Internationalizing the international: International students who study abroad

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Introduction

Developing skills for success in a global economy is central to liberal education in the twenty-first century (Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2010), and study abroad has been recognized as a powerful educational experience, capable of fostering a greater understanding of world events that endures for decades after graduation (Dwyer, 2004). The importance of study abroad to American students was emphasized in the U.S. Congress policy proposal Global Competence and National Need: “Study abroad should be the norm, not the exception, for American undergraduates, one of the signs of a well-educated college graduate.” (The Commission on the Abraham Lincoln Fellowship Program, 2005, p. 6).

Study abroad has moved from being a marginal activity for children of the upper class, to a compulsory component of undergraduate education at some institutions (Hoffa & DePaul, 2010, Institute for International Education, 2010). More than 91% of institutions now offer study abroad programs to their students (Hoffa & DePaul, 2010), and at the U.S. university most engaged in study abroad, just over 3,700 students participated in study abroad programs in the 2010-2011 academic year (IIE, 2012).

Although many research studies have examined the effects of study abroad on traditional or local students, the current study considers the experience of a new group of participants: International students. Student voice is used to illustrate the unique perspectives of this group in an exploratory investigation of how the study abroad experience impacts their interpersonal, intrapersonal, and cognitive development and their college experience.

Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

For the purpose of the current study, study abroad is defined as an academic endeavor undertaken in another country for credit towards the home institution degree (Hoffa, 2007). The
term broadly includes semester-length study abroad and exchange programs, short-term programs of less than eight weeks, international internships, and international service learning. An international student is defined as an individual who is enrolled at a higher education institution on a temporary visa. In the 2011-2012 academic year, there were around 760,000 international students in the United States, of which 36% of them were enrolled in bachelor degree programs (IIE, 2012).

There is no official data collection on international student participation in study abroad programs, so the size of the phenomenon is unclear. However, international student participation in study abroad has been identified as an emerging trend, as increasing numbers of international students enroll in degree programs at U.S. universities (Grassi & Espiritu, 2010). As there is no specific literature on international students and study abroad, this literature review considers American student development through study abroad programs in order to frame this study within relevant literature in the field.

**Study Abroad as a Developmental Trigger**

Stemming from the work of Piaget (1965 cited in Carlson, Burn, Useem, & Yachimowicz, 1990), study abroad has been identified as a source of dissonance, acting as a trigger for development, which occurs as the participant tries to reconcile new experiences with existing knowledge structures (Baxter Magolda, 1992; Baxter Magolda & King, 2004; Carlson et. al., 1990). However, empirical studies in the early 1990s yielded inconsistent results. The Study Abroad Evaluation Project (SAEP), one of the earliest and most extensive studies, did not find significant differences between participants and a control group on a scale of “personal self-efficacy” (Carlson et. al., 1990, p. 23). Results in the area of intellectual development, however, showed that study abroad participants progressed in their approach to knowledge, indicating
some support for the hypothesis that study abroad promotes student development (Carlson et al., 1990, McKeown, 2009).

Co-curricular activities, including peer relationships, student organizations, living arrangements, internship or employment experiences, education advising, general campus environment and study abroad, can play a role in helping students to transition through stages of development or patterns of knowing (Baxter Magolda, 1992). To make the outcomes more consistent, study abroad programs can be intentionally designed around a model of challenge and support, fostering development through critical reflection (Yonkers-Talz, 2004).

As part of the overall college journey, study abroad has been found to promote significant development across the domains of interpersonal, intrapersonal, and cognitive development (Braskamp, Braskamp, & Merrill, 2009). Both the strongest and the weakest areas of growth were in the cognitive domain. Knowledge or “what students know” showed the most development while knowing or “how students come to learn and understand” showed the least (Braskamp, Braskamp, & Merrill, 2009, p. 111).

In contrasting findings, cognitive developmental differences were only reported in first time travelers in a study of students from the State University of New York system (McKeown, 2009). No differences were detected in students who travelled prior to their study abroad experience. In explaining this result, the researcher suggested that the level of change may relate to program design length, and it is possible that any developmental effect triggered by study abroad continues when students are back on campus. It may take longer than the duration of a study abroad program for students to change existing beliefs and internalize new meaning-making structures (McKeown, 2009).
Perhaps the most significant results have been found in the area of personal and social development (Chieffo, 2009; Dwyer, 2004; Gonyea, 2008; Edmonds, 2010; Fairchild, Pillai, & Noble 2006; Ingraham & Peterson, 2005). In an alumni study of study abroad participants from the past 50 years, over 95% of respondents agreed that study abroad increased maturity and self-confidence, and had a long-term effect on their world view (Dwyer, 2004). The study also illustrated the enduring benefits in the personal and social domains with the finding that study abroad leads to long-term friendships, and that even after considerable time, many participants were still in touch with friends they met during their study abroad experience (Dwyer, 2004).

**Intercultural Competence**

Much of the research on the influence of study abroad concerns the development of intercultural competence, which includes skills, knowledge and attitudes needed to communicate effectively and appropriately in another culture (Deardorff, 2006). Intercultural competence has been found to improve in students in study abroad programs (Chieffo, & Griffiths, 2004; Dwyer, 2004; Ingraham & Peterson, 2005; Sutton & Rubin, 2010; Vande Berg, Connor-Litton, & Paige, 2009), with longer-term study abroad programs facilitating a greater change (Dwyer, 2004; Engle & Engle, 2004; Ingraham & Peterson, 2005). Although intercultural competence can be considered as an important skill for students to develop (Deardorff, 2006; Vande Berg, Connor-Litton, & Paige, 2009), the theory differs from major student development theories through their distinct epistemological roots. Initial work on intercultural development stemmed from cultural anthropology and was later influenced by linguistics, as an interest in communicating with different cultures developed in American society (Bennett, 2010).

**Student Engagement**
Study abroad participants have been found to be selectively more advanced in college learning and development than their peers. Following their international experience, they show even higher levels of integrative and reflective learning (Gonyea, 2008). Deep learning, as it is referred, can lead to higher levels of engagement and a higher quality collegiate experience (Gonyea, 2008).

**Conceptual Framework**

The current study seeks to understand whether a study abroad experience influences the development of an international student across the cognitive, interpersonal, and intrapersonal domains. King (2007) identified study abroad as a “developmentally effective experience” (p. 9) that can move a student from an external orientation to an internal orientation, towards more mature ways of knowing and making meaning of the world. Development across these domains helps a young adult become the author of his or her life (Kegan, 1994). Self-authorship is “the internal capacity to define one’s beliefs, identity, and social relations” (Baxter Magolda, 2008, p. 269), although it is rarely seen in college-aged students (Baxter Magolda & King, 2007).

Kegan (1994), a developmental psychologist, identified three domains of self-authorship. Cognitive development centers on how one understands and makes meaning of knowledge; what is seen and noticed, how it is organized, processed, and evaluated. Intrapersonal development centers on one’s sense of self, values and beliefs, and how they guide choices and behaviors. Interpersonal development centers on one’s interaction with others, and the choices one makes in social situations (King and Baxter Magolda, 2007). Although maturity requires advanced development in all three areas, they do not necessarily develop at the same pace (Kegan, 1994). It is possible, therefore, that a student could be further developed in the cognitive domain than in the interpersonal or intrapersonal domains.
Important to our study, cultural messages and norms are included in the interpersonal dimension (Pizzolato, 2010), and may also overlap with definitions of self in the intrapersonal dimension. Cultural messages and norms are particularly relevant in collectivist cultures, such as many Asian cultures, where good decision-making focuses on the collective good rather than individual benefit (Pizzolato, 2010).

Understanding the experiences and developmental opportunities of international students while studying abroad is complex and has not been studied in the study abroad literature. Increasingly, institutions throughout the United States are opening their doors and recruiting more international students (Zhao, Kuh, & Carini, 2005). With national and institutional policies moving towards higher rates of participation in international educational experiences (The Commission on the Abraham Lincoln Fellowship Program, 2005), it is important to understand and map how these study abroad experiences are impacting international student development.

Study abroad has been identified as a developmentally effective experience for American students. The current study examines the research questions: Are there observable developmental outcomes for international students who study abroad, and if so, how do they compare to developmental outcomes for American students who study abroad?

Methods

This study was conducted at Michigan State University (MSU), a large public land-grant institution in the mid-west. With just under 3,000 study abroad participants in the 2009-2010 academic year, MSU is the leading state institution for study abroad. Over 80% of MSU study abroad participants choose a short-term (less than eight weeks) faculty-led program (Michigan State University, 2010). In 2009-2010, 74 of a total population of almost 2,500 international undergraduate students participated in study abroad programs (Office of International Student
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and Scholar Services, 2009). Although this number is still very small, it has grown from 30 students in 2006-2007. MSU has strong institutional support for study abroad: around 30% of undergraduate students have an international study experience (IIE, 2010).

Using the Office of Study Abroad database, 85 international students were found to have studied abroad from September 2009 to March of 2011. Out of these 85 students, 39 had graduated and were therefore unsuitable for this study. In order to secure diversity of students and study abroad programs we controlled for Chinese students who accounted for 38 of the available participants, and only invited two Chinese students to participate. Finally, we contacted 20 students via email and invited them to participate in this study. A total of six students responded with interest in participating, however, one student failed to show up for his interview bringing our sample size to five. These five students came from Pakistan, Thailand, China (2 students), and a Middle Eastern country (to protect the identity of the participant, the country name will not be used).

Interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format under three themes to give respondents freedom to identify subjects relevant to them, while enabling the researchers to probe on areas important to the research questions (Baxter Magolda & King, 2007). The main themes of questions transgressed from background information, to their decision to study at MSU, to their decision to study abroad. We also asked all participants about their parents’ roles in their decisions to study internationally and to pursue study abroad experiences. Throughout the interviews, the focus was on how the respondent experienced the process rather than the actual subject of the discussion. We were intentionally looking for evidence of a deeper level of reflection on experiences and internalization of their meaning (Baxter Magolda & King, 2007).
The results are presented in case study format to preserve the richness and complexity of the participant stories (Creswell, 2003). The unit of analysis is the individual student. Data were triangulated with institutional information on the study abroad program (Yin, 2006). General findings complement the case studies and present the themes that were most common across the group. The stories of Priscila, Betsy, and Stephen are provided to give greater insight into their reflections of their own study abroad programs. The two other participants (Wendy and Veronica) are shared as supplemental information to support the chosen case studies.

**Limitations**

There was a limited pool of participants who fit into our protocol and their stories cannot be generalized to fit other international students' experiences with study abroad. Additionally, with four females and only one male participant, gender may be an influential factor which is not discussed in this paper. All of the programs discussed are short-term, faculty-led programs. Although it would have been desirable to include students who had participated in semester-length programs, 85% of MSU students choose short-term, faculty-led programs. In addition, MSU is a unique institution because of its history of international engagement and study abroad. Internationalization is at the core of the institutional mission and there is broad support for study abroad.

All potential participants who responded to the invitation were included in the study. This sampling procedure may have produced a bias of motivated students who had a positive experience to report. Such a limitation is common to study abroad research and may result in an overly optimistic view of the study abroad experience. Other possible methodological weaknesses include the lack of a pre-study abroad interview (Gonyea, 2008).

**Results**
Case Study One - Priscila

Priscila, from Thailand, was completing her junior year at the time of the study. She is still deciding her major but has narrowed the choice to finance or economics. She studied abroad in London at the end of her freshman year, participating in a five-week economics and public policy program. Priscila signed up for the program because she was awarded a scholarship to study abroad when she was admitted to MSU. The scholarship reduced her tuition fee for the program to in-state tuition rates (a saving of around $5000). She also chose the program in economics in order to work with a faculty member in a small group setting to help her decide if she would continue with the major and potentially enroll in graduate school.

From her interview, Priscila appears to be very mature and independent. She is a confident traveler, who first left her family to study English during summers when she was in middle school. Her most significant stay abroad was at the age of 15, when she studied for a year in Colorado and Vancouver. Although her sister also studied in the U.S., she is now the only member of her family in the country, though she is in contact with a family friend nearby.

Priscila spoke of many decisions she has made about her education, with little reference to her family. Although her father would like her to study law, she knows they’ll be happy with her decision to pursue a career in international economics and development. In terms of her personal and family decisions, she is internally referenced (Baxter Magolda, 2010). She expects others to accept her decisions, and although she seems to have an open dialogue with her parents, she did not suggest that there was any friction between them or pressure to conform to family expectations.

In contrast, Priscila’s decision process for studying abroad referenced external sources, her faculty, as important in her major and career decision: “I think if I were to take economics
classes here it would be in a big group of people, but when I was in London I got to interact with
the professor better…they can give you really good insight, especially since I would like to do
graduate school for economics, so they can give me good advice on which courses I should
take.” Priscila had strong ideas about her career direction but was seeking advice to guide her
decisions. Baxter Magolda (2010) refers to such advice-seeking behavior as “following external
formulas” (p. 11) and categorized it as moving towards, but not yet in self-authorship.

Her description of the program was of an American perspective on economics, with a
little history and site seeing in a group. However, her earlier experience abroad was a more
challenging experience, and it appeared to create significant dissonance for Priscila. She
described calling her mother every day, and changing homestay families three times during the
duration of her stay. In reflection, she indicated that studying abroad as a high school student
was a great experience and a much more difficult transition than the move to East Lansing or the
college study abroad experience in London.

Case Study Two - Betsy

Betsy was a senior in college and only a month away from graduation at the time of the
study. She began as an economics major, but changed her major in her sophomore year to
nursing. Over spring break she participated in a week long study abroad program in Mexico.
She was motivated to choose this study abroad experience because it would provide her with an
experience helping people. Additionally, she sought out a program that would be working in a
developing country.

Entering college in the U.S. was Betsy's first time traveling outside of China. She was
well supported by her family and has an aunt who lives close by who she has visited frequently.
Her decision to change majors was extremely difficult as she was concerned that entering a nursing program would threaten the status of her visa. She was also concerned that her father, who runs a business, would be disappointed in her choice. In the end, Betsy's decision was well supported by her parents, and she also received support from her uncle who is a doctor in the U.S. Betsy experienced some dissonance in her transition to living and attending college in the U.S. She described difficulty overcoming the language barrier among her peers and adjusting to some cultural differences, "...and I feel here like people are more individualized and they have more personal space, like they respect people's personal space more than we would back in Asia."

Throughout the interview, Betsy referred to her struggle with integrating into the social environment and relating to others. Several times she made comments about being isolated, lonely, or being a minority in her degree program. The study abroad experience provided her with a new perspective as she was able to relate to others she was working with "...sometimes people here don’t always care how you are doing. But the group of people I went out with, mostly from Texas, we were really a team and worked as a group and really felt that there was actually people who cared about you." The interaction with this new group of students helped propel her into intrapersonal reflection (Baxter Magolda, 2010).

By the end of the interview, Betsy’s analysis of the development of her interpersonal relationships was articulated in the following reflection:

I think the program give you more idea about global diversity, global competency. You are able to work with people from different cultures, and I also learned that global competency, it doesn’t just mean that you are working with people coming from different
countries but actually even people from the same country, the same area. Each person has 
his own culture and you’re able to have that competency to work with different people.

Betsy’s reflections of her experiences as an international student and throughout her study 
abroad program showed growth in understanding of the world around her and her own role 
within that world. She was the most advanced student within the study and was able to articulate 
her experiences more clearly and distinctly than others.

**Case Study Three - Stephen**

Stephen’s case is very unique. A student from a large Middle Eastern city, he moved to a 
third country in the Middle East to commence his undergraduate studies. Having been admitted 
 to MSU, at the end of his first year, he traveled to Japan to meet a MSU study abroad group. 
 There they undertook a program in technology and communication. Although he had traveled 
 extensively in the past with his father, it was his first visit to Asia. For Stephen, the program 
 fostered a new passion and respect for Japanese people and their culture.

Formal Skype class meetings facilitated introductions before arrival in Japan. The group 
 bonded well, and for Stephen, the new friendships played an important part in his MSU 
 experience. Stephen continues to be fascinated by Japanese technology and the pleasant surprise 
 of the unfamiliar culture. He expressed his amazement at the helpful nature of the locals, who 
 even without a shared language were willing and able to assist a lost tourist. He commented on 
 the Japanese locals’ willingness to assist as being in stark contrast to earlier travels in France, 
 revealing a deeper reflection and advancing cognitive development.

Upon arrival in East Lansing later in the summer, Stephen’s friends from the Japan 
 program met him at the airport and he noted, “we’ve been together ever since. We see each
other every day, we hang out.” The only transition issue was the size of East Lansing. Having always lived in large urban cities, being able to walk around East Lansing was a novelty.

Although Stephen would love to return to Japan for a semester program, his dad would like him to experience another country. Although “it’s not really a strict no but a suggestion”, Stephen respects his father’s opinions and advice. If he really wanted to go, he believes his father would support his decision. While his deference to his father is some indication of external referencing (Baxter Magolda, 2010), parental respect can also viewed as an ability to incorporate multiple perspectives into his decision-making, another step along the path to self-authorship (Baxter Magolda, 1992). The role of culture in the development in the self will be discussed further below.

**General Findings**

**Cognitive Development – Academic Motivations**

One of the major themes throughout the stories is a clear motivation by all participants to pursue study abroad in order to enhance their academic experience. These academic motivators were seen as an opportunity to take extra credits, an exploration of subject areas early in their academic career, and an opportunity to connect with faculty in a more personal way. For all five participants, the ability to gain credits during a winter, spring, or summer break was a huge motivator. For one participant, the credits earned during a study abroad program allowed her to add a second major without delaying her graduation. Veronica (from Pakistan, studied abroad in London) was able to not only add a second major, but the study abroad program leveled her coursework.

For Betsy, who didn't study abroad until her senior year, the experience was a way to put what she had learned in her nursing classes into practice while working at a clinic for children
with cerebral palsy. She and other participants went to locations that reminded them of their home country in the level of development of the city. For example, our two Chinese students, Betsy and Wendy, felt at ease while in Mexico and Dubai as it reminded them of China (although in very different ways).

It was clear that two of the participants were still processing their experiences but had experienced a shift in their ways of knowing. Stephen was still trying to understand the juxtaposition of girls in very formal high school uniforms while displaying the playboy sign on their sox. Betsy, in discussing the relationship between her experiences in Mexico and the U.S., and her future career in China noted how much could be changed to improve the social treatment of people with disabilities in China.

**Interpersonal Development – Making Connections**

All participants identified that their study abroad experience allowed them to meet new friends that they otherwise would not have met. The experience of traveling, studying, and living with the same group of students was seen as a positive experience by our participants and aided in improving their interpersonal relationships with other students. As a transfer student to MSU, Stephen's study abroad program took place within his first year before he had arrived on campus. The friends he met on study abroad helped him transition to living in East Lansing. For Wendy, the study abroad program was an important step in gaining her first American friends and having the ability to practice her English conversation skills.

Several of the participants expressed greater confidence in their ability to interact with their peers. This increase of confidence appears to have helped encourage intrapersonal reflection and development. Priscila noted the ability to connect with MSU faculty in a smaller class experience was also a significant academic motivator. The small class sizes and the focus
of the coursework on a specific major, in this case economics, was seen as a strong incentive in finding, applying to, and participating in study abroad. She was intentionally seeking a mentor in her future academic field and used study abroad to build this relationship.

Our findings show the participants in the current study to be independent in their decision-making, while deferring to the wishes of their parents without question. Stephen provides us with an example to illustrate this concept when he describes how his father reacted when he expressed the wish to spend a semester in Japan. There was no angst or dissonance in Stephen’s description of this dialogue, as may have been the case with a family from a more independent culture.

Intrapersonal Development – Personal Learning

Three of our participants expressed small levels of personal growth as a result of their study abroad experience (Betsy, Stephen, and Wendy). These three individuals were all at different levels of engaging and understanding their internal voice, however, it is clear in their stories that the study abroad experience was responsible for some internal reflection. For Betsy, the connection of her academic major with the hands on experience gave her greater insight into her personal development. She stated, "I feel like I am a changed person because of that program. I just wish I had done it sooner."

While Betsy's personal growth was the most advanced that our study found, Stephen appeared to have made great strides in identifying new personal beliefs and values due to his interaction with the Japanese culture. Stephen was shocked by how well received he and his classmates were into Japan. He recounted stories of being helped by anyone from whom he sought information and assistance. The same incidents also prompted cognitive reflection in
None of our participants expressed a significant amount of intrapersonal reflection as a result of studying abroad, however, the three participants who did reflect internally were much more articulate in describing their experiences. Their responses to the questions were well thought-out and showed an advanced level of intrapersonal reflection.

**Discussion**

Most of the student development literature is based on research about local students primarily from a majority demographic within the United States. Fundamental concepts of development may be culturally bound, as Pizzolato (2010) suggests that students from diverse cultural backgrounds may have different conceptualizations of independence and maturity. In her work with Asian students, Pizzolato (2010) suggested that the collective nature of Asian society imposed a different understanding of the intrapersonal and interpersonal domains than those defined by King and Baxter Magolda (2005).

International students undertaking study abroad programs add an additional layer of complexity for the researcher when attempting to understand how study abroad influences their development. Some of the adjustment issues encountered by international students upon arriving in the United States include an increase in stress, language barriers and issues with proficiency, social integration, and self-efficacy (Zhang, 2010). Additionally, some international students have been found to experience dissonance with their identity while studying in the United States (Magolda Baxter, 1992; Izumi, 2010). These issues, their connection to our findings, and the implications for further research will be discussed in this section in relation to the major domains of student development.
Cognitive Development

The study of cognitive development in students is complex, and the short-term nature of study abroad makes it difficult to determine if development has occurred, and whether it can be attributed to the study abroad experience (McKeown, 2009). Opper, Teichler, and Carlson (1990) found that compared to a control group, study abroad participants changed in their self-reported capacity to develop their own point of view and in considering comparative and cross-disciplinary perspectives. While three of the students in our study (Stephen, Wendy & Betsy) appeared to have incorporated new perspectives into their ways of knowing, we cannot clearly attribute this change to the study abroad experience.

The academic motivations of international students to study abroad appear to be in contrast from their American classmates. Research on American students’ motivations to study abroad indicates that their primary reasons relate to seeing the world and learning about themselves, with academic motivations rating much further down the list (Carlson, et. al., 1990; Peterson, 2003). All of the participants in our study expressed academic motivations for the decision to study abroad. Although culture formed an important part of the experience in two cases (Stephen & Betsy), three participants had very little to discuss in relation to their cultural experience. The lack of salience of the cultural aspects of the experience for these students may be more related to destination and program design than their underlying motivations.

All of the students demonstrated independent thinking to varying degrees, and this placed them further along the development spectrum than their domestic counterparts described in the literature. However, given the significant life events that have already occurred for these students, it seems overly optimistic to attribute this to study abroad.

Interpersonal Development
Short-term, faculty-led programs are often criticized in study abroad literature as creating an American bubble through which the students are isolated from a genuine encounter with local people and culture (Gore, 2005; McKeown, 2009). For the participants in our study, travelling, living and studying within a small group created unique opportunities for friendships. Three of the four participants from the East Lansing campus reported not having significant American friendships before the study abroad experience. All participants reflected that making close American friendships was one of the most important aspects of the program.

An important part of interpersonal development is the capacity to respect both self and others and to engage in mutually beneficial relationships (Baxter Magolda & King, 2007). Exposure to diverse others has been found to promote self-authorship in students (Hornak & Ortiz, 2004), and so the new friendships formed by our participants can be assumed to have made a positive contribution to their interpersonal development. Issues surrounding the limitations for international students in forming friendships on the American university campus are not new, and should continue to be of concern to educators. Although they are beyond the scope of this paper, the potential for study abroad programs to become a partial solution to the issue of campus integration should be examined further.

Benefits of increased social connections go beyond the interpersonal development framework being discussed. Social involvement is linked with college persistence and increased satisfaction with their educational experience (Stage & Hossler, 2000). Interaction with faculty during the study abroad programs was noted as beneficial by four of the participants. Tinto’s (1993) theory of departure places the lack of interactive experiences with faculty members as central to college attrition and the ability of faculty-led study abroad programs to facilitate such interaction should be noted.
Although some studies report some small changes in study abroad participants in areas such as their perception of others, their comfort with people unlike them (Braskamp, Braskamp & Merrill, 2009), and their appreciation of the importance of cultural context in interactions with others (Sutton & Rubin, 2010), the results from the current study appear to be strongest in the interpersonal domain. It may be a result of a lower baseline before study abroad, that is, our participants had lower levels interpersonal interaction on-campus than the average American student and therefore our results appear to be stronger. It is also a slightly nuanced result: as “culturally different others” in the general campus environment, our participants already had an understanding of cultural difference and cultural context before studying abroad. Their interpersonal growth was facilitated by the context of the small group experience rather than the international experience per se. Although the benefits of the small group experience on faculty-led programs is mentioned in the literature (Ingraham & Peterson, 2005) it is rarely explored as a focus of research in study abroad.

Finally, the relationship between participants and their parents was of particular interest in this study. Hofer (2010) noted that the very concept of self-authorship is bound to individualist cultures that value autonomy and independence, such as the dominant culture of the United States. With much of the research on self-authorship focusing on White, European American students, Pizzolato (2010) discussed the importance of further research on diverse student populations in order to explore the relation of the self to culturally constructed understandings of maturity and independence. The participants described academic and career decisions as coming from an internal belief structure, and most commonly referred to their own processes when making decisions. When prompted, they most often responded that their parents supported their decisions and trusted them to make the best decisions in the circumstances.
However, in all cases, their decision processes showed that their family had been an important consideration in their decisions. The ability to incorporate multiple perspectives while not being dominated by family expectations (Torres, 2010) demonstrates Pizzolato’s (2010) conceptions of culture crossing into the intrapersonal domain to join the self with the community in a broader vision of relationships.

**Intrapersonal Development**

Internal identity development is an important component of the intrapersonal domain, and it includes consideration of an internally or externally derived sense of self (King & Baxter Magolda, 2005). Increases in maturity and self-confidence (Braskamp, Braskamp & Merrill, 2009, Chaison, 2008, Ingraham & Peterson, 2005), and personal and social development (Dwyer, 2004, Goynea, 2008) are among the more frequently reported developmental outcomes from study abroad programs. However, the analysis is complicated by the very nature of our participants. Cultural shock has been studied as a transitional issue that many international students encounter when entering education outside of their home country (Weigel, 1999). Similar to dissonance, cultural shock can cause students to alter their self-perception and hide aspects of their identity in order to "fit in" with the mainstream culture (Weigel, 1999). Work by Boschner (1982, cited in McKeown, 2009) suggests that cultural shock is a process in which one "re-orders" his or her cognitive structures resulting in a new person. It is therefore likely that international students who study abroad may have already undergone an important transition within their identity.

Our study supports the finding that international students experience many transitional issues when they move to the United States for college. In the case of Priscila, a more significant shift in her identity probably occurred when she studied abroad in high school, an experience she
Internationalizing the International: International students who study abroad described as being a much greater challenge than moving to East Lansing or going to London on study abroad. Betsy had never traveled outside of China before moving to college, and Wendy had only traveled to neighboring countries with her family. Although both Stephen and Veronica were experienced travelers, both talked about how different East Lansing was from their homes in Tehran and Lahore. Having experienced major cross-cultural adjustments in the past does not mean that the study abroad experience had no personal learning outcomes for our participants. Wendy discovered a new love for travel, Veronica and Priscila developed confidence in their chosen career direction, and Stephen is still deep in reflection about the new aspect of human nature he experienced in Japan. Yet, studying abroad needs to be considered in relation to the journeys they’ve already made in their young lives.

This finding highlights the need to consider study abroad participation as just one component along the development curve for these international students, a journey that spans their entire degree experience in the United States. By taking a study abroad program experience in isolation we may be missing important developmental markers that may be identified by looking at the bigger picture. Such an oversight is not unique to this study, but is common to the much of the empirical work on study abroad outcomes. In the case of international students, practitioners need to consider collaboration between the international student support office and the study abroad office to more effectively engage international students in study abroad, and to ensure program design considers the needs of this group. This goes beyond the administrative support required to manage the complexity of visa regulations around the world. It will call for a more holistic focus on the overall educational experience of international students.

**Implications for research, policy and practice**

The findings of this study affirm the research question that study abroad creates
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developmental opportunities for international students. Where international students differ in
developmental levels in the domains of cognitive, interpersonal, and intrapersonal development
appears to relate more to earlier experiences of dissonance in adjusting to their new living
environment in the United States. Research into self-authorship in diverse populations is still
new, and we only partially understand the role of culture in the developmental domains. Future
research studies could examine the relevance of traditional student development framework for
international students, and other diverse populations. As international student enrolments
expand on U.S. campuses, it will be necessary to question our assumptions through empirical
studies.

Important to both researchers and practitioners is the impact of the administrative split
between study abroad and international student services at many institutions, which also frames
research projects and our knowledge in this area. The international education experience of
studying abroad as part of a degree and undertaking a whole degree in another country are
usually split into different areas of research and considered related but different phenomenon. In
the case of international students undertaking study abroad, it was difficult to analyze the
developmental outcomes of a study abroad program without considering the entire educational
journey for this group, particularly as it relates to cultural experiences and adaptation. More
research is urgently needed on the overall educational experience of undergraduate international
students in the US. Additionally, this study raises the question of whether more work is needed
on international education as a phenomenon for a more mobile generation of students, moving
beyond the traditional divide between study abroad and international student research.

The results of this study raise multiple opportunities for practitioners in both the areas of
study abroad and services for international students. First, the small group model of faculty-led
study abroad could be explored as a mechanism to build friendships between international and domestic students. For the international students in our study, this was one of the most important and enduring benefits of their study abroad experience. Secondly, the academic motivations highlighted in this study could be purposefully promoted to encourage participation. While some students have the skills to navigate the study abroad system to their advantage, other students could benefit from similar strategies, which may also improve their academic performance. This applies equally to international and domestic students.

As colleges and universities develop policies to further encourage or mandate study abroad participation, international students should be considered as a diverse student population with distinct needs and motivations for participation. This group is often overlooked because they are already studying abroad. However, this study has demonstrated distinct academic and social motivations that have the potential to support international students in their study and career goals. International students should also be counted as part of institutional participation goals and statistics; their exclusion as a group may be viewed as marginalization rather than bureaucratic oversight. By not being attuned to this group, institutions may be overlooking a valuable opportunity to differentiate themselves, through attractive study abroad programs, in an increasingly competitive market.

Acknowledgements

The authors wish to acknowledge the input of attendees at the first presentation of this paper at the Forum on Education Abroad conference in Denver 2012, and also our co-presenter, Rachel Wellam for her contribution.
References


