group assignments, most stated that it was the final product that counted, and that assessing group dynamics was something reserved for undergraduate assignments.

> I feel like now, at this level, they are less involved in how you deal with the group problems and issues. That is something that they—it's not really that they don't care, but it's something that you are now at the level that you handle it. What they will look for is the final result. (S3)

One student discussed the problem of lazy students in team exercises, although a Commerce student noted how her faculty had sought to solve this through initiating a system of peer assessment after group assignments. One of the participants reported difficulties expressing himself in speech as compared to having the time to compose written work. Another student, who had expressed her opinion that participation marks were unfair for international students, shared what she had concluded from this: "The most valued lesson: talk as much as possible even if you are right or wrong" (S4). This anxiety around spoken English by no means dissuaded the participants from wanting to push themselves, however. It seems to be something they regarded as a necessarily difficult but valued part of Western education. One student expressed his disappointment that his course did not require him to make a spoken presentation: "I had no chance to improve the skill of public speaking as expected" (S10).

The above findings inform earlier research by Nguyen (1997) who identified two possible issues Vietnamese students faced when studying in the Western universities in the 1990's: that they were unfamiliar with team-work; and held passive learning attitudes. These findings are not evident in our study. It is evident that Vietnamese students are now more familiar with group

work but find the execution of group work in English as the most challenging element. Furthermore, there was no evidence of a passive learning style reported among these students. On the contrary, many reported active, independent study and a willingness to face challenges; although this may be a feature of their postgraduate status.

Students described strict regimes for writing papers or studying for exams, expressing the difficulty they sometimes had producing work that met markers' standards. One student noted that her teacher: "required me to write essays as smoothly as a native one" (S4). Another was dismayed at the amount of calculation her exams required her to do by hand compared to her experience in the workplace:

> Until now we don't need calculators much for our work, we need more computer skills or something like that. Rather than we had to calculate like we are the computer, we are the robot in modern society. (S2)

Again, these points highlight the need for Australian academics to be mindful of the prior experiences of international students. Such reflection should be built on direct contact with the students themselves and recent international literature rather than assumptions about their home educational experience and dated perspectives. With shifts in the global economy and rapidly evolving education systems elsewhere, there is a need for Australian education academics and systems to build evidence-based practice into university teaching and learning in order to remain competitive. For example, while calculation by hand is considered important within some contexts, there is strong evidence that use of calculators can lead to substantial learning gains (Human Capital Working Group, 2008).

On-campus learning environment

Students often expressed the expectation that they would be able to immerse themselves in Australian culture by associating with the locals on campus. However, many were surprised by the high number of Asian students on campus, especially Chinese.

> It's quite surprising when I came to this University and it's like "Oh my god", like, almost 80 percent of the students come from China, it's weird. You know, like, I expected I could see a lot of Australians, but I see a lot of Chinese, so I have to deal with that. (S7)

Another participant noted "I expected to study with local students; however, in most of my finance subjects, I met Asian (Chinese) students only". This student was glad she had enrolled in some Project Management units, however, as it meant there were fewer international students: "if I had chosen Finance major only, I would have had very few opportunities to meet local students" (S8). This lead to friction in group work, as well. More than one respondent referred to "lazy Chinese students" (S5). One student explained her difficulty when working with other international students:

> The biggest problem with the Chinese students is that they normally copy and paste without referencing . . . I don't know how to say it, but they usually do that and it's very annoying to me. And I keep saying that "You need to do quotation or rephrase it, you cannot copy and paste like this." And then normally . . . they're quite lazy, they just leave you to do everything and they just say "Never mind I can just fail this assignment and then try my best for the final exam". (S7)

This student sympathised with locals not wanting to associate with international students, citing strong accents, slow reading and speaking speeds, and plagiarism as barriers to interaction. She felt that, once they saw her adeptness with English they were happy to interact with her. One

student was quite philosophical about the lack of interaction between local and international students, attributing it more to the limits of postgraduate study: "I feel like for undergrad students they have a longer time to know each other, so they actually have a stronger kind of bond" (S3).

Participants were generally happy associating with other international students, however, among whom English served as a lingua franca: "that's why it also gives me a chance to practice English every day" (S6). This sort of networking was valued and actually sought by the respondents. One said: "I can improve the capacity of doing research as well as have some kind of other opportunities for research and an academic career" (S1). The student enrolled in Public Policy found this particularly useful: "liked to have friends from many different countries so that it will be diversity in policy researchers in the course" (S4). Another was somewhat disappointed at the networking opportunities in her course, as very few students were already working in her industry.

As expected, some students experienced culture shock and loneliness upon arrival, although only three participants mentioned it explicitly. One student had expected to feel lonely, but was surprised when he did not.

> I had a time to live slowly, reflect on myself and experience many interesting things as travelling around in free time, or respecting the money earned from hard-working times for a part-time job. (S10)

The above findings are supported by those found by Campbell and Li (2008) and Poyrazli and Grahame (2007) who argue that international students often have difficulties in making friends with local students and experience a lack of a sense of belonging, which is likely due to their cultural differences, communication barriers, and adaptability. Volet and Ang (2012) found this to be the case at an Australian university because both local and international participants cited cultural issues, facility with English, outside commitments and ethnocentrism as reasons they remained segregated from one another.

Interviews with the Vietnamese students made it clear that they valued: opportunities to interact in English and opportunities to mix with international students from a range of backgrounds. If these views are also those of other international student cohorts, they should be considered in relation to institutional policies where marketing and recruitment campaigns have led to a dominant national group within the international student body or within specific degree programmes.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study has explored some of the deciding factors for Vietnamese international students when considering satisfaction with their student experiences, including the reputation of the country and city, and of the institution in teaching and research, as well as the physical and cultural environment surrounding it. These students want to learn Western academic methods and possibly apply them in their professional lives in Vietnam. While there is some evidence of shifts toward progressive constructivist pedagogy in Vietnam, these are often hindered by a centrally controlled curriculum and traditional approaches that dominate universities there (Tran, 2013). Nevertheless, these international students demonstrated a familiarity with constructivist approaches that influenced their expectations and experiences. They expect a lot from lecturers and university facilities, but can be equally overcome by heavy workloads and difficult group

assignments. They are ready to seek support, and some expressed dissatisfaction in relation to support from academics.

The Vietnamese international students highlighted their difficulties with English. They are anxious about their English ability, but eager to challenge themselves and actively sought to face this to various degrees. It was important for them to associate with students other than Vietnamese in order to avoid laziness with regard to English practice. Students noted concern about their inability to express understanding of course material. Thus, it was suggested that there could be a service for international students to join English-speaking clubs to practise their presentation and speaking skills and/or to have their work proofread. A proof reading service would remove one of the reasons international students plagiarise: a lack of confidence with their English writing skills.

Another interesting finding of this study is that international students are familiar with Western notions of the Asian learner and have some experience in social constructivist pedagogies; like group work. In fact, the expectation of different learning and teaching styles are often what caused the participants to study in the West: citing skills they wished to learn, such as presentation, independent learning, and logical thinking. While some students subscribed to these notions wholesale, others suggested that these distinctions between Asian and Western perspectives are meaningless, at least in relation to students who have been in an international context for some time. Participants believed themselves well versed in issues of plagiarism, and criticised other international students for poor referencing.

Students struggled with assessment, on top of which was their increased workload around studying in another language. There could be scope for allowing international students to study part-time (currently not allowed due to visa requirements). While students mostly expected this and were prepared to take it in their stride, other aspects of assessment bothered them. Apart from the student who believed participation marks were unfair for international students, another student noted his disappointment at never having to make a presentation, as this was a skill he was hoping to get a chance to work on. A banking student did not understand why students were still required to make calculations by hand during exams, when this was never done in the industry. These examples highlight the need for teaching and learning practices to be reviewed in light of research and evidence on effective practice.

A big factor influencing the participants' study in Australia was the anticipated opportunity to learn among and interact with local students. Many interviewees felt that local students often lumped them together with other international students, who sometimes had no desire to befriend or even work with them. This seemed especially true in those subjects deemed more approachable to non-English speaking students. However, most participants were extremely happy to spend their time among other international students, finding that the people of diverse backgrounds they mixed with enriched their study experience. What did surprise them, however, was the large number of Chinese international students on campus. The University should keep in mind that, while it wishes to attract many international students, one of the main attractions to those students is a high proportion of locals and a mix of different international cohorts. This is a difficult tension to manage, and universities should be mindful of this when designing course and subject offerings for international students. The tendency to offer courses in satellite campuses that suit the geographic preferences of international students may also cause dissatisfaction if a suitable student mix does not occur in these courses.

The international student experience is evolving, and our understanding of it must evolve alongside. We can no longer assume that Asian students are passive receivers of Western

education, and Western notions of their own learning styles. The students interviewed displayed a sophisticated understanding of the differences between Asian and Western education systems, and many of them had previous international and postgraduate study experience to back up this understanding.

This study did not seek to be representative of the views of all Vietnamese international students. Instead it sought to explore some of the issues of the international student experience through a series of qualitative interviews with a small sample of students. Even so, there are several factors which will limit the utility of its findings. The sample only included two males, while the balance of Vietnamese male students enrolled at the University is more like 40 percent. Similarly, the majority of participants were scholarship holders and would, no doubt, have received much more dedicated attention than other students. It remains, however, that the themes that were revealed from the data are similar to what has been identified in the literature. The findings of this study will go on to inform the modification of the project's questionnaire for use with larger cohorts of other international students from a range of different countries.

Given these limitations, we can only conclude that among the Vietnamese students in this study, there are some characteristics that contrast with other cultural groups within international student cohorts, notably: their dominant concerns regarding English language proficiency; their informed expectations regarding active, constructivist pedagogy; and their reported desires to challenge themselves in terms of English language, academic learning and socialising.

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Professional international service learning as an international service learning opportunity appropriate for graduate or professional students

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Graduate and professional schools are increasingly using short-term international study abroad courses as one way for internationalizing their curriculum. While international service learning can be a means for improving students' engagement in international learning experiences and providing a structure for learning, it is difficult to design meaningful international service learning projects appropriate for graduate or professional students that can be completed during a short-term study abroad course. This article introduces professional international service learning as an approach to international service learning on short-term international study abroad courses that is appropriate for students studying at the graduate level.

Keywords: study abroad; graduate education; professional education; international service learning; short-term trips; internationalization of higher education

Graduate and professional programs in a variety of disciplines are increasingly offering short-term international study courses for students as a means to internationalize graduate school education. In many of these short-term courses, international service learning projects are included as a means to provide a structured way of increasing the engagement and learning of students, as well as to give back to the countries or communities being visited. This paper introduces *professional* international service learning, or service learning in which students provide service to a profession or professional organization, as an approach to service learning on short-term international study abroad courses that is appropriate for students studying at the graduate level.

BACKGROUND

The past decade has witnessed a dramatic growth in the number of colleges and universities offering study abroad programs. Today, about 223,000 US college students are engaged in some form of study abroad, immersing themselves in diverse cultures, language, and practices (Anderson, Leigh Lawton, Rexeisen, & Hubbard, 2005). Researchers have demonstrated a wide variety of benefits from study abroad. Studies have found that students engaged in study abroad programs are more likely to have higher levels of intercultural proficiency and global engagement than students who do not (Lindsey, 2005; Doyle, 2009; Paige, Fry, Stallman, Josic, & Jon, 2009; Vande Berg, Paige, & Lou, 2012), though studies have also found that design of the program matters in the degree of intercultural proficiency (Vande Berg, 2009). However, for many students, particularly graduate students and non-traditional students, full semester study or long-term field placements are not possible because of time, cost and/or family obligations. There has, consequently, been a growth in the amount of shorter-term study abroad options, with about 55 percent of study abroad experiences now of eight weeks or less duration (Bringle & Hatcher, 2009). These short-term

international study abroad courses are increasingly seen as a method to allow greater student access to international opportunities. Research has found that, even though short-term, the programs can result in significant gains in global engagement and global values (Bell & Anscombe, 2013; Fry, Paige, & Stallman, 2009; Vande Berg et al., 2012), particularly if they have a structured facilitation component to guide the learners (Vande Berg, 2009).

In spite of the many benefits, a difficulty in short-term learning experiences is that they often do not allow for meaningful service learning opportunities for graduate students.

Service learning is typically defined as structured community service that meets the self-defined needs of a local community, is coordinated through an education authority, is integrated into the curriculum, and includes a structured method for reflection on the service (Cone & Harris, 1996). Service learning has its theoretical roots in experiential learning, as discussed by Dewey, who argued in *How we think* (1933), that education should be grounded in experience. These experiences produce changes in the learner that then, through reflection and feedback can result in deeper learning (Kolb, 1984). Much of the research and discussion on service learning focuses on the importance of meaningful reflection in the design of service learning (Hatcher & Bringle, 1997).

An additional aspect that Dewey (1933) discusses in regards to experiential learning is the importance of the principle of continuity of experience, which signifies that experiences should build on previous experiences. Thus, service learning should be designed at the appropriate level of based on previous experiences (Giles & Eyler, 1994). This principle requires that experiential education involve high quality experimental activities that lead towards learning and growth.

The emphasis in the scholarship about service learning has primarily been at the undergraduate level. However, many graduate level programs have incorporated some forms of service learning for years. For example, many graduate professional programs require community-based internships or practica that are designed for student skill development, such as Master of Social Work (MSW) programs which require extensive community-based field practicums coupled with reflection seminars (Lemieux & Allen, 2007) or Master of Public Affairs (MPA) programs which require practica focusing on real-world issues coupled with reflection (Bushouse & Morrison, 2001). There has been much disciplinary research into the success of various internships and field placements (Brescia, Mullins, & Miller, 2009; Cross & Grant, 2010; Raskin, 2014), but little research into the effectiveness of graduate or professional level service learning focused on internships or field placements as service learning (Lu & Lambright, 2010).

A review of literature of professional service learning in Public Affairs programs found that the key conceptual aspects of service learning explicated at the undergraduate level remain at the graduate and professional levels, such as the importance of linking the service activity with learning objectives and the central roles of reflection and feedback as critical for learning (Imperial, Perry, & Katula, 2007). However, at the graduate level, the learning goals are typically more advanced, the reflection is in greater depth, and the skill level is higher. The types of learning experiences differ from those of undergraduates, according to Dewey (1933), because they are at a different place on the learning continuum.

International service learning is essentially service learning that occurs when students are studying in an international location. It is a way to improve students' engagement in their international experience, to provide a structure for learning in an international setting that includes a reflective piece, and a way to meet community-defined needs. International service learning is increasingly seen as a way to improve students' engagement in their international learning experience and to provide a structure for learning (Bringle & Hatcher, 2009). It can be the type of structured activity

upon which learner facilitation is built. This type of learning is especially appropriate for professional programs that typically rely on field-based experiences.

While international service learning can increase students' engagement, there are also serious concerns that, if it is not done with careful planning, it could have negative impacts for communities, such as community groups competing for the service projects or the service project reinforcing the notion that development requires outside donors (Crabtree, 2008). Similarly, there are concerns that service learning opportunities run the risk of being logistically burdensome for some agencies, especially in the form of staff-time needed to coordinate service learning projects (Bushouse, 2005; Eckert, Luqmani, Newell, Qurashi, & Wagner, 2013). Likewise, there is a danger that participation in international student learning can work to highlight the distances between students and international communities rather than help bridge them (Grusky, 2000). Crabtree (2008) has suggested that a way to help minimize these potential negatives of international service learning is to design service projects that focus on building relationships and developing the critical consciousness of all participants.

For short-term international study abroad courses, international service learning can be even more difficult, because it is difficult to build ongoing relationships during a short-term course. While there are many opportunities for international volunteering, if a volunteer opportunity is to be characterized as service learning, it has to be carefully structured to both meet the needs of communities and provide structured opportunities for student engagement and reflection. In a brief two- or three-week study abroad tour, service learning can involve a day or two of providing community service in a setting relevant to the course's educational goals, with structured opportunities for students to reflect. For example, an undergraduate international study tour focusing on educational issues might include, as part of its tour, a day spent volunteering at a local school, teaching modules or tutoring school children, coupled with another day spent painting the exterior of a school building in conjunction with local teachers. This community service experience could be coupled with course reflection time in which students could meet with teachers or students in the host country to discuss educational issues and pedagogy; and time discussing experiences with other students doing their community service with a focus on processing their experiences and gaining an understanding of the educational system operating in their country of origin. This might also involve a reflective journal, in which students are instructed to link course readings with their own experiences in the community, and meetings upon returning home to further process their experiences. Reflecting back to Dewey's principle of continuity, this type of international student learning is appropriate for undergraduate students who might have had little or no international or service learning experiences.

Many fields, such as public affairs (Ryan, 2010) and social work (Engstrom & Jones, 2007) are now promoting in-depth international service learning experiences for graduate students as critical for student development. Unfortunately, for many fields, it is more difficult to incorporate graduate level international service learning projects that meet both Dewey's principle of continuity and are congruent with graduate level curriculum during short-term study abroad experiences. Some fields, in which students learn highly advanced but discrete skills might, in a fairly straightforward way, be able to have graduate students participate in a meaningful international service learning project on a short overseas program. For example, advanced students in the health sciences might be able to set up mobile surgery clinics or health screening clinics in which they meet a community-defined need, use students' advanced skills, and have opportunities for reflection and feedback. However, in other disciplines that rely on more complex or longer-term community relationships, such as social work, public affairs, business, or educational administration, the international service learning

opportunities for a short-term study tour are not as clear-cut and may not build appropriately on the previous experiences of graduate students, directly relate to the graduate curriculum of that field, or make good use of the advanced skills of the graduate students. For example, it is not uncommon for service learning projects on short-term international study abroad courses to involve: masters of business administration students in service learning projects in which they plant trees, build latrines or assemble wheelchairs; or MSW students in projects in which they visit with children in an orphanage or paint a school. While these projects might be somewhat related to their fields, provide opportunities for meaningful reflection, engage with the community, and be quite rewarding experiences for participants; they are not at the level of learning of graduate education. In fact, these are often the same types of projects requiring the same types of skills that undergraduate or even high school students complete on study abroad or mission trips. Thus, these types of activities do not meet Dewey's principle of continuity of experience and might not result in the amount of learning appropriate for graduate students.

One solution to this problem is to build more meaningful or relevant international service learning opportunities for graduate students on short-term international study abroad courses. However, it is important that these be constructed appropriately. While involving graduate students in more meaningful projects, such as civic education or participatory action research projects, might seem more closely related to a graduate level experience, in a short-term international study abroad course these projects run into the danger of not having real engagement. Having long-term meaningful relationships between the partner agency and the academic institution can mitigate this danger. Other types of appropriate graduate level service learning could include a day of engagement at a free clinic, the development of policy analysis and recommendations for a non-governmental organization, technical assistance on grant proposals, program development proposals, needs assessments, business planning or program evaluations for government, educational or nongovernment organizations. For all of these types of service learning opportunities, it is critical for students to have extensive pre-trip preparation, to have the service learning opportunity relate directly to learning objectives, and to have critical reflection built into their service activities.

PROFESSIONAL INTERNATIONAL SERVICE LEARNING

Another approach is to view the concept of international service learning in a slightly different matter to include the concept of *professional international service learning* as a type of service to the community. Professional international service learning is similar to other types of international service learning. But, instead of providing service to a local community, students provide a service to a particular professional community in a host country. A professional community could be a professional association, such as a local or national association, a graduate program in a university, or other similar entities. Professional international service learning could include developing a continuing education workshop for local professionals, presenting at a policy forum held by a professional association, helping develop a survey or instrument for a professional association, or helping with the development of accreditation guidelines for a professional association.

Like other types of service learning, the learning opportunity in professional service learning must be a structured activity that is integrated into the curriculum, and include a structured method for reflection on the service. In addition, the professional community must be involved in identifying the particular need that the graduate or professional service learning student will address, which will ensure that the project is relevant to the professional community. This type of international service learning is particularly appropriate for graduate students in professional programs. While

professional international service learning activities exist, there has been virtually no attention placed on this type of international service learning activity.

The benefits of professional international service learning are broad. For the professional community, this type of service learning allows the professional community to participate in an international exchange or receive the technical assistance that they desire. Professionals or professional associations often have difficulties getting appropriate professional development opportunities, so this could be a benefit to them. Further, the service that they are receiving is very low-cost because graduate students donate their time and effort. Another benefit is that service to the profession does not necessarily imply hierarchy between nations, as is often implied in traditional international service learning. International exchanges of information are often considered useful for professionals in general. Thus, students studying abroad from higher income countries could do an international professional service learning project in another higher income country or a lower income country, or students from a lower income country could do international professional service learning in a higher income country. Finally, the local professional community is able to benefit from increased networking opportunities.

The potential benefits for graduate students of international professional student learning projects are also broad. First, professional service learning draws directly on the skills graduate students are learning in their graduate program. A professional service learning project can help students focus their learning before, during and after their short-term international study abroad course, because this type of service learning will require extensive pre-trip preparation, focused attention while they are on their trip, and wrap-up activities likely after their trip. Second, professional service learning can help build students intercultural communication skills because they not only provide professional education or technical assistance to other professionals, they also provide assistance cross-culturally. Thirdly, an international service learning opportunity allows students to have an opportunity to network with international colleagues. Finally, because professional service learning is at the appropriate level of the experiential learning continuum for graduate students, it is likely to promote the greatest level of learning for students.

The main disadvantage for graduate students is that this type of professional service learning disallows students the opportunity to be involved with regular community members. However, as noted above, short-term attempts to engage with local communities can be detrimental to communities because real engagement is unlikely to occur in just a few days, and requires more long-term commitments at relationship building. Professional international service learning attempts to avoid this problem because professional types of engagement are more common in shorter timeframes, such as at conferences or trainings. The following section provides examples of two professional international service learning projects.

EXAMPLES OF PROFESSIONAL INTERNATIONAL SERVICE LEARNING

The first example of professional international service learning is a social development conference to a professional organization that served as the culminating project for a two-and-a-half week MSW tour from the US to Namibia. A second example is of a professional international service learning project that took place in a two-week international social welfare policy study abroad course from US to South Korea, involving the presentation of policy forums at two universities.

Professional service learning in Namibia

The topic of the course was "social development and social policy in Namibia." Eighteen students from the University of Minnesota participated in the short-term international study abroad course. The professional international service learning project for the course was the development of a one-day social development conference to the Namibian Social Work Association (NASWA). One of the faculty leaders of the short-term international study abroad course had spent a year in Namibia and had a professional relationship with the president of NASWA. Prior to the trip, the instructors gave multiple lectures to students about social development in Namibia. The instructors also collaborated with the president of NASWA to develop an agenda for a one-day social development conference.

The students brainstormed topics that they would be interested in presenting, and then the president of NASWA chose the topics that would be most relevant to professional social workers in Namibia and added additional topics. The MSW students participating in the short-term international study abroad course prepared their presentations for the conference before leaving for Namibia. At the beginning of the two-and-a-half week trip, MSW students visited over twenty government ministries and NGOs. During these agency visits, the MSW students needed to learn more about Namibia for their conference presentation. Towards the end of the trip, the students had a day to work on "Namibianizing" their presentations. They made presentations at the conference on the very last day of their study trip.

The full-day conference drew over 80 participants from across Namibia. It included six student presentations, a key-note presentation, and several opportunities for small-group discussions with both the US graduate students and the Namibian social workers. The evaluations of the conference from the attendees were positive, and the president of NASWA commended the students on how well they Namibianized their presentations.

The students wrote in their journals about their experiences at the conference. A month after returning to the US, students and the US organizers discussed the conference at a wrap-up meeting. Students noted that fretting about their presentations and dealing with the additional stress of preparing for the conference added to the short-term international study abroad course; that is, it differed from a sightseeing vacation. Students also discussed how the preparations for their presentations added focus to their trip and greatly increased their learning.

Professional service learning in South Korea

The course was entitled, "Health, Culture, and Social Welfare Policy in South Korea." A total of nine students and two professors from the University of Minnesota participated in the short-term international study abroad course. The course was developed through partnerships with Seoul City and Busan Metropolitan City Governments; and the Schools of Social Work at Ewha Women's University and Busan National University. The short-term international study abroad course's professional international service learning project was the development of two Policy Forums that students delivered to the two School of Social Work Programs in Korea. One of the professors who led the international course had a long history of research collaboration with the professors at the two universities and negotiated the development of the policy forums, including the format of the forum, duration of each presentation, and overall an agenda for the forum. At pre-departure meetings, the two course instructors offered four sessions on international social policy, the impacts of culture on policy formulation, and social welfare policy in Korea. The nine students formed four groups, and two groups presented policy presentations to social work graduate students, faculty and

other community members at Ewha Women's University in Seoul and Busan National University in Busan.

The MSW students enrolled in the short-term international study abroad course planned and organized their presentations as a group prior to leaving for South Korea. Upon arriving in South Korea, the students visited more than 25 government ministries, social welfare centres, and NGOs. During each visit, students were given numerous lectures on social welfare policies that were relevant to each student group's policy topic. With the information given, each student group added new information into their presentations or revised their existing presentations during breaks or at meetings at night. Each forum lasted an hour-and-a-half, with students presenting their work, followed by a lively question and answer session, after which there was an opportunity to socialize informally. The policy forum not only enabled students to learn more about and contextualize the policy they presented, but also offered an opportunity to build their professional networks. The professors at both universities discussed the value of the students' presentations to their own students and faculty members, noting the benefits gained by students and faculty in learning about the policy content, and observing the professional speaking style of the US students. They also discussed the value of the cultural exchange.

The MSW students in the short-term international study abroad course also discussed the value of the project. Their feedback noted one limitation of the experience, which was the limited English proficiency among South Korean students at one of the universities. This inhibited active discussion of the policy issue among some students. Another limitation of the policy forums was that only the US students made presentations, and it would have been beneficial if the Korean students or faculty had also made presentations. Despite the limitations, the policy forums at both universities were excellent opportunities for the graduate students on the study abroad tour to learn about policy.

Characteristics of international service learning in examples

Both of the above examples demonstrate how a professional service learning activity can be integrated into a short-term international study abroad course. In both examples, the professional community in the host location for the students' visit was involved in providing input into the content and format of the activity to ensure that it met the local professional community's needs. In the Namibian example, this involved a national professional association and had a country-wide focus on professionals working in the field. In the South Korean example, this involved two large universities and focused on graduate students and faculty.

While the service learning opportunity involved some costs, in both cases the costs were minimal and the professional service learning event was integrated into already-planned activities. For example, the Namibian social work association used the conference as a regular training event and, in South Korean, these policy forums were integrated into the academic calendar.

Both professional service learning activities related directly to the course content of the respective courses. In both courses, there were structured opportunities for reflection, led by instructors, of their service learning opportunity. Both courses required students to write in journals reflecting upon their experiences, and also had formal discussions and feedback about their professional service learning experience at a wrap-up meeting upon return from their international study abroad trip.

In both cases, the instructors included one instructor with strong connections with the host country. Both course activities were also at the level of experience appropriate for graduate students who had

already been engaged in various other projects in communities in their earlier education and in pre-graduate school experiences. The instructors of both courses believed that having the professional service learning activity as a key part of their trips enhanced students' engagement throughout the trips. In government agency and NGO visits prior to the presentations, students would ask questions and engage in discussions with agency workers and community members about the topics they had already researched, and were able to integrate their new learning into their presentations. Their engagement over issues during their visits was not just for the sake of their own personal learning, but also for the sake of improving the presentations they would be making to professionals in the community.

CONCLUSION

Professional internationals service learning is one method for adding a service learning component into a short-term international study abroad course for graduate or professional students. It is a method that allows graduate students to apply their advanced skills and knowledge to a project that gives back to the community, albeit a professional community, and is the type of international service learning project which can be completed successfully and appropriately during a short-term visit. This type of international service learning activity can increase the value of a short-term program by having a significant, task related to the course that students could focus upon in preparing for a trip, during the trip, and during structured reflection. In addition, it gives students the opportunity to engage in service to the country they are visiting.

While professional international service learning is limited in that it focuses only on engagement with other professionals rather than with local communities, it is an appropriate type of service learning activity for students at the graduate level on a short-term study abroad trip. Certainly, in more long-term international study opportunities, graduate student learning should involve meaningful engagement with appropriate communities in a way that is suited to their field of study. However, professional international service learning allows for engagement that is quite appropriate for graduate students on short-term study abroad courses.

Because professional international service learning is a new area, there is a need for research to further explore the effectiveness of international service learning. Findings from such research can lead to the development of design principles for these types of experiences.

An important area of inquiry is to ascertain which types of professional service learning activities already exist, and which types lead to the greatest level of learning and growth in graduate students. This is a very broad area of inquiry, and might vary depending on academic or professional discipline. However, cross-disciplinary research into this topic could lead to a more comprehensive understanding of professional international service learning.

A second area of research is to determine if and how previous experiences of graduate students effect professional international service learning outcomes. While graduate students might, as a whole, have greater experience on which to build than undergraduate students, the particulars of these experiences might vary considerably. For example, some graduate students might have extensive domestic work experience, such as working as a social worker for 10 years before returning for a MSW, but have never left the country. Other graduate students might have substantial international experience, such as studying internationally, but little community or work experience before entering their graduate program. If the principle of continuity matters in professional international service learning, it is important to understand how these varied experiences effect outcomes.

In addition, there is a need for research into how to appropriately incorporate reflection and feedback into service professional international service learning. Finally, a benefit of professional international service learning is the potential development of ongoing partnerships between professionals.

Research into these four areas will provide information needed to develop guidelines for appropriate professional international service learning.

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Short-term faculty-led study abroad programs enhance cultural exchange and self-awareness

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Though many experts argue that semester or year abroad study is the optimal path, short-term programs meet the needs of students who would not otherwise study abroad and can be effective at increasing intercultural competency. The present study describes one type of short-term program—the embedded faculty-led model—and provides evidence that programs of three weeks or less may be practical and affordable. Participants (N=136) in short-term faculty-led study abroad courses completed the Global Perspectives Inventory in a pre-post test format. Results indicated that these short-term programs enhanced participants' understanding and awareness of other cultures and languages, appreciation of the impact of other cultures on the world, and awareness of their own identity. However, these programs may need to address more fully the value of living in complex situations, respect and acceptance of varying cultural perspectives, and a greater sense of responsibility to others. This model can be used with students from a variety of cultures.

Keywords: short-term study abroad; faculty-led programs; Global Perspectives Inventory; study abroad assessment.

INTRODUCTION

> My experience abroad this summer has truly changed my life because I realized just how small we are in such a big world. This broadened my education by showing me just how much there still is to learn, and I brought back a new outlook that a classroom could never teach.

This quote from a student after completing a short-term faculty-led study abroad course program clearly expresses how transformative and educational short-term study abroad can be when well executed. It can be transformative because students view these experiences as life-changing, much as they do long-term ones—they begin to see themselves as part of a larger whole, and come to understand that the world extends beyond county, state, regional, and national boundaries. It is educational because not only do students benefit from the hands-on experiences and applied learning, but they also return to campus as ambassadors of international and cultural education; they teach other students and faculty members about the cultures they have come to know and also how their knowledge of their discipline fits within that context. There is no substitute for study abroad, as we have all heard students tell us. Having an academic experience abroad contributes to students' personal and academic development by helping them to grow in global and cultural awareness, which is increasingly an institutional goal of particular importance in the 21st century. Studies show that study abroad of varying lengths is related to an increase in graduation rates, academic performance, disciplinary learning, sensitivity to cultural context, self-knowledge, appreciation for cultural differences, and practical travel skills (Sutton & Rubin, 2010; Sutton & Vande Berg, 2007). It also enhances job prospects because employers desire graduates who have experiences that reflect their ability to adapt to unfamiliar situations, interact with a variety of cultures, and exhibit intercultural understanding (AAC&U, 2013). Because of

these documented benefits, colleges and universities should strongly encourage students to participate in study abroad and provide affordable, academically rigorous study abroad experiences. Though many experts argue that semester or year abroad study is the optimal path (e.g., Dwyer, 2004; Medina-Lopez-Portillo, 2004; Ruhter McMillan & Opem, 2004; Zorn, 1996), short-term programs often meet the needs of students who would not otherwise study abroad and such programs can be effective at increasing intercultural competency and communication (e.g., Anderson, Lawton, Hubbard, & Rexeisen, 2005; Chieffo & Griffiths, 2004; Kehl & Morris, 2007-2008). Following is a description of one type of short-term program—the embedded faculty-led model—along with empirical evidence that programs three weeks or less may be a practical and affordable way for students to study abroad. Though this study focused on college students in the United States, this model can be applied with students of varying ages and cultures.

Recent studies have indicated that more than 50 percent of students who study abroad will do so in short-term programs, defined as one to eight weeks in duration (Institute for International Education, 2011). Many of these programs are faculty-directed, often sponsored by the home institution, and are offered during a special term, such as in January or May, or during summer break. More recently, short-term programs are embedded into a course that is offered during the regular semester and contains a study abroad component at the end of the term. Reasons for students choosing short-term programs vary from concerns about the cost of semester abroad programs to reluctance to participate because of involvement in extracurricular activities or athletics. Often students and their parents share concerns about the expense related to long-term study abroad, which is sometimes difficult to predict with currency exchange rates and lack of funding. Students who are completing multiple majors or who attend colleges and universities where required courses are not offered every semester also must carefully schedule semester abroad study. In addition, some students may be generally reticent to travel because they have rarely travelled internationally; it is not uncommon for first generation college students to have very limited experience outside of their home regions. Some students do not feel they can be away from campus for an entire semester due to academic or family obligations or the need for a part-time job to support their education. According to the 2010 National Center for Education Statistics (Snyder & Dillow, 2011), 35 percent of students enrolled in US colleges are over 25 years old, with 15 percent of these over the age of 35. Thirty-eight percent of these non-traditional students have full-time jobs and 27 percent must care for dependents. Therefore, it is particularly difficult for non-traditional students to participate in long-term study abroad programs.

In addition to helping students who may not be able to spend a semester abroad, short-term programs provide a safe and familiar initial exposure to another culture. They are an effective method to strike interest in international education, particularly with first- or second-year students who may later choose to spend a semester abroad. Though long-term study is ideal for foreign language majors, a short-term study course may be useful in helping non-language major students make sense of a general foreign language requirement. As mentioned, these short-term programs clearly meet a need for students who are hesitant and perhaps fearful about international travel, particularly because they involve fellow students and are led by a known faculty member. This is true for students in the US and is also applicable to students in other countries.

There are several models of short-term programs, and institutions must decide what approach will work best for their needs. Described here is the embedded model, involving topical, discipline-based courses with an embedded study abroad component, most often at the end of the semester, but also possible during mid-semester. Much academic and practical preparation is completed on the home campus and then the time abroad is spent highlighting cultural and historical sites, attending lectures, and interacting with the local culture. These types of programs are not new, but

have become increasingly common. For instance, in 2010-2011, over 61 percent of institutions indicated that they had developed new faculty-led programs (IIE/Forum on Education Abroad, 2011).

At a small, private liberal arts college, we have found the embedded model to be most beneficial to our students, faculty, and the institution as a whole. As mentioned above, short-term programs offer students an alternative to semester abroad study. These programs also allow faculty to provide students with an applied experience to help in their learning. Furthermore, because of professional and personal reasons, faculty members may be more likely to lead a two- to three-week study abroad program as compared to one that lasts six to eight weeks. For the institution, short-term programs can be more financially feasible than semester abroad study, particularly for small, private tuition-driven institutions that may suffer from the loss of tuition when a student is abroad for a semester. In addition, these programs are led by faculty members and are considered part of the student and faculty course load. This arrangement keeps program costs down for students, most of whom receive some kind of financial aid to attend the college or university. It also helps limit institutional costs because faculty are teaching the course as part of their regular semester load and do not need to be compensated for an extra course.

We currently have eleven of these courses, most of which meet during the spring semester and study abroad at the end of the spring term. The courses are in: *Tropical Biology* in Costa Rica; *Global Comparative Education* in Brazil; *The Social Psychology of the Holocaust* with study in the Czech Republic and Poland; *Cultural Christian Mission* in El Salvador; *The Emory Odyssey* in Greece; *International Perspectives on Student Leadership* in Guatemala; *Italian Art* in Rome, Florence, Pompeii, and Siena; *Media and Journalistic Practice* in Zambia; *The Wide World of Sport* in varying locations in Western Europe; *Spanish Language and Culture in Latin America/Spain* with study abroad to Peru/Spain; and *Environment and Sustainability* in Belize.

Short-term, faculty-led courses are effective when they include extensive preparatory study and prerequisite learning that helps students to apply their knowledge while abroad. According to Spencer and Tuma (2002), best practices for short-term programs include having clear academic content that is connected with the study abroad. We also believe it is important to focus not only on the topical knowledge base, but also on personal growth and cultural understanding. All of the courses mentioned above include an on-site journal component and time for group reflection, which is facilitated by the faculty leader. Cultural immersion and direct interaction with the individuals who live in the studied culture is essential. The goal of cross-cultural understanding is prominent—even in relation to the disciplinary knowledge base. We also require that faculty leaders make a clear link between the course content and the international experience, and encourage courses that derive from faculty interest and expertise, rather than simply a desire to travel abroad with students. These requirements all fit within Spencer and Tuma's (2002) best practices.

There is evidence that short-term study can be effective at increasing global awareness, as well as intellectual and personal growth (Chieffo & Griffiths, 2004; Gorka & Niesenbaum, 2001; Jurgens & McAuliffe, 2004; Lewis & Niesenbaum, 2005). However, much of this research has examined short-term programs that are four- to eight-weeks in duration. Studies that have examined two- to three-week programs are more limited. Of the studies that have examined shorter programs (three weeks or less), results suggest that such programs may offer needed exposure to other cultures and increase global mindedness (e.g., Festervand & Tillery, 2001; DeLoach, Saliba, Smith, & Tiemann, 2003). Other studies that surveyed alumni to assess long-term global engagement found that there was no difference in those who studied abroad long term and those who spent a few weeks abroad (Paige, Fry, Stallman, Josic, & Jon, 2009). Though some studies indicate that the

longer the study abroad program, the greater the benefits, other research suggests that there are clear positive outcomes of short-term study abroad, including increased global mindedness, cultural awareness, and appreciation for diversity. The goal of the present study was to explore pre-post changes that take place as a result of two- to three-week embedded short-term, faculty-led study abroad experiences.

METHOD

Participants

Participants were 136 college students (86 women, 48 men, 2 missing; Mean age = 21 years) attending a small, private liberal arts college in Southwest Virginia. Table 1 is a description of the participants by gender ethnicity, class status, and field of study. Over 50 percent of students at the college are from within a 100-mile radius, primarily from Southwest Virginia, East Tennessee, and Western North Carolina. The student body is mostly of European/White descent, with the next largest group being Hispanic/Latino. There are equal numbers of African/American and Asian/Pacific Islander students.

Table 1. A Description of Participants by Gender, Ethnicity, Class Status, and Field of Study

	Men %	Women %	Total %
African	0.0	2.3	1.5
African American/Black	6.3	1.2	2.9
Asian/Pacific Islander	0.0	4.7	2.9
European/White	89.6	84.9	85.3
Hispanic/Latino	2.1	0.0	5.1
Native American	0.0	2.3	.70
Other	2.1	4.7	5.1
Seniors	27.1	46.5	53.0
Juniors	43.8	25.6	45.0
Sophomores	25.0	23.3	32.0
First Year	0.0	3.5	3.0
Other	4.2	1.2	2.2
Agriculture/Natural Resources	4.2	3.5	3.7
Arts and Humanities	2.1	2.3	2.9
Business/Law	10.4	11.6	11.0
Education/Social work	0.0	5.8	3.7
Engineering	8.3	2.3	4.4
Health/Medicine	10.4	2.3	5.1
Physical/Biological Sciences/Math	12.5	12.8	12.5
Social/Behavioral Sciences	4.2	0.0	1.5
Other	6.3	7.0	7.4

Materials

The Global Perspectives Inventory. In an effort to determine the impact of the short-term study abroad experiences, we used the Global Perspectives Inventory (GPI) (Braskamp, Braskamp, Merrill, & Engberg, 2011), which we administered online in a pre-post format. The GPI is a 40-item measure that assesses three domains of holistic human development based on the work of Kegan (1994) and later refined in a social-cultural development context by King & Baxter Magolda (2005). The three domains are cognitive (i.e., How do I know?), intrapersonal (i.e., Who

am I?"), and interpersonal (i.e., How do I relate to others?). This theoretical framework considers how individuals grow, change, and develop as they think about the world, explore their identity, and interact with others. The GPI can be used to assess intercultural maturity and communication over a period of time, such as throughout the college years, or in response to a specific experience, such as study abroad. The GPI is appropriate for use with persons of all ages, but may be of particular interest in assessing the effectiveness of campus internationalization efforts with college students.

Within each of the three domains of the GPI are two subscales. In the cognitive domain, the GPI assesses: (a) knowing (i.e., How important is cultural context in judging the importance and value of knowledge?)–sample item: *When I notice cultural differences, my culture tends to have the better approach*; and (b) knowledge (i.e., How much understanding and awareness does a person have about other cultures and languages, as well as the impact of other cultures on the rest of the world?)–sample item: *I understand the reasons and causes of conflict among nations of different cultures.* In the Intrapersonal domain, there are the two subscales: (a) identity (i.e., How aware is a person of his or her own identity and the role that race, ethnicity, and gender play?)–sample item: *I have a definite purpose in my life*; and (b) affect (i.e., How much does a person respect and accept differing cultural perspectives and to what degree does he or she have confidence about living in complex situations?)–sample item: *I often get out of my comfort zone to better understand myself.* Finally, the Interpersonal domain subscales are: (a) social responsibility (i.e., To what extent does a person acknowledge interdependence and concern for others?)–sample item: *I think of my life in terms of giving back to society*; and (b) social interactions (i.e., How comfortable and culturally sensitive is a person when interacting with those who are different and how frequently does this happen?)–sample item: *"I intentionally involve people from many cultural backgrounds in my life.* Participants respond using a 5-point Likert-type scale (Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree). Higher scores indicate greater cultural awareness and global perspective. The GPI also examines the extent to which students' level of commitment to making a difference in the world, working for the concerns of others, and having a purpose in life, as well as a 1-item measure of Global Citizenship (i.e., "I see myself as a global citizen").

Previous studies have reported test-retest reliability coefficients for the GPI subscales used for short-term study (e.g., 3 weeks or less) ranging from .49 to .81. Coefficient alpha for the individual subscales has ranged from .63 to .75 for previous studies, and .54 to .75 for the present data, indicating a range of weak to moderate internal consistency. According to Nunnally (1978), individual subscale α for previous research and the present study respectively were: cognitive knowing ($\alpha = .63, .61$); cognitive knowledge ($\alpha = .75, .73$); interpersonal identity ($\alpha = .72, .70$); interpersonal affect ($\alpha = .65, .75$); intrapersonal social responsibility ($\alpha = .70, .54$); intrapersonal social interactions ($\alpha = .70, .70$). Validity analyses are ongoing, and preliminary data suggests adequate face and construct validity (Braskamp, Braskamp, Merrill, & Engberg, 2012).

Procedure

Participants completed the pre-test GPI online in a pre-departure session for their course at the beginning of the semester, approximately three months before the study abroad experience. They completed the post-test GPI within two weeks of their return home. The courses and disciplines involved in the present research studied abroad in Australia/New Zealand (Mass Communications), Belize (Environmental Studies), Bulgaria (Theatre/Culture), China (Business), Costa Rica (Biology), Czech Republic/Poland/Hungary (Psychology), Germany (Business), Germany (German), Italy (Art), and Zambia (Mass Communications).

RESULTS

Braskamp, et al. (2011) suggested that an examination of the group mean difference scores between pre- and post-test administration may be more useful for interpreting the impact of study abroad programs on intercultural maturity and communication than are observations of statistically significant differences between means. We focused on group pre- and post-test mean difference scores of at least .10. This magnitude of change occurred on the subscales of cognitive knowing, cognitive knowledge, intrapersonal identity, interpersonal social interactions, and global citizenship (overall *M* increase = .16). Please see Table 2 for details.

Though we focused on group mean difference pre-post test scores of at least .10 rather than statistically significant differences, as can be seen above, we also wanted to note that one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) indicated statistically significant differences between pre and post means for cognitive knowledge ($p = .02$) and interpersonal identity ($p = .03$), confirming that the greatest pre-post change take place on these dimensions. Means and differences scores can be seen in Table 2.

Braskamp, et al. (2011) established pre-post data mean change norms for study abroad. A comparison of mean difference scores from the present study to the comparison sample revealed that the present findings are consistent with difference scores on five of the six subscales. See Table 3 for these results.

Table 2. Pre- and post-study abroad GPI subscale means and difference scores

Subscale	Pre M (SD)	Post M (SD)	Difference	F	p
Cognitive: Knowing	3.57 (.45)	3.72 (.44)	.15◊	3.18	.08
Cognitive: Knowledge	3.39 (.60)	3.65 (.66)	.26◊	5.43*	.02
Intrapersonal: Identity	3.85 (.50)	4.05 (.49)	.20◊	4.77*	.03
Intrapersonal: Affect	3.80 (.46)	3.88 (.43)	.08	.83	.36
Interpersonal: Social Responsibility	3.71 (.45)	3.78 (.46)	.07	.642	.43
Interpersonal: Social Interactions	3.57 (.40)	3.70 (.45)	.13◊	3.06	.08
Well-Being	3.79 (.44)	3.82 (.40)	.03	.06	.80
Global Citizenship	3.68 (.43)	3.78 (.43)	.10◊	1.07	.30

◊ = Post-mean increase $\geq$ .10. *$p < .05$. $df = 1, 135$ for six subscales. $df = 1, 99$ for well-being and global citizenship.

Table 3. A Comparison of pre-post study mean change of E&H Students vs. national norms

Subscale	National	E&H
Cognitive: Knowing	.11◊	.15◊
Cognitive: Knowledge	.27◊	.26◊
Intrapersonal: Identity	.15◊	.20◊
Intrapersonal: Affect	.13◊	.08
Interpersonal: Social Responsibility	.06	.07
Interpersonal: Social Interactions	.13◊	.13◊

◊ = Post-mean increase $\geq$ .10. National $N = 700$.

DISCUSSION

Results suggest that the embedded short-term, faculty-led study abroad programs examined here enhanced participants' understanding and awareness about other cultures and languages, as well

as the impact of other cultures on the rest of the world (i.e., cognitive knowledge). Furthermore, participants reported an increased awareness of their own identity and factors that may influence their self-perceptions, such as race, ethnicity, and gender (i.e., intrapersonal identity). Smaller, but notable change indicated that participation in these short-term programs was related to increasing the likelihood that students would consider the role of cultural context in judging the importance of knowledge (i.e., cognitive knowing) and being somewhat more culturally sensitive and willing to interact with those who are different (i.e., interpersonal social interactions). A more limited change occurred in participants being more likely to view themselves as global citizens after their study abroad experience. Findings are consistent with the changes in mean norms found in previous studies (e.g., Braskamp, et al. 2011).

Considering the demographic characteristics of the sample, with most students living in homogenous counties in southwest Virginia, it is not surprising that, after their study abroad experience, participants reported more understanding and awareness of other cultures and the role of these cultures in world events as compared to before. For some participants, the short-term study abroad program provided their first time to travel outside the region, fly on an airplane, and be immersed in a culture other than their own. Prior to their study abroad experience, students may have been limited in their understanding and awareness of diverse cultures and languages, as well as the impact of other cultures on the rest of the world because few had previously had the opportunity to experience another culture and be immersed in a foreign language.[1] It is possible that once they came to understand the powerful social and cultural factors in the lives of people in other cultures, they were able to explore their own sense of self and consider what factors shaped their own identity. Perhaps the short-term programs studied here enhanced participants' cultural awareness and understanding, as well awareness of their own diversity.

Another source of change was in participants' willingness to interact with persons from cultures other than their own. This finding is consistent with previous research that indicates that short-term programs can increase cultural sensitivity and desire for interaction (e.g., Anderson, et al., 2005; Chieffo & Griffiths, 2004; Kehl & Morris, 2007-2008). It makes sense that participants would grow in this area of interpersonal development because they may have limited face-to-face contact with individuals sharing a different cultural heritage from their own and few real opportunities to consider their own place in the world while spending time in another culture. Short-term programs should continue to promote an understanding of cultural diversity as part of the on-campus curriculum and then emphasize interactions with the local community while abroad. For these programs to be most effective, the focus on cultural understanding and awareness should hold as much importance as the disciplinary topic of the course.

Less movement from pre- to post-test was on the developmental domains of intrapersonal affect (i.e., participants' respect and acceptance of differing cultural perspectives and confidence about living in complex situations) and social responsibility (i.e., the extent to which they acknowledged interdependence and concern for others). Although previous studies using the GPI have indicated intrapersonal affect to be enhanced after study abroad (e.g., Braskamp et al., 2011), it was not the case in the present study. One explanation is that students may have already been at a high level of intrapersonal affect because they attended a college with a strong liberal arts tradition, which fosters an understanding of cultural context and how it plays a role in a culture's knowledge and values. However, students' mean score on intrapersonal affect was closer to the mid-point on the scale rather than at the highest level, suggesting that there was room for

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[1] In a 2012 survey of all E&H students, approximately 50% reported they had not traveled outside North America.

movement. An alternative explanation is that the short-term programs studied here emphasized *contact* with other cultures more so than an *understanding of the complexity* of cultures and the *value of learning to adapt to unfamiliar situations* suggesting that the short-term programs studied here are less effective at helping students to increase on these dimensions. Overall, it appeared that though participants were more likely to grow in their *thinking* about the influence of other cultures and *willingness to interact* with those who are different after their experiences abroad, they did not experience great change in the degree to which they accepted cultural differences and their willingness to live in a complex setting. Whether students need less growth in these areas or the programs need to specifically address these two dimensions should be considered for subsequent program offerings.

The limited change on interpersonal social responsibility is consistent with previous studies using the GPI. This may be explained by recognizing that many colleges and universities today include service and social responsibility as part of their missions. This is particularly true of the college attended by participants in the present study. Service is clearly part of the college mission and many courses require service learning and students are encouraged to give back to the community. However, similar to interpersonal affect, mean scores on social responsibility were closer to the mid-point rather than to the highest possible score. If a college has a goal to increase international social responsibility, then it may be the case that these short-term programs need a stronger focus on serving others abroad. Perhaps the growing number and popularity of service-learning programs abroad address the goal of increasing students' international social responsibility. Future research could compare the sense of social responsibility reported by those who participate in traditional short-term study abroad programs versus those who take part in programs centred on service-learning.

Overall, participants *increased* in their *cognitive* consideration of cultural context and the realization of other cultures in the global scene. They also *increased* in the *intrapersonal* aspect of understanding the complexity of identity and the *interpersonal* aspect of desiring increased social interactions with others who are different; however, they learned less about accepting cultural differences and acknowledging interdependence with others. There was also some evidence that they came to see themselves more as global citizens, considering themselves as part of something beyond their state, region, and nation. Therefore, short-term experiences such as the ones described above may increase cultural awareness and engagement and the likelihood that participants will realize they are part of something beyond the local context, as well as encouraging students to examine their own cultural identity. However, these programs may need to address more fully the value of living in complex situations, respect and acceptance of varying cultural perspectives, and a greater sense of responsibility to others. Furthermore, the difference between the comparison sample and the responses of the participants in the present study may reflect geographical and/or regional differences that should be explored.

Though the GPI is widely used as a measure of the development of global perspective and is solidly grounded in theory, caution should be used in the interpretation of results because limited factor analytic work has been conducted with subscale items. Moreover, the internal consistency of the subscales in the present study ranged from somewhat weak to moderately reliable, suggesting again that the results must be interpreted keeping in mind the limitations of the existing psychometric properties. In addition, further validity studies could add to the confidence of conclusions derived from work with the GPI. Until this psychometric work has progressed, the current data should be considered primarily in light of previous norms established for mean change scores using larger samples. With this in mind, data from the present study are meaningful because they are largely consistent with pre-established norms. Furthermore, the present study

adds to previous research using this instrument and provides additional data to be used in considering the reliability and validity of the scale.

Due to the aforementioned documented benefits of study abroad, both personally and professionally (e.g., Sutton & Rubin, 2010; Sutton & Vande Berg, 2007), we strongly encourage colleges and universities to provide a variety of international opportunities to students. Future studies could examine learning outcomes associated with different types of programs, adding to previous work in this area. Furthermore, a more thorough understanding of the role of academic and practical pre-departure preparation for short-term programs in student learning is worthy of study, as is work in helping students to process their experience upon return. Future research also could explore how short-term programs such as those described here could be used with students in a variety of cultures and disciplines. Because these programs are more affordable, they may be more accessible to international students who could not study abroad otherwise. Using the GPI cross-culturally could add to the understanding of how students from other cultures may experience growth through international education and also establish a baseline of their knowledge and understanding of culture and self in comparison to students in the US.

CONCLUSIONS

Though the present study is limited in sample size and scope, we cannot discount the growth that occurred in students following a semester-long on-campus course with a two- to three-week embedded study abroad experience following. In addition, results are relatively consistent with findings from large-scale studies, suggesting that the change that occurred in the present sample is similar to the change that happens with other students. Findings of the present study demonstrated that short-term study abroad experiences might increase participants' hands-on knowledge of other cultures and languages, as well as their frequency of interaction with cultures outside their own: both are attributes that lead to higher levels of cultural understanding and global perspective, skills desired by future employers.

Though long-term programs remain a particularly valuable academic experience for which short-term programs will never be a substitute, if the goal is to increase cultural awareness and understanding, then short-term programs may be an effective and practical option. In fact, participation in short-term programs may provide students with the knowledge and confidence to pursue a long-term experience abroad. We recommend that colleges and universities continue to provide short-term study abroad experiences, particularly considering that many students and faculty may not have the time or financial means to participate in long-term programs. In order to develop greater cultural awareness and appreciation, these programs must include intentional pre-departure work in understanding the complexity of culture, and students must have real interactions with those from cultures other than their own when they are abroad (Spencer & Tuma, 2002).

These short-term programs, where students spend time abroad with familiar faculty and students, may serve certain student populations well, particularly if they have not had previous opportunities for international travel or are hesitant to travel on their own. It is also critical that colleges and universities identify goals and objectives for study abroad so that programs can specifically address expected outcomes. Short-term programs also could include applied experiences that will benefit graduates as they apply for graduate study or employment. Overall, short-term programs are a meaningful international study opportunity with clear benefits and should be seriously considered as students prepare for professional lives in the 21st century.

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