



Doctorate in Professional Studies
(Educational Psychology)

***Developing a conceptual learning enhancement
framework for study abroad programmes: the role of
action research in the participation of students***

A project submitted to– Middlesex University in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor in Professional Studies with adjustments to fulfil the viva voce conditions.

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DPS Projects

Disclaimer: The views expressed in this document are mine and not necessarily the views of my supervisory team, examiners or Middlesex University.

Abstract

Studying abroad is frequently described as a life changing experience yet evidence suggests that more can be done to improve and add value to the student experience. This doctoral study purposes to present how learning can be enhanced for the student abroad through a broad spanning consideration of good education practice.

With an emphasis on the student as a valuable resource, this study uses an action research approach to uncover evidence of high value learning experiences by engaging student participation in the development of a learning enhancement framework design to guide practice.

The doctoral project takes place at a study abroad university in Athens. The methodological design consists of action research within a qualitative setting and is conducted through a series of guided focus groups over a systematic time frame. The diverse sample consists of 12 students who attend a US homeschool and share the same study abroad location during the study.

Enriching this primary study, two additional data sources are used to support and compare findings:

Professional observations systematically considered and recorded over time include critical incidents and offer professional insight into the study context.

Introducing Experiential Education, a professional project designed and instructed by the researcher took place separately during the timeframe of this doctoral project, the outcomes of which are directly relevant to the broader topic of learning enhancement and to the questions posed by this study.

Supported by the relevant literature, the primary study and 2 secondary studies are used in the synthesis of triangulated outcomes and claims. Taking an in depth, critical examination of the study, and developing an emerging framework from this analysis, the case is made for utilising student participation to implement improvements to educational practice. Drawing on the complete findings and outcomes, a series of mechanisms bridging the gap between learning experience and student are presented as mechanisms that can be used within the Learning Enhancement Model as drivers of good practice.

Significant outcomes include the correlation between students' engagement with the local culture, academic performance and student enjoyment of the experience abroad. The emerging conceptual framework for learning enhancement is presented as the primary contribution to knowledge in the study abroad field and identifies a system of professional good practice that could be adopted and adapted by learning instructors, administrators and study abroad providers. The presentation of the work offers the second contribution to knowledge by showcasing the role of action research in the participation of students and documenting the development of the study.

The thesis concludes that study abroad currently provides the potential for a rich learning experience.

Innovatively, the study determines that by considering the emerging indicators of enhanced learning and incorporating them into strategic and teaching levels, students and educators will benefit from a re-evaluated model of practice, through the emerging Learning Enhancement Framework is presented in the study.

Foreword

In October of 2010, I found myself substituting for a colleague, trying to navigate the densely populated, vibrant Medina in Tunis, 11 students following me in an organised line – we were not lost exactly but trying to chart unfamiliar territory in order to grasp our bearings and discover everything of significance in limited time; not wanting to miss anything of value in the enchanting, historic place, neither wanting to glide through the market like passive tourists.

The Medina market itself is not linear but made up of winding narrow streets decorated by jewellery and fabric stalls, carpets lining the walls. Each corner is similar, overcrowded with objects and people, unidentifiable. Yet, once you enter through the historical walls, you have no option but to follow the spiral network of footpaths and streets until you inevitably arrive at the imposing walls once again.

During subsequent walks within the Medina walls, I followed the same routine- but everything was different. It was no longer the unfamiliar sounds and smells or the way vendors called out and switched location that I noticed but sign posts in the stall signs, incomprehensible, still, but familiar, the sequence of gesticulations, recurring mannerisms, words I began to recognize. As I completed the circuit daily over the next week, wandering, exploring and returning to the point at which my walk had begun I discovered that arriving at the walls I viewed the Medina in a different light, understanding its natural order with different perspective.

My journey through this thesis and research project has been much the same- a circuit, repeated in a salient evolving environment, the inhabitants of which have shaped its value and colour.

Acknowledgements

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Chapter 1

Introduction and Terms of Reference

Introduction

Over the last decade, there has been a preoccupation in Higher Education regarding the value of Study Abroad, how it is assessed and how it is evaluated in terms of pedagogical and academic potential. A global network, study abroad programs offer a variety of student experiences, learning opportunities, internships and academics. Within the academic sphere, study abroad offers plentiful experiential learning ventures, diverse methods of learning and varying applications of intercultural pedagogy. Yet, evidence in this study suggests that students do not benefit fully from the opportunities available and that there is more to be done in facilitating a stronger capitalisation of the study abroad experience for students through considering study abroad learning in a holistic manner.

This chapter contextualises the research project within the study abroad landscape.

Terms of Reference

- Learning Enhancement: a term adopted by learning institutions to refer to formalised supplemental learning strategies offered to students
- Study Abroad: The formal attendance of a student in a registered study abroad university located in a country different to that of the home school

Table 1: Terms of Reference

Project purpose

Beginning at the Arcadia University Athens Center, the purpose of this thesis, is to bring into focus crucial components of study abroad through investigating the impact of study abroad on students and evaluating their engagement and interaction with elements of their broader learning experience. This is effort is made in order to identify value adding, impactful practice and to build on this practice in order to capture and frame an emergent learning enhancement framework. Building on the outcomes of the study, 3 steps are taken in creating an emergent code of practice.

1, following the research design under an overarching Action Research approach, the investigation begins with the design of several focus groups that consecutively take place during the investigation semester. An additional 2 sources are used to accumulate data. These consist of the professional observations made by the researcher within the professional context of the university and documented systematically and the findings of a professional project, 'Introducing Experiential Education', that the researcher was involved in.

2, the outcomes of the focus groups are analysed and further synthesised with the professional observations and professional project outcomes supported by literature. The evidence of practice that enhances learning is evaluated and developed into utilisable, actionable mechanisms that are implementable by students and practitioners. 3, the learning enhancement framework is formulated, emerging from good practice, drawing from the expertise of faculty and documenting the student experience to enhance the study abroad semester. The investigation aims to offer guidance to facilitators and institutions for an enhanced, richer learner experience informed by current practice and adjustable to maintain the salience required for a working framework. The process of this development is presented as a testimonial to the value of student participation in education research.

The project topic reflects and encourages a sector shift in focus toward a culture of learning continuity and learning enhancement (Johnson, 2010). This focus underlines that there is a new emphasis on learner development and examines how this development can be addressed by the education institution and study abroad provider.

The next section offers a contextualising overview of the broader study abroad sector and outlines evidenced emerging skills associated with the experience. Following this, the local setting for this study is discussed, leading on to the investigation rationale.

An overview of study abroad

Study abroad programs have formed part of university programs globally over the past decades with a documented increase in American students studying abroad. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and

Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) (2012) in 1975 0.8 million students studied in global locations, in 2009 the number had increased to 3.7 million study abroad students worldwide. Over the past 10 years UNESCO has recorded a 12% annual increase demonstrating a steady growth in students opting to study abroad with universities including study abroad in degree composition. The Harvard Global Immersion Program (2013), for example, requires all Harvard Business School students to study abroad for a minimum of one semester during their degree. The United States of America (USA) and United Kingdom (UK) are the most popular destinations and Greece has experienced a decrease in students studying abroad with the lowest number of students attending Greece based study abroad programmes recorded in October of 2012 with 109 American students in Greece for a full semester (Greece, National Statistics, 2014), also demonstrated in the table below. The recent decade has lead Graduate schools to consider study abroad experience in applications for graduate studies. The University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) graduate division (2014), for example, requires a demonstrable ‘commitment to Diversity’ from prospective students and New York University (NYU) Graduate programmes (mission statement, 2014) requiring ‘recognition of cross-cultural competency’.

J. LEADING DESTINATIONS of U.S. Study Abroad Students

- 15 of the top 25 destinations are outside Europe.

Rank	Place of Origin	2010/11	2011/12	% of Total	% Change
	TOTAL	273,996	283,332	100	3.4
1	United Kingdom	33,182	34,660	12.2	4.5
2	Italy	30,361	29,645	10.5	-2.4
3	Spain	25,965	26,480	9.3	2.0
4	France	17,019	17,168	6.1	0.9
5	China	14,596	14,887	5.3	2.0
6	Germany	9,018	9,370	3.3	3.9
7	Australia	9,736	9,324	3.3	-4.2
8	Costa Rica	7,230	7,900	2.8	9.3
9	Ireland	7,007	7,640	2.7	9.0
10	Japan	4,134	5,283	1.9	27.8
11	Argentina	4,589	4,763	1.7	3.8
12	India	4,345	4,593	1.6	5.7
13	South Africa	4,337	4,540	1.6	4.7
14	Brazil	3,485	4,060	1.4	16.5
15	Mexico	4,167	3,815	1.3	-8.4
16	Ecuador	3,107	3,572	1.3	15.0
17	Czech Republic	3,291	3,477	1.2	5.7
18	Israel	3,441	3,189	1.1	-7.3
19	Chile	3,280	3,064	1.1	-6.6
20	New Zealand	2,900	2,969	1.0	2.4
21	Denmark	2,478	2,876	1.0	16.1
22	Greece	3,428	2,701	1.0	-21.2
23	South Korea	2,487	2,695	1.0	8.4
24	Peru	2,448	2,680	0.9	9.5
25	Austria	2,736	2,657	0.9	-2.9

Table 2: Leading Destinations (source: Open Doors, website, 2012)

Study Abroad Student Impact

Several studies have been conducted to discern the student impact that abroad programs have on students with the results demonstrating a number of skills and traits of both academic and non-academic natures. For example: *A German study compared personality development and found that students who studied abroad showed improvements in five core traits compared to their peers who did not study abroad: openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness and emotional stability* (UC Merced, 2014).

In terms of academic skills, results demonstrate a shift in performance, ability and knowledge accumulation. For example, (UC Merced, 2014):

100%	Greater improvement in GPA post-study abroad. Student GPAs tend to rise as they approach the completion of their undergraduate degree. Students who studied abroad saw their GPAs rise twice as quickly as a result of going abroad compared to students who stayed in town according to a Georgia study.
19%	More likely to graduate: that describes how study abroad participants are more likely to graduate than non-participants by six years. Even at four years, study abroad participants are 15% more likely to graduate based on a UC San Diego study. UT Austin and Georgia data show a similar trend.

Table 3: Study Abroad Impact (source: UC Merced, 2014)

Study Abroad Skills and Employment

The Trooboff *et al* study (2009) correlates student study abroad skills with employment prospects as identified by employers:

Table 3.0 Personal Qualities in Prospective Employees: Ranking for All Employers (5-point Likert scale, with 5 indicating the highest, and 1 the lowest, importance)

Quality	Importance in Hiring	Enhanced By Study Abroad
1. Honesty and integrity	4.93	2.25
2. Shows strong work ethic	4.87	2.79
3. Self motivated, shows initiative	4.85	3.63
4. Listens and observes well	4.68	3.24
5. Flexible, adapts well	4.58	4.02
6. Rational and logical	4.47	2.77
7. Innovative and Creative	4.33	3.32
8. Enthusiastic and outgoing	4.29	3.35
9. Curious; wants to discover more	4.28	4.27
10. Non-judgmental toward other world views	4.24	4.16
11. Willing to take risks to learn new things	4.08	4.06
12. Recognizes own world view is not universal	3.91	4.24

Table 4: Study abroad skills and prospective employment (source: Trooboff, 2009)

Table 3.1 Personal Skills of Prospective Employees: Ranking for all Employers (5-point Likert scale, with 5 indicating the highest, and 1 the lowest, importance)

Skills	Importance in Hiring	Enhanced by Study Abroad
1. Effective working in teams	4.73	2.93
2. Works well under pressure	4.69	2.94
3. Analyzes, evaluates, interprets well	4.60	2.92
4. Works effectively outside comfort zone	4.54	4.03
5. Expresses self effectively in writing	4.22	2.60
6. Knowledgeable about firm's core activities	4.22	2.31
7. Communicates effectively in intercultural situations	3.41	4.06
8. Knowledgeable doing business elsewhere	2.92	3.20
9. Understand global econ., political trends	2.74	3.58
10. Well-informed re: world events/history	2.68	3.71
11. Effective socializing/doing business elsewhere	2.14	3.96
12. Knowledgeable re: other history/culture	1.93	4.12

Table 5: Study abroad skills ranking (source: Trooboff, 2009)

In a study maintained by the CIHE (2012), employers identified the significance of study abroad in terms of increased perspective:

The value of [a student's] international experience goes beyond purely the acquisition of language - it lies in the ability to see business and personal issues from other than your own cultural perspective (CIHE, 2012, p.3).

Although the accumulation of skills from the rich experience of study abroad is abundant, a disconnect between the ability of students to connect their experience with the future or transpose it to articulation have also been observed:

We are experiencing a lot of applications from candidates who are lacking in communication skills, who do not possess the ability to sell themselves in an interview (CIHE, 2012, p.3).

It is undeniable that the experience of study abroad, though significant, is not always capitalised on in terms of student acknowledgement and understanding and that this gap is further identified by potential employers as well as instructors and scholars.

My professional observations at Arcadia University in Athens not only counterpart these facts but inspired this investigation of study abroad. I continue with an introduction to study abroad at Arcadia University.

Background and Context: Arcadia University

Originally founded as Beaver College in 1853, following the end of the Second World War during the summer of 1948, The College of Global Studies, Arcadia University was established to enable mobility and abroad study for students located at American Universities. Over 3000 students select to study abroad with Arcadia annually with over 75,000 students expected to have complete an Arcadia Study Abroad Program by the end of 2019 (Arcadia, 2019).

Currently ranked 1st in study abroad participation (Arcadia, 2018), the Arcadia study abroad network is made up of 67 global locations for students to select and spend a semester, academic year or summer studying transferable academic classes. One of these locations is the Arcadia University Athens Center where this study takes place.

Arcadia in Greece, Athens Study Abroad Program

The Arcadia Center in Athens welcomes 30-60 students each semester for either a semester, short term program or the entire academic year. The students who arrive from a US based home-school live in central Athens during their studies.

The academic program consists of Modern Languages, Classics, Humanities, Economics and study credits are transferred from these classes directly to the student's home school hence the term 'a semester abroad'.

As Assistant Director, Experiential Education and faculty member I teach, strategize, assess and design components of the program. Through my experience of over a decade, I have gained insight into the student learning within the academic, social and cultural contexts. From these observations, it is clear that there are rich interactive experiences afforded to students within our academic structure. These include on site learning, where students study archaeology and architecture at an ancient site and intercultural exercises; ranging from experiential experiences for students to accredited intercultural skill development, diversity conferences and an ongoing orientation inclusive of reflection points throughout the semester. In recent years, my professional responsibilities have developed to include the evaluation of practice in relation to value added student experiences and enhancing student learning.

Learning Enhancement

Learning enhancement is a term used widely in academia to describe the supportive strategies and resources offered to learners and educators in a variety of contexts. The aims and contexts vary although there is a distinct tendency to pair development for both instructor and learner:

- To offer effective study via the Learning Enhancement Team, part of Student Services (University of East Anglia, 2012)
- Developmental support of student learning, curriculum design, blended, flexible through the Institute of Learning Enhancement (University of Wolverhampton, 2012)

- A provision for scholarly, informed and principled guidance in relation to learning and teaching via the Learning Enhancement Unit and university intranet and developmental awards (Goldsmiths College University of London, 2012)
- Via faculty and student support and development through the Learning Enhancement Center (University of Southern Mississippi, 2012)

This investigation is framed within the Athens Arcadia Center setting, and takes place within the broader local academic context with an aim to explore how learning is and can be enhanced. Spanning from within the university and academic to daily experiences, from formal to informal experiential learning and learning stimuli, the project aims to explore and build on current practice, in order to retain value adding experiences and their impact on students while strengthening student engagement and participation.

A number of study abroad providers and educational institutions have begun to assess the relevance of learning enhancement during the last decade both in the UK and USA. The issue is prominent, for example, in the University of Minnesota Program Professional's Guide (Paige et al, 2003) and the Roger Williams University statement of Study Abroad (2014) to name a few of the initial institutions at the forefront of this shift.

Currently, learning enhancement is addressed in the form of autonomously applied strategies, for example, through reflection focused seminars designed to draw out the engagement of students as well as support their development. Within any learning institution particular mechanisms like this can be added to support class engagement as well as impact learner outcomes through the design of an academic class. A more holistic approach including several of these mechanisms and strategies is expected to have a greater impact. For example, in terms of lifelong learning and skill retention, it has been observed that the use of both class design and developed instructor practice can be used successfully to create lifelong learners (Stolk et al, 2003).

Considering the potential in enhancing learning for students at the Arcadia Center, this research project emerged out of observed indicators that our practice could evolve further.

Rationale and Motivation

The aforementioned area of research emerged as an effort to further understanding our practice in relation to students in accordance to the following organisational aims:

- To facilitate cultural awareness for each student
- To offer stimuli to encourage local cultural engagement
- To provide a balance between learning and experience
- To offer resources for each of these things

Prominent issues surrounding the study abroad experience presented in student feedback and my professional observations seemed to highlight student interaction with the immediate environment. These included:

- The impact of co-curricular activities for students while abroad and their opposing potential to become seemingly obsolete with the student becoming isolated from what we, as practitioners, view as ‘the rich intercultural study abroad experience’.
- The ‘disconnected’ feeling students often describe in relation to their new academic context.
- The challenges students voice in ‘making sense’ of the many stimuli in Athens ranging from academic topics to intercultural understanding and managing to socialise with Greek students.

I found myself trying to clarify the links between the academic, the co-curricular, the local environment and the student. Through this effort, various questions arose and guided me to develop and begin to frame the research question.

What is it exactly that we are offering in terms of learning enhancement and how can we see if this is effective?

How can we document and measure these devices?

How can we use students as data assets in understanding this?

And more importantly, are we offering students all that we can?

Table 6: Driving questions

This was my first contact with the interrelated concepts of learning enhancement and holistic programming. Becoming informed in reflective, reflexive practice I began to acknowledge my role in terms of research potential and action research and formulated a strategy in order to capitalise on my role, through the evaluation of practice, with the ultimate aim of producing an emerging code of practice made up of the collective value adding components currently in use by faculty and staff. These aims were fuelled by the evidence of good practice and a student need for a systematic, value adding approach to learning enhancement during the length of their program.

The following section presents the study aims as they developed into my doctoral investigation.

Aims, Objectives and Research Questions

The ultimate goal of this study to develop a code of practice based on the investigation outcomes and documented participant interaction is stated below.

Aim

- To develop a learning enhancement framework for study abroad through participatory action research with students.

Research objectives and questions

Stemming from the investigative need to explore and accumulate evidence of enhanced learning from current practice, the following questions were developed in order to guide the research process and explore the valuable potential of student input in the study.

Objective 1a: To explore through action research why learners study abroad on these programmes, what their expectations are, their perception of each programme segment and how it can be further developed or changed in order to address the salience of the learning culture.

Objective 1b: To contribute knowledge to the field through this exploration by bringing together the fragments of peripheral learning process.

Research question 1

How can skills learnt in the abroad context by the learner be capitalised upon in order to create a shift toward a systematic process of learning enhancement (as opposed to fragmented practice) by educators in the area of study abroad?

Considering the interaction of students with the study as participants under an action research approach, the 1st study objective acknowledged the value of this input. In order to understand the full extent of this impact as practice, an evaluation of the collaboration would be necessary as demonstrated in objectives 2a and 2b.

Objective 2a: To assess if, how and to what extent the collaborative research has enhanced the learning experience.

Objective 2b: To identify the impact that lasts after programme departure and what has remained from the process (3) months later.

Documenting the process of the focus groups and assessing participant impact would reveal potential activity in engaging students in order to enhance their learning experience, leading to the following question.

Research question 2

By utilising evaluation outcomes and findings from the redevelopment of this research practice what characteristics would a learning enhancement framework need to encompass emerging, proven, value added interactions?

Objective 3: To establish how the suggested framework can be created in a form easily adaptable and applicable taking differentiating factors into account. This will be addressed through the development of the framework based on the research outcomes over the project time span.

Research question 3

What are the contributing factors to enhancing learning and what are the restrictions, for learner and instructor, and are these factors location specific?

Emerging from the study, the documented participant interaction and project findings, investigation approaches the ultimate aim of designing a framework of practice. The final component of the inquiry focuses more on the research design in order to assess the design approach and contribute to our understanding of action research within study abroad education.

Objective 4a, to involve learners in the designed research collaboration.

Objective 4b: To try out the result driven change and redevelop based on new feedback.

Objective 4c: Verification to reconsider original expectations at the end of each cycle to assess whether the expectations were met or changed.

Research Question 4

What is the role of action research in learning enhancement?

Contributions to knowledge

To summarise the project aims in relation to the contributions to field knowledge, the 2 claims are outlined below.

Primary claim to knowledge

By successfully enhancing learning for students on our study program, we enrich the experience by further equipping students with transferable skills and demonstrate a longer-term study abroad impact. By demonstrating how this can be done through presenting an emergent conceptual framework, future practice is informed with the potential to be further developed.

Secondary claim to knowledge

Further to this, the project uncovers the role of Participatory Action Research in study abroad and consequently in enhanced learning. The documenting of the action research cycles will demonstrate student impact and offer insight into learner perspective through the process.

Studying abroad is, by default, an experience that shapes how students learn in a new cultural context.

Specifically, capitalising on how these skills can be cultivated and enhanced will further enrich our understanding of

- How a semester abroad can foster the ability to develop and learn as a continued process or experience of developmental value through further facilitating student engagement and autonomous learning.
- By understanding how learning enhancement can enrich this intercultural learning experience, practitioners in the study abroad sector can become equipped to facilitate a culture of enhanced learning building on student participation.
- How the study abroad student can cultivate transferrable skills to be used long after the learning experience has occurred and how the environment can facilitate this.

Having addressed the objectives and research questions through primary and secondary research, the outcome of the project could be used as a generalised template to be adopted and used by learner and learning facilitators.

Why this project?

This position brings learning enhancement into much needed investigative focus following evidence that suggests great value adding potential in the drawing together of experiences and skills cultivated and built upon via today's study abroad experience. In this project, the holistic learning experience is considered including the factors that differentiate between a student engaging fully with contextual stimuli and the loss of the rich opportunities study abroad offers. In this way, holistic learning is considered crucial to learning enhancement and addressed throughout this thesis.

The involvement and participation of students in this research offers valuable insight into the varying learner vantage points and allows for a learner focused redevelopment of how we can enhance engagement, intercultural understanding and, more broadly, learning in this study abroad context.

Towards a learning enhancement framework

The end product, takes the shape of a learning enhancement framework focusing on learning enhancement in study abroad in an aim to move from the understanding that 'Learning enhancement adds value to the study abroad experience in terms of faculty involvement, student engagement and performance' to 'how we can further develop and enhance learning for our learners?'

Innovation, Impact and Implementability

In terms of project value and desirability, the following points place this thesis within the spheres of innovation, impact and implementation.

- 1st Assessment of current practice through this research and opportunity to better and redevelop this practice.
- The creation of academic dialogue with students, inviting a learner centred approach to how we strategical view learning enhancement at Arcadia University in Athens.
- The involvement of other Arcadia locations encouraged to implement and asses the emerging framework.
- The sharing of the framework with universities outside of Arcadia including Athens based abroad campuses.
- The comparative use of the framework with existing practice.

The diagram below further demonstrates research impact.

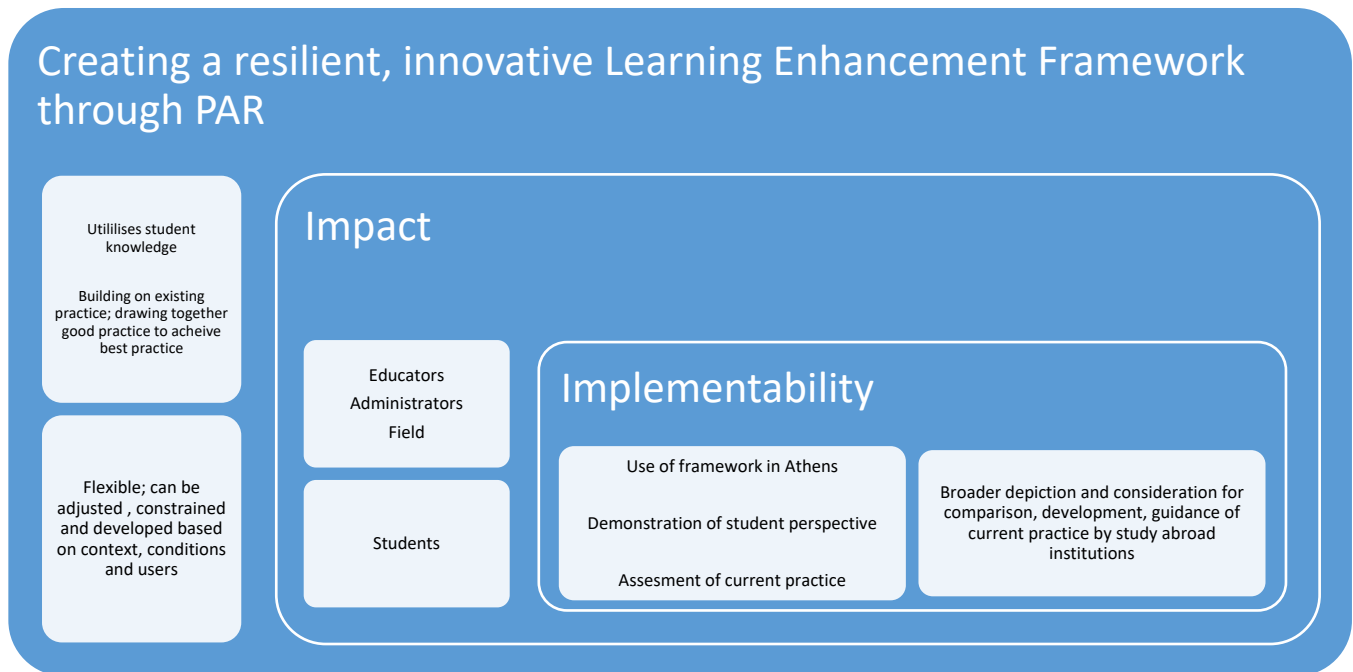


Diagram 1: Project innovation, impact and implementability

Practitioner development

Further to this, this research has a direct impact on my dual professional role in relation to the final outcome as well as the research process. As an administrator and strategist in the field of experiential education, this Dprof project has offered me the opportunity to become immersed in current theory and practice related to the subject. As a faculty member, this project has brought me closer to an informed understanding of the dimensions to learning enhancement that play a crucial role in the lecture hall. The design of a learning enhancement framework for study abroad programs affords a potential guide for programs within the organisation in support of organisational initiatives, policy and practice to explore added value potentials.

Benefits to Arcadia University

Considering organisational impact, several factors highlight this study as desirable and impactful.

Arcadia University has forged long standing study abroad programs with a number of partnerships taking place in various geographical locations such as (Arcadia University, 2015)

- The Alliance of Global Education with programs in India and China

- The American Graduate School in Paris collaboration for a programme in France
- The East African Community partnership basing the programme in Tanzania
- The Kadir Has University collaboration with a programme in Turkey
- British university partnerships including Middlesex University

The synergy of these institutions indicates collaboration regarding the learning experience, and utilises the learning objectives set out by the leading learning institution, Arcadia University.

There has been a preoccupation within the field on how we can capitalise on the skills and knowledge students acquire while studying abroad. This research creates an avenue to do just that by developing an emerging framework for enhanced learning.

Benefits for the instructor and learner

By gaining a greater understanding of learner needs and how emerging solutions can be incorporated into the operation of a study abroad program, we uncover a resource for educators and administrators. Utilising this resource offers students a learning culture informed by their needs as learners. Students will benefit from an enhanced learning experience according to best practice as well as one that caters for the ever-evolving learner culture.

Thesis structure

This introductory chapter has presented the research context, bringing together the case for this thesis, my role in the research and the operational background of my professional environment. The terms of reference clarify the themes, values and aims that guide this project. From here on, the narrative is structured in this way:

Chapter 2 Literature review

Here, a discussion of relevant learning theories, studies and policies is presented in relation to the project.

Chapter 3 Research Methodology

This chapter begins with a grounding of research and positions me as researcher within ontological and epistemological paradigms before outlining the methodological research design and process. The 3 sources of information are outlined to demonstrate a coherent project in terms of triangulation:

- The project inquiry, Action Research: focus group series
- Experiential Education: a professional project
- Professional Observations

Chapter 4 Project Activity

Documents the research process and presents a timeline of activity, including a discussion how practice developed for the focus group series.

Chapter 5 Project findings analysis

Analyses the data acquired and formulates the learning enhancement conceptual framework. Emerging learning enhancement indicators are grouped and used in the framework formulation.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This chapter demonstrates my conclusions drawn from the full research project. The continuity of research as well as the impact to the learning community is discussed with recommendations regarding the emerging Learning Enhancement Framework and suggestions for further research.

A look Back, a critical reflection

The final chapter documents my development as learner, critically reflecting on my progress as parallel to the development of the research project. This section makes use of critical reflection theories to assess and evaluate my journey as a work based researcher.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

Introduction

Study abroad is inherently preoccupied with how the learner is and becomes educated within new sociocultural environments and how their learning evolves within related academic and experiential contexts. This chapter contextualises the learning enhancement research question within theory and identifies significant studies and perspectives.

In order to frame the process of inquiry within the existing literature, the process began with an extensive literature review in order to acquire a comprehensive understanding of the study abroad field in relation to critical issues, current developments and the studies of learning within the study abroad context, as well as gain an understanding of the relevant learning theories. These theories, coupled with practice, form the foundation of this research.

Using the process outlined by Saunders et al (2003), I programmed my literature review activities to culminate in a critical literature review to enrich my research in two key areas outlined by Wilson (2013):

- **Focusing interests** By reviewing current practice and policies, the scope of this project focused on concepts and areas related to study abroad, learning theories and learning enhancement in terms of good practice and research value.
- **Theoretically informing the study** Enriching my understanding of learning theory and analysing the relevance to study abroad and learning enhancement offered exposure to the prominent discourse, practice and gaps in knowledge.

The path outlined by Saunders et al indicates a path similar to that of action research with interim intervals of adjustment and refinement between the reviews of literature. This process is demonstrated in the diagram below.

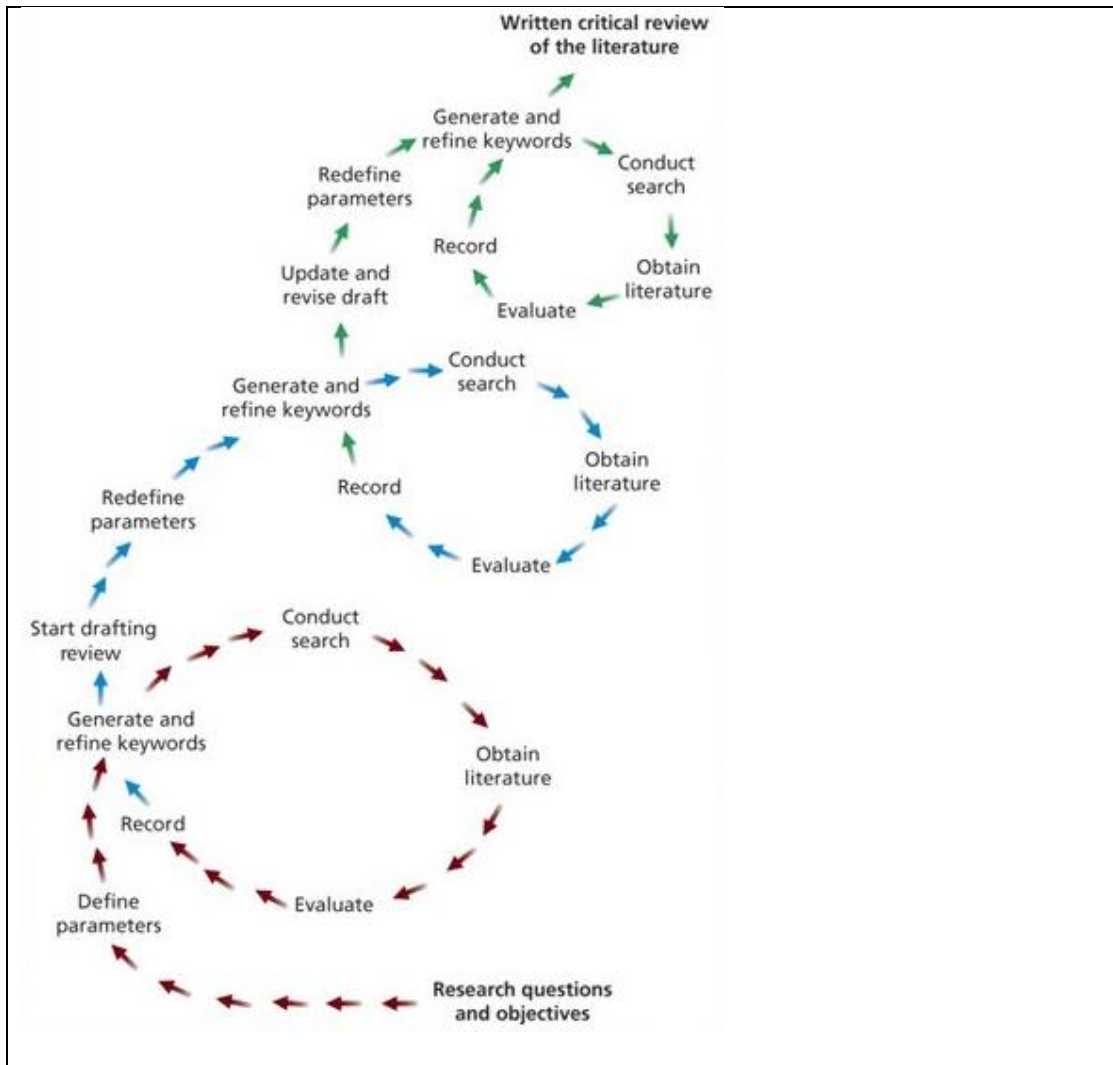


Diagram 2: Literature Review cycle (source: Saunders et al, 2003)

My own literature cycle matched this process with emerging themes and topics appearing in relation to learning enhancement within the study abroad context. The literature review process informing my project is demonstrated in the diagram below building on the spiral depiction above.

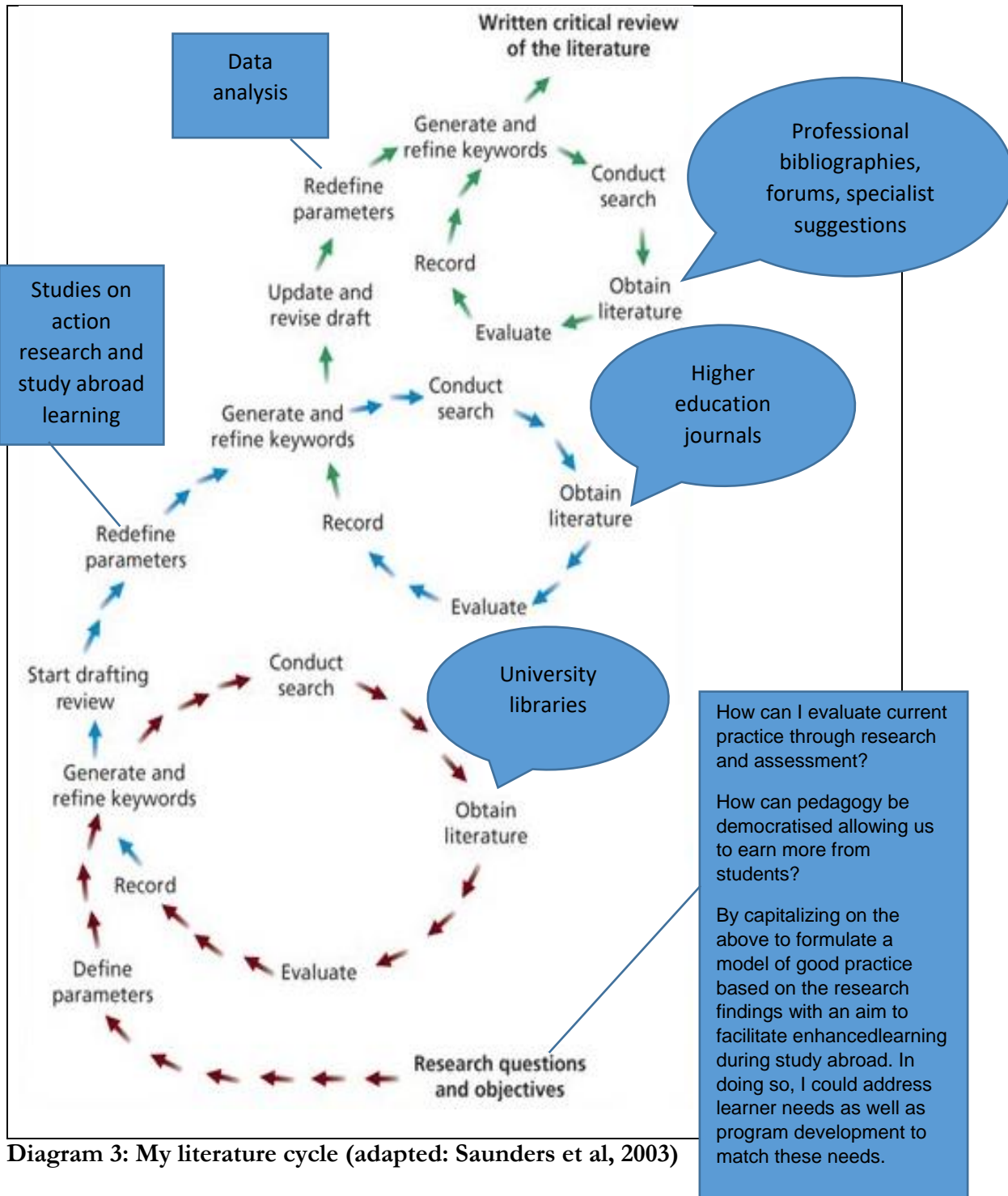


Diagram 3: My literature cycle (adapted: Saunders et al, 2003)

From here on, the text serves to contextualise this research project within literature as guided by Wilson (2013), in the areas of education, relevant policies, research and good practice.

Theoretical Perspectives

This section discusses theoretical perspectives that are relevant to learning in order to create a theoretical foundation on which this doctoral project can base the academic inquiry into enhancing learning for study abroad students. I begin with a summary of contemporary learning theories to create a comprehensive understanding of the underpinning theory and continue to discuss theories related to learner transformation, learner communities and types of learner impact. Study abroad student experiences are then explored through current literature. The relevance of these theories is discussed, demonstrating the literature review as a foundation for the research practice.

Contemporary Learning Theories

Constructivism

Constructivism as a philosophy of education, indicates that the learner creates and recreates meaning through personal experience and builds mental value systems through learning in order to accommodate more experience according to Fosnot (2005). This process could be described as framing and codification in relation to the surrounding stimuli. This layered process of learning is akin to the intercultural learning experience students embody while studying abroad: to view the learner through this perspective uncovers the importance of experience, how this experience is analysed and what this means as time abroad progresses in terms of learner development and contextual interaction.

The leading constructivist codes dictate the following:

- According to Johnson (2003), Learning is a search for meaning: the learner actively initiates the process in their effort to construct meaning. Pedagogically, this presents our student learner as leading the process, highlighting the need for the learner to engage and ‘want to’ create meaning for the cycle to take place.
- According to Vanderstraeten (2002), Meaning requires understanding wholes as well as parts: the learner and learning are considered within an impacting, impactful context. This signifies the learner within social constructs and contexts and leads us to consider her within this interactive environment. Further to this, we must consider the broader pedagogical context rather than focus on the learner and

instructor, **for** example, and recognize the prominent cultural context the study abroad students find themselves located in.

- Understanding student mental models: we must comprehend the student perspective in order to have an educating impact (OPA, 2001). We must view the student, then, as an active learner who is addressed using active methods; moving away from traditional distanced pedagogical practice for example.
- The aim of learning is for the learner to construct personal meaning; assessment of learning must be part of the learning process (**Roeschl- Heils, 2003**). Assessment, here, becomes a tool to help the learner further engage and understand the value of their own learning.
- In terms of impact to learning and instructional design, constructivism can be seen to focus on the learner as the stimulus to reshape a learner oriented perspective of practice. More specifically, standardised curricula and assessment techniques are replaced with tailor made practices that are transformed by learner needs and instruction focuses on analytical problem solving skills (**Piaget, 1973**).

Viewing the learner in pursuit of meaning, within the study abroad context where there are evidenced examples of rich learning opportunities, this potential active status justifies a responsibility for instructors to develop a learning environment that offers stimuli and cultivates student development in relation to the immediate cultural environment. Further to this, likely barriers to this search for meaning must be examined so as to remove them to the extent possible through program design. Typically associated with the psychology and abilities of the learner, in this study instructional design is given equal weighting.

In terms of the impacting, impactful context, technologies in pedagogical methods inviting a consideration of the student as a participant within the various interactive contexts are required. For example, within the local Athens setting, and considering the need for students to become familiar with their new surroundings, a workshop consisting of navigating the area through the use of maps with inbuilt interaction with residents of the area offers students the tools to navigate the area (impact) and gain from their socialising within the environment as new comers (impacting).

As discussed above, encouraging ownership of the learning process and individual-focused instructional approaches constitute the final two components of the constructivist approach. This direction of tailor-made

assessment and the construction of personal meaning lead to consideration of critical reflection, and inbuilt instructional components that invite learner self-assessment in stages.

Each of these areas highlights the value of a student focused investigation into the learner as leading participant in their individual experience as well as valuable resource for informed instructional practice.

This doctoral project is guided by the above principles as a foundation to construct a learning enhancement framework, guided by the Vygotskian social constructivist concept of scaffolding (Vygotsky,1978) learning.

Piaget's theory

Piaget(2001) outlined a theory indicating the increasing mental sophistication of children from infancy as time progressed building and attuning mental maps, therefore developing refined cognitive structures. In relation to curricula and instruction, this theory suggests a mandated consideration of learner development needs and the contextual prominence in developing cognitive structures. A critique of Piaget's theory by Matusov and Hayes (2000) presents the theory as incomplete and suggests that a consideration of human nature as inherently social must be made in order to fully understand the learner. This perspective invites consideration of Piaget's theory in relation to the learner abroad and whether this evolving sophistication is impacted by the new environments as well as whether tools of practice can include this consideration. The study abroad program time span also emerges as a criterion for evaluation. Although the students are adults with a faster developmental rhythm, the development over time may signify a relationship between growth and study length. Once again, in relation to this study the environment is brought into focus as stimulus for the development of these structures as is the learner interaction and associated personal developments.

Learning Styles

The theory of learning styles is preoccupied primarily with how the learning individual manages information and negotiates the learning experience. The theory is based around the concept of concrete vs abstract perceivers and active vs reflective processors (OPA, 2001). According to Smith (2010), recent developments in the field of undergraduate education indicate that the theory of learning styles can have a direct impact on inclusion and widening participation for learners when elements of the theory are matched with care to organisational needs. The theory suggests that traditional education practice is one dimensional in the sense that assessment and

instruction should be diverse enough to encompass varying learner needs across the 4 categories. Once again, for this study, the theory of learning styles clarifies the value of experiential learning and instructional design that is learner centered and accounts for the diverse learner needs appears in order to address the multidimensional learners. Consequently, the aim to design a learning enhancement framework must include this perspective. For example, critical reflection is frequently used in study abroad classes in the form of the written journal as a uniform way of collecting student learning discourse. However, reviewing the 4 learning styles poses questions as to whether this uniform practice allows for the diversity within any learning community. Although it may be unlikely that an all-encompassing process can be implemented, it is clear that in the case of critical reflection, practice should be reviewed in order to assess learner impact according to individual learning styles and that this review should be ongoing to match the pace of an ever-changing learner community.

Communities of practice

This approach views learning as an exchange within community structures of practice across disciplines (Doolittle, 1997). This perspective further acknowledges the experiential components of learning and suggests that the educator incorporates and replicates learner community practice (Palinscar & Herrenkohl, 2002). Establishing collaborative research work communities is highlighted here and supports the notion of bringing together good practice once established across our study abroad community of practice.

If we are to consider learners valuable participants in how we understand and investigate learning, it is important to acknowledge them as vital partners within this study and research community.

Vygotsky and social cognition

According to Johnson (2003), this culturalist view identifies the learner or developing individual as a product of their cultural context with the social environment contributing directly to intellectual. The Vygotskian perspective suggests that curricular design include interaction between learners as well as between learners and the assignment. According to Rogoff, Gardner and Ellis (1984), further to this, instruction and learning have an interactional nature. In terms of assessment, Johnson tells us the theory suggests scaffolding is identified as attuning instruction to learner development resulting in an optimal course of development. Further to this,

assessment, here, is preoccupied with the difference between actual ability or development and potential in the learner and how instruction shapes each within groups of learners at varying levels. This view of the learner as a developing subject within the given environment points to a recognition of scaffolding development, stages and points in the historic learning period. This signposting is particularly relevant to this study structurally in relation to the design of the framework as well as in recognizing the stages of learner experience and documenting them as signposts for future practice.

Learning challenges

In his paper, 'Normal Learning problems in youth', Ziehe (2009) outlines the disconnect between research into youth populations and education research, signifying the need to address the prominent questions of how and why education cultures have changed and more importantly how students are (trans)formed. This statement may explain the observed disconnect between our daily education practice and 'getting through' to our students. Our practice cannot be tailor made for our current student demographic if we do not understand this particular demographic with any distinguishing characteristics that they may have for example. If we are to consider the importance of offering learners the opportunity to interact with the social order and immediate learning environments in order for them to experience new perspectives (Hansen and Phelan, 2019), the student must be critically viewed in terms of socialisation.

Through the lens of cultural theory, Ziehe demonstrates the student within their conceptual knowledge systems and rules, redesigning each to recognize the foundation of student or individual socialisation. In this context, this socialization is twofold: it would be important to recognize the pre study abroad experience context as well as the study abroad experience itself. This demonstrates the need to probe in depth to each of these distinct individual areas of conceptual knowledge for example.

Through his study, Ziehe builds on the cultural theory preoccupation with symbolic and cultural components of social reality rather than examining the individual through psychological methods preoccupied with introspective mental world. Perhaps this direction offers a more accurate recognition of the student transitions and transformations given the intercultural perspective of study abroad. The proposed method below offers a way to do so.

Ziehe further presents his 3-step process of analysis in learning problem solving as follows:

1. Subject oriented contextualisation; locating the individual within their meaning parameters in order to identify the context surrounding learner experience.
2. Meaning structure-oriented contextualisation; to substantiate the subject expressions, scientific social analysis will investigate past the expressed meaning structures of the learner to reveal underlying context.
3. Meaning system-oriented contextualisation; further revealing the hidden structures of meaning, this step will uncover the possibilities to reshape meaning sequences and knowledge structures which would include “semantic changes in supra-subjective meaning patterns” (Ziehe, 2009, p.185).

These steps aim to uncover the learning challenges faced by students and enrich this understanding we can attain from them with expertise to evaluate and ratify these discoveries scientifically in the two final steps. This valuable process would unveil a wealth of understanding in meaning structure schematics, particularly in the study abroad context where constructing meaning through the cultural context has such prominence.

According to Hansen and Phelan (2019), this is particularly important in highlighting aesthetical experiences for the learner in order to amplify how the environment is experienced.

What this means for the youth learner

Ziehe continues his analysis to demonstrate what the impact of these shifts has on the youth as follows:

- Orientation towards personal affairs; the pre-existing school context defined practice and the learner populous, something that the current evolution of the learner now constrains with a developed accessibility to parallel conceptual social spaces that now define the individual psychological perspective with a view of the temporal outside ‘my time’ as irrelevant.
- Informalisation of the social pattern of behaviour; behaviour has become less structured and less formal impact on individual practice as personal and learner with a tension between individual and learning experience or institution where structure becomes a refutable knowledge structure.
- Subjectification of motivation; a consensual cultural of introspection has become part of everyday knowledge and practice, almost as duty with the severe valuation dimension shaping youth psychology

with a detrimental impact to motivation... clarifying that this youth culture cannot be motivated by generic pedagogical inclusion and self-motivation practices.

Each of these challenges directs us to re-examine education practice and research to reform our symbolic understanding and use within the creation of meaning for current learners. The potential of such a re-examination, according to the theorist, lies within developing our knowledge of this culture of post-traditionalisation.

The learner self, then, can be seen to struggle with issues of identity and identification inviting us to consider how aware our learners are of their own personal identity.

Knowledge of the self

Jarvis(2009) introduces the notion of disjuncture as preeminent of any form of learning. Developing this disjuncture in relation to self-identity, he demonstrates the theory of human learning in relation to knowledge of the self. Although postmodern approaches argue of the difficulties with defining a core, true self, and identity, for addressing the learner, Tennant (2006) closes the argument with the directive that the self must be framed if it is to be understood. In relation to the existing learning theories, Jarvis further suggests that the absence of social and social interaction considerations make learning models too simple as they do not include the intricate social dimensions of the learning process: In recognizing the learning as a product of social experience, the following process was developed to reflect the working learning model in more detail:

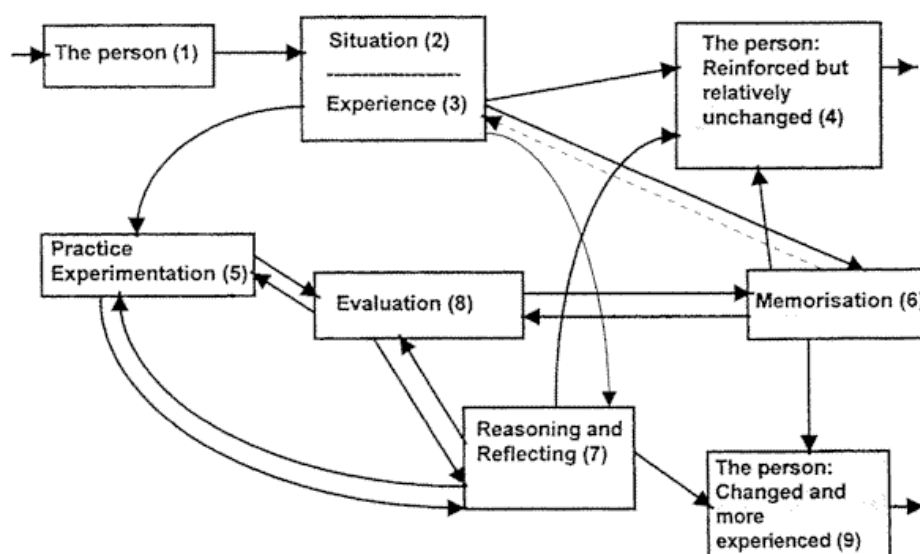


Diagram 4: Model of learning (Source: Jarvis, 2009)

This shift placed the learning individual in the focus of the process. Jarvis tells us, “fundamentally, it is the person who learns and it is the changed person who is the outcome of learning, although that changed person may cause several different social outcomes” (Jarvis, 2009, p.24). Jarvis continues to analyse the learning as both experiential and existential, recognizing that the individual operates within the social and is social, as well as transforming and evolving through learning from primary experience, for example. Here, we are brought again to the notion of disjuncture as the beginning of conscious experience with our learning manifesting as social constructs.

Building on Jarvis’ suggestions of the person as the starting point for learning theory, we see that this inclusion reshapes our psychological- sociological duality, mentioned in theories so far, into a triad where we now examine the cultural context, the individual mental sphere as well as our addition of the person complete with body and mind and transforming through learning.

Experiential education: the postmodern approach

Usher (2009) provides an introduction of education discourse as occupied primarily with autonomy and social empowerment with self-expression and self-realisation forming prominent dimensions.

Application and adaptation are recognized, here, as more subtle signifiers within the diverse experiential discourse. Elaborating on the culturalist stance of the postmodern perspective, Usher warns us that experiential education must not be seen as a technique or as owned by the learner but as an evolving concept located within the social, cultural and organisational context with the potential to transform. Adding to the complexity of the contextual interaction, Zepke and Leach (2010) describe the meaning making process as multifaceted with the learner encountering meaning, often hidden and unheard.

The tension underlining this external environment, Usher tells us, creates movement and momentum within the 4 poles of application, autonomy, expression and adaptation, constructing the learning experience as a struggle, claimed by varying discourse, stimuli and learner response. Considering this approach in relation to the learner, we could view the learner as negotiating this activity of experiential learning rather than the process taking place

as an inherent evolution belonging to the learner. This perspective makes way for the interaction with the external environment presented by Zepke and Leach. In the diagram below, we can visualise the concept of experiential learning and view the interactions between the continua poles and what Usher names ‘the discursive material practices’ to demonstrate the varying possibilities.

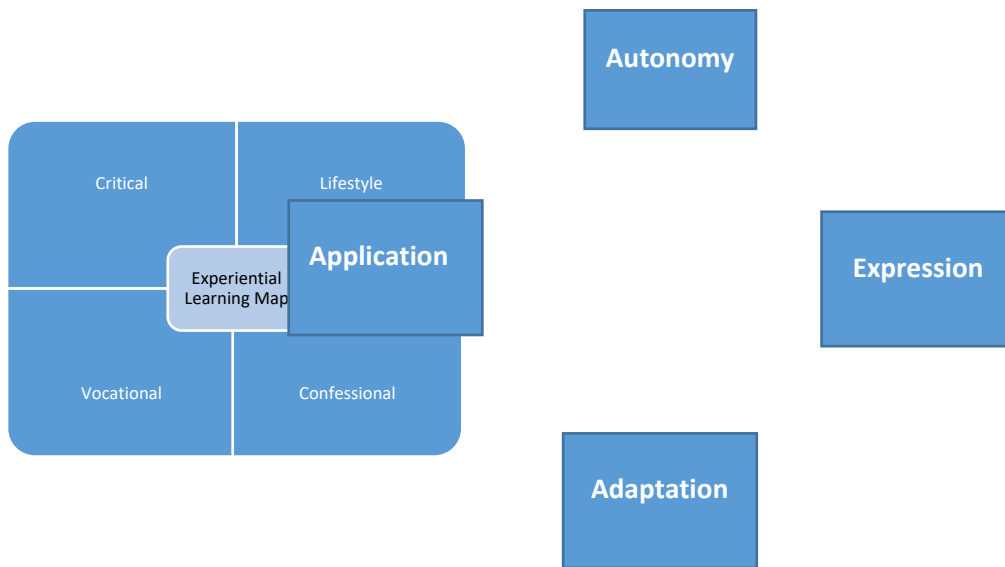


Diagram 5: A map of experiential learning in social practices of postmodernity (adapted from Usher, 2009)

For Usher, lifestyle practices refer to the conscious self-reflexive acts of consumption an embodiment through which identity is shaped. While vocational practices include the formation of pedagogy and experience as tools to solve problems, in turn shaping learning based on these arising experiences. Confessional practices, Usher explains, are constituted by introspective actions that bring understanding and knowledge of the self to be examined, pedagogically this would be presuppose helping the student cultivate, recognize and accept these practices. In addition, for Usher, critical practices refer to the transformations mediated between self-reflexive and communal learning in potential, reasoning and planning. In keeping with the postmodern lens of experiential education as evolving (Usher and Edwards, 1994), incorporating each of the practices above in our critique removes restrictions on how we define learner practice allowing for total fluidity of the evolving process.

Culture and Education

In his paper on cognitive research theory and education, Bruner (2009) offers an analysis of the tensions between culture, education and the human mind. Differentiating between computationalism and culturalism, we read of the impact the cognitive revolution had on theoretical understandings of the human mind and the devolved concepts about how the human mind operates in relation to learning. Described as the enculturation of education by Collins and Bielaczyc (2009), the movement from the first to the latter has signified a movement in critical thought from psychological paradigms to a more anthropological approach.

According to Bruner, the computationalist perspective, focuses on how information is processed, how information is coded, maintained, categorised and managed and invites consideration of the human mind in relation to this type of operation. Emerging dilemmas surrounding this theoretical vantage point are related to the use of technology in improving instruction and the question surrounding the validity of the critical claim that this view is commensurate to the intricacies of the human mind and therefore useful comparatively. This of course does not cancel the use of technology as a tool, Bruner points out that the workings of the human mind are developed and evolve based on the tools available.

Culturalism on the other hand, argues that the mind operates and evolves only within culture through the processing and managing of symbols, according to Bruner. For the theorist, this perspective is further supported by the sequential nature of tradition that predisposes a retention and redistribution of what has been learned. In this sense, the cultural exchange that takes place due to the surrounding cultural context, makes that cultural context necessary for the process of learning to begin and continue making the learners ways on knowing and communicating inextricably linked.

For Kóczy and Komlósi (2019), computationalism and culturalism are based on separate assumptions for meaning creation, while the evolution of digital learning requires a collective reconsideration in terms of social cognition and what this signifies for our learner. Considering each of these perspectives as components of the mind's operation, we are invited to consider them as complementary theories addressing separate parts of the learning process. Bruner continues by clarifying that computationalism aims to analyse how information is managed and how this information becomes useful whereas Culturalism seeks to decipher how meaning is created and transformed within cultural context and communities. The two perspectives are reconciled by acknowledging the

categorical computationalist dimensions when we read, “Once this limitation is recognized, the alleged death of struggle between culturalism and computationalism evaporates” (Bruner, 2009, p.163). It could be argued that principles belonging to each of these perspectives would equip us as educators in considering the learner mind holistically in planning any given learning program component; potentially incorporating the use of technology for an informative instructional cultural understanding of etiquette in local verbal communication for example. This approach would also address the learner within the advanced technological environment described by Kóczy and Komlósi.

Bruner discusses the characteristics of a desirable theory of the mind in relation to use of resources, whether instrumental or barrier removing, together with a recognition of contextual stimuli. Acknowledging the position of education within the schemes of culture, culturalism develops this theory more compatibly. Culturalism does so by considering learning resources, education as purpose, while the evolution of the inquiry would usefully develop into how education is related to culture and how power dimensions are mediated within this placement. In conclusion, we see that **for Bruner**, culturalism presents itself as our tool in understanding how reality is constructed through a cultural psychological lens and negotiates inter-subjectivity with a mandated need to consider learner emotion and feeling explicitly and appears as a significant part of education.

Human Learning

In his work on human learning, Illeris (2009) offers a comprehensive analysis on the learning process and identifies a series of dimensions building on prominent learning theories. To begin, we are invited to **visualise** the main areas of learning through the following representative *structure of theory* diagram.

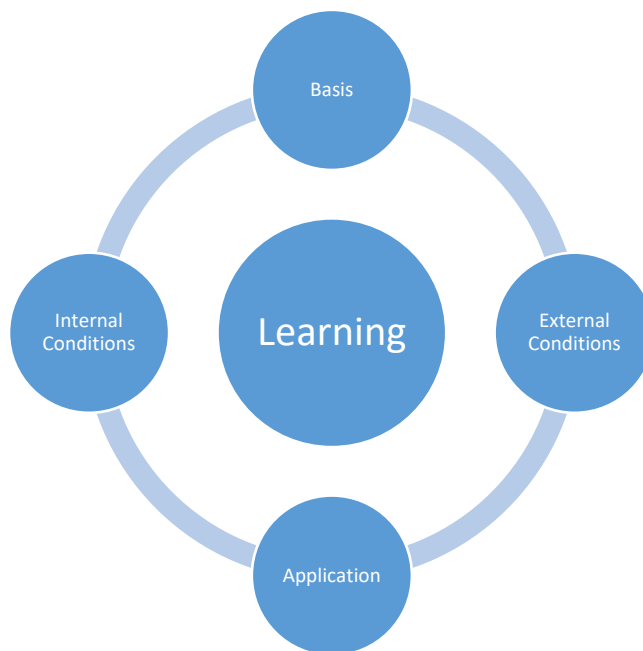


Diagram 6: Structure of theory (source: Illeris, 2009)

In understanding the complex learning process, we are told by Illeris of the conglomeration of the two separate areas:

- external interactions between learner and their environmental context, usually explored through recent social theories
- and the internal psychological acquisition, typically examined in behaviourist and cognitive theories.

It is apparent that not only are both sides of the learning process significant, but that they each play a significant role in understanding how we could enhance learning within the study abroad context, and examining how each of these are (or are not) addressed in the institutional environment and how they materialise for the learner as their learning process evolves. To further depict the interactions of each dimensions in relation to the learner, and how they mediate the full learning process from stimulus, response and interaction, Illeris demonstrates 3 core components in the following diagram.

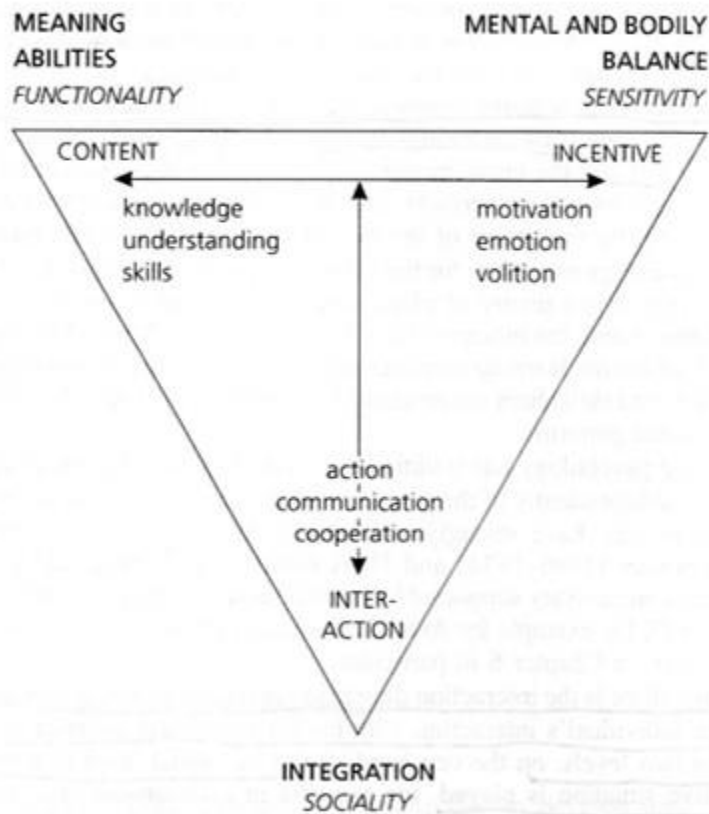


Diagram 7: The learning process (source: Illeris, 2009)

Content, Incentive and Integration

According to Illeris, the Content, Incentive and Integration elements form the locations within the learners' domain with exchanges between each: Interaction consists of the actions that begin the learning process, Content refers to the knowledge and skills accumulated, used and developed while Incentive refers to the learner response and motivation. Each of these transforms the learner evolving towards 3 respective abilities: Integration, Functionality and Sensitivity.

Illeris (2009, p.11) continues to describe an example, applying the model to a typical scenario within a school. For clarity, I adopt the model, here, to show how its use may be represented in a typical part of a day at Arcadia University in Athens.

During the Work in Thought and Action: Internship seminar which I teach, students are presented via lecture with the DIE (Kappler and Nokken, 1999) cultural understanding tool. Students are then invited to make an individual DIE debrief related to an experience within their internship experience. This practice serves to engage

students with theory through grasping the theory foundation and using it to understand their experience from an experiential education perspective. My aspiration here is that students digest and accommodate the theory as part of their developing skill set to enrich their knowledge within the sphere of intercultural learning. Taking the aforementioned 3 dimensions of learning into account, failure to reach this goal can be related to instruction, student ability and previous knowledge as well as student motivation directing us to recognize how much we focus on the one dimension of learner content in instruction. We read, “both the content and the incentive are crucially dependent on the interaction process between the learner and the social, societal, cultural and material environment” (Illeris, 2009, p.12).

Types of Learning

Prefacing the four types of learning, Illeris describes the structures the learner cultivates in the brain named mental schemes in terms of psychological dispositions. Illeris elaborates to identify these mental schemes as the evidence of previous learning, a type of precedent knowledge that the learner automatically relates to the present when encountering a new learning stimulus in relation to Content. Further to this, examining the Incentive and Interaction dimensions, ‘mental patterns’ are used to conceptualise in relation to preceding responses that are then revived.

Illeris continues to discuss the four types of learning building on the learning structures we have discussed so far:

Cumulative learning; conditioning, learning in an isolated form via automated response in order to complete a task, for example that is unrelated to historically: a student learning how to operate the university entrance card system for example.

Assimilative learning; building on the pre-existing ‘precedent’ and developing a foundation of knowledge. An example of this could be the classics students who completes a core Ancient Greek class at their home school and then takes the next more advanced level in Greece. Illeris highlights the challenge of assimilative knowledge outside of the student disposition towards an area, such as an academic subject.

Accommodative learning; more exertive mentally, this reconstructive form presupposes the learner leaving part of what they already know in reshaping and developing what they know leading to a more transferable mental scheme, Illeris tells us. To consider our study abroad student, this type of learning may define the moment our student recognizes she cannot utilise and benefit from her role at the home school of sorority mentor and point of counsel on university life and now must reconstruct her ability to seek solutions to simple daily challenges such as negotiating the unfamiliar city to get to an onsite class in Archaeology.

Transformative learning, Illeris tells us; significant, expansive or transitional, transformation to the learner as an individual, the profound development in character following significant challenge. We are encouraged by Hutchison and Rea (2011) to view transformative learning as discursive positioning, indicating the awareness of the learner in terms of discourse. The two researchers highlight that experience of a new environment can have a direct impact on this transformative potential. To consider an example of transformative learning, we could look at the student who tends to experience mental stress and adopts stress relief practices she has been coached on during orientation week. During the first weeks of the semester she perseveres in using these techniques, is challenged by them and challenges herself to identify moments of stress and revisits these techniques- something she has not tried before. Two months later, she has transformed her ability to recognize a pre-emptive stress episode and can control her emotions to a certain extent.

Barriers to Learning

Adelman and Taylor (2005) suggest that barriers to learning are addressed primarily within the learning organisation. Beginning with the immediate infrastructure, the educators recommend a holistic synergy between resources, the organisation and broader spanning collaborations in the community. Bringing the focus back to the learner, Illeris identifies a series of psychological mechanisms that act as barriers to learning related to modern day life and the impact of prior experience and learning stimuli around us:

Identity defence; learner reaction to a pressure to change in a certain familiar area often needing a counsel style process to overcome.

Ambivalence; needing extended support for the learner, this barrier is associated with the individual being met with a mandated need to learn something new for benefit and not wanting to do so.

Mental resistance; arising as a response to the learning rather than existing prior to it, the great associated learning potential for the learners is equally significant as a learning opportunity for the instructor through raising the relevant learner dilemma.

The components of Learning Theory that Illeris brings to light, offer a broader scope of potential in the learner and reveals the typical yet in a sense negligent focus on assimilative learning and the assumptions that providing the learner with adequate stimuli, evolution will follow. The narrative suggests that a conscious spherical consideration is made of learning theory and invites examination of learning barriers and how they may be impacting on any given diverse group of learners.

Transformational learning

Kegan(2009) creates a conceptual framework and develops how we view transformation learning by distinguishing components he believes should become more explicit.

Primarily, Keegan outlines the need to separate transformational learning from the informational kind while recognizing the valuable role of both. This demonstrates the current inadequate representation of the transformative learning experience ranging from acknowledgment, evaluation to strategy and suggests the need for formal consideration of this type of learning formally within the field and more importantly, on a pedagogical level. To visualise this formal consideration of transformational learning, potential practice might begin with instructor focused training.

After all, transformative learning does take place often during study abroad, yet we are unable to frame it, measure it and conceptualise it past the name it has been given. Kegan validates the need to introduce concepts for practice formally within the learning institution when describing the observations of a subject in his study where she points out the necessity of involvement at the instructor level. We read, “The school should be a learning place for everyone. I decided that if we want kids to be learning in school, it would help them if we

modelled learning ourselves” (Kegan, 2009, p.36) this is, perhaps, insight into the potential of instructor involvement.

For Illeris (2014), Kegan’s definitions develop how we view transformative learning and match the rapid social changes impacting our learner. Though Illeris supports this view, he suggests that in order to recognize the full extent of the developing learner, we must view transformational learning as transformations to learner identity.

Kegan continues, to discuss the gap in our knowledge surrounding the process of transformational learning, or, as he puts it “the form that is undergoing the transformation” (2009, p.41). This indicates to the value of a deeper consideration of the transformative learning experience, the value of examining the interaction between learner, instructor and institution for example; through a systematic examination of how the learner is transformed, why and how this happens and what we can do to utilise clearer practice for example.

Kegan reminds us that transformational learning takes place on the foundation of knowledge, the learner’s way of knowing and is defined by an epistemological shift. The point Kegan makes, is that there is the possibility of misrepresenting transformational change; that is to say that we would seek a change in a learner’s theory of knowledge to establish the transformation. This invites the question of how we can assess or induce this transformation conceptually to shape an operational way of doing so, in relation to the epistemological scope. The learner abroad undergoes many challenges, cultivates many skills, may stagnate and achieve none of this, and may become fluent in a language. But here, we need to identify and focus on the epistemological transformation within the somewhat chaotic momentum.

In studying abroad, it is a common expectation to hear of transformational learning in students related to their personal development and world view. Their adaptation to a new culture and cultivation of intercultural, interpersonal skills is documented primarily. An assumption is made here that these areas undergo the most prominent transformation. Kegan highlights that though transformational learning must be a consideration of the epistemological, it must also recognize the broader spanning facets of the learner and learner’s life. In this way, we should be considering transformational learning through disciplines, academics, lived experience; as having the potential of being ongoing. This perspective of an evolving change might help us view the learner spherically and remove the limiting focus of our identified expected learner outcomes.

As a starting point for transformational learning, Keegan outlines the understanding of learner epistemology. He highlights the danger of presuppositions made by facilitator during instructional design suggesting that instructors could begin with an effort to learn more about their students epistemologically speaking. This idea brings the instructor- learner relationship into focus and the question of instructor strategies to help inquire into learner epistemology arises. Furthermore, there is a presumption here that student learners are able or aware of their epistemological perspective- an area that often needs careful facilitation to help learners arrive at a point of recognizing their epistemological position. In addition, Keegan suggests that a consideration is made of the complex components of learner learning challenges; with the fluidity of the study abroad context, this final dimension serves to further recognize the learner perspective while studying abroad.

Expansive Learning

In his paper on Expansive Learning, Engestrom (2009) presents us with a systematic depiction of activity theory and demonstrates the 5 summarising principles together with guiding questions for theories of learning. Engestrom's first principle indicates that an activity system complete with artifact mediation and object orientations is not only viewed within the broader context of the surrounding activity systems, but is also viewed as the primary point of investigation. This brings the activity system in question into focus and permits us to see it in connection to interrelated activity.

Principle two highlights the multiple perspectives within a given activity system, acknowledging the layers and levels of perspective, input and output. Engestrom invites us to view the activity system as a community bringing to the forefront the complexity of the movement within the system, ranging from the cultural components of participants to how they are mediated within the system. We are warned of the potential engraved in this quality and of the necessary deciphering and reconciliations associated with it.

Engestrom's principle of historicity recognises that activity systems as transformed in time and therefore viewed fully within the specific historical context. This would suggest that learning enhancement in study abroad, for example, must be viewed in light of the university itself, and in the broader historical scope which includes changes in policy, practice, initiatives and so on.

Engestrom's fourth principle presents contradictions as significant in development and shifts. To elaborate on this principle within the study abroad context, there is a significant contradiction within the academic program between student engagement, academic development and the 'transferability' potential of these accumulated skills and knowledge. Introducing online tools to engage students with Greek language learning components will disrupt the more traditional practice of a Greek university class set up, previously an asset in assimilating local student experience. The tension created here invites us to re-examine practice in what Engestrom calls 'innovative attempts to change activity'.

Engestrom's final principle recognises the activity system transformative potential. Engestrom discusses the cyclical nature of activity systems and their evolving consistency through participant response, action and practice. Engestrom describes the ideal cycle of an activity system as developing toward a collective change initiative informed by participant deviation from the norms. We could, perhaps, visualise these cycles using the spiral model from action research (Coghlan and Brannick, 2001).

Young (2001) critiques Engestrom's theories as conducive to updating our view of the learner. According to Young, one more element of the theory must be considered. Engestrom's expansive learning theory underlines the importance of pedagogical issues in settings external to the classroom as much as within. In this sense expansive learning, it is suggested, validates the epistemological approach of the broader study abroad student experience. So far, we have discussed underpinning theories related to learning and we now continue with theories that contextualise learning within an experiential setting.

Constructive Dialogue and Knowles principles for learning

Through his study of adult learning and learning processes for young adults, Knowles (1990) developed a set of learning principles specific to the more mature learner in his theory of Andragogy. Framed within the curriculum strategy, these principles were then developed at Duke University (1997) to create a set of 7 implementable pedagogical values. These values are useful in developing practice informed by learner needs and serve to shape a foundation for addressing the learner and broader learner experience:

- Motivation
- Maturation

- Past Experience
- Activity
- Practice
- Reinforcement
- Transfer of Learning

A more recent investigation into the impact of Andragogy and these principles uncovered additional learner needs and corresponding strategies. The study by Ota et al (2006) concluded that a positive learning experience directed by these principles resulted in higher learner retention.

We are reminded of Knowles' theory: "The richest resources for learning reside in adult learners' themselves; therefore, emphasis in adult education should focus on experiential techniques that tap into the experience of learners" (Ota et al, 2006:132). The study demonstrates 6 elements of instructional technique to address this focus. These elements take the form of lecture, problem based learning, case studies, educational games, role play and discussion (Ota et al, 2006).

Ota et al (2006) continue to argue that this matching of technique and learner needs directly enhance participant learning. The implementation and arising theory at Duke University (1997) and the outcomes in the study by Ota et al (2006) reveal the important dimensions in institutional consideration and implementation building on the Knowles Principles (1990). Considering the other side of the learning relationship, it is rational to examine learner responsiveness to these practices and whether the learner is available to engage.

Readiness to Learn

In a study investigating Feuerstein's Cognitive Enrichment programming, an assessment was made by Wood (2000) of learner challenges in relation to cognitive abilities and instruction implications. Reflecting the critical domain this study also demonstrated a set of critical values indicating learner readiness to learn. In her proposed theory of Learning Readiness, Wood begins with a focus on the learner and identifies 4 learner characteristics necessary for any valuable learning experience, coupled with mechanisms to address each during instruction:

- The disposition for learning/creating learner understanding of content value.
- Adequate Cognitive functioning/instructor awareness of cognitive learner functions and consideration of these via instruction.

- An adequate knowledge base for the content presented/clear prerequisites.
- Adequate study skills and strategies/supportive resources made available to students.

Wood continues to discuss the relevance of learner readiness to instruction design and outlines the student specific contextual factors that may still prove detrimental to the learning experience despite the presence of her 4 principles. These are identified as, personal challenges, low quality instruction and curriculum content. The first of these contextual factors often relates to the cultural environment and how students adapt, or struggle to adapt, to their new location for example.

A typology of student adaptation

By observing study abroad students in Switzerland over 3 years of study, Morgan (1974) developed a typology of student adaptation in the cultural context. This study in the early 70's is relevant to framing the foundation of learner adaptation. Building on the typology of students and incorporating this into the universal institutional aim to enrich the study abroad experience- across the span of student abilities and challenges, Morgan developed the following outcomes:

1. To understand that being a stranger will make it necessary to restructure routine responses in order to adapt to the new culture.
2. To understand and possibly appreciate that which is different.
3. To acquire the ability to make judgements based upon comparisons using different criteria which are developed through cross cultural experience.
4. To resolve or reduce successfully value conflicts between the old and the new and to begin organising an internally consistent value system.
5. To use the tools of another people to perform specific tasks.
6. To appreciate cultural heritage- one's own and that of others.
7. To communicate by word, image and gesture in order to grasp the meaning of a particular lifestyle.
8. To integrate what is being learned into the formulation of new patterns of adaptation.

In the study, Morgan continues to share a significant observation. Students respond to a new cultural context and adapt in unique ways, this typology is formed based on these ways of adapting. Ranging along Morgan's spectrum, the 2 extreme types are:

The Cultural Relativist-----The Cultural Opposite

Each student is located across the spectrum, according to Morgan (1974) based on their response rating to a series of in depth questions. We read, "The valued outcome of study abroad stated very simply, is to help the individual acquire a deep understanding of another culture, and to begin to appreciate and develop empathy for people who are different." (Morgan, 1974, p.213) Throughout the study, an observed disconnect between the classroom and external experience is observably prominent with detrimental impact. We are told, "Student's deep search for meaningful values and a personal identity should not be excluded from the formal academic

program. By attempting to integrate the affective and psychomotor with the cognitive in the academic program, students can be helped to meet the unique challenge of change in a cross-cultural setting” (Morgan, 1974, p.214). This not only supports the view of educator intervention but suggests a holistic inclusion with clear institutional recognition of what has translated to today’s practice as critical reflection.

In his concluding remarks, Morgan suggests that a student located in an abroad context holds great potential that must be unlocked through active instruction rather than left to the student to explore as this proves unsuccessful.

This vantage point stresses the significant role of pedagogical practice in study abroad as a transformative experience.

Democratic Pedagogy for a transformative learning experience

Literature defines the term democratic pedagogy in relation to Dewey’s three democratic dispositions (Macmath, 2008):

- All human beings are morally equal.
- We are all capable of intelligent and well informed opinions.
- We can solve any problem if we work collaboratively.

In her investigation of democratic pedagogy and its application within the classroom, Macmath, offers these characteristics as structural necessities for endorsing a democratic pedagogy.

The benefit of democratic pedagogy and student participation

Wilmer offers another definition of democratic pedagogy when he tells us,

“It means creating a learning environment in which students are participants, in which all positions are equally respected without necessarily being equally valued, and where the evaluation of varying positions takes place through critical, informed and knowledgeable dialogue” (Wilmer, 2006, p.4). This position sets more workable parameters for democratic pedagogy in the practical sense and aligns the principles of democratic pedagogy with an evocative consideration of students as valued participants. The notion of democratic pedagogy is complimented by various learning dimensions discussed in this chapter, emergent from literature, academic studies and good practice.

Democratic pedagogy and PAR

Theory demonstrates the impact of democratised, participant involving pedagogy on the overall learning experience and demonstrates the benefit for learner as well as learning institution (McKernon, 2008).

This shift to a careful consideration of the learner as part of a learning community further supports this project position in encouraging participatory action research to address and evaluate how learning can be enhanced.

Having discussed prominent related learning theory, I continue with a series of related themes that further exemplify practice in relation to study abroad learning.

Related themes

Shifting our perspective toward practice on an operational level, the following narrative serves to highlight the significant issues that emerge within the learner study abroad environment. Beginning with a consideration of experiential education and good practice, learning outcomes, and learner interaction, this section closes with a discussion on learning assessment and evaluation and how each of these themes plays a role in enhancing learning.

Experiential Education

Towards the end of the semester, students often describe their experience at the Arcadia Athens center as life changing. Encouraged to elaborate on this impact and describe what this impact means, how they have been impacted is often viewed as a challenge past recounting vivid memories, things that have been done.

Montrose (2002, p.6) describes the return of a student after a semester in Ireland. The student is full of descriptions, experiences but restricted in putting the experience within a learning context. Montrose asks, “The activity of studying in a foreign country in and of itself does not provide learning- the kind of learning that can be evaluated, graded, accredited. How are we to understand the learning derived out of class experiences abroad?” (2002, p.6)

Montrose elaborates on the relationship between experiential education and traditional methods to describe their dual potential for the learner. “Experiential education complements traditional models of education as a method of teaching and learning that supports the individualised knowledge that occurs outside the classroom walls, and allows students to stretch in unique and creative directions.” (2002, p.7) She continues to highlight the impact of

the two on the student's ways of processing, exposing students "through concrete learning experiences to different ways of processing how they acquire knowledge" (2002, p.7).

Good practice in experiential education

The National Society for Experiential Education guidelines (in Montrose, 2002) for experiential education list 8 principles for good practice in experiential methods:

1. Intention
2. Authenticity
3. Planning
4. Clarity
5. Monitoring and Assessment
6. Reflection
7. Evaluation
8. Acknowledgment

Building on these principles, Montrose has devised a Learning Objectives Matrix in order to facilitate with students defining their initial goal for study abroad. In [grey](#), I build on the template to present the possibilities locally, at the arcadia center to enhance learning.

Specific Program content	Academic Integration	Skills Development	Problem posing	Values Clarification
Academic Courses	Building on academic route and direction in terms of local class selection.	Component recognizing skill through experiential practice and assessment; practical implementation of learning.	Challenges, projects, introduction of student impact locally in class goals.	Learning outcomes presented in the syllabus and addressed during the semester.
Language and Culture	Thematic programming to ensure Greek language classes compliment academic classes and students can match vocabulary to cultural and academic components.	Opportunities to use Greek language and include these activities in assessment.	Facilitate interaction of students with local current events e.g. the need for English language instructors in central Athens could provide an opportunity for students to engage.	Aims developed by students individually to create personal development routes.

Government, History or Geography	Opportunities in leadership associated with class responsibilities and developed into broader spanning academic projects,	In built program components to position students within current events; interning or visiting the Greek parliament for example.	Inviting students to build on current issues and develop solutions; could take the form of forums.	Program workshops offering critical understanding of underpinning theory together with critical reflection.
International Travel/ Group Dynamics	Relevance of historical locations in relation to class topics presented as a resource with encouragement of students to initiate their own interactions.	Students supported to reflect critically on development associated with their travels.	Students supported to reflect critically on development associated with their travels.	Students supported to reflect critically on development associated with their travels.
Outstanding Critical Incident	Students supported to reflect critically on critical events personal, local or international.	Students supported to reflect critically on critical events personal, local or international.	Students supported to reflect critically on critical events personal, local or international.	Students supported to reflect critically on critical events personal, local or international.

Table 7: Learning Objectives Matrix(Montrose, 2002)

Montrose proposes that the model be used in preparation for students to address confusion and resistance surrounding learning objectives. This method could potentially be further developed to frame student learning through the salient semester leading to a continuous reflective process.

The Learning Agreement

The next step, according to Montrose, is the creation of a Learning Agreement with the collaborative effort of facilitator and learner. Creating a learning plan, the written agreement, Montrose tells us, should contain the following:

- Clear, measurable and realistic learning objectives.
- A well-defined time frame for evaluation and assessment.
- Relevant policies and procedures stated in writing.
- Specific guidelines from the host institution or program included.

Montrose highlights the transformative impact of experiential education in study abroad:

- A lack of integration between experience and educational value leads to the need for structured framing of the two as well as the interchange of processes for learners.
- A structured approach to experiential pedagogy is necessary in making this transformation possible.
- With the focus on the activity of learning contrary to the more traditional focus on intentional learning facilitators can create strong links between study abroad and experiential learning.

- Applied experiential education is beneficial to students in enriching their learning experiences from memories and descriptions to theory, analysis and a greater understanding of self and context.
- Experiential education provides a foundation that will enhance and support learning from experience. Montrose highlights the impact of experiential learning in study abroad as a validation of the student engaging with the learning experience in an informed, structured manner. Once this area has been addressed and the student able to recognize this relationship, the next step would be for the student to gain ownership of this process and develop their engagement into involvement. Student Voice is a dynamic serving this purpose.

Student Voice and the learning community

Freeman (2014) invites us to discuss the gap in knowledge regarding the impact of student voice stratagems on instructors, facilitators, institutions and of course students themselves. She tells us, “Student voice mechanisms implicitly and explicitly change relationships between institutions, academics and students but these effects are currently underexplored” (Freeman, 2014, p.12). This demonstrates the need of assessment of these devices in the instances where they form deliverable institutional initiatives.

The diversity of student voice

Responses and perspectives on Student Voice vary among peer groups. Freeman argues that that this is largely informed by the views of students as consumers, accountability, democracy, wellbeing, equality and resistance. Though it is important to appreciate the political discourse surrounding student voice as democratising for education, according to Czerniawski and Kidd (2011), the explicit inclusion of student voice in the operation of a learning institution acts as a vehicle toward person-centric education with tangible valued outcomes for the broader institution community. Freeman continues to demonstrate the short falls of student voice policies and strategies in place: “A lack of transparency about the purpose of formal mechanisms and the imperatives of involvement were often understood to be implicit” (Freeman, 2014, p.12). This demonstrates the disconnect that may appear between learner and institution that is related to attempted initiatives and the need for these initiatives to be communicated in ways that portray them as aims rather than possibilities.

Assessment

Harvey (2008) highlights the significance of engagement with assessment at organisational level (2008), suggesting that not only can learners become more engaged through well-structured assessment mechanism and cultures but that the participation of learning facilitators in how these are shaped is of equal value.

Building on the principles of critical pedagogy, Bain (2010) proposes a model for integrating student voice and assessment for empowerment. Through this conceptual model, Bain directs us “away from a dominant discourse of assessment that illuminates the role of students as passive recipients, toward a discourse that supports the development of student autonomy and more effective student/academic partnerships” (2010, p.14).

With the notions of learner autonomy and dialogue between faculty and students at the epicentre of this research project, Bain’s claims serve to strengthen the case for both as interrelated components of the university experience. Bain continues to highlight the way in which these two areas might frame pedagogy into a more coherent process through use of the conceptual model:

We might juxtapose the transformative goals of critical pedagogy with the transformative possibilities of student voice (Bain, 2010, p.14).

Bain creates a 3-step model of assessment, below, that demonstrates the interactions between learner and facilitator building on learning and assessment as parallel actions.

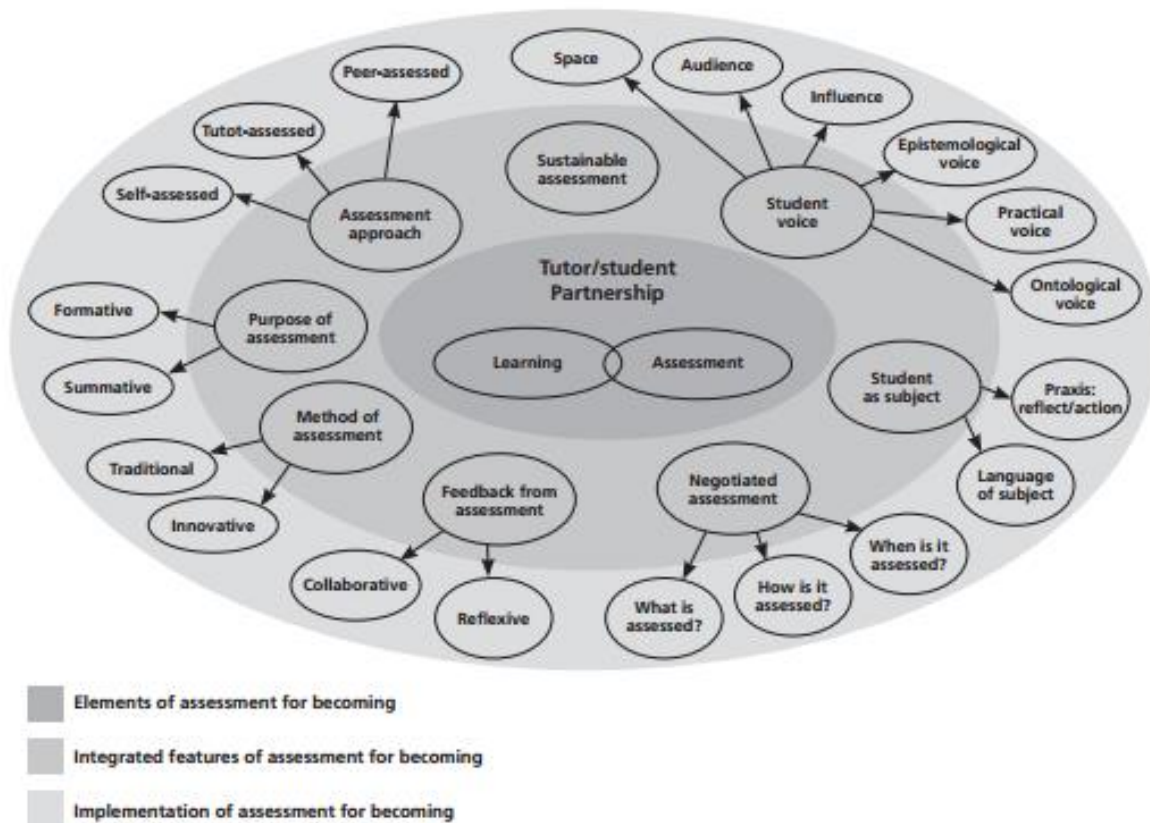


Diagram 8: A conceptual model of assessment for becoming (source: Bain, 2010)

Through her model, Bain highlights the interaction between learner, facilitator and organisations as an impacting factor on learning and assessment, which she pairs as fundamental in learner development.

Bain's model based on interaction is supported by Gardner (2011) who argues that the value of assessment is evident when assessment supports learning rather than when learning is being assessed. The study by Gardner presents a direct correlation between student engagement and assessment. This is further discussed on page 64.

Evaluation, the student perspective

So far, I have looked at the literature addressing methods of assessment of the learner. In this section, I consider the evaluation of higher education through the eyes of students.

In a study investigating student opinion of the value of student evaluations, Miron and Segal (1986) offered insight into how students viewed program assessment at the time. The investigation unveiled the fact that students at the Tel Aviv University were willing to participate in program and academic evaluations and considered their evaluative contributions to have value. A substantial percentage of students expressed uncertainty in terms of ownership in evaluating their instructors whereas attitudes to evaluations formed the general consensus. This study

would suggest that students participate in the process of evaluation as routine, passively in the sense that they respond to specific questions asked engaging in a clearly outlined process that does not foster a high level of engagement.

Student Engagement and Participation

Student engagement is often considered in terms of student behaviour demonstrating an active response to academic co/extra-curricular stimuli (Marwell, 2004). In the case of study abroad, student engagement is aimed to span through the classroom and academic spectrum and into the new cultural context (Stebbleton et al, 2013).

PAR and student engagement

Participatory Action Research is a method of community based research with an emphasis on collective synergy and action (Argyris C. and Schon D., 1989). In his investigation of student community engagement, Nhamo (2014), discusses the academic perspective of meaningful community engagement through active participation introducing action research as a platform for community engagement in Higher Education. The study presents good practice and theory surround community engagement and documents how participatory action research acts as an engagement factor in the particular context of community engagement.

In this section, I discuss the study as a demonstration of the potential for student engagement through PAR.

Nhamo tells us of the reciprocal interaction between learner and context through participatory action research, “PAR provides a two-way engagement process that locks in both the researchers and communities they will be reaching, in seeking to solve community problems” (2012, p.1).

PAR and engagement in the study abroad context

Using the PAR principles, this reciprocal problem based process could be developed to enhance engagement with other study abroad components. Considering immersion through language, for example, a significant study abroad component in Athens. Moving deeper into cultural immersion and using the Greek language class as a standing point, we could formulate ways to use their Greek within the community based on a reciprocal transaction, solving the problem of the decreased knowledge of English in the immediate local community; a language partnership exchange with local peers or, students could be encouraged to volunteer at a local school to teach in English in return for conversational Greek sessions for example.

PAR impact on engagement

Action research facilitates critical interaction. Based on this premise, the introduction of action research to a learning experience, results in a more engaged interaction. We read, “PAR moves higher education from linear-oriented to research to web-oriented systematic cycles of inquiry that involve planning, asking questions, taking , action, observing, evaluating and critically reflecting, prior to planning the next cycles” (Nhamo, 2012, p.1).

In this sense, guided by an action research project, of whatever scale, with herself as participant, the learner abroad engages with the new context or stimulus in a far more meaningful way.

Here, the framing of this experience with critical reflection is significant as is the academic introduction of AR to the student to form a foundation of action and learning.

The learner and engagement

In terms of engagement, therefore, it is important that we recognize the student as potentially active in an explorative autonomous capacity supported by knowledge and program facilitation.

Now that we have clarified a way of addressing and increasing learner engagement, it is important that we consider how this engagement can be evaluated and assessed.

Assessment and Engagement

In a study investigating effective and engaging assessment practice in higher education across 13 departments (Harvey, 2008), Harvey identifies assessment components that factor into learner engagement. The study built on PAP as an evaluation of university assessment. The initial findings showed mechanisms were in place in the absence of a large-scale strategy. Harvey tells us,

“The data told many interesting stories including assessment practice with a heavy emphasis on final semester examinations, a lack of variety in assessment tasks, no staggering of due dates for assessment tasks and all within an organisational context of no formal organisational assessment policy, a context not compatible with engaging assessment” (Harvey, 2008,p.5).

Assessment of the holistic learning experience

The focus, here, on examinations as the focus of assessment demonstrates that assessment is not based on the holistic learning experience- in terms of study abroad, this poses a significant question as to best practice in order to consider the various dimensions of learning and shifting assessment to encompass them.

Diverse assessment

Harvey's study adds to the discussion of assessment to describe findings suggesting that, in the absence of a widespread assessment policy, departments, educators and staff developed their own practices for assessment and evaluation. This would indicate differing assessment methods encountered by students and a fragmented overall method of evaluation.

Evidence of good practice and student engagement

Harvey tells us that good practice emerged from these independent methods of evaluation as a phenomenon more present in the examples of evaluation and assessment being viewed as a process informed by student participation. This observation matches our understanding of the potential of assessment culture in increasing student engagement. Harvey's study demonstrates that an assessment culture fostering student engagement and therefore enhanced learning, evolves in response to data collected of students and facilitators and takes the full learning experience into account.

Here, the challenges of evaluating learning in the broader context emerge, indicating that graded assignments form a small area of a broad spanning issue.

Assessment culture

Harvey tells us of her research impact, "Departments began to change culture around assessment (for example, from a norms-based approach to a standards-based approach). The policy is evidence based and clearly promotes principles of good assessment" (Harvey, 2008, p.6). This shift in assessment culture demonstrates the development into a guiding assessment policy addressing fair assessment in response to the learner.

Assessment and learning enhancement

Considering the literature discussed in the previous sections in relation to the various dimensions of the study abroad learning experience, the dimensions of assessment could build on this investigation into good practice but would need to address the various academic components, pedagogical styles, and facets of student learning during a semester abroad. This study would suggest that the careful consideration of assessment practice could enhance learning.

Constructive Intervention

As a practitioner researcher, the extent of my pedagogical intervention is a subject on which I have reflected extensively. “Response to intervention flourishes when educators use the correct practices” Buffum et al (2010, p.2) tell us, identifying the judgments made by educators in intervention based practice. Literature suggests that academics are not either pro or against intervention although many would position themselves in either of the 2 categories. The extent of the intervention in terms of identified pedagogical goals has been discussed at a greater length in recent decades (Elsworth, 1989)

Addressing Diversity; the intercultural dialogue

Diversity is a prominent topic of study in the study abroad field. For students, it offers an avenue of understanding in terms of cultural difference. For programs and instructors, it offers a thematic exploration of difference in terms of theory and practice with the immediate cultural context coming into prominent focus (Otten, 2003).

Immersion

Immersion is a goal aimed for by numerous study abroad programs, often aimed for in the realms of culture, language, experience and academic focus. A study depicting the formulation of study abroad program design based on aspired learning outcomes (Engle, 2004) presents the need for an assessment based approach to the many possible ways of facilitating cultural immersion.

Cultural Engagement

Following immersion, facilitating student engagement with local culture forms a significant pedagogical aim by study abroad programs (Savicki, 2008).

Bridging skills and knowledge to the future

Study abroad claims to help students develop significant transferable skills in their time abroad. Literature refers to these transferable skills as a component of student development within the study abroad experience (Jones, 2013) a development that students tend to struggle with articulating (Trooboff, 2009) as we have discussed earlier on in this chapter.

Autonomous learning

According to Day, (1999) one of the ten fundamental duties of the educator is to inculcate in their students a disposition to lifelong learning in order to facilitate the emergence of the autonomous learner. According to

Little (2004), to be an autonomous learner is to be an effective and efficient learner hence cultivating the ability to transfer the knowledge and skills acquired outside the classroom. In the context of the foreigner abroad, the foreigner being a type of 'mobile learner' (Brown & Sharples, 2010), the ability to learn indefinitely becomes a developmental priority.

Autonomous learning "is not inborn but must be acquired either by 'natural means' or by formal learning, i.e. in a systematic, deliberate way" (Holec 1981 in Little 2004, p.23). This project aims to address the benefits of learning enhancement through intervention therefore resulting in a systematic way to create lifelong learners as they study abroad.

The learner lens

At current, the perceptions and perspectives surrounding global learning and study abroad have a focus on the student experience using the colonial experience as a point of reference (Ogden, 2007 & Johnson, 2009) through an attempt to reconstruct the student experience into an understandable more familiar critical setting, therefore giving the learner entity a pre-eminent comparable context.

Although this analogy helps us to address the possible forms the experience of the learner abroad can take and the relate risk that follows, several issues arise in light of the positioning of the foreign learner within that new context; modernised, 'untraditionalised' and different to the traditional local experience. Are they ideally situated in a simulacrum of familiarity and given the opportunity to observe from afar? Is the learner to be led, hand held, into this foreign realm in the hope of acclimation? Or are they to be deposited faced with the chaos of the new, the different, the seemingly irreconcilable and ideally adopt, learn and understand?

Matching learner needs

According to Ogden (2007, p.11) "providing programming that responds to student and industry demands however should not be at the expense of allowing students to remain within the comfortable environs of the veranda while observing their host community from a safe and unchallenging distance". This perspective matches global shifts in reflection lead learning in academic, education and professional contexts (Johnson, 2009). Highlighting the necessity for engagement 'on impact' through an intentional effort on the learner's

behalf, to make sense of the daily whether this falls into the desired non-tourist like experience or not, Johnson states that “while the concern is understandable, these vilified places and the local circumstances that create them are some of the least accessed teaching opportunities study abroad programs have to offer” (Johnson, 2009, p.13). Johnson describes the disregard of the ‘post-modern abroad experience’ and the lack of value acknowledged in this very experience. This position considers this disregard to have overlooked the significance of the post-modern experience and dismissed it based on the superficial, first level of contact.

Arriving on the learner continuum

Each learner arrives at their preferred abroad location with much more than a suitcase and back pack. They carry an agenda, an understanding and a reality unique to their life experience. According to Johnson (2009), this outlines the need for the learning experience they are about to embark on to be self-directed and broad enough to embrace this individuality and more importantly initiate the learner’s deconstruction of their own knowledge as they learn.

This position sees the learner abroad as an example of the post-modern experience hence the homocentric approach. This project is premised upon and aims to create a framework that encourages individual engagement and facilitated self-directed learning as well as approaching the learning experience systematically and not relying on the latter.

A recent shift in the preoccupations surrounding education abroad from the experience itself to the assessment (Dutchke, 2007) element depicts a field focus on the learner past the ad locum period. This movement towards measuring the outcome of learning abroad reveals the hidden gem of possibility in taking this movement a step further and creating a learner ad infinitum. For all the richness of the college study abroad endeavour, “study abroad, although increasingly available in a variety of contexts, remains an undervalued and underutilised means of instruction” (Hayward, 2000).

Enriching the learner experience with measurable outcomes is the continuation of the developmental goal for students shared by numerous education institutions globally. Learning Enhancement takes the shape of the desirable result of the learning abroad experience together with the holistic development.

Having considered the above prominent themes in relation to the operation level of the educating institution in study abroad, it is now useful to consider the role of policy in implementation.

The role of policy

So far, I have discussed theory and practice related to the study abroad learning experience within the context of pedagogy and learning theories. Emerging from this literature review is an underlying interest in the cultures surrounding instruction and pedagogy and how these cultures contribute to the learning experience. This section purposes to take this inquiry a step further and discuss the role of policy in education implementation in order to further highlight how policy can reinforce good practice. The analysis begins with a synthesis of theory and practice towards shaping policy, continues with a discussion of policies currently in place and ends with a presentation on the significant culture shaping components of education practice.

Relating contemporary theory to practice

Strategic development and policy implementation will serve to reinforce good practice during what can be described as a transitional time for education with the tensions of traditional and newer praxis. In their paper on contemporary learning and instructor impact, Wilson and Peterson (2006) highlight this responsibility for educators to identify practices of value in reforming education.

Presenting the theoretical concepts underlying education development during the past 2 decades, we read of the benchmarks for learning and teaching that serve to shape education culture through this transition.

Benchmarks for Learning and teaching

The benchmarks identified by Wilson and Peterson, indicate toward an evolving instruction to include facilitation and edification of class content with the learner being encouraged to develop cooperation skills, interdisciplinary problem solving skills through active engagement.

Considering the lengthy varied theories surrounding learning, 3 concepts are drawn to acknowledge current tendencies in education: “learning as a process of active engagement, learning as individual and social and learner differences as resources to be used not obstacles to be confronted.” (Wilson and Peterson, 2006, p.2)

Learning as a process of active engagement

Wilson and Peterson move away from the perspective of the learner as a passive absorber of knowledge and away from behavioural theory, recognition of the cognitive dimensions of learning gave way to neuroscience and the notion of learner mind development through time and experience. This development combined with constructivist views has brought a greater responsibility on the instructor in terms of how they encourage and edify learner interpretations as they construct meaning. Given the varying limitations related to the many learning theories, it becomes imperative that the instructor is aware and informed by learning theories.

According to Wilson and Peterson, “students need opportunities to learn in multiple ways and, and teachers need to have a pedagogical repertoire that draws from myriad learning theorists” (2009, p.4).

Learning as a social phenomenon

Stemming back the Vygotskian theory of the transforming effect social environments have on learner development, the social dimensions of learning have come to preoccupy the 2 contemporary theorists. More specifically, learning must be witnessed or viewed for us to ascertain what is known and, learning takes place within a social community within which our interactions allow us to construct meaning and knowledge. Thirdly, this perspective on learning reveals that learning standards and values are located within our social contexts with communal assessments of performance. Further to this, learning is situated, not necessarily transferrable, developed given a particular context and becomes more likely to become transferrable for and by the learner depending on their metacognitive awareness.

Learner difference as resource

Wilson and Peterson tells us that to acknowledge that the learner construct meaning pre-empts the necessity to understand that learner within the context of diversity; cross cultural considerations by instructors allows for a great understanding of student prior knowledge and experience.

What students should learn

The theorists tell us that further to the mastering of disciplinary content, learners must now become equipped with related knowledge and skills of discourse, argumentation and problem solving. We read of the conflicts between theorist and practitioners of confusing knowledge and teaching to the learner’s detriment, the risks involved in practice without empirical foundation, oppressive political agenda such as social. To this end, a

conceptual level of understanding is important to allow the learner to build on their foundation of learned knowledge and use it to elucidate important problems.

What does this mean for the educator and teaching?

Considering the impact the theory discussed so far has on instruction, Wilson and Peterson suggest 5 guiding principles in shaping policy and educational culture.

Teaching as intellectual work; instructors negotiate content and interact with student learning needs to balance information and inquiry and are then assessed through interviews and invited to justify and evaluate their own practice.

Teaching as varied work; to address the types of interaction necessary for learners to engage and cultivate knowledge according to ways of learning, for example, through using diverse approaches to teaching and acknowledge the situated factors of learning.

Teaching as shared work; toward a practice of inquiry into student thought, this principle suggests a shift to encompass student interaction in the intellectual since and support a collaborative engaged exchange.

Teaching challenging content; instructors must be able to teach from an informed content foundation in order to instruct on complex content while selecting methods with care to ensure student needs and teaching goals are met.

Teaching as inquiry; presenting instruction as continually evolving to ensure instructor awareness of student demographic, practice, techniques and content expertise, this principle further encourages inquiry into learner response to help us decipher student thought and stimulate instructor critical reflection.

During the review of learning theories, in the first section of this text, I discussed the theoretical perspective of viewing the learner as a resource, together with the benefit this exchange interaction has on enhancing learning (Ziche, 2009). Above, Wilson and Peterson (2006) further demonstrate this point. To broaden institutional impact and look at greater practice in higher education, student involvement and student voice can be observed as technologies supporting the resourceful exchange with the learner in the specified study abroad context.

Study Abroad Theory

Study Abroad Benefits

The experience that unfolds during programmed study abroad affords learners benefits that are primarily related to the immediate cultural environment, and to social interactions within the program (Dwyer and Peters, 2018). Evidence therefore suggests that although study abroad professional beliefs tend to view the new cultural environment as primary in stimulating the learner, the interactions within the community have equal value. For the purposes of this study, the interactions between peers, learner and instructor are viewed as participation rather than separate observable activity. Incorporated into the design in order to enhance our understanding of how these social interactions contribute, the research-related interactions are documented.

With direct positive outcomes recorded in the areas of personal growth, intercultural development and career attainment, Dwyers and Peters tells us, for students, there is evidence suggesting the long term impact of study abroad attendance. Supporting the investigation into what endures past the experience, this evidence suggests that the study continues past the departure of students from Athens in order to critically analyse this long term impact and corroborate the areas emerging as the most developed.

Further to this, we read that students involved in systematic experiential learning opportunities displayed a significantly further enhanced learning experience with internships adding value at the forefront and volunteering activities close behind. With an abundance of experiential opportunities available to students, examining the experiential components of our program will demonstrate how the experience is enhanced for students and what this can tell us about instructional and program design in fostering further enhancing opportunities. While anecdotal evidence suggests that the acquisition of skills through an internship, for example, adds to the semester experience for the student intern, the literature previously discussed suggests that on-site social interactions may also play a significant role in student development.

In terms of intercultural adaptability and intercultural sensitivity, students who have completed a semester abroad demonstrate greater advancement compared to students who have not left their home campus (Rundstrom and Williams, 2005). In terms of intercultural communication, the primary criteria pre-empting

development is the exposure to a new culture, we read. After comparing students studying abroad with their counterparts based at their homeschool, international political concern, cross-cultural interest and cultural cosmopolitanism emerge as developed abilities following a study program abroad (Carlson and Widaman, 1988).

While the duration of study abroad impact can be explored through practice and literature with evidence that this impact can be sustained, there is also evidence that long term impact and program duration are linked (Dwyers, 2004).

Program duration

In a study by Dwyers (2004) exploring the correlation between enduring learning outcomes for the study abroad graduate and the length of their study abroad program, it emerges that language acquisition and academics based on culture-specific teaching methodologies benefit from at least a year long program. It is unclear whether other academic components benefit from the longer study abroad term. Considering the many factors that enhance a learning experience, it is useful to examine if impactful learning experiences endure longer and whether there is correlation between particular experiences and the long term impact for the learner. According to Dwyers, evidence further suggests that language use, academic achievement, intercultural development, personal growth and broader career options are enhanced by study abroad and these benefits can continue up until 50 years later.

Long term effects

According to Di Pietro (2013), study abroad has a positive impact on employment probability 3 years after the student graduates. More specifically, study abroad alumnae display experience-related influences in their cultural interactions years after their study abroad program has ended, with a demonstrated interest in new cultures and broader social diversity (Dwyers and Peters, 2018). These characteristics are associated to cultural exposure and confirm that this exposure fosters development and transformation. Still, based on the fact that not all students experience the same in depth transformation, nor do students respond to any given experience in the same way, the need for support and direction in making sense of the cultural environment re-emerges.

Hearing Student Voice

According to Freeman (2014), devices for student voice are rapidly becoming components of educational policies. These mechanisms include:

- Surveys
- Course representation
- Complaints
- Protest
- Social media

Ranging from the local university level to national initiatives on the education continuum, student voice and student engagement are being addressed.

In terms of institutional governance initiatives such as the Student Engagement Partnership created by the HEFCE, Higher Education Funding Council for England, in 2013 (HEFCE, 2013), student voice is being used to influence student activity. The partnership philosophy reads “We aim to help students and their associated representative bodies become partners in the student experience. This means giving students an active role in the development, management and governance of their institution, its academic programs and their own learning experience” (HEFCE, 2013, p.6).

Considering Freeman’s list and student voice at the arcadia center, the following devices need to be added:

- Student council
- Student government
- Evaluations and assessment
- Experiential education initiatives

The Welsh Assembly Government’s for Our Future (Cardiff University, 2014) initiative and publication demonstrate another national strategy developing student voice within higher education. At Cardiff University, the mechanism for incorporating student voice into the university decision making, regarding planning, implementation, and evaluation of the educational experience focuses on 3 identifiable levels of engagement forming good practice in student engagement and representation:

Involvement- Participation- Partnership.

The student voice framework designed and used at Cardiff University features in the tables below: Using the table as a template, I make a comparison to the arcadia center in grey text. The synthesis of this comparison demonstrates how activity at the arcadia center compares to the aspired ‘threshold level engagement’ at Cardiff and uses the criteria as a benchmark for good practice.

Table 8: A student voice framework, Cardiff University and the Arcadia Center

(Adapted from Cardiff, 2014)

	Gathering, evaluating and responding to School-level feedback	Gathering, evaluating and responding to University & National feedback	Student Academic Representation	Student-Staff Panels	Students' Union Elected Officers	Student engagement in curriculum design
<p>Involvement</p> <p>Opportunities are provided for students to express individual opinions, perspectives, ideas and concerns on their experiences</p>	<p>Students are invited to participate in module/ programme evaluation surveys throughout their studies.</p> <p>There is a consistent set of core questions for module/ programme evaluation across the University.</p> <p>Students provide formal evaluations at 2 points regarding academic classes and the full program during the semester and these evaluations are universal.</p>	<p>Students are invited to participate in university and national surveys at various stages of their academic career on a range of topics (experiences, expectations, IT and libraries, residencies).</p> <p>Students are included in participant research regarding programming, study abroad semesters and use of instructional technology.</p>	<p>Student Academic Representatives (SARs) should be appointed via a democratic election process, with all students having the opportunity to stand.</p> <p>Students are aware of who their SARs are and what their defined role is.</p> <p>There is no formal role or process for students in terms of academic representation- the elected Student Government adopts part of this process.</p>	<p>Student-Staff Panels (SSPs) meet at least once per semester to discuss the educational experience.</p> <p>Minutes of SSPs are made available to all students within a week of the meeting.</p> <p>The student government meets once every 2 weeks and meeting notes are shared with the program community.</p>	<p>Information is provided to Elected Officers on student involvement in university processes, e.g. Programme Approval Panels.</p> <p>The student government is informed of protocols practices and their associated responsibilities.</p>	<p>Students are invited to provide comment on their curriculum and its delivery through module/programme evaluation.</p> <p>Students evaluate academic classes via formal evaluation.</p>
<p>Participation</p> <p>Opportunities are provided for students to take a</p>	<p>Student Academic Reps are routinely provided with the results of module/ programme evaluation.</p> <p>The results of module/ programme evaluation</p>	<p>Student Academic Reps are routinely provided with the results to university and national surveys.</p> <p>The outcomes from university and national</p>	<p>SARs attend meetings and regularly contribute, bringing the views of students they are representing.</p> <p>The Students' Union is in regular</p>	<p>SARs determine, with the Senior SAR, the issues to be highlighted at the Students' Union's Academic Council, where cross-School issues can be identified</p>	<p>Elected Officers sit on all formal university committees.</p> <p>A monthly forum is held with Elected</p>	<p>Schools regularly run student focus groups to gain student feedback on learning activities.</p> <p>Student-Staff Panels are routinely used to inform</p>

<p>more active role in a defined activity</p>	<p>are explored at Student-Staff Panels.</p> <p>Students are not formally involved in these processes.</p>	<p>feedback are explored at university committee level.</p> <p>All students are given the opportunity to participate in focus groups on key university initiatives/priorities.</p> <p>Evaluation outcomes are discussed by staff with emerging strategies and adjustments taking place as university policy- participation of students is minimal.</p>	<p>communication with SARs about HE issues, university issues, and information about the Students' Union and the university in general.</p> <p>The student government brings student issues to the attention of staff via formal meetings.</p>	<p>and raised at higher levels.</p> <p>SARs compile a single 'Annual Review of Business' for their School and the Students' Union at the end of each year.</p> <p>The student government presents a portfolio of semester developments- this documents change, issues and discussions.</p>	<p>Officers, PVCs and key senior directorate staff.</p> <p>At this small local scale, the student government forms the only formal committee with student participants.</p>	<p>developments in the curriculum.</p> <p>Focus groups are held in response to emerging issues or opportunities for adjustment reflected in critical incidents or student feedback.</p>
<p>Partnership Collaboration between the University/Schools and students, involving joint ownership and decision making over both the process and the outcome</p>	<p>The results of module/ programme evaluation questionnaires are discussed at Student-Staff Panels and responses and actions are jointly decided by staff and students.</p> <p>Decisions and actions that have been informed by survey results are consistently fed-back to the student body in all Schools and from the university as a whole.</p> <p>Outcomes from module/ programme evaluation are used to inform quality processes and operational activity.</p> <p>The reshaping of the student evaluation</p>	<p>The outcomes from university and national feedback are discussed by staff and students at university committee level and responses and actions are jointly decided by staff and students.</p> <p>Decisions and actions that have been informed by survey results are consistently fed-back to the student body in all Schools.</p> <p>Outcomes from university and national surveys are used to inform quality processes and operational activity.</p> <p>The outcomes of student focus groups are routinely used to</p>	<p>SARs are respected within their School and their opinion is valued and actively sought by staff.</p> <p>The SARs system works because it is a partnership between the Students' Union and the university, where roles and responsibilities have been clearly defined in a code of practice or guidance doc.</p> <p>Students are aware of the impact that SARs have on improving their educational experience and the Students' Union can measure the impact and demonstrate this to the institution.</p>	<p>The SSP is chaired by Senior Student Academic Rep.</p> <p>There is regular communication between meetings ensuring business can be acted on quickly.</p> <p>There are reporting mechanisms into other School committees to ensure adequate consideration is given to the outcomes of the SSP.</p> <p>The Annual Reviews of Business are analysed for University-wide issues, changes and successes for consideration by the Pro Vice-Chancellor</p>	<p>Elected Officers have a voice on all formal university committees and are jointly involved in formal decision making processes.</p> <p>The President of the Students' Union meets weekly with the Vice-Chancellor to discuss core business.</p> <p>The President of the Students' Union signs-off on key areas of university business on behalf of the student body (e.g. the Fee Plan).</p> <p>Student body representation does not have a role in business initiatives, although recommendations are</p>	<p>Students understand the concept of curriculum design and the role they can play in its development.</p> <p>Decisions on changes to curriculum design and delivery are made in partnership with students and staff within schools.</p> <p>Students are partners in the process for the curriculum design of new programmes.</p> <p>Students are informed of the role they can play in curriculum development but this</p>

	<p>template was informed by faculty and student participation as a response to general feedback.</p>	<p>inform University policy.</p> <p>The outcomes on a larger scale could reach further into the local student community through the university itself- local outcomes could be communicated broadly in a formal manner.</p>	<p>The responsibilities of the student government are clarified but usually have an emphasis on broader community contributions rather than student body representation.</p>	<p>for Education and Students.</p> <p>Pertinent information is published by the university with local announcements in terms of local development.</p>	<p>accepted as part of feedback.</p>	<p>is not then put into formal practice.</p>
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Having established the link between student voice and student engagement, this comparison is useful to explore how student voice can be incorporated in study abroad. The comparison suggests that student voice can be established further within the study abroad program. However, programming questions arise with this potential and invite a careful assessment of impact for a small-scale setting, such as the arcadia center.

Student Voice and institutional impact

During 2015, the impact of student voice on academic institutions has come to the forefront in terms of policy making and curriculum content through various incidents. In the States, for example, part of this exposure has been driven by student representative groups lobbying Trigger Warnings (Lukianoff and Haidt, 2015); a request that professors issue a trigger warning regarding the content of literary works lest they trigger a harmful response in students¹. In the UK, and following the White paper of 2011 promising to put students “at the heart of system”, student union demonstrations have been restricted with legal action following incidents at the University of London and the University of Sussex (McQuillan, 2014).

Student Voice and learning enhancement

In the context of my project, student voice is addressed in terms of the student learning experience with a focus on the student rather than the government of the institution. This project is preoccupied with the impact of student voice in study abroad and its place within the case of learning enhancement. Students are viewed as active members of the learning community as change agents and sources of valuable information that can inform and potentially improve learning via an enhanced learning experience.

Given the global characteristics of study abroad with the movements of students, varied practices in local environments and institutions, this review would be amiss without considerations of the broader education policies on an international level.

Education Policies

Education policy borrowing

Adopting education policy is not uncommon in higher education and study abroad and can be an introduction of good practice within the adopting nation, governing body or organisation. According to Halpin & Troyna (2010), evidence suggests that adopting education policy on a cross-national level tends to be used to validate practice rather than impact on success yet there is a greater likelihood of active borrowing

¹For example, the case of the Great Gatsby at Northwestern University where student groups felt the text would elicit strong emotional responses from students with a background of domestic violence (in Lukianoff and Haidt 2015).

in the presence of common reform agendas and education system characteristics. This provokes questions on inter-organisational policy borrowing and brings codes of standards and evaluative bodies such as the Forum for Education Abroad into focus as meditative guides between the adoption and implementation of good practice.

Education policy; international perspectives

Balancing current good practice and progressive trends with local education forms a challenge in emerging practice and policy edification. Ball (1998) discusses this tension with a focus on translation and contextualisation, areas, he suggests, that need significant attention in transferring and adopting policy. Ball continues to suggest that interpretation and constant balancing to formulate policy that takes local tradition, culture and practice into account must be ongoing. It is rational to claim, then, that the relationship between organisational climate and policy implementation can dictate the outcomes significantly.

Policy and institutional climate

Institutional culture or climate can shape practice and the extent to which mandated policies are received. In their study of research, policy, practice and education, Cohen et al (2009) investigate how the 4 are linked in terms of improvements in practice. The study presented the correlation of a positive climate to successful outcomes across learner achievement and instructor practices primarily. A vast gap was identified, however between the evident impacts of a positive climate, policy formation and codes of practice. This gap presents an opportunity for research into the interaction the operating cultural context of the education institution and practice with the potential to reveal how value can be added through learning enhancement.

Conclusion

This chapter has discussed contemporary learning theory, policy and related themes in order to provide a theoretical foundation for the ensuing inquiry into learning enhancement in study abroad. Literature suggests an emerging interest in the learner and process of learning as situated and contextual, presenting the study abroad context and learning within as a valuable environment for study. In summary, contemporary learning theories indicate a need to address the learner within their social context, taking into account theories of how

the mind works and ultimately learns (OPA, 2001). For the study abroad context, this shows the potential learning enhancement will have using these theories as a foundation.

Learning cultures have developed to present additional challenges to the learner (Ziehe, 2009) and therefore need to be included in this inquiry into enhanced learning. Autonomy, social empowerment (Usher, 2009) and concepts of the self and self (Jarvis, 2009) realisation are present in current learner development and become prominent dimensions for study. Learning as transformative (Kegan, 2009) experience and developing transferable skills (Kegan, 2009) cannot be presumed depending on stimulus and context (Ziehe, 2009) but must be addressed as an outcome in learning design. An evolving student populous and development in practice indicates towards a necessary culture of change and evolution in education practice, suggesting an emergent framework must contain evaluative components and the capacity to be updated often with this evolution.

Learning can be enhanced and teaching practiced further developed through a culture of varied pedagogy, evolutionary practice (Wilson and Peterson, 2009) demonstrating the potential impact of doing so, particularly when the learner emerges as a valuable resource (Ziehe) to be utilised as such through teaching as inquiry (Wilson and Peterson,).

The emerging themes impact on the learning process demonstrating the case for learning enhancement. This position illustrates a rationalisation of the value of the student within the formal learning setting. By shifting emphasis to the learner as a resource to inform and develop pedagogy, we enter the area of learning enhancement.

Chapter 3 Research Approach and Methods

Introduction

From the emerging evidence discussed in the previous chapters that student learning can be enhanced to add value to the study abroad experience, examining the role of student participation in action research can offer insight into the learner perspective and how this relationship can be further developed. I believe that a Learning Enhancement Framework formulated with emerging data can have a significant impact in further enhancing the study abroad learning experience for students in terms of bridging theory and practice, intercultural engagement and framing the valuable study abroad learning experience.

Presenting the research process below, this chapter discusses the research approach in terms of the research context, paradigms and methodological design and offers a rationale into the choices made in this selection.

Each step is stated, framed within theory and the operational context, and it is then explained.

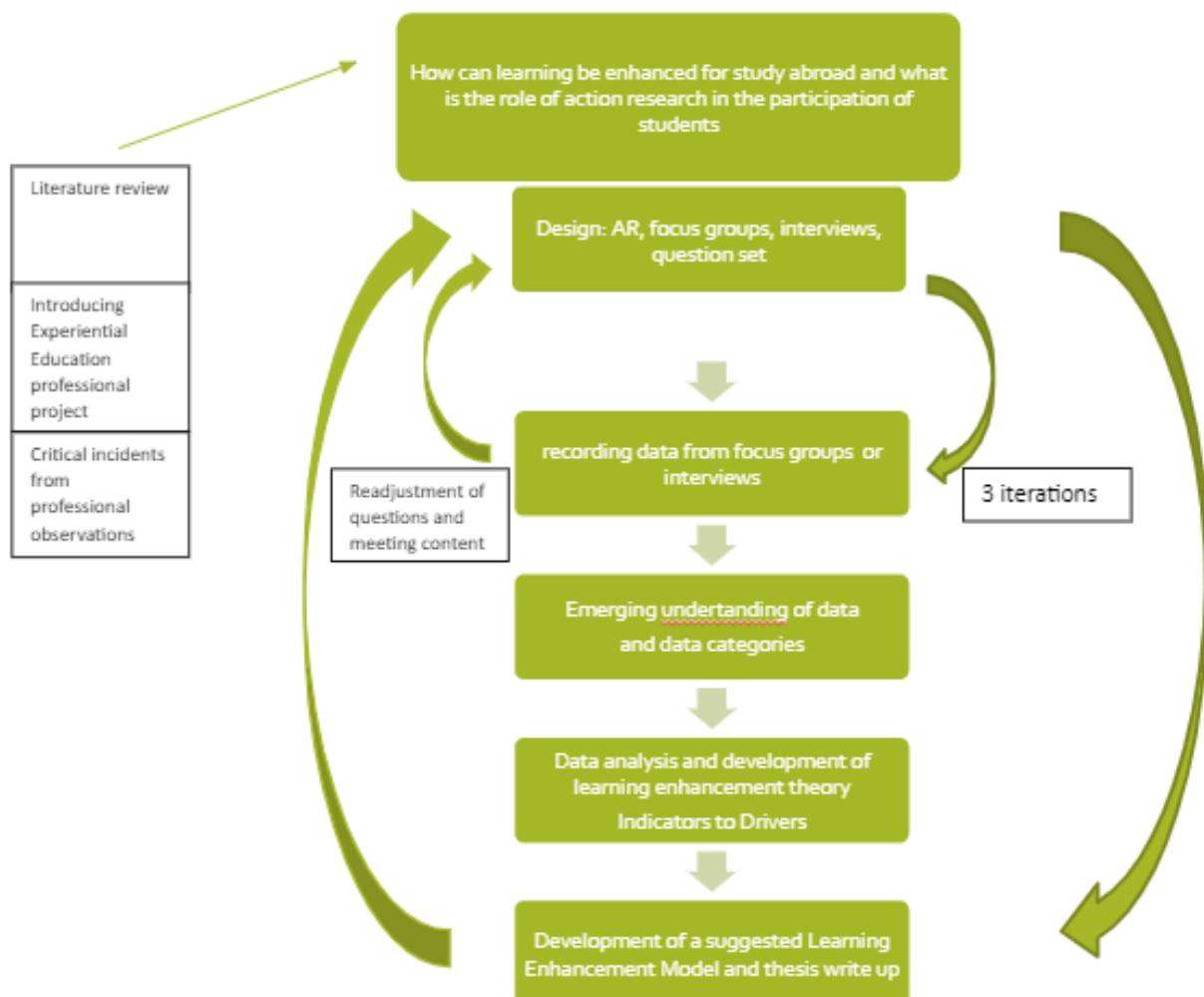


Diagram 9: The research process

With an overarching Action Research approach, this study consists of AR in a Participatory Action Research framework. The primary research inquiry is made up of 3 iterations of focus groups with 12 students from the Arcadia Center in Athens.

Two supportive data inquiries are included in the study: 1, 'Introducing Experiential Practice', a professional project that took place near the timeframe of the study and examined the role of Experiential Education at the Arcadia Center and 2, my professional observations of organisational practice, learners and critical incidents during the academic program.

Emerging data is finally analysed using Krueger's systematic analysis process (2002) and data matrix codification in order to create an emergent Learning Enhancement Framework.

Following an outline of the broader philosophical assumptions that underline this work, this chapter:

- Discusses the researcher perspective. An analysis of my positionality within the research serves to clarify my input as a work as a researcher practitioner and how this role impacts on project development.
- Research approach, design and data analysis are presented, framed within theory and explained as the research praxis.
- Following a discussion of the data sampling parameters, the next section discusses data collection and analyses the project in terms of validity, reliability and research limitation.
- The ethics section uses professional codes of ethics to frame the inquiry and these are developed to account for the scale of this project.
- The chapter closes with the introduction of benchmark criteria for action research, principles we revisit at the end of the project to evaluate the action research inquiry.

To begin, I discuss my worldview as a researcher (Creswell, 2014).

The Researcher Perspective

Philosophical Assumptions

According to Guba (1990 in Creswell, 2014), each researcher has "a basic set of beliefs that guide action" (Guba in Creswell, 2014, p.5); my ontological and epistemological (Crotty, 1998 in Creswell, 2014, p.5) position has

informed my professional practice as an educator, and, consequently, shapes my research approach in this study. Given the influence of researcher beliefs on research decisions it is vital to discuss my perspective and approach to this educational enquiry (Wilson, 2013). This section aims to unpack my philosophical standing point in order to explain these underlying philosophical assumptions and demonstrate how they are linked to and underpin this research design.

My ontological and epistemological perspectives

Wilson describes ontology, epistemology and, methodology as the 3 key steps toward research which are then followed by the practice of research with methods and sources. For clarity, I define ontology as the beliefs about the nature of things we are researching (Wilson) and define epistemology as the theory of knowledge (Wilson,). The ontological perspective forming the foundation of my work lies within the context of study abroad education. Evidence suggests that students partake in a potentially valuable learning experience abroad. This is a common understanding for students and professionals. My professional observations suggest that not all students benefit equally and this is an opinion supported in the broader learning community. The emerging ontological question is whether learning for study abroad students is enhanced and how this comes to be.

Epistemologically speaking, it is my understanding that it is possible to scientifically investigate this area and construct an outcome to help us further understand how the study abroad experience can be improved for the learner. The epistemological questions emerging to lead the research design become preoccupied with: whether this enhancement can be measured and if this outcome can be used to further enhance learning. What is the role of action research in the participation of students? Is there a way to design a framework to answer these questions?

Broader Philosophical Paradigms in the Education Research perspective

The choice of theory has much to do with the initiative to create an authentic contribution to the field, hence the reliance on action research. Consequently, I intend to collect data and then observe the emerging patterns rather than hypothesise before these patterns are identified. I develop the research design as related to my own beliefs and understanding of research. As a researcher, my approach is constructivist (Vygotsky in OPA,

2001): I intend to further build our understanding of study abroad learning. As a reflexive practitioner, I acknowledge the impact my theoretical perspectives have on my research approach and value judgments (Wilson, 2013).

Judgment standards and criteria

“Care and due regard, ontological values, about the way we are, would count as standards of judgment. They reflect our commitment in terms of who we are and how we understand ourselves in the world.” (Mcniff and Whitehead, 2006, p.12)

My research project was inspired by a sense of responsibility in relation to what educators offer students and how I could positively contribute to the student experience by creating a learning enhancement guiding structure. A sense of service towards the immediate learning environment was the primary driving force for me to begin this research. I view myself as an integral part of my immediate learning environment and an active participant. I teach, offer cultural support, plan and maintain co-curricular program elements and aim for an open dialogue with students during the semester with the student government student voice initiatives. I am an insider.

This position, is informed by a series of judgements related to my ontological, epistemological and professional values. What has changed over the course of the project, however, is my understanding of these values and more importantly, acknowledgment of these values in terms of the research project data judgment standards.

The diagram below demonstrates my thought process in shaping dimensions of epistemology and methodology for this research project using the criteria outlined by McNiff and Whitehead (2006).

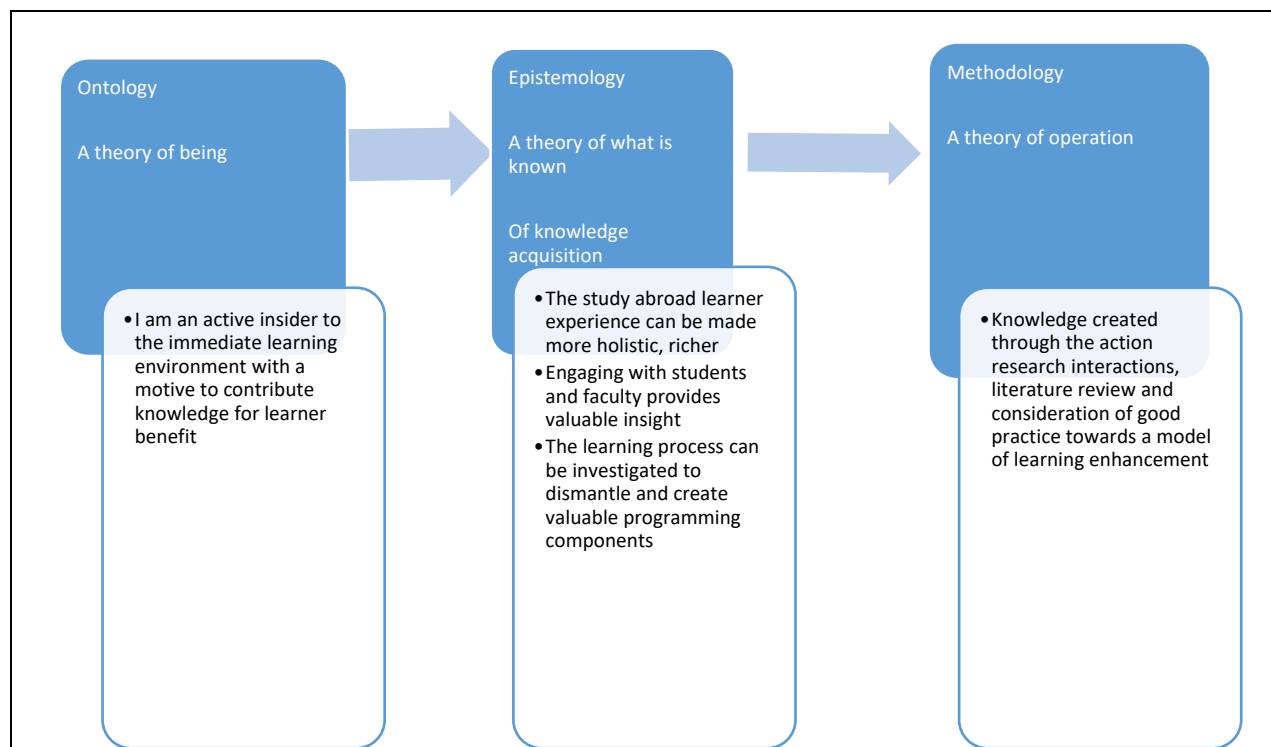


Diagram 10: Epistemology and Methodology (adapted: McNiff and Whitehead, 2006)

McNiff and Whitehead (2006) continue to outline 3 key elements of epistemology:

1. An understanding of the unit of appraisal; in the sense of what is being judged
2. The standards of judgement in terms of how valid judgements can be made
3. A logic in the sense of the form that reasoning takes in understanding the real as rational.

Each of these elements guides my research practice in scientific terms in the following ways respectively:

1. Participant input and observations are evaluated within the broader study abroad learning context as pieces of a puzzle leading towards a greater understanding of how learning can be and is enhanced.
2. Reflexive practice, reference to formal guidelines and my own philosophy of education are used to assure valid judgments are made through the cycles of action research, for example.
3. Participant input is valued and processed as data (including codification) in order to construct meaning and shape the learning enhancement framework.

These ontological and epistemological beliefs constitute my perspective as a researcher, or, my 'world view' as described by Creswell (2014).

A Constructivist world view

According to Creswell (2014), constructivists address participant interaction to understand relations with specific contexts. This describes my practice in examining participatory action research within the learning environment to formulate a framework of practice.

The following paragraph further discusses the elements of the constructivist research paradigm (Creswell, 2014) in relation to the research design.

1. Understanding (Creswell, 2014): This inquiry is driven by the aim to understand more about the learning experience from the participant perspective, what the value of action research is for participants and, ultimately, to understand from the participants how learning can be enhanced.
2. Multiple participant meanings (Creswell, 2014): The efforts to diversify the sample of participants highlight the value of multiple participants meaning while striving to construct meaning out of these multiple perspectives to create an inclusive set of data. This project recognizes the diverse nature of students as well as the need to inform practice in education as varied work (Wilson and Peterson, 2006) catering for diverse evolving learner needs and is driven by the premise that multiple perspectives are necessary to develop education practice.
3. Social and historical construction (Creswell, 2006): the temporal nature of action research is recognized in this sense, as an indicator of evolving practice within an evolving learner demographic. The outcomes of this project are time sensitive and context specific, yes, but more importantly, they present the value of action research within this specific social and historical frame creating a reference point. This element of the constructivist perspective is fully aligned with the suggestion that learning enhancement must be considered as ongoing and evolving with a suggested framework for practice that incorporates this.
4. Theory generation (Creswell, 2014). This project stipulates that an emerging learning enhancement framework based on participatory action research can inform practice.

My role in the research

A statement of positionality within the research project

Although the researcher has made an effort to design this project and conduct the planned research in an objective manner, there are a number of factors positioning restricting the project from being entirely ‘value-free’ (BERA, 2006-2011).

According to Cooper (2001, cited in BERA, 2006-2011, p.13) “Research is inevitable framed by conceptual and theoretical considerations... such frameworks, properly handled, can enrich and enhance the research”. Considering the impact research positionality may have on this project, a positionality statement follows aiming to firstly acknowledge the position of the researcher and secondly to counter- balance through the employment of devices and evidence restraining this positionality into a guided direction.

To name a selection of factors determining the researcher’s positionality:

- The researcher is employed by a key provider of study abroad programmes and this research is sponsored by this provider.
- The researcher as educator is an interventionist (hence the interventionist aspiration of the project that learning enhancement can actively be pursued by educators)
- The researcher is geographically located with immediate access to a center of study abroad, the primary source of data, with a set of operating strategies, aims and context that will differ to those at many other locations and institutions.
- The researcher believes based on reviewed literature, experience in the field and through emerging trends that a learning enhancement model can be created through devices put in place on a study abroad program (evidence discussed throughout this text).

May, 2001, in BERA, 2006-2001 outlines a series of questions aiming to contextualise research answered below. Although May encourages these questions in retrospect to determine influence, the following are useful in this earlier time as a further contextual depiction:

1. Who funded this Research? The Researcher’s employer and the researcher themselves.
2. With what intention in mind? On the part of the employer as a staff development opportunity and opportunity for organisation based research. The intention of the researcher is to contribute to the field and organisation furthering the applicability of enriching learner experience as a goal.

The dual role

A professional development served in providing added perspective of the student experience for me. Having joined the faculty, I now teach a weekly class on research and work based learning for undergraduate interns. This dimension of applied pedagogy has enriched my understanding of the holistic student experience with an insight into the classroom as well and thus indications of how a learning model can contribute to this holistic experience taking into account the classroom element. For example, throughout this class, drawing into theory lived experiences while in Greece has been successful higher constructive participation in student led discussions.

This duality has been significant in the modes of research concerning the direct participation of students when I have made lengthy considerations to ensure that my perspective and attitude towards students do not change and that the research initiatives do not become infringed in the areas of student support, counselling, informing and the facilitation of learning. Similarly, it has been necessary to ensure that this research does not disrupt the Arcadia program.

I have encountered conflicting principles while applying the dual roles of researcher and worker (Armsby, 2008, p.59) for example, in the case of an emerging need to revisit with students, an exercise that has not been altogether feasible due to the extra work this would place on students.

My role in relation to others

Although I am autonomous in my dual role, as researcher and worker, it has been necessary to establish a clearer view on the freedom with which I carry out proposed research: through discussing with my line manager and presenting her with plans as soon as they are created. As noted above, I have emphasised the need to avoid disruption of my relationship with students as I juggle the two roles.

The resident director, has been involved in my research as she is my line manager and the sole signatory for this project. I am lucky to have a very good working relationship with her and have made sure to have her informed at all stages while waiting for her approval. Consequently, this is the individual I would and have elicited support from.

The 'insider' and the research environment

The autonomous freedom with which I complete my work, and consequently my research, means I will have little immediate feedback from stakeholders in the organisation. However, in the instances of immediate feedback, I have encountered constraints and opportunities (Armsby, 2008, p.59) in anticipation of which, I aimed to prepare accordingly with flexibility to accommodate necessary changes or a new direction in research.

Through reflexive exercise such as the learning diary, brain storms, and brain maps, I can document and capitalise on the knowledge I have as an insider at the Arcadia center. This insight was initially used to transfer my knowledge into a feasible proposal and has continued to guide the formation of this thesis. A parallel will be drawn through this knowledge and the research in question to ascertain what the ideal research methods are such as Action Research and Case Study.

I am aware of the pre-existing biases I have regarding the organisation culture, the research audience and project topic. I cannot remove these external factors as they form the basis from which I operate but have addressed the issue of objectivity by focusing on my own development rather than considering my expertise as a sound foundation. Triangulation supported by the literature review, input from the professional network together with my primary data sets have been instrumental to this.

How are the results to be interpreted and used? The results are to be interpreted by the researcher and used to create a learning model and manual on learning enhancement.

Considering the two sides of the spectrum in terms of what is considered good practice in addressing the positionality of the researcher, Malcolm, (1993, cited in BERA, 2006-2011) states that a distance between research and practice is necessary, spanning away from a simple recognition of non-neutrality and accepting our bias.

This research position aims to maintain objectivity through clear strategy, where possible but also to develop the acknowledgement of the arbitrary researcher context, seeking to counterbalance through remedy and

build on the various elements of this context that enrich the project outcome such as the tacit knowledge acquired by the researcher, the understanding of the sources and experience working with them.

According to Carr (2000, cited in BERA, 2006-2011,p.12), it is necessary to build on this positionality when he tells us that “Far from being some unwelcome intruder whose presence or absence can be empirically detected, partisanship is an essential ingredient in educational research whose elimination could only be achieved by eliminating the entire research enterprise itself. The existence of partisanship in educational research is, therefore, not an empirical matter concerning what, as a matter of fact, is the case but a logical necessity which it is neither possible nor desirable to avoid... In empirical research, there is no telling it as it is. There is only telling it from a theoretically partisan point of view”.

This project aims to examine how learning enhancement can be addressed while learners study abroad. Although the researcher is a representative of an organisational movement towards a focus on learning enhancement, there is a shift in the education industry to focus on this outcome aligning the agenda of the organisation and researcher with a broader, current field need and aspiration. The autonomy with which the researcher conducts the project aims to remove any conflict of interest where possible, supported by the fact that the project aims to develop a framework rather than correct, validate or test strategies in practice. The interventionist approach is validated by increasing support of professionals, theorists and educators that interventions in education and particularly in the study abroad experience are necessary for systematic learning.

Further to this an open dialogue is maintained with professional networks such as the NAFSA forum, colleagues in separate geographical locations regarding the direction and application of this research piece.

My contextualised positionality within the inquiry has presented issues of bias and professional practice, further developed into ethical considerations. These issues are further discussed in the ethics section of this chapter.

So far, I have discussed my theoretical perspective, the lens through which I have formulated my research design and practice. The diagram below demonstrates how my philosophical world view fits in to the research approach.



Diagram 11: My framework for research (adapted from Creswell, 2014)

The next section discusses the remaining sections in this diagram, research approach and design.

The Research Approach

In this section, I present the approach and design and justify the selection of each in relation to the integrity of my methodological practice.

The Research Family

The choice of qualitative methods as the starting point of research is made due to the broader subject, education, for which qualitative research is more accommodating (Marshall, 1997) due to the critical roles the social, cultural and psychological factors play in the context of studying abroad. The researcher who focuses on qualitative research methods is preoccupied with the complexities of social interactions daily and from the

meanings participant give to these daily interactions (Marshall, 1997). This is true not only of myself as researcher, but matches the framework in which my primary information resource, students, learn in.

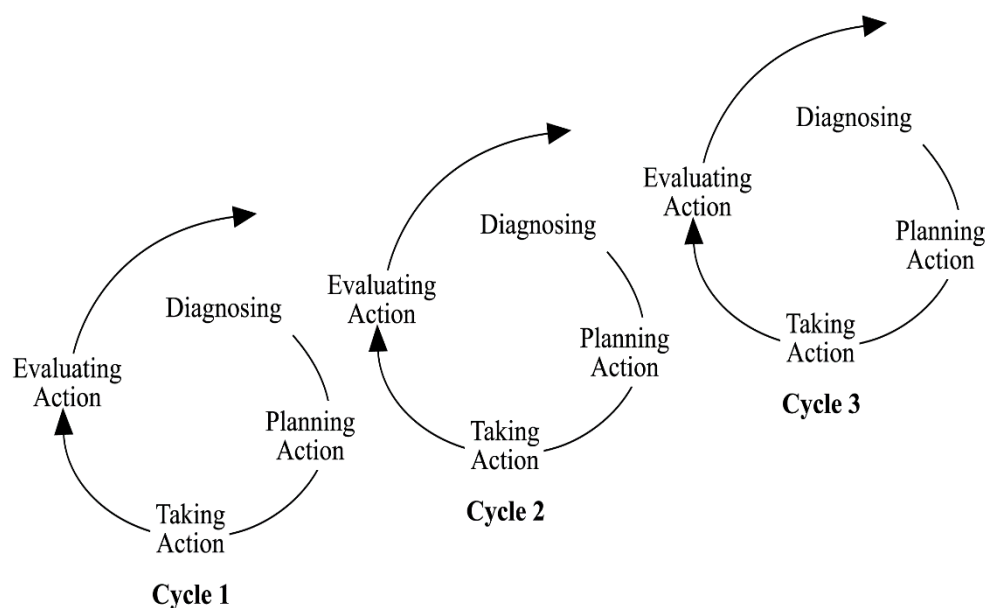
The overarching Action Research approach

The cyclical manner with which results inform further adjustment to practice through evaluation during action research maintain the role of the researcher as a guide of the research process as outlined by Rowley et al (in Blaxter et al, 2010):

A conventional action research approach:

- Examine the nature of a problem situation; evidence suggests that practice can be adjusted to enhance learning for students abroad with students playing a more active role in informing this practice.
- Devise an appropriate intervention; a series of focus groups examining the student perspective.
- Trial this: Pretesting and then at each of the 3 stages in the focus group series.
- Evaluate Impact: Informing practice of research in 3 loops and culminating in a suggested way of practice to enhance learning.

This is further demonstrated by the Coghlan Brannick cycle below and reflected in the research plan to conduct 3 iterations of research simultaneously.



Source: Coghlan and Brannick (2001) p. 19

Diagram 12: Research cycles (source: McPherson et al, 2002)

This timeless quality of action research allows the project to move forward accommodating any unexpected outcomes, allowing for their placement within the next cycle of research.

Action Research and the project outcomes

This project aims to address the significance of action research in learning enhancement (objective 4) in order to achieve an understanding of the extent to which action learning participants can benefit and develop as learners (outcome 3). This direct involvement of the participants in the research itself as active sources creates the foundation for the matching of research and (standardised) practice, opening up the opportunity of development and investigation. Avison, D. et al (1999) tell us of this unique nature of action research combining research and practice, so research informs practice and practice informs research synergistically highlighting the dialogue of information between each element- the crux of the development opportunity for each through this project.

Action research cycles of operation

To present the cycles of action research within this project, there have been 3 points of data collection, each point evaluated in terms of practice and data recorder in order to reformulate practice of research for the next point. These points begin with the initial focus group with the 12 students, continues with a second focus group and ends with an in depth telephone interview with each participant as they are no longer in Athens.

Justifying the questions of action research

Using action research in this context of learning abroad, a number of questions emerge- by answering these questions, we are steered toward maintaining the focus on the above objectives and outcomes validating

them as questions. Reason et al attempt to categorise these action research driven emergent questions (2001) demonstrated below in relation to this project.

- Questions about emergence and enduring consequence (2001). The impact of a suggested model of learning is addressed (objectives 3 &4) as is the impact of the suggested model as an intervention for development (objective 1, outcomes 1 &3).
- Questions of Practice and practicing (2001). 3 outcomes are outlined above that serve to contribute a developed field suggestion in how learning can be enhanced through practice.
- Questions about significance (2001). The inbuilt evaluative component to both the method of research and suggested model itself will serve in steering the focus in terms of relevance of findings and feedback.

Implications of Action Research

Education institutions and more specifically, study abroad programmes must keep up to date through practice with the salient needs of the learning community. In my dual role of practitioner researcher, this informed educative stance has been greatly enhanced through action research.

Lomax, (2007 in Bell, 2010) outlines the change agent nature of the researcher through action research when addressing research purpose in 3 questions:

1. Can I improve my practice so that it is more effective?
2. Can I improve my understanding of this practice to make it more just?
3. Can I use my knowledge and influence to improve the situation?

Validating the creation of knowledge between the researcher and participants, action research capitalises on the already existing information extracting it to be placed in the research context: “AR is a way of producing tangible and desired results for the people involved, and it is a knowledge-generation process that produces insights both for researchers and the participants. It is a complex action knowledge generation process. The immense importance of the insider knowledge and initiatives is evident, marking a clear distinction from orthodox research that systematically distrusts insider knowledge as co-opted “(Greenwood and Levin in Blaxter et al, 2010).

Bringing about development through strategized change, a “feedback loop in which initial findings generate possibilities for change which are then implemented and evaluated as a prelude to further investigation” (Denscombe in Bell, 2010) is created, maintaining an evolving element which addresses the current state of each research problem or question allowing for salience.

A combination of factors led me to identify action research as the best suited and feasible research approach.

The method is accurately suitable with the following justifications:

- I have extensive experience conducting and designing focus groups and action learning sets in a variety of contexts and have maintained my up to date knowledge on the method. I am interested in the responses of participants which strengthens my enthusiasm in conducting the research.
- The research area, learning enhancement in the study abroad context focuses on students at the Arcadia Center, the primary stakeholders regarding how they would be affected by the research results who are also the primary sources of information. Therefore, tapping into information on their learning process through action learning provides me with suitable, accurate data while furthering their own development.
- Action research fits in with exercises I would facilitate with students in a non- research context therefore allowing the research to be conducted with minimal disruption or impact to the students and making use of research opportunities I have in my role. Considering the ethical ramifications, experiment would not be a suitable method.
- Ideal in ‘opening up’ and identifying a problem, a thorough method.

Collaborative Research and Learning

Collaborative research and active learning form the basis of this research project in order to capitalise on existing knowledge through an action research- action learning interaction, equipping the learner with a learning experience as well as gathering the learner’s input as a reflective learner. In this way, the project aims to re-evaluate and further develop existing practice highlighting the appropriateness of action research since as Cohen and Manion describe, action research is suitable where “specific knowledge is required for a specific

problem in a specific situation, or when a new approach is to be grafted on to an existing system” (in Bell, 2010, p.32), the latter of which describes the research question.

The all-encompassing data capture model

So far, I have discussed my Dprof project research inquiry, by presenting the overarching action research and the conceptual framework within which my research was designed. From here on, I clarify the approach and methodology in practical terms.

During this process of inquiry, 2 additional categories of data emerged as triangulating sources and were consequently formulated in my research plan as supportive research methods.

The 2nd source of data, is a professional project I undertook entitled Introducing Experiential Learning. This project gave me the opportunity to use action research throughout a training initiative and capture valuable data pertaining to the impact of introducing an experiential education strategy. Faculty and students from 3 locations were involved in this process.

Critical Incidents observed during my work over the past 4 years inform the 3rd set of data. These incidents serve to ratify findings and offer a perspective from the daily operating of the Arcadia Center as opposed to the formulated process of inquiry data. The following table demonstrates the 3 merging categories of data together with their specific data capture methods.

	The Project Inquiry	Experiential Education: professional project	Professional observations
Data source	12 students studying abroad at the Arcadia Center in Athens with prior and following study abroad semesters	33 faculty 80 students From: Arcadia University, Athens Erasmus Partnership Amrita School of Education, Coimbatore	Arcadia Center Students
Data collection mechanism	Action research via 2 focus groups and then individual Skype calls for the 3 rd iteration: Focus groups recorded by Dictaphone and Skype calls recorded using Pamela software	Action research via staff training, focus groups and individual interviews recorded via Dictaphone and my own notes. Observations.	Critical incidents are recorded in my professional development diary. Observations.

Ethical considerations/ permission	All participants gave their involved consent via signed permission ² form before research began and confidentiality has been maintained.	Following the first round of training, faculty were invited to participate via email ³ and those who agreed are used as sources.	My critical incidents diary began in 2008 as part of professional development in order to gain a deeper understanding. These entries do not contain names or identifying features in order to protect student privacy and are located on me code protected laptop to which only I have access ⁴ .
Time-period	4 semesters during 2012-2014	Data collected over 3 years 2012- 2015	Data collected 2011- 2015
What can this data do?	Uncover student needs related to student enhancement Identify the areas where learning enhancement in study abroad is necessary Inform the model of Learning Enhancement	Demonstrate the impact of Experiential Ed. On the learner and facilitator Demonstrate the link between study abroad, experiential education and learning enhancement	Shed light through actual examples of student incidents.

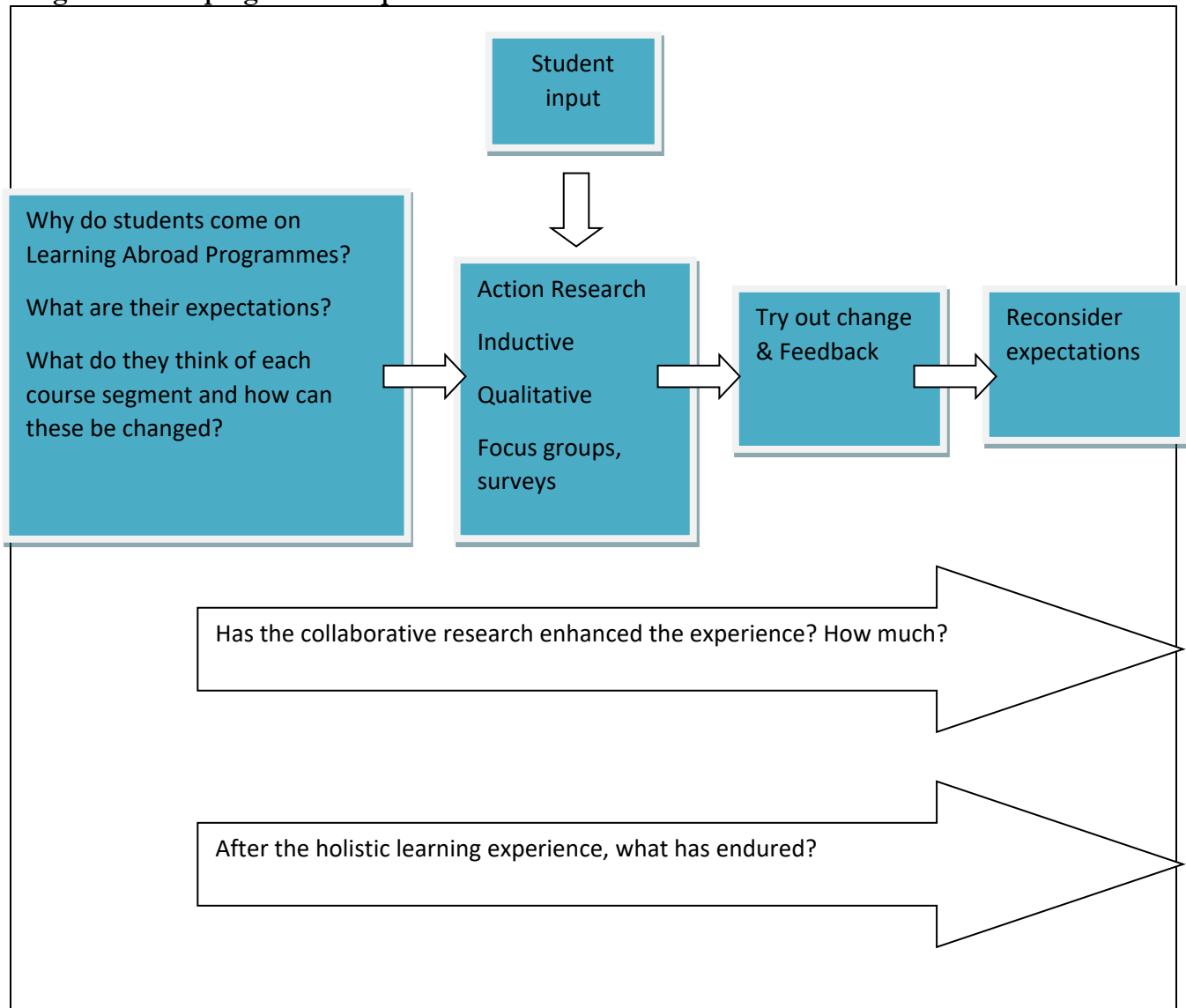
Table 9: The data capture model

²The permission form is located for view in the appendices

³ An example of this email and permissive response can be found in the appendices

⁴These ethical considerations are commensurate with best practice in handling student data as demonstrated in the appendices.

Diagram 13: Shaping research questions



Matching the outcomes of this project with the conceptualised 3 outcomes of action research (Riel and Lepori, 2011 in CCAR, 2012), the diagram below demonstrates the outcomes from the 3 delineated categories; the personal, the organisational and the scholarly.

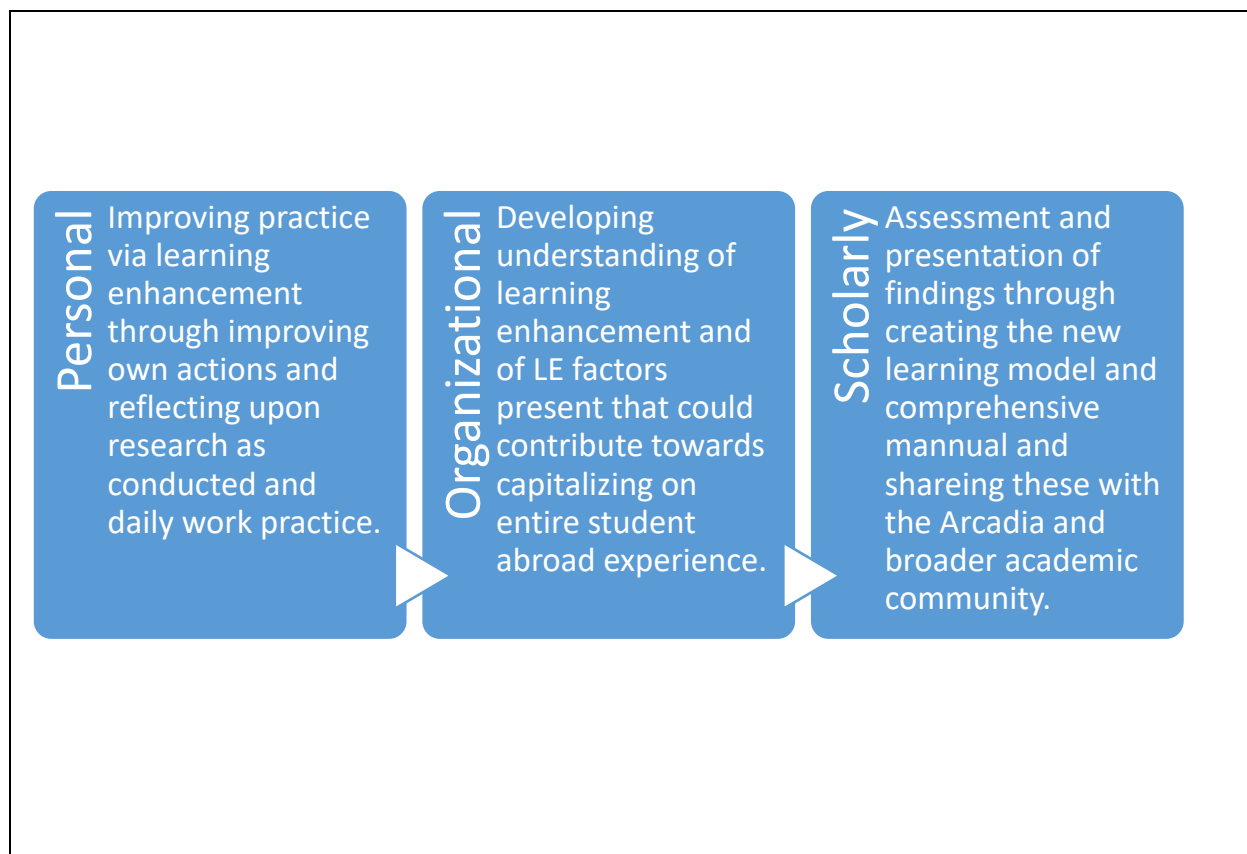


Diagram 14: Action Research Outcomes (adapted from Riel and Lepori 2011 in CCAR, 2012)

Research Design

Focus groups

Focus groups are often preferred as a method of action research when dealing with groups in education (Kitzinger, 1995) for the numerous benefits in contrast to other methods due to the number of involved participants at a given time as well as the benefits of an individual forming part of a group activity. More specifically, a focus group can “help people to explore and clarify their views in ways that would less easily be accessible in a one to one interview” as Kitzinger (1995, p.43) tells us, highlighting the underlying principle that “knowledge and attitudes are not entirely encapsulated in reasoned responses to direct questions... revealing dimensions of understanding that often remain untapped by more conventional data collection techniques” (Kitzinger, 1995, p.46).

Building on the theory discussed the study participants are students studying abroad, actively sharing their (experiential) learning of (and during) the program of study in an organised context steering the application of this knowledge within the program frame as learning enhancement. The aim has been to create a methodology of implementation of the acquired input matching theory and program practice by developing a suggested model of learning enhancement. Particular programme elements are incorporated into systematic reflective meetings. These reflective meetings occur during any given semester and will continue to have a focus on student development allowing for each meeting to focus on a particular element of research for example during the first meeting program expectations are discussed, these are addressed at the last meeting and revisited after the semester has ended as questionnaires will be distributed past the end of the program, 3 months later in order to ascertain the impact of these meetings and the semester in entirety. Addressed as a significant priority, participation, time management and active engagement are carefully addressed to ensure useful, accurate input is accumulated.

Observation

Observations are often used to support research that is carried out and further contextualise findings (Blaxter et al, 2010). In this way, Observations have served to support this research project in 2 specific areas:

- During the focus groups, I kept structured notes on participant behaviour and interesting nonverbal actions (Kawulich, 2005). Here, the aim was to consider useful insight from the behaviour of participants to enrich my understanding of the content discussed (Bell, 2010).
- The professional project and professional observations presented to support the findings are based on observation in order to offer contextualising data for comparison and triangulate the emerging data and claims. These observations are an amalgamation of structured and unstructured notes taken over an extended period of time in varying contexts within my professional capacity. A small part of the observations were made prior to the project under the auspices of my professional development and research into student performance, the majority of observations were recorded during the inquiry timeframe such as the professional project. All observations were recorded in my profession journal of reflective practice as critical incidents (Bell, 2010) with a clear purpose (Kawulich, 2005) to understand

more about the student learning experience to enhance my own practice. These inserts of information served to “further validate the research project by offering a greater understanding of the phenomenon under study” (Kawulich, 2005, p.3).

Spanning across each of these categories, my active role within the learning environment as educator and, during the inquiry, moderator, places the observations within an action research approach due to my position as a “key and active participant” (Blaxter et al, 2010, p.201).

Ethical concerns

The primary ethical issues surrounding the use of these observations lie between informed consent and anonymity. The participants in the focus group series, were notified of their role in a research project and completed informed consent forms as part of the process, including an explanation as to how their anonymity would be maintained through codification in the final presented findings (Kawulich, 2005). It was important to take a different route in using the information from my professional observations as the observations were not made during a structured research cycle but from the daily context of the arcadia center. Here, I asked individuals for permission to use the documented information and received their written consent to do so. Again I took care to present the data with the anonymity of participants in mind and presented verbatim quotes with pseudonyms (Corden and Sainsbury, 2006).

The use of critical incidents

The significance of chance events occurring during my research and daily work solicited recognition as some of these instances offered insight and further uncovered my understand of the study and context. Building on the definition of critical incidents as instances that are produced according to our critical perspective and value judgements (Tripp, 2012), I documented relevant incidents that contributed to my understanding of the research focus and questions.

Documenting field notes

To ensure that the observation notes made during the inquiry period were accurate and could be used to add validity to the thesis, I used the following guide to ensure good practice.

Good field notes
Use exact quotes when possible
Use pseudonyms to protect confidentiality
Describe activities in the order which they occur
Provide descriptions without inferring meaning
Include relevant background information to situate the event
Separate one's own thoughts and assumptions from what one actually observes
Record the date, time , place and name of researcher on each set of notes

Table 10: Characteristics for good field notes (source: Schensul, Schensul and LeCompte, 1999 in Kawulich, 2005)

Using the criteria above contributed to the validity of the substantiated presentation of observations (Bell, 2010).

Triangulation of data

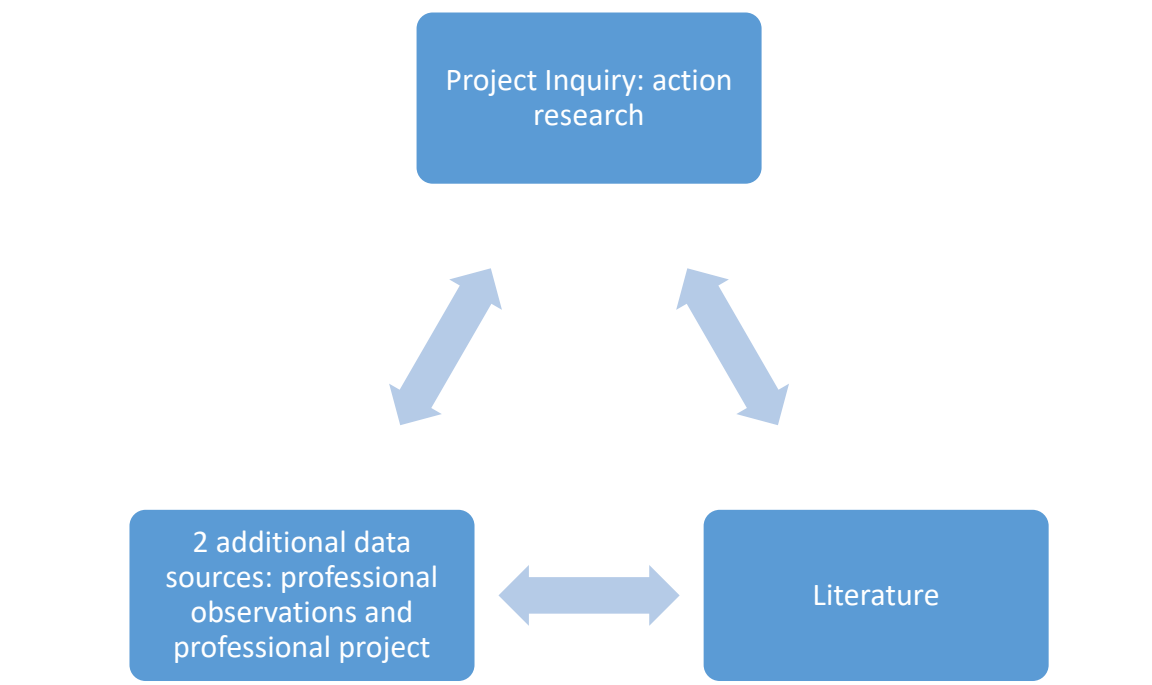


Diagram 14: Triangulation of data using all sources of information

As demonstrated in the diagram above, data is triangulated: the primary source of data from the focus group series is supported and compared with findings from a professional project, my professional observations and then further supported by literature.

Preparing for the process of inquiry

Following methodological design, the next step in this process was to schedule student semester meetings in agreement with the institution⁵ and find a group of students with plans of 3 consecutive study abroad semesters- of which, 1 would be Athens to allow for a control and direct contact with students for me⁶.

The process of inquiry

Consisting of 3 iterations of research, the process aimed to inform procedure as well as present findings at the end of each iteration. In this way, adjustments were made at each stage to allow for a richer sampling of data in the following iteration. The diagram below demonstrates the processes through which each iteration was analysed in practice.

Reflection-in-action

- **Works on getting to the bottom of what is happening in the experiencer's processes, decision-making and feelings at the time of the event or interaction.**

Reflection-on-action

- **Works of sifting over a previous event to take into account new information or theoretical perspectives available in conjunction with the experiencer's processes, feelings and actions.**

Diagram 14: Schon and Reflection (1983, source: Bradford University, 2015)

⁵Evidence of permission can be viewed in the appendix.

⁶This was easy to do given my contact with students at the arcadia center; during orientation, I asked the broader group of students and invited those with continuing abroad studies if they would like to participate.

Cycles of Inquiry

The diagram below further demonstrates the emergent nature of my inquiry cycles with examples of emerging themes in relation to the action research process across the 3 iterations of research.

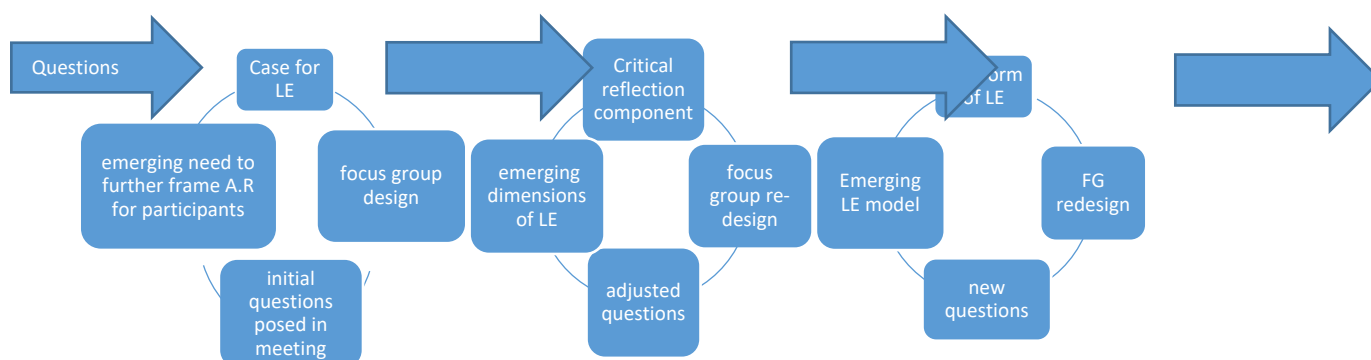


Diagram 15: Research cycles of development

The diagram above documents the action research cycle and the development of the core research inquiry.

The following sample of activity demonstrates the action cycles of research in practice based on critical reflections and evaluation.

Cycle 1

Beginning with the pre-existing evidence and suggestions from the literature review demonstrating a need to address learning enhancement, I devised a set of questions for participants to accumulate data on their personal learning experiences and presented participants with these questions during the 1st meeting. I observed participant responses to be descriptive accounts more than engaged critical reflections. This indicated the need for an adjustment in the next cycle to facilitate a deeper participant response⁷.

Cycle 2

The questions were redeveloped for the 2nd cycle to stimulate a more critical engagement, inviting participants to consider topics through reflexive thought⁸. For example, one of the initial questions,

How has the semester impacted your understanding of current events in Peru?

Was adjusted to instigate further reflexivity:

⁷The findings chapter further explores the impact of action research on participants and documents learner development through this specific method.

How have current events in Athens, the crisis for example, impacted you? How have you engaged with these events over the semester? Has anything changed?

Emerging from this cycle, indicators of learning enhancement were expressed by the participants in relation to either their comprehensive understanding and engagement in relation to the host culture or as gaps expressed in the two.

Cycle 3

This further shaped the focus group questions with a cycle informed focus on the indicators of learning enhancement, emerging in the dimensions of the proposed Learning Enhancement Model. The participants tended to reference the research meetings as enhancing towards their overall learning experiences, for example, demonstrating the dimensions of critical reflection and participatory action research as drivers enhancing learning.

The meta-cycle

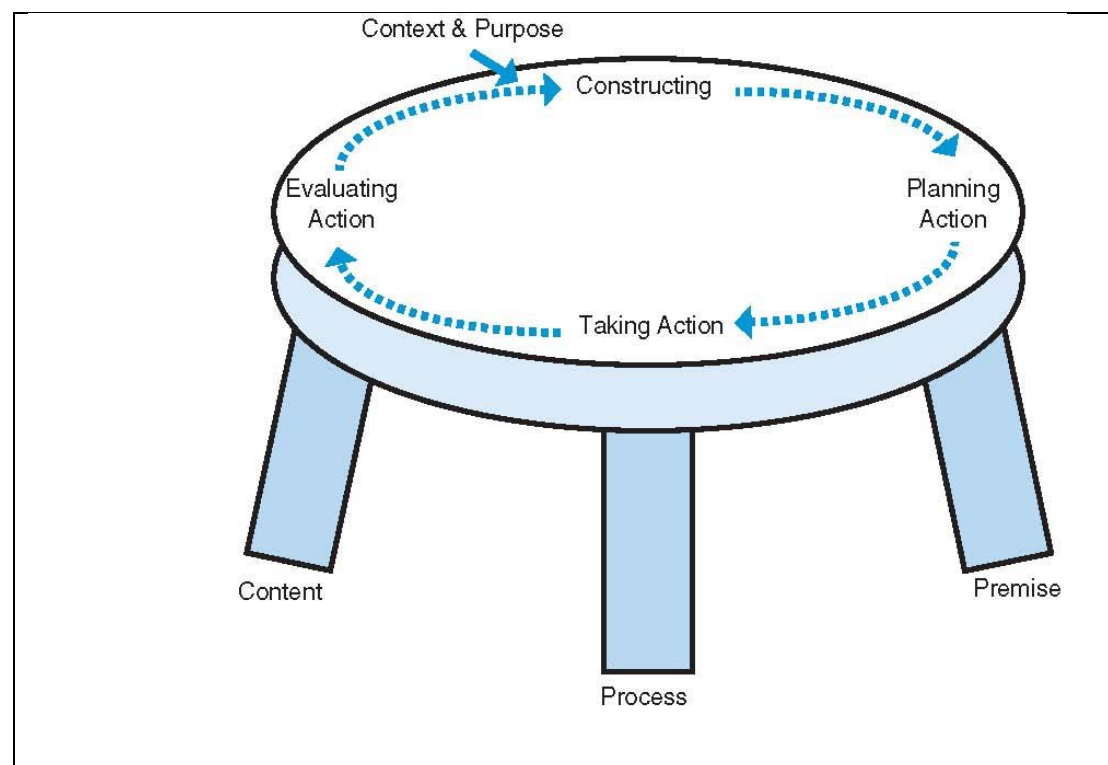


Diagram 16: The meta-cycle of action research (source: Coglán and Brannick, 2014)

The meta-cycle of research demonstrated in the diagram below, allows us to conceptualise the process of action research in terms of linking theory to findings in our emerging constructs. This process is also cyclical,

with the movement from premise to process and then content shifting in accordance to the cycle of action research. Here, a secondary pattern emerges.

Within my process of inquiry this meta-cycle indicated the implications of the research cycles on practice and the impact on student participants. This evolved into a practice of participatory action research as linked to learning enhancement.

Adjusting Iterations

The 1st iteration of research took place in Athens just after the 12 students had arrived having complete a semester abroad elsewhere. As expected, students were not in full understanding of the research process hence the need for the 1st iteration to act as a type of introduction in the sense that students would have the choice to opt out of future iterations based on the meeting. Here, the collaborative nature of action research was demonstrated by me in terms of my research and how this research could potentially inform future practice. Students seemed far more comfortable taking part following this clarification. It was useful to reference this theme during the next 2 iterations of research as a reference point- I aimed to spend a substantial amount of time during the 2nd iteration relating the research to students but this seemed to stifle conversation. This indicated a progression to me past the need to reconcile the focus meetings with student benefit- there was no longer a need to negotiate participation but there was a need to cater for students treating the process as personal development, for example. Although this evolving student perspective yielded far more valuable contributions to discussion, it needed a development of my questions to foster in depth critical reflection.

Data analysis

Developing the data accumulation methods

Data for this thesis was accumulated for all 3 research sources in the 2 ways mentioned previously in the data capture model: recordings (transcription) and my systematically collected professional observation notes. The project activity chapter discusses the stages of data collection, transcription and the codification of data. Each

of these practices was informed by good practice claims in supportive literature following the data analysis process demonstrated in the diagram below:

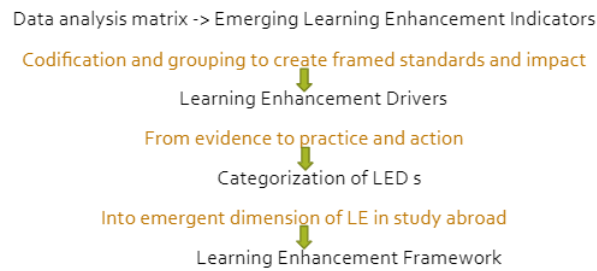


Diagram 17: The data analysis model (based on Krueger, 2002)

Data Validity of emergent findings through triangulation

Earlier in this chapter, I discussed the role of triangulation in research and demonstrated how triangulation in methodological design brings together the literature review, primary process of inquiry and secondary processes of inquiry in this project. Further to this, in terms of the claims this thesis makes, the triangulation in findings using the 3 data sources adds to the project validity. The triangulation of findings data is further demonstrated below:

- **Project Inquiry**
- **Professional observations, critical incidents**
- **Experiential Education: professional project**

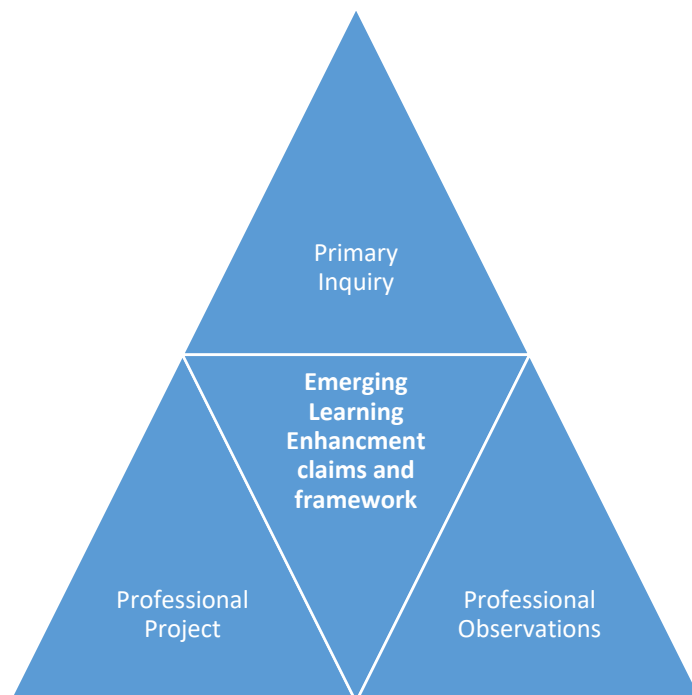


Diagram 18: Triangulation of data within the inquiry

Organising of recorded data

The accumulated data formed 2 categories; data I recorded in observation and discourse data recorded electronically and then transcribed by myself.

Recording observations

In order to maintain a systematic method of recording observations, my notes were made in a designated notebook (soon becoming several notebooks), transcribed, codified (Wilson, 2013) and transferred to electronic files by myself. Some of the professional observations I discuss in the findings chapter emerge from previously recorded critical incidents and my critical reflections that I wrote as part of my ongoing professional development. The data handling process is further discussed in the project activity chapter.

Data analysis

Using Krueger's Systematic Analysis Process (Krueger, 2002), I devised a timeframe of systematic analysis in order to benefit from the stages of analysis. I followed this timeframe for each focus group as in the table below.

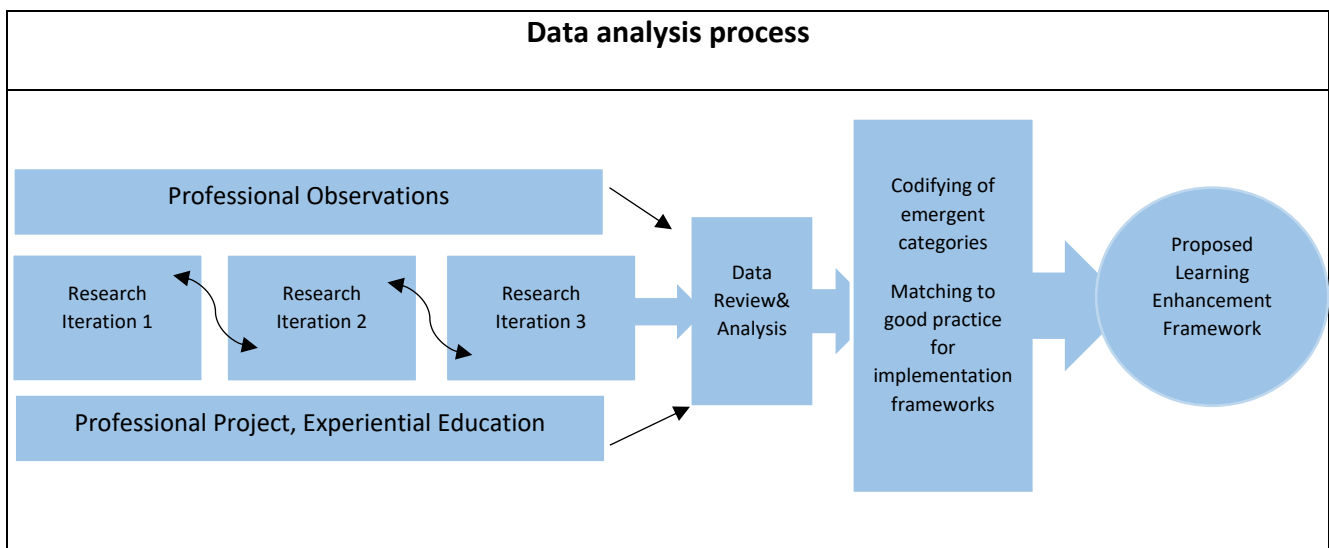
In the group	Just after	Soon after	Days after	Critical analysis
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<p>I looked for student tendencies, unclear positions, and built on responses.</p>	<p>I recorded seating arrangements, outlined emerging themes.</p>	<p>I transcribed the recordings, into a clear narrative format and re-examined emerging themes.</p> <p>For later iterations, this was the stage of comparison.</p>	<p>Construction of emerging categories related to learning enhancement.</p> <p>Codification thematically: this also anonymised input.</p>	<p>Thesis writing stage and demonstration of important findings.</p>
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Table 11: Data analysis (adapted from Krueger, 2002)

Further to this, I categorise meeting outcomes and student responses to identify the emerging findings and dimensions of learning enhancement. This made it possible for me to gauge the impact of the focus groups on the students in terms of language, level of engagement and reflection towards the end of the research project.

Diagram 19: Validity and reliability: evaluating research methodology



Data categories

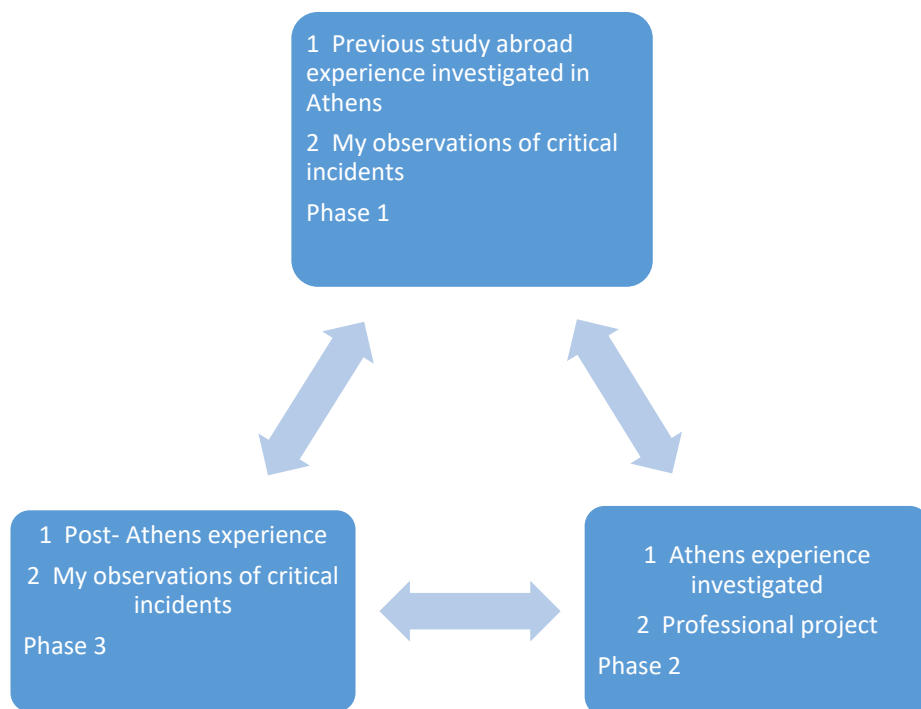


Diagram 20: Categories of data

Presenting my ethical framework, (adapted from Wilson, 2013)

The above iterations complied with best practice (CCAR, 2012) in action research: The challenge here was the location of participants for the final iteration of research. For this purpose, the final iteration was completed via Skype and telephone calls.

Data sampling parameters

This section discusses sampling parameters in relation to the 12 focus group participants.

Multiple variables of interest and sources of evidence; the demographic of each student cohort is diverse in many ways (cultural background, reason for study abroad in Athens, major) and the aim has been to replicate this demographic in the representative 12 student participants during the focus groups. The next section further discusses the participant pool and data.

Sources: the research population

The population itself is made up of students enrolled in American Universities, Colleges, or are graduates of the American Higher Education system. During any given term students come from approximately 50 different American colleges or universities (Arcadia Center data, 2010). Registering with Arcadia University,

as with all American Universities the pool is diversified through selection ensuring diverse cultural, educational and ethnographic backgrounds as per the CEPR DP6278 'The Distributional Consequences of Diversity-Enhancing University Admissions Rules (Chan, 2007).

In this context, the limiting factor of US based participants becomes the access point to the participants due to the systematic admissions process that though includes diversity, offers a unifying factor, enrolment in the Greece program through which, this research takes place.

The sample this research is based on is, in effect, a diverse amalgamation of individuals filtered through the admissions process.

Further diversifying factors include:

- The high number of non-nationals studying in American Universities or Schools who attend study abroad programs and in this instance, attend the Greece program (approximately 30% of students each term, Arcadia center data) indicating the geographical diversity of the group prior to arrival. Nearly half of all US international students come from India, China, South Korea, Canada and Japan with Asian student making up 57% of international students (OpenDoors 2009). In this particular set of 12 students, there were 4 nationalities: 5 US national, 3 Indian nationals, 2 Chinese nationals and 2 British nationals. Given the fact that each of these individuals aged 18 to 23 attended school in their respective countries of origin and then began their university studies in the US, the generalisability of the study results is optimal in offering diverse learner perspectives.
- The growing number of study abroad scholarships, grants and stipends available to students with a suitable financial background bringing a more even distribution in the pool sample of students and how well off they are (approximately 60% of students each term arrives on funding for study abroad, arcadia center data).
- The reasons for which a student applies to study abroad in Greece; heritage seekers, financial reasons, academic, cultural (reflection meetings with students May 2009, arcadia center data)

- The variety across fields of classes taught at the arcadia center (and transferrable in credits to home schools) diversify the students as per their area of study and consequently choice to attend the center including business, ancient, Sociology, Literature, language and byzantine studies.
- The year of study students choose to study abroad with 36% percent of students studying abroad during their Junior Year (OpenDoors 2009)
- In this sample group, students either attended a university that requires that they study abroad (5) or selected to study abroad individually (6). This breakdown of reasons for studying abroad within the group encompasses the 2 possible scenarios for a students applying and spending a semester at a university abroad.

Relevance and applicability of the emerging framework

For the emerging framework to be applicable and developed into a workable form, restrictions and shaping factors need to be outlined (objective 3). The nature of action research as a method through which a “mutually acceptable ethical framework” (Avison et al, 1999) is created due to the physical presence and interaction of the participants and researcher identifying a number of these shaping parameters through the context of the research itself. In the very least, through this interaction, parameters necessary for a ‘mutually acceptable ethical framework’ may become apparent.

The applicability of the emerging framework is further considered in terms of usability as well as a re-visit and re-adjust element to ensure the suggested model is created with components to make it evolve continually with use, through assessment and evaluation (objective 3 & outcome 2). This initiative is supported by the process of action research described as trying out “theory with practitioners in real situations, gain feedback from this experience, modify theory as a result of this feedback, and try it again” (Avison et al, 1999, p.43). Here, we see the evolving nature of practice informed research and theory where adjustments to research are made as the need arises. Avison et al discuss the development further highlighting the contribution of action research to diversified theory making this theory adaptable to a variety of contexts, “Each iteration of the action research process adds to the theory- in this case a framework for

Joanna Simos - Developing a conceptual learning enhancement framework for study abroad programs; the role of action research in the participation of students
information systems development- so it is more likely to be appropriate for a variety of situations” (1999, p.44).

The research audience

This research project is aimed primarily at a specialised audience with an interest in learning in the abroad context. This project will be applicable by education practitioners in the foreign context and will identify how a student can emerge from the study abroad experience via learning enhancement stratagems to continue their development for long after they leave the experience behind them. Endurance of the experience is key. In addition to this, the findings will contribute to how the learner abroad can cultivate permanent learning skills making this research relevant to educators and learners teaching or learning in the abroad context.

The audience spans past readers of this final report and framework as this project aims to encourage the use and application of the resulting learning model across study abroad locations linked to Arcadia. More specifically, for institutions the learning model will potentially change or develop practice. For educators, this research will provide a new operational paradigm. For students, there will be a maximisation of benefits taking into consideration time constraints, capacity and other differentiating factors to the learning abroad experience.

Ethical Considerations

This research project aims to conduct the investigation with integrity and respect towards stakeholders and employs the British Educational Research Association Revised Ethical Guidelines for Education Research (2004) as a basis in identifying the ethical considerations.

As per these guidelines, the following 6 areas are examined in light of this project and examined with an ethical respect for:

1. The person
2. Knowledge
3. Democratic Values
4. The Quality of Educational Research
5. Academic Freedom

6. Responsibilities to Participants

Voluntary Informed Consent & Right to Withdraw (BERA, 2004)

Participants are informed prior to the focus group series that there is the option to withdraw in the case the commitment becomes difficult for personal reasons. There is no expectation that the focus group meetings would create discomfort. Given the context of a study abroad program with the possible associated challenges, this decision to include a right to withdraw serves to ensure that students are aware that should they face any personal challenges during the semester, they would be relieved of this commitment. Good practice dictates ensuring participants are aware that they can voluntarily withdraw from research (Wilson, 2013). Further to this, offering student participants the ‘option to withdraw from education research’ is a prerequisite for research within the auspices of Arcadia University, the College of Global Studies and therefore aligns my practice with the institution guidelines.

The dual role of the researcher is already discussed in this text - the researcher will take into account instances of confidentiality conflicts such as the professional role of offering support to a student should the researcher understand during a seminar and discussion that “something is wrong”.

Participants will be explicitly made aware of the how their input will be handled, the significance of this input and what the end result of the project is expected to be: the recordings are handled by the researcher and are anonymised in findings presentation.

Researching Young People, Vulnerable Adults & United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (BERA, 2004)

As per the guideline that individuals should be granted the right to express their views freely, students are invited to give fully informed consent.

Privacy (BERA 2004)

All recorded data, transcriptions and codified information is handled with confidentiality and anonymity is maintained.

In regard to data handling, the Data Protection Act (1998) (ICO, 2005):

1. Accumulated data will be inaccessible to others apart from the researcher; password protected electronically and hard copies will be locked in a draw.
2. Transparency; the respondents will be fully informed of where their contribution will be used and how.
3. Informed consent from participants.
4. Data will not be used for additional purposes than those stated to participants.

Duty of Care

As an educator and employee of a registered, American study abroad college, Arcadia University, The College of Global Studies, the researcher is legally bound to the duty of care towards program participants. This includes

“make decisive that all substantive aspects of programs are fully depicted in prose and that program participants receive, and understand all of the substances” (Arcadia University, 2013, p.3) during the orientation period students will be informed of the ongoing researched and the aims, cope and data handling will be discussed and disseminated to them in written form.

The aspects relevant to the dual role of the researcher worker in this context are:

- ‘that all substantive aspects of programs are fully depicted in prose and that program participants receive, and understand these’ (NAFSA, 2006), during the orientation period students will be informed of the ongoing research aspect of the term, aims, scope and data handling will be discussed and disseminated to them in written form.
- ‘staff act in the interest of the student’ (NAFSA, 2006) in which instance the ethical consideration begin to include the dimension of the researcher responsibility as employee.

Ethical framework

Further to the BERA guidelines and professional duty of care, I referred to the Ethical framework outlined by Wilson, (2013) to build an ethical code of practice during the design phase that could be used as a guide during the research phase. The chart below shows how I have considered the relevant components of the

ethical framework for this inquiry.

BERA codes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adopted as a guide for practice • Used in conjunction with the institutional requirement for participant's rights to withdraw
Benefits for individuals-informed consent	The 12 participants in the focus group series are clearly informed of the research aims, that data is stored and use is limited to this research project, confidentiality is maintained by anonymisation through researcher codifying of input.
Confirmation of findings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Triangulation • Taking measures to ensure good practice in research approach and data storage: particular care in moderation of the focus groups (outlined in project activity chapter).
Researcher and participant power relationship (Stewart and Shamdasani, 2015)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With the role of moderator during the focus group series, it has been important to consider the power relationship with participants as they also happen to be my students and view me as an authoritative figure. • Building on the literature surrounding the role of the moderator in relation to leadership, interview technique and group dynamics (Stewart and Shamdasani, 2015), an effort has been made to create a good balance of group sociability (Stewart and Shamdasani, 2015). This activity is further discussed in the project activity section. •

Table 12: Presenting my ethical framework, (adapted from Wilson, 2013)

Possible emergent participant scenarios, issues and their solutions

- Student does not want to participate; students are informed in the first instance with the benefits of the investigation discussed in order to make an informed decision and this decision will be respected
- During the seminars, a student in need of mental/health support is identified; student will be released of participating responsibility if required
- Privacy of all participants. All notes, reports, statistics, audio and document recording will be kept locked in a filing cabinet in my office and before each group/individual session participants will be

asked to keep discussion private. The researcher will not divulge information regarding participants to others and clearly informs the participants of this.

- The reaction to data or emerging themes in findings may result in an indication of needed change. Sensitivity will be shown towards the organisation, colleagues and participants and any intervention will be avoided. If researcher is placed in a compromised position due to emergent information that is significant enough to be addressed, the appropriate stakeholder will be informed i.e. the director will be informed if it is discovered that a student has a learning disability.
- A debriefing provision will be offered should participants want to continue discussion.

Evaluating the research approach and methods

This section offers a justification of selected practice to evaluate research design for this project and present how a robust consideration of validity and reliability has been made.

Critical reflection: testing out practice

My overarching critical reflection approach is informed by the Kolb Cycle of action Research (1984). This approach serves to ensure method rigour by guiding my critically reflective practice. The cycle is followed during the process of inquiry to ensure an interaction between myself, the research practitioner and the process of inquiry for valid emergent data.

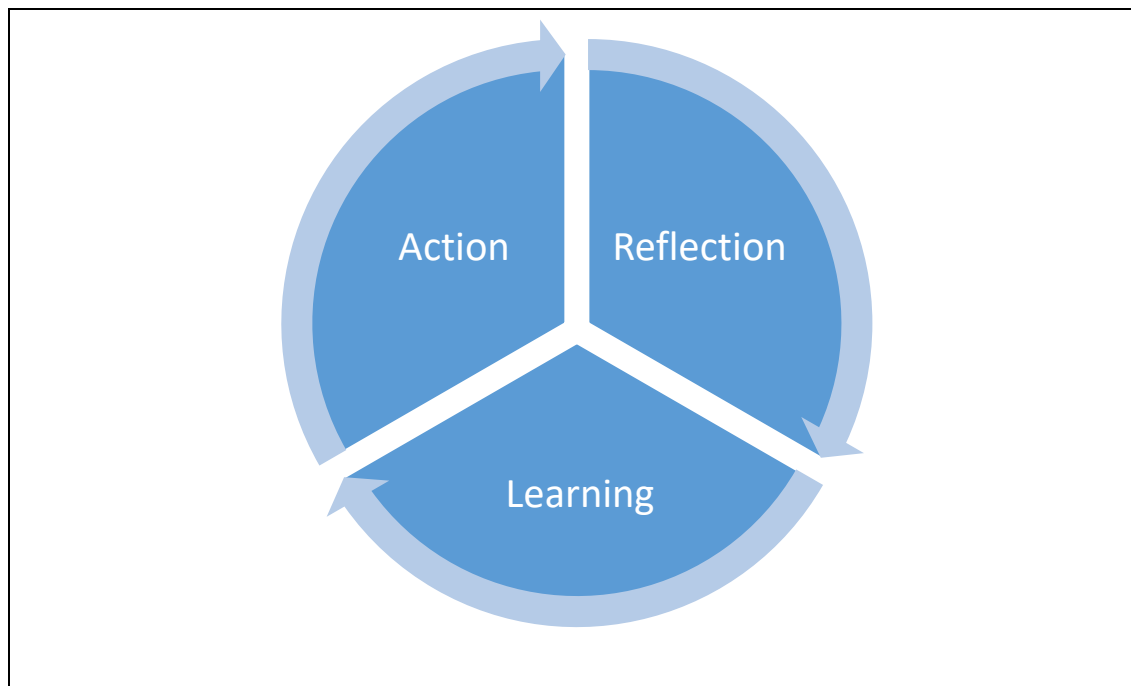


Diagram 21: The action research cycle (adapted from Kolb, 1984)

In terms of the methodological design, the underlying method of testing out findings and further informing process is conceptualised in Schon's (1983) separation of reflection below. In practice, this serves as a critical reflection point considering each iteration of research: addressing the practice itself during the research phase and examining what can be ascertained, the outcomes, and adjusting delivery to include the information that emerges. And then reflecting over each iteration and outcomes following each research iteration; considering the outcomes in relation to other sources of information.

The overarching Action Research approach: an evaluation

In this section, an analysis of strengths and weaknesses in relation to the approach and method is developed using the criteria of good action research developed by Bradbury (2010). These criteria are used to benchmark the research in a frame of good practice and are further used to guide practice as the process of inquiry continues.

In consideration of potential risks and strengths, this preliminary list of strengths and weaknesses emerges taking into account my roles as researcher practitioner. This focus on methodology and my own role and contribution is split into the categories of strength and weakness and is accompanied by a description of how each is resolved and developed throughout the project.

Research weakness and potential risk

- The research method is constituted primarily of qualitative methods. This method matched the context and phenomenon of study and data collection will be strengthened by systematic recordings.
- Much of the research depends on the ability, skills and knowledge of the researcher. The researcher is in the ideal position to conduct this research due to their access and understanding of the context but may make human errors. The latter will be addressed through constant reflection and learning and the use of prescribed data collection and manipulation programs to minimise human handling.
- The researcher would benefit from a greater awareness of literature on the field. There will be a continued effort for development through literature reviews and accessing reports and data in periodicals and journals.
- A segment of the research relies on being in contact with primary sources of information (learners) when the researcher no longer has daily contact with them. These individuals will be informed well on the benefits they will have from continuing to be involved (strengthening learning skills, can add to CV that they were part of research). There is evidence in the previous cycle that students readily maintain this involvement. Learners will also be informed of the ease with which they can contribute and remain in contact with the researcher (social networking sites, emails).

Strengths

- The researcher has a sustained, enthusiastic interest on the topic and enjoys the conducting the research, reviewing literature on the topic and developing as a researcher.
- The research proposal is feasible with results and patterns emerging from preliminary research conducted by the researcher.
- The topic at hand is described by numerous academics in the field as innovative and a useful contribution.

The seven criteria of good action research

Below, I discuss the 7 criteria (Bradbury, H, 2010) in relation to how they inform my own research.

1. *Articulation of Objectives; The extent to which authors explicitly address the objectives they believe relevant to their work and the choices they have made in meeting those.*

My aim is to create a proposed learning enhancement model building on students and faculty experiences in study abroad in order to inform practice through uncovering the student perspective.

2. *Partnership and participation; the extent to and means by which the project reflects or enacts participative values and concern for the relational component of research. By the extent of participation, we are referring to a continuum from consultation with stakeholders as full co-researchers.*

Beginning from a researcher practitioner perspective greatly informed by my pre-existing professional observations, I assemble focus groups and interviews with study abroad students and record these in order to categorise the accumulated data. This data is comprised of documented learner experiences. The research that follows is further informed by the documented input until, after 3 iterations of research, these responses are shaped to create a Learning Enhancement Model for use by the broader study abroad field.

3. *Contribution to action research theory/ practice; the extent to which the project builds on (creates explicit links with) or contributes to a wider body of practice knowledge and or theory, that contributes to the action research literature.*

I contribute to field knowledge through the research subject content through uncovering student experience in relation to learning abroad and the subsequently emerging areas where learning enhancement will add value. In terms of AR, I develop a practice of reflective meetings and dialogue with students and identifies the ways in which students can inform the practice of educators through action/ participatory research.

4. *Methods and processes; the extent to which the action research methods and process are articulated and clarified. The choices, justifications and methodology are developed in the Approach and Method and Project Activity chapters to clarify the methods and processes.*
5. *Actionability; the extent to which the project provides new ideas that guide action in response to need.*

My project aims to suggest a new, all encompassing mode of practice for educators via the proposed Learning Enhancement Model as well as insight into the value added to the educative experience with the participation of the student body.

6. *Reflexivity; the extent to which the authors explicitly locate themselves as change agents.*

My reflexive account of the research process accompanies the research project and is further elaborated on in the chapter dedicated to my reflection. This reflexive narrative considers my own educative values and influence and the impact these have had on the formulation of my research as well as locating me as a change agent within the research inquiry.

7. *Significance; the extent to which the insights in the manuscript are significant in content and process. By significant, we mean having meaning and relevance beyond their immediate context in support of the flourishing of persons, communities and the wider ecology.*

Study Limitations

A critique of AR limitations and their solutions

Having identified the key limitations through literature and my own research experience, in this section, a critique is made of the selected approach and methods.

Action research;

1. The **collaborative nature** of the method relies on engaged participation which may not be granted as well as being time consuming and could be restricting on other elements of the research such as the case study.
 - Given the formal context in which I am a practice based researcher, the platform for participatory research is also part of a formal educative process for students. For example, the 3 iterations of research, focus group meetings and calls, take place as programmed reflexive meetings for students.
 - A careful plan will be followed as well as the researcher developing their technique through study and practise.
 - This reliance on participation is developed into a strength of this investigation through evaluative cycles of action research, informing each iteration with better developed practice: within the research context as well as practitioner's professional context.
2. Due to the risks associated with '**soft' nature of action research** (McNiff, 1988), the parameters of the study will be clearly outlined and followed in an effort to recreate some of the findings into quantitative evidence. Further to this, each iteration is carefully documented and supported through literature and triangulated conclusions.
3. **Action research lacks rigour and validity (Koshy, 2004)**

Strict data collection techniques are employed as well as triangulation to ensure vigorous recorded results.

Representative in depth focus group questions

The research cycles of focus groups were designed according to theory and good practice in order to address the research questions and capture data directly from the participants. Below, the examples of questions included offer a brief sample of the themes addressed during the cycles. A detailed discussion of the focus groups is further presented in the Project Activity Chapter.

A sample of questions and their category follows outlining the topics of the in-depth interviews. These questions are further developed and adjusted prior to the interview stage.

- Bringing the experience together

Consider your experience in Athens so far, classes you are taking, daily experiences and events. What are the factors that bring these experiences together for you? Have you developed any strategies in doing so?

- Making use of learning opportunities

Consider a 'new' experience you have had in Greece whether at school or around Athens. How did you respond to this experience? What prior knowledge did you use in making sense of this experience? What will you bring forward from this experience?

- Transferable skills

Communication styles; Has the way you communicate with friends, family changed during your time here? How? How could this adaptability of communication be further developed?

Conclusion

This chapter has presented the process of enquiry ranging from the epistemological and ontological position to the overarching action research approach and research design, how these perspectives filter into the research inquiry, the development of the project into a process of action research and how this process can be further evaluated. The underpinning principles of good practice in action research have been discussed in relation the project. The research design has been justified to present the validity of the choices made defining this research project

The consecutive chapter documents the project activity demonstrating how the project evolved from method to practice and showcases activity in terms of documented practice.

Chapter 4 Project Activity

Introduction

Having presented my research approach and methodology in the previous chapter, this section presents the research activity and process that was developed building on the theoretical foundation. This chapter serves to provide an account of how theory informed practice in terms of method and technique and to outline the temporal steps within this practice and how my activity developed. Focusing on my primary source of data, the series of focus groups, I begin with a delineation of my theoretical perspective in relation to the investigation actions, continue with an analysis on the formulation of the focus groups and, discussion design and how the data was evaluated for conclusion. Each step demonstrates the systematic thematic analysis of the data, how this produced emergent themes leading to the overall findings. Following this, I discuss my professional observations and records of critical incidents in terms of practice and relative contribution to research.

The time frame

Literature review	Reviewing current related literature	Beginning 2011 Ongoing
Design of interview guide and preparation as moderator	Using theory and building on literature review	Spring, 2014
Recruitment of participants pretesting Pretesting	Email invitations to incoming cohort of students Simulated focus group with current students and review of practice	Fall 2014
Research Phase 1 Focus group 1	Onsite meeting about previous study abroad program for participants	Spring 2015: Beginning of term
Analysis of data and review of practice	Codification of data and analysis, content analysis Review and redesign of practice in terms of content and moderator	Spring 2015
Research Phase 2 Focus group 2	Onsite meeting about Athens study abroad program	Spring 2015: end of term
Analysis of data and review of practice	Codification of data and analysis, content analysis Review and redesign of practice in terms of content and moderator	Spring 2015

Research Phase 3 Final interview	Individual or focus group interviews according to availability via Skype	Fall 2015
Analysis of data and comparison with professional observations	Codification of data and analysis, anonymisation in transcript, content analysis Final review of accumulated data	Fall 2015
Professional observations & critical incidents: documentation	As part of my professional development, I document professional observations and critical incidents systematically.	Ongoing, since 2011
Critical reflection on project	Critical reflection journal.	Ongoing with a focus following research phases
Collating and codification of all findings and review: data triangulation	Reviewing data from focus series, professional observation & critical incidents, literature	Summer, Fall 2015
Writing up phase: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formulation of Learning Enhancement Indicators and development into Learning Enhancement Drivers • Formulation of suggested, practice based framework for learning enhancement 	Presented in the Project Findings and Analysis and concluding chapters.	2016/2017

Table 13: Research timeframe

The research phases were developed using Coghlan and Brannick (2001, cited in Mcpherson et al, 2002) cycles of action research, testing out practice and informing the next cycle while redirecting focus according to data outcomes. My critical reflection practice was based on reflection in action and reflection on action (Schon, 1983) to critically review my research and role as moderator.

Project process

The research stimulus

Critical reflection forms part of my professional development through strategic reflection of critical incidents, colleague interactions and program evaluation.

This critical reflection is guided by the cycle below.

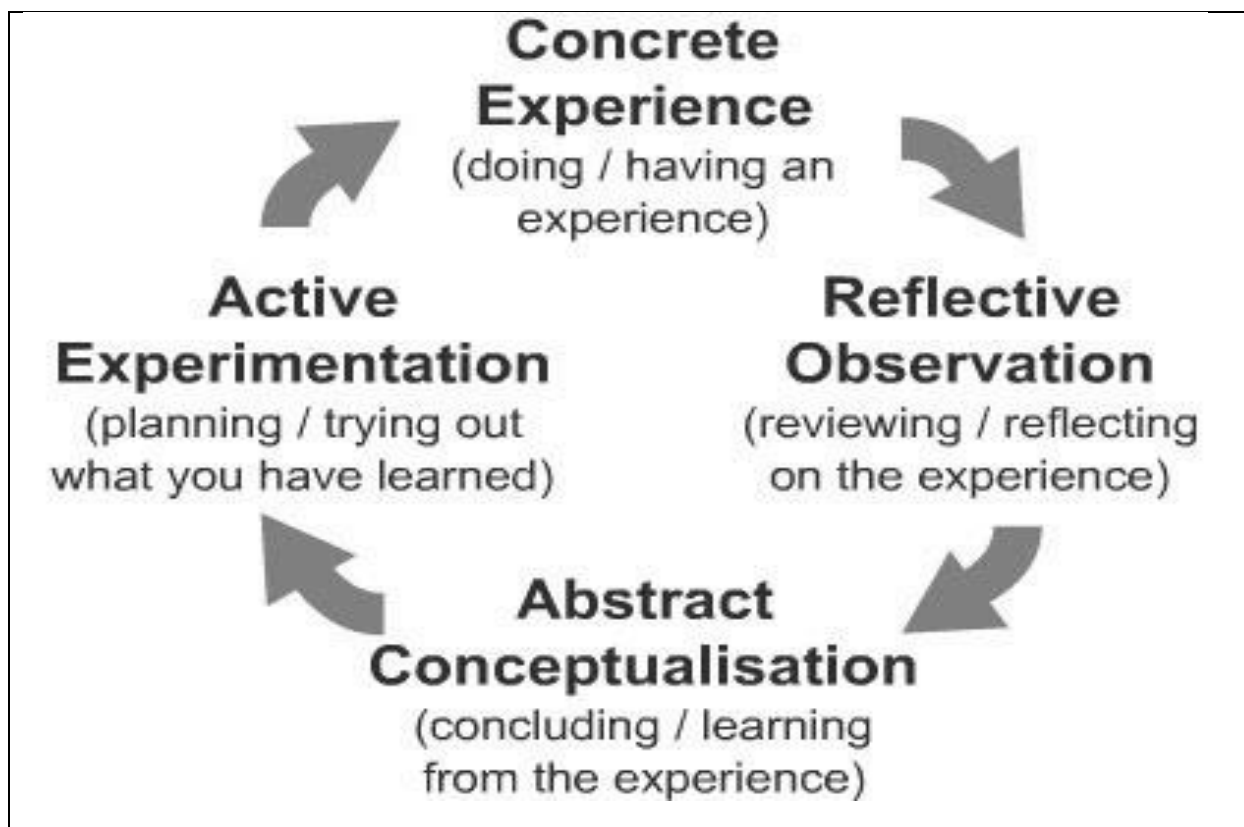


Diagram 28: A critical guide (Source: adapted from Kolb 1984)

During a critical reflection phase, it became apparent to me through my observations of students that their performance, cultural integration and engagement levels were somewhat stagnant. Students were arriving in Greece with enthusiasm, skills and were being offered high quality academic classes and rich cultural experiences yet these many forms of good practice did not seem to maximise or enhance the overall learning experience.

The research question

In the knowledge that our practices, pedagogical mechanisms and strategies were of high quality, I considered the recurring students feedback indicating to a lack of cohesion within the program posing a challenge of

fragmented stimuli to students. This demonstrated to me the need for cohesion at a more strategic level giving birth to the idea of a model, a mode of program practice to bring together program elements in cohesion.

Educative responsibility and the model

This notion of strategy and process were clear to me in terms of creating a developed holistic experience but highlighted the important role of educative agenda; the drive was based greatly on my view that we could do better for students to gain as much as possible from their study abroad experience. This would need to be done,

- By evaluating current practice through research and assessment.
- By democratising our pedagogical perspective and learning more from our students.
- By capitalising on the above to formulate a model of good practice based on the research findings with an aim to facilitate enhanced learning during study abroad. In doing so, I could address learner needs as well as program development to match these needs.

The evidence

Evaluations on the program and academic classes completed by students, indicated a perceived disconnect between academics, the cultural environment and a difficulty in framing learning within context. Student reflections and feedback further demonstrated these issues throughout the semester. In matching student difficulty to articulate learning, express accumulated skills, abilities and knowledge, a platform for development was identified.

The emerging case for research from observation

In this way, the need for research and consequently the research question emerged from my professional practice and my observations within this context.

The diagram below demonstrates this process using the Kolb Learning Cycle (1984) to frame the emerging plan in continuation of my critical practice. The process demonstrated below began with my professional observations and experience developing cyclically into a research questions and consecutive plan.

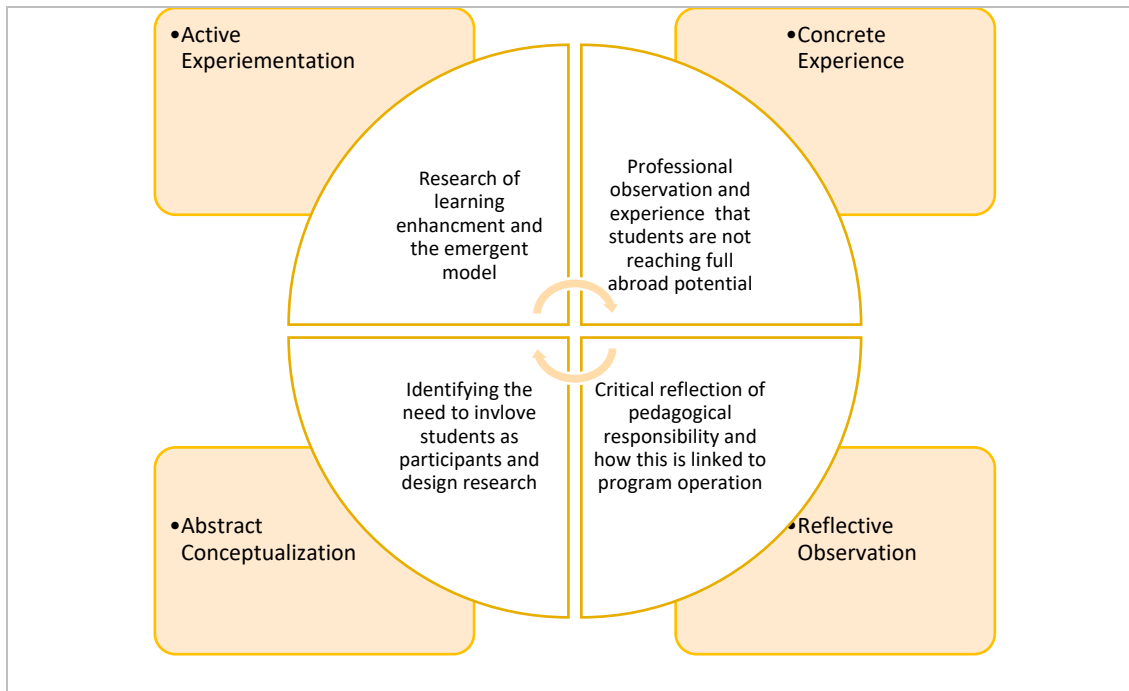


Diagram 23: Research process development (adapted from Kolb, 1984)

The Research Questions

These developed into research questions formulated by the identified issues at the Arcadia Center and matched with the studies and literature available:

- What is it exactly that we are offering in terms of learning enhancement and how can we see if this is effective?
- How can we document and measure these devices?
- How can we use students as data assets in understanding this?
- More importantly, are we offering students all that we can?

The development of a framework based on the answers to these questions, would aim to demonstrate:

- How a semester abroad can foster the ability to develop and learn as a continued process or experience of developmental value through further facilitating student engagement and autonomous learning
- That by understanding how learning enhancement can enrich this diversifying experience, practitioners along the study abroad sector can become equipped to facilitate a culture of enhanced learning building on student participation
- How the study abroad student can cultivate transferrable skills to be used long after the learning experience has occurred and how the environment can cater for this facilitation

Focus Group Series

In the previous chapter, the methodological approach and design leading up to the formulation of these focus groups was presented. Here, the operational level of the investigation is discussed.

Theoretical underpinning

The design and implementation of my focus group activity utilised the surrounding theories of good practice (Shamdasani & Stewart, 2015) to create a practice that generates information in a way that harnesses valuable information from the participants and does not constrain the possibility of unplanned, critical direction. This practice is exemplified in the cycles of action research with outcomes from each cycle informing practice and direction for the next.

The approach follows the structure proposed by Stewart and Shamdasani (2015) to use theoretical perspectives in shaping the nature, structure and purpose of the focus groups (Stewart and Shamdasani, 2015). In this way, I began with grounding my understanding of related theory with an aim to design a series of focus groups to “improve the likelihood of discovering things that are more interesting, useful and valid” (Shamdasani and Stewart, 2015, p.9).

Thematic activity focus

With an aim to uncover more about how learning can be enhanced for our students, the focus group theme is defined through the focus on each participants' experience studying abroad. This definition of a common experience and focus of the facilitated discussion is purposeful. This approach stems from Merton's discussion of focus group singularity (Merton cited in Stewart and Shamdasani, 2015, p.10) and the evidence stating that the singularly defined focus group yields deeper insight, participant interaction and allows for an environment within the group that is more conducive to the aim of the discussions (Stewart and Shamdasani, 2015).

Embedded in my focus meetings, the broad thematic focus is on 'your study abroad experience' and is couched. Each participant has already studied abroad and the focus meetings begin while on a study abroad program in Athens. The meetings are contextualised within my research on how learning can be enhanced for study abroad students. In this way, the focus series is singularly defined with clarified parameters.

Group engagement

To ensure that participant engagement yields insight and instigates participation, 3 key elements (Stewart and Shamdasani, 2015) have been addressed within the focus group design. These consist of group composition, interpersonal influences and research environment factors (Stewart and Shamdasani, 2015). Keeping the aforementioned thematic singularity of the focus group in mind, Merton recognises that focus group participants are not necessarily a group but constitute a grouping (Merton, cited in Stewart and Shamdasani, 2015), while Stewart and Shamdasani present the fact that homogeneity within the focus group can be more productive (Stewart and Shamdasani, 2015).

Within this particular grouping of participants, the singular thematic experience of study abroad is shared, the participants are not yet known to each other they are heterogeneous in terms of ethnicity and background, yet they are homogenous in relation to the environment and learning experience- they are students and peers.

This all points us in the direction of how the focus group engages, how and whether facilitation is needed.

Group Dynamics

The previous section ended with a consideration of homogeneity within the focus group as a factor for success. In this section, I consider the various factors that impact the focus group dynamics and describe how these have been addressed within my own approach and research design. It is imperative to understand the factors shaping group interaction in relation to what factors are termed influences (Stewart and Shamdasani, 2015) as these impact individual perspective and contribution within the focus group. Examining the impact factors on group dynamics, (Stewart and Shamdasani, 2015) the following 3 areas are outlined.

Intrapersonal factors and individual differences

In consideration of the intrapersonal characteristics that make participants unique, Stewart and Shamdasani highlight the benefit of a diverse group of participants in offering greater perspective and innovation (Stewart and Shamdasani, 2015). The selection of the participants for this project consisted of criteria making it possible to formulate a group with a shared previous experience of study abroad, planned study abroad in Athens, and a 3rd study abroad program planned elsewhere. As discussed in the previous chapter, due to this homogenising characteristic, it was important to ensure the sample of students were diverse enough to offer varying perspectives. Having clarified this, however, the next step was to consider what could be done from a moderating perspective to encourage heterogeneous perspectives.

Literature suggests that individuals operate differently within a group than they would if alone due to intrapersonal influence (Forsyth in Stewart and Shamdasani, 2015). Literature also suggests that specific characteristics within a given group will impact collective behaviour (Shamdasani, 2015). Considering each of these points and how they can be addressed within a relatively diverse group the role of the moderator comes into focus. Building on the notion of suggested 'blending' of focus groups (Stewart and Shamdasani, 2015) outlining ground rules as guidelines for the participants within the facilitated discussion became a way to create a mutual platform of expression.

Interpersonal factors

With minimal choice to broaden the participant group with intrapersonal factors outside of the selection, interpersonal influences were given additional consideration. Stewart and Shamdasani (2015) present the moderator as fundamental in managing participant expectations to allow expansive input. In this respect, several dimensions of interpersonal influence became instrumental in the focus group design.

Engineering a cohesive group to facilitate accepting, thoughtful contribution was significant in creating the correct atmosphere for discussion. With an aim to facilitate structural cohesion (Stewart and Shamdasani, 2015), a focus group series within which participants would complement their overall presence and understand their defined roles of input (Stewart and Shamdasani, 2015) I balanced strategies for social cohesion and clarified the task at hand before our series began. The social aspect of the meeting, time to socialise before and after the meeting acted as an icebreaker but also introduced a type of comfort of expression to the group interactions. By assigning the weighting of individual input and clarifying my aim as a researcher and moderator addressed the structural element of cohesion. Group success in our communal purpose was clearly recognised to further influence group cohesiveness (Stewart and Shamdasani, 2015) and discussion began with an icebreaker activity to start the group with a common grounding before moving into more challenging areas of discussion (Stewart and Shamdasani, 2015).

Compatibility has a direct impact on group behaviour (Stewart and Shamdasani, 2015). As student peers, the group possessed a tendency towards compatibility by default. Though homogenous in the social, educative context, the mix gender group shared age group and higher education schooling at an institution in the USA. A supporting factor in the compatibility of the group in terms of engagement and purpose was the preliminary experience studying abroad: most study abroad programs and home schools have an inbuilt critical reflection component encouraging students to engage with their time abroad.

Environmental factors

To capitalise on the beneficial impact of focus group design through group composition and spatial layout (a number of factors were considered including the environment, seating and interpersonal distance Stewart and

Shamdasani, 2015). Each meeting took place in a neutral classroom with chairs located at consistent intervals and placed in a circle shape to allow eye contact in order to enhance engagement through the environmental setting.

The focus group in practice

Application

The investigation begins with the core aim of this research project to generate information from the set group of students on the impact of action research, via the focus groups, and to generate information on how learning can be further enhanced regarding student's skills, expectations and educative practice. In this sense, this exploratory focus group series aims to fulfil clear research need. Primarily the series has an aim of "generating impressions of programs, institutions" (Stewart and Shamdasani, 2015, p.45); examining study abroad program experiences and what the participant tells of the learning experience and "learning how respondents talk about the phenomenon of interest" (Stewart and Shamdasani, 2015, p.45); deeper insight into student perspective and the impact of the focus group and action research.

Advantages and limitations

Having discussed the theoretical foundation and research aim for the research series, it is important to look at the benefits and potential restrictions associated to technique. Considering the advantages and limitations of the focus group as outlined by Stewart and Shamdasani the following tables present my own practice in relation.

Advantage	In practice
Fast data generation and access	The series was relatively easy to coordinate with initial email invitations to participants and ease in planning the meetings in Athens. My access to the data generated allowed for immediate critical analysis. For example the progression of participant engagement depth was apparent during and following each meeting suggesting progress along a continuum in terms of practice and opened the question of moderator impact and participant development within the focus group series.
Direct interaction between moderator and participants	My observations during the meetings allowed for added understanding past 'what is said' and due to the interview format, I could prolong discussion of an interesting topic, ask for elaboration or refocus.

	One participant was reserved and visibly more comfortable listening rather than speaking, at each stage I was able to invite their further input.
Open responses and rich data.	During the meetings and during data analysis stages, I was able to make interpretations and draw conclusions across the data generated. Building on data comparisons from the 1 st and 2 nd meetings, my observations of the participants within the group contributed to their individual input and my interpretation of their contributions.
Participant synergy	On numerous occasions, I observed participants react to statement by their peers and frequently either react vocally or agree emphatically. As moderator, I did not observe similar synergistic reactions and input to my direction. In fact, valuable direction changes took place within the discussion following this synergistic evolution. For example, during the 1 st meeting, a participant made a statement identifying that they did not feel involved in their education before being invited to the focus group. A number of participants continued the discussion, revealing the significance of student voice and adding it to my research as a tool and prerequisite to enhance learning.
Flexibility	Thematic diversity was covered during the meetings.
Varied participant levels of literacy	This idea lends itself to the data generation from 12 participants varying in academic ability etc. .
User friendly results	The combined hand written notes and recordings invited immediate interpretation and analysis.

Table 14: Focus group advantages in practice (adapted from Stewart and Shamdasani, 2015)

From focus groups to final interview

Due to the last iteration of research taking place while participants were no longer in Athens, the third generation of data took the form of individual in depth interviews via Skype. To ensure continuity in the valuable data generation accumulated from the 2 first focus group iterations, I relied on relevant literature to design a type of good practice reconciling the difference between the focus group and individual interview. To do so, I considered the focus group advantages Stewart and Shamdasani (2015) present in comparison to the individual interview. I then formulated the interview process so as to incorporate these advantages where possible.

The table below presents the advantages outlined by Hess (in Stewart and Shamdasani, 2015) and discusses my efforts in designing a final iteration of research to capitalise on participant engagement and in equal measure to the focus group meetings.

Focus group advantage over interview	Interview design
Synergism	Between the 2 nd focus group and individual interviews, I collectively invited participants to share any thoughts via email and reminded them of outcomes of the previous meetings. This served as a reminder of peer input.
Snowballing& stimulation	I used statements made by individuals previously during focus groups as reference points in the interview questions.
Security	The individual interviews were prefaced with an explanation that all perspective is welcome.
Spontaneity	Perhaps the most challenging dimension to address, spontaneous responses were encouraged by offering a variety of stimuli to the individual participants such as a copy of the questions sent to the student and statements made by other students to instigate a spontaneous response.

Table 15: Further focus group advantages (adapted from Hess in Stewart and Shamdasani, 2015)

During the 2 focus groups, there was contact between participants and myself outside of the focus meetings.

Once the participants left Athens this was no longer possible. In addition to the above, I employed techniques that served to keep the thread of the discussion going as there was no longer that contact. This practice included updates of research progress and keeping in touch via intermittent emails in order to keep some of the momentum and participant memory of the project and discussions. This included inviting participants to revisit our guidelines and purpose.

Focus group limitations

For the advantages afforded to the focus group, there are commensurate potential disadvantages and I considered these in shaping the design of the focus group series.

The table below build on the disadvantages outlined by Stewart and Shamdasani (2015) and presents how my practice took each into consideration.

Focus group disadvantages	Ways incorporated into research design
Sample scale vs population of interest	The focus of the project matches is represented within the scale sample and data is presented as representative of students who study abroad multiple times. This is not the rule, students often choose to do so placing them in an identifiable group. However, with the growing prerequisites of

	USA based universities for multiple study abroad experiences within a given degree, this identifiable group is diversified. The 12 participants have multiple study abroad experiences for varying reasons.
Sample codependence and bias	Moderator coercion to balance individual input and encourage perspectives during meetings and interviews.
Invalid credibility to 'live' responses	The focus group series presents the primary source of data. However, literature and professional observations serve to further address outcome validity.
Open ended responses	This disadvantage posed a challenge in data review and analysis in terms of time. The value of the open-ended responses was crucial to valid outcomes and was managed in terms of filtering data rather than incorporated into the practice of interviews.
Moderator bias	In order to control potential moderator bias, several techniques were used to encourage unguided discussion and evaluate interpretation in the analysis of data (moderator practice is further discussed later in this chapter).

Table 16: Overcoming focus group challenges (adapted from Hess in Stewart and Shamdasani, 2015)

The steps in the focus series design

In order to design and conduct the focus groups, I followed the steps outlined by Stewart and Shamdasani (2015) as below. From here on I present an account of my research project activity in the design and conducting of the focus group series.

Problem definition/formulation of the research question
Identification of sampling frame
Identification of moderator
Generation and pretesting of the interview guide
Recruiting the sample
Conducting the group
Analysis and interpretation of data
Writing the report
Decision making and action

Table 17: Steps in design (source: Stewart and Shamdasani, 2015)

Problem definition

Having defined the research problem and aim *to develop a learning enhancement framework for study abroad through participatory action research with students*, and the research objectives discussed in the 1st chapter, the next step was to address the participant sample.

Recruiting the participant sample

Given my access to student cohorts studying at the Arcadia Center in Athens, it was imperative that the focus groups take place within this context.

Given the focus of the research problem, the sample group needed to reflect the student demographic in study abroad. Although I opted for convenience sampling by scanning eligible candidates from the community of learners who had planned to study in Athens I made a critical consideration of the group characteristics as prescribed by Stewart and Shamdasani (2015). These characteristics included a planned total of 3 study abroad experiences of which Athens would be the 2nd. Due to my access to student data I was aware that a number of students shared this characteristic. To ensure that participants made the decision to partake in the focus series, I wrote to the broader student body of the particular cohort asking if any students with this characteristic would be interested in participating in my research. This was my first step in screening eligibility (Stewart and Shamdasani, 2015).

Following 12 positive responses and in this way ensuring that each participant was appropriate for participation (Stewart and Shamdasani, 2015), I wrote to confirm the collaboration and shared with each:

- my research goals
- explained the importance of their input
- the form of the meetings
- the timeline of our contact
- that refreshments and treats would accompany our meetings.

Considering the time participants were asked to contribute, I provided an incentive of traditional Greek refreshments and snacks, tying in our meetings to the cultural environment.

Considering the expectation that there may be last minute cancellations (Stewart and Shamdasani, 2015), I retained the 12 participants in total for each meeting in the series.

The focus groups took place within the Arcadia Center, the university location for each of the students in the student library afterhours.

Selected questions were pretested (Stewart and Shamdasani, 2015) with a small group of 3 students prior to the focus group series beginning, during the design stage. This activity served in testing the questions as well as offering insight into further topics to add. The 3 participants were student volunteers and allowed for me to continue designing the official focus groups with certainty in the developed practice.

Designing the interview guide

This section outlines the focus group design beginning with moderator practice.

The moderator

Building on my experience teaching and facilitating classroom discussions, my position to moderate the focus group was defined. The moderator can influence the outcome of a focus group significantly and with this consideration, I relied on supporting theory to enhance my practice.

Karger (1987, in Stewart and Shamdasani, 2015) outlines a number of necessary qualities for the successful moderator stating that these include a variety of roles: encouraging interaction, using silence, intervening or not when necessary, remaining non-coercive. Stewart and Cash (2011, in Stewart and Shamdasani, 2015) emphasise the interview activity and highlight the need for open ended questions and probing.

Considering how that students view me as an authoritative figure, it was important to verbally clarify that our focus meetings were not taking place in the usual academic sphere. Recognising this perception, the needs of the group, and considering my research aim to examine the role of students in action research, I continued to moderate through participative leadership (Stewart and Shamdasani, 2015) to encourage participation and reinstate perceptions of my focus group role.

The focus group in practice

In order to glean sufficient participant responses from the limited timescale of 3 iterations of research, I reviewed the literature and theory related to focus groups in order to devise a strategy based on good practice.

Building on Krueger's work (2002) and the text by Stewart and Shamdasani (2015), I formulated the structure of the focus groups considering the characteristics shown in the table below.

Focus Group Characteristics for good practice	My corresponding focus group design and structure
Participants <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carefully recruited • 5-10 per group • Similar types of people • Repeated groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Careful selection to match 3 study abroad semester criteria and willingness to participate ✓ All students at the Arcadia Center and same participants in repeated iterations. ✓ The group exceeded the suggested number with 12 students due to the time restrictions.
Environment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comfortable • Circle seating • Tape recorded 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Held after classes in a comfortable library with a round table, tea, coffee, homemade snacks and my Dictaphone to record the discussions.
Moderator <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skilful in group presentations • Pre-determined questions • Creates permissive environment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ I am experienced in leading classroom discussions and facilitating inclusive participation due to my formal training and teaching experience. I reminded participants that this was no longer class but a more comfortable discussion with their opinions and perspective being of the utmost value. I used my designed research questions as guide.
Analysis and Reporting <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Systematic analysis • Verifiable procedures • Appropriate reporting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Analysis took place systematically following meetings through transcription, listening with my electronic and paper records of the meetings verifying the procedures. My reporting of the findings followed ethical considerations and follows doctoral research guidelines using theory and program guidance.

Table 18: Focus group design based on good practice (adapted from Krueger, 2002)

Leading the focus group

Krueger outlines a set of moderator responsibilities necessary for the focus group (2002):

- Purposeful small talk
- Smooth and snappy introduction; welcome, topic overview, ground rules, first question.
- Use pauses and probes
- Record the discussion
- Control reactions to participants
- Use subtle group control
- Use appropriate conclusion

In preparing for the focus groups, I used this guide to inform my practice and maintained a record of critical reflections in order to further develop these skills.

Focus group structure

To allow time to elaborate on important points between questions (2015) and foster a comfortable environment of exchange (2015), each hour-long meeting was guided by 6 questions directed to the entire group. Following good practice in structuring interview (2015), the typology of questions below (2015), was used in communicating with participants:

- Open ended questions
- Probing questions
- Clarification questions
- Comparative questions

3 iterations: the focus group template

Each iteration of research followed the same template for the meeting with a structured schedule lasting 60 minutes.

I took particular care in shaping the beginning and ending of the meetings in accordance with the recommended pattern for focus group meetings (2015):

Focus group beginning

Building on the theory discussed so far, I started the focus group meeting in the following manner. This sample (2015) is taken from my guiding notes for the first focus group meeting:

Hello and thank you for agreeing to join me on what is usually an afternoon off for each of you. As you are aware, today we will be discussing your previous study abroad experience as part of my doctoral research into how learning can be enhanced for study abroad students. I am hoping to gain your perspective in how the study abroad experience can be improved.

Each of you have studied abroad previously, and, following the semester here in Athens will spend a 3rd semester abroad. So, I invited you to participate based on your repeated study abroad experiences.

Please treat our meeting today as a discussion. I will be asking you some questions that I have prepared and would like to hear your opinions and perspectives. Our discussion will remain confidential and I am interested in hearing your responses whether they are positive, negative or neutral. If at anytime, you want to contribute to the discussion or ask a question of your own, please signal to me.

As we talk, I will be recording the discussion using the Dictaphone in the center of the table if that is alright with you? I am hoping to keep accurate records of our 3 meetings and will be using the Dictaphone and my notes to do so.

Before we begin, please take a moment to read through the permission document⁹ and, if you are happy to continue, sign and hand back to me. Don't forget to help yourself to some tea and cake.

Why don't we start with getting to know each other a little more- let's move around the table and share our favourite meal eaten abroad.

Focus group ending

Krueger (2002) continues, to outline the significance of summarising the meeting at the end through reflective questions. Following this suggestion, I ended the focus group meetings with a summary of the meeting and invited round table participant resonating outcomes before thanking the students and reminding them of the future commitment.

⁹ Participant permission document can be viewed in the appendix

Good practice in focus groups: the questions

Based on the principles of good practice in focus groups (2002), the York University framework (2002) for good questions in focus groups suggests that the questions asked of participants contain the following crucial characteristics (2002):

- Conversational
- Participant language
- Clear
- Short
- Easy to understand
- Open ended
- One dimensional
- Clear instructions

Given my experience teaching seminar style interactive workshops at the arcadia center, the formulation of questions matching these criteria was a feasible exercise- my challenge related to question design appeared when trying to formulate one dimensional questions. Theory suggests that asking questions that can be interpreted differently by participants can restrict responses due to confusion (2015).

In this particular project, the interaction of students with the activity itself and their distinguishing characteristic responses to the questions- as act and as content- are equally valuable. Hence the value of *how students respond* as well as *what they respond*. Following this deliberation, some questions containing multiple dimensions were introduced during the 2nd and 3rd iterations of research.

Sample Questions

- Thinking about your academic selection of classes at the previous location:
 - How were the classes useful to you?
 - What aspects of the classes were particularly useful?
- Focusing on your experience with the host culture:
 - What aspects of the program helped you engage with the host culture?

- Could the program have helped you more in engaging with the host culture?

Moderator bias

Given my dual role of researcher and moderator, I recognise the need to address potential personal bias explicitly. In their suggestions of addressing moderator bias, Stewart and Shamdasani suggest 2 crucial developments: gaining an understanding of bias impact on focus group validity and understanding the steps to deal with this bias (2015). To this end, during the design phase I solicited the help of colleagues in reviewing my question prompts to identify evidence of bias. During the interview phase, I prepared myself in advance of each session by revisiting the likely manifestations of bias in my practice (Kennedy, 1976 in Stewart and Shamdasani, 2015). Critical reflections on the meeting recordings further allowed me to negotiate practice.

Focus group data analysis

Recording data

Though each focus group meeting or interview was recorded, I made notes during each with observations and supportive information contextualising each meeting (Stewart and Shamdasani, 2015). My aim here, was to be able to revisit as much of the content as possible at the analysis phase: taking into account the discussion and non-verbal communication as well. This focus on what Stewart and Shamdasani describe as the ‘character’ (2015) of the discussion informed my choice to work with the recording and observation notes and transcribe when this was required, in the codification phase, in the analysis rather than work from a transcript of the discussion. The decision was further supported by time limitations and a consideration of the drawbacks to transcribed data primarily that the written text might allow a non-representative interpretation of what has been said (Stewart and Shamdasani, 2015).

Presenting substantiated quotes

At the later stage of writing up the findings chapter, I further codified quotes in terms of presentation. The process of transcription described above, served in allowing a greater access to the transcription data (Corden and Sainsbury, 2006) and I was able to cross reference and ultimately select representative (Corden and Sainsbury, 2006), verbatim quotes of value. Although numbers were used in the analysis phase, fictitious names are given to the quoted participants in the thesis to bring the speaker to life (Corden and Sainsbury, 2006.)

Investigating the role of action research

To address the 2nd part of my research into the role of participatory action research, it was important to employ a supplemental method of content analysis looking more at the process impact, document any changes observed in the participants during the series as well as to capture their critical reflection of the experience. This content analysis was a review of the responses and discussion following the relevant directed questions through a form of pragmatic content analysis (Janis, 1965 in Stewart and Shamdasani, 2015). In this way, I used my observations to examine if content was related to the actual activity of the focus group. This ranged from evaluating participant ability to engage, critically reflect, over the series to associating participant input with components of the specific focus group.

Challenges in data handling

Following an established mode of practice for acquiring the data during the focus groups, a challenge regarding data review emerged. Although the choice to record and transcribe content selectively freed up the time consumed to a certain degree, the volume of data to analyse was larger than the capacity for handling. This caused a severe delay just before the writing up phase. The development of the matrix, mentioned earlier in this section, to categorise content assisted in organising the large volume of data.

Challenges in research practice

The culmination of the research series taking place while the participants were no longer in Greece presented itself as an issue requiring care in logistics and practice. The ideal plan to host a virtual focus group became impossible due to the schedules and locations of the participants, resulting in a number of individual interviews and 2 collective interviews. This development meant a readjustment of the research process to include a theoretical grounding for in depth interviews as well as a consideration my practice and interview design. Some of these developments are discussed earlier in this section and draw a comparison between the focus group and interview and present my efforts to reconcile the two for a valid outcome.

Analysis methods

Investigating learning enhancement: systematic thematic analysis

In order to ascertain from each focus meeting and interview, the emerging themes surrounding enhanced learning, codify these themes into typological categories and then proceed to compare the data sets between each round of research practice, I opted for the 'scissor and sort technique' (Stewart and Shamdasani, 2015).

This particular technique was preferable as it permitted the selection of significant components of the, identification of representative comments, formulated the typological categories in order to make sense of the focus group content (Stewart and Shamdasani, 2015).

For each of the 3 iterations, I used the following process building on the steps outlined by Stewart and Shamdasani (2015):

1. Identify topics relevant to learning enhancement from the recording and my notes and record them thematically as categories.
2. Create a classification system of topics and issue based on ‘categorical units’ (Krippendorff, 2013 in Stewart and Shamdasani, 2015).
3. Transcribe statements, ‘thematic units’ (Krippendorff, 2013, in Stewart and Shamdasani, 2015) relevant to each topic / issue and add relevant observation notes i.e. for a particularly emotive response.
4. Tally overall frequency of topic references during the discussion.
5. Repetition of this process for review

At the end of each focus group analysis I had a complete table with this data as presented in the following format.

Topic/issue	Relevant statements	Non-verbal observations	Frequency of reference
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Table 19: Content analysis matrix

This process was repeated for each of the 3 iterations with a systematic reconsideration of practice following each cycle to inform direction of questions, adjustments to thematic focus and critical review of my own practice as moderator.

The systematic thematic analysis discussed above, formed the first part of the data analysis process as indicated in the data analysis model below previously introduced in the methodology chapter.

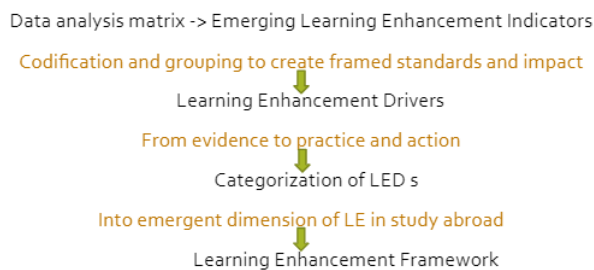


Diagram 24: The data analysis model (Krueger, 2002)

Emerging Learning Enhancement Indicators

By merging the 3 content analysis matrices from each of the 3 iterations of focus group research, I was able to classify responses into categories according to elements of the academic program. Primarily examining the categories of Topic/ issue, Relevant statement and Frequency of reference, these categories emerged as dominant themes, demonstrated below.

- Experiential opportunities
- Academic content
- Programming
- Skill capitalization
- Cultural Immersion
- Intercultural development
- Student life
- Co-curricular
- Student ownership and involvement

Table 20: Emerging themes

These themes demonstrated the areas referenced by students indicating the topics prominent in their experiences. In order to further frame and conceptualise how these learners accounted for their study abroad semester, it was important to revisit the data from the content analysis matrices with a new perspective, this time focusing on program evaluation. During this data analysis step, the 3rd, previously unused, category of non verbal observation in the content analysis matrix was useful in demonstrating how and whether the participants responded positively or negatively to a Topic/ issue or Relevant statement being discussed.

Inspired by the frequently used SWOT analysis (Strengths Weakness Opportunities Threats) I devised the following matrix to demonstrate the criteria through which the participants accounted for their experience.

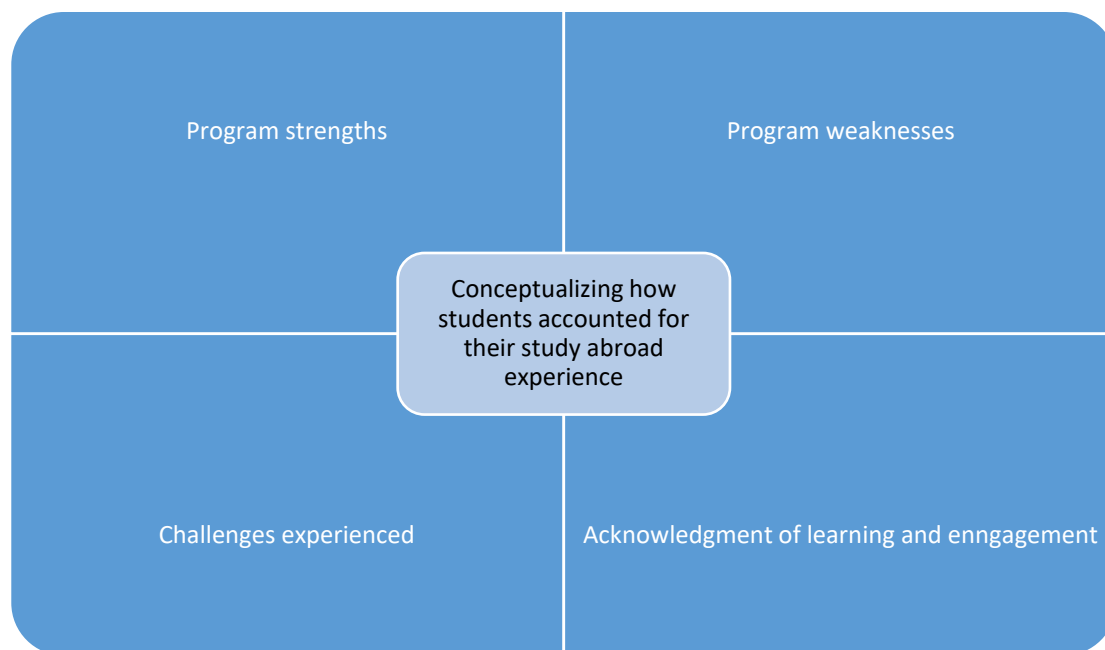


Diagram 25: Participant experience matrix

Together, the two groupings demonstrated in both the emergent themes and in the matrix above, showed how learning was either enhanced or challenged for participants in relation to the program and to academic categories within the broader learning experience.

With this insight into program impact and of the clear categorised areas, the next step was to develop the themes and evaluation of practice into evidence of enhanced learning so as to reveal learning components and experience that play an enriching role. I named these components learning enhancement indicators. The example presented below lists the learning enhancement indicators that emerged in relation to study abroad programming and academic practice: the areas typically under the control of a study abroad provider.

- Experiential Education Strategy
- Student engagement; including student voice
- Professional experience; internship
- Community involvement
- Inbuilt learning objectives and learning agreement
- Critical reflection
- Capitalizing on skills
- Culture of assessment
- Space and time for autonomy
- Addressing readiness to learn
- Cultural immersion
- Formal intercultural Development

Table 21: Learning enhancement indicators

Learning Enhancement Drivers

In order to capitalise on these findings and use them in an operational level, it was important to transform the evidenced indicators of learning enhancement into actionable components for practice. In some cases this transformation consisted of developing a descriptive indicator such as ‘culture of assessment’ into the actionable form of ‘peer assessment activity in evaluation’. In the majority of cases, the transformation consisted of carrying forward practice already in place as an activity. For example, the ‘inbuilt learning objectives and learning agreement’ emerging as an indicator could be implemented as such or developed accordingly. During this development step, an extensive list of Learning Enhancement Drivers emerged as examples to further enhance student learning:

63 Learning Enhancement Drivers that include:

- Formal Intercultural Development
- Holistic Experiential Ed. Strategy or systemic practice
- Edifying dialogue
- Cultural immersion

Table 22: LE indicators to LE drivers

Drawing on the previous data analysis steps and emerging data from each, the Learning Enhancement Drivers were further categorised into 4 areas of practice to outline 4 distinct programming areas within the study abroad program context. This synthesis of the emerging LE Drivers according to the emerging impactful areas of focus was the penultimate step in shaping the Learning Enhancement Framework:

<p>Ongoing Program Development Ongoing evaluation AR; participation of students in program development Participative assessment culture Democratic involvement of students</p>	<p>Experiential Education Strategy Training for staff and faculty on philosophy/mission Forum for instructor dialogue Incorporating Exp. Ed. Mechanism in academic practice</p>
<p>Structured contextual Engagement Cultural immersion mechanism Engagement activities with critical reflection components Formal Intercultural Development</p>	<p>Learner Development Framing of personal learning objectives and development Critical reflection Inbuilt assessment and evaluation of transferable skills and knowledge acquired Temporal/ mental space allowance for autonomy</p>

Table 23: Synthesis of LE drivers

The Learning Enhancement Framework

The conceptual Learning Enhancement Framework and primary contribution to knowledge presented below is further discussed in the Findings Chapter.

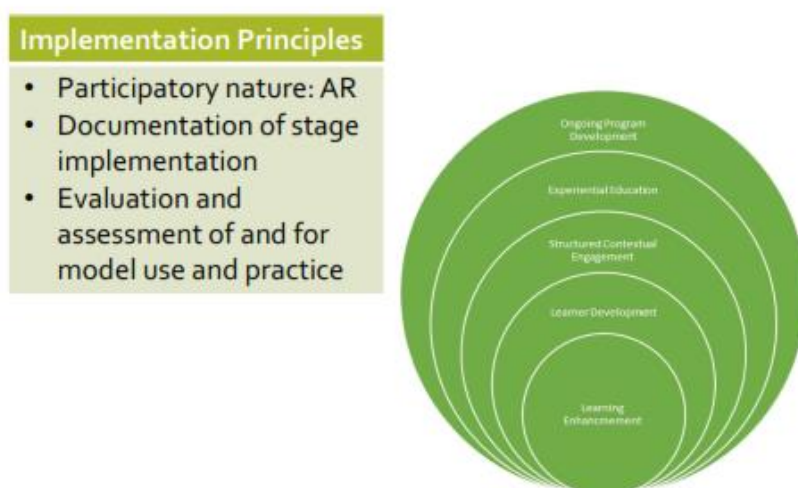


Diagram 26: The Learning Enhancement Framework

Conclusion

This chapter has presented my research activity and documents how research practice evolved for the focus group series leading to an identification of significant outcomes regarding learning enhancement and the role of action research. The following chapter presents these outcomes and presents and further discusses the formulation of Learning Enhancement Drivers toward a framework of learning enhancement.

Chapter 5 Project Findings and Analysis

Introduction

This chapter presents and analyses the findings of my inquiry in order to develop a conceptual learning enhancement framework for study abroad through participatory action research. The formulation of this chapter is based on the text by Elaine Wilson (2013) regarding the presentation of education based research.

The chapter begins with a summary presentation of the research findings in relation to the research questions (Wilson, 2013) and continues by demonstrating a detailed account of the findings: findings according to the source of inquiry and a concluding section in which the conceptual learning enhancement framework is developed based on emerging criteria. This final section presents the findings discussion; the major findings, outcome significance, how the study is related to other studies, considers alternative explanations and ends with a series of suggestions for further research (Wilson, 2013).

Framing the findings

The findings for this project stem from the 3 identifiable sources discussed in the previous chapters:

1. **My project inquiry:** 3 iterations of in depth interviews and focus groups with 1 set of students, investigating the need for learning enhancement based on their 3 study abroad experiences.
2. **Introducing Experiential Education:** The 2nd research strand is characteristically related to my work. I was tasked to perform a series of training sessions for faculty named 'Introducing experiential education' and in doing so to assess our practice in the area of experiential education. In practice, this professional project contained a strong action learning component through which I was able to explore the impact of a structured experiential strategy over a set period of time.
3. **Critical Observations and incidents:** in my role, I observe and interact with much of the learner's experience while in Athens. Drawing on these critical incidents, I have been able to identify significant events adding to the investigation.

Relating emerging outcomes to the research questions

Considering the guiding research questions designed earlier on in the project, this sections summarises the research findings and explores how these questions have been addressed.

- How can skills learnt in the abroad context by the learner be capitalised upon in order to create a shift toward a systematic process of learning enhancement by educators in the area of study abroad?

It is evident from the findings of this project that students are a valuable source of information in understanding what skills are cultivated through study abroad. By recognising the student body as such and inquiring into how student learning is enhanced and restricted and where it has the potential to develop according to practice, we can unveil the need for specific development in our education practice. This project proposes a particular method of doing so: a series of focus groups evaluating learning experience and educative impact to inform practice through a conceptual framework.

- What are the contributing, shaping factors and what are the restrictions and how do these changes depend on study abroad contexts and conditions?

The synthesis of outcomes suggests that a number of areas affect and potentially enhance learning. The typology of learning enhancement table demonstrates the emerging findings. These are later named Learning Enhancement Indicators and are discussed in the Thematic Findings section.

Emerging themes; a typology of learning enhancement

Before moving on to the 3 categories of data, it is important to consider the overall findings. The following chart summarises the overall findings from this doctoral project in relation to enhanced learning for study abroad students and presents the key thematic findings

Evident in the study, the contributing and restrictive variables are many, frequent and difficult to account for. For this reason, the emerging conceptual model is designed according to emerging good practice.

- What suggested framework can guide educators and administrators in developing successful learning enhancement in learners abroad?

This project ends with the design of a conceptual learning enhancement framework that encompasses practice that the study identified as emerging components of enhanced learning for study abroad students.

- What is the role of action research in learning enhancement?

General observations: the impact of participatory action research

Before moving on to the identifiable areas of student responses, it is important to reference my observations made of the process of inquiry and address the role of action research.

The initial focus group referring to a previous study abroad experience acted as an introduction to the process for students.

A development in student engagement with the process was observable during the research period. The first focus group, for example, elicited more superficial responses, usually descriptive in nature. As the research progressed, the participants became more engaged developing their perspective as far as to compare the 3 experiences during the final research iteration.

1st focus group

Compared to the 2 more iterations of research, student responses were more superficial with participants positioning themselves within the learner continuum to a lesser degree. At this stage, participants tended to evaluate experiences in terms of program assessment, the categories of program strengths, weaknesses and challenges. A higher level of encouragement from me was necessary to facilitate participant acknowledgement of their personal learning processes in order to uncover the 4th category, acknowledgement of learning.

2nd focus group

The 2nd iteration in Athens followed on from an introduction to experiential learning¹⁰; the impact of which was clear during our focus group meeting. Students were able to frame themselves as learners within the educative context, used vocabulary to show this and linking their experience in a more contextualised way.

3rd iteration, interviews

At this point, students moved more in the direction of comparisons between study abroad experiences and indicated a greater awareness of educative components. This familiarisation with the context led to the deepest discussions of the research series. Paired with the fact that the discussions were now individual and personal, the participants offered their unique perspectives.

¹⁰This introduction took place under the auspices of the Greek Key, a core course I taught that semester with a focus on intercultural skills.

Students displayed a greater linking of experience to themselves as individuals, acknowledging their own ways of understanding as well as the restrictions related to them.

Research process impact

The process of inquiry can be seen to have had a developmental impact on the participants- to which they attested. I designed this process to be complemented by the Athens program in terms of scheduling, hosting the focus group towards the end of the semester and following classes on experiential education and reflection for example. I also designed the process to pose as small an intervention as possible within the learner's process at the time offering an opportunity to reflect through the contribution to my research. This impact on learner development toward a critical eye emerged in a self-evident manner, demonstrating the role of students in action research through the emerging insight and the significant impact of the process on the participants.

Learner development through participative reflection

I view these observations as proof of learner development through participatory reflective practice. They demonstrate the learner evolving from a passive role to more aware position of their learning context, learning process and ultimately their development of knowledge. The level of ownership and engagement of the focus group series displayed by the participants demonstrates the impact of action research on students as well as their important role in the formulation of practice design emerging from student learning demands.

Key findings and Emerging considerations

A distinct correlation between enhanced learning and the presence of particular technologies of practice can be observed in the presented data. This observation suggests that these technologies *indicate* the potential for enhanced learning.

Learning Enhancement Indicators

Drawing on the complete findings and outcomes, a series of mechanisms bridging the gap between learning experience and student formulate. Here, I name this grouping Learning Enhancement Indicators. These indicators preface the presence of enhanced learning, their absence noticed onced experienced by students in a previous location and in some case identified without prior experience.

The prominent indicators are presented below:

- Experiential Education strategy
- Student Engagement; Student Voice
- Internship
- Community involvement
- Inbuilt Learning Objectives and Learning Agreement
- Critical Reflection Sessions
- A capitalisation on learnt skills
- Culture of dialogic assessment and evaluation
- Space and time for autonimity
- Edifying dialogue
- Addressing Readiness to Learn
- Cultural Immersion
- Formal Intercultural Development

These indicators emerge from the analysis of findings in the table below in relation to skills that develop and add value for the learner. The following table contextualises the identified learner outcomes from each research strand and offers potential frameworks for implementation: these frameworks have been identified based on good practice evident in secondary sources and documented practices from selected education institutions as discussed in the literature review chapter. These factors are consecutively used to assess learning enhancement.

The table is comprised of a matrix building from the research findings in categories of practice and leads to suggestions for implementation. In this way, the table presents the findings stemming from the data accumulation

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categories through to the emerging implementation potential. The topics in the left hand column emerge as relevant learner characteristics with a direct impact on learning enhancement from the literature review as terms and consecutively arose from the student narratives and data. Each of these topics/ characteristic, has been discussed in the literature review section.

The following table demonstrates how this thesis has captured the data emerging from each research strand and addresses these highlighted learner characteristics in order to offer a technique for enhancing student learning.

Topic	Project Inquiry	Experiential Ed. Project	Critical Observations	Potential Frameworks for implementation	Learning enhancement category
Transferable skills	Learning enhanced through PAR project and skills carried forward. Students able to frame learning through PAR and displayed greater ownership.	Exp.Ed. has a long lasting impact in terms of knowledge and skills... it endures well past the study abroad experience and seems more readily implementable as a new skill set.	Skills cultivated by cocurricular involvement and development unblocked in relation to study abroad challenges	Learning Objectives Matrix(Montrose,2012)	Learner Development
Experiential Education	Important in enhancing learning related to academics. Higher perceived academic value. Deeper comprehension. Encouraged individual identification with materials.	Dialogue between faculty has enhanced learning for faculty and students. Exp.Ed. has bridged theory and practice. Exp.Ed. culture shaped through practice.	Contextual experiences enhance learning .	National Society for Experiential Education guidelines(Montrose, 2002) Emerging framework	Experiential Education

<p>Student Voice</p>	<p>Formal program components of SV enhanced engagement and learning. Being heard must then include materialising of SV suggestions. Involvement in decision making of a learning/research experience displayed high level of engagement and ownership by participants.</p>	<p>Classroom participation more vocal with introduction of Exp.Ed.</p>	<p>Student evaluations seen more as a complaint for if written, verbal evaluations as participating in development . Higher engagement and contextual understanding through student government .</p>	<p>Mechanisms for implementation(Freeman, 2014) The student engagement partnership(HEFCE, 2013) The student voice framework(Cardiff University, 2014) Student Government at the arcadia center</p>	<p>Structured Contextual Development/ Ongoing Program Development</p>
<p>Student engagement (SE)</p>	<p>Development of SE observed through PAR project. Critical reflection enhanced SE. Students required more freedom in identifying areas of engagement. Recurring mentions of their opinion being considered.</p>	<p>Students engaged laterally in response to Exp. Ed. Stimuli .</p>	<p>Contextual engagement predetermines higher student engagement and enhanced learning .</p>	<p>Participant Action Research(Nhamo,2012) Emerging Framework</p>	<p>Structured Contextual Engagement/ Learner Development</p>

Assessment <i>Joanna Simos</i>	Exp.Ed. needs clear assessment, objectives and outcomes. A tendency to react against traditional assessment.	Self assessment enhances understanding of objectives and learning .	Self evaluation important in enhanced learning	Good practice in student enagement(Harvey,2008) <i>role of action research in the participation of students</i>	Ongoing Program Development
Readiness to Learn	Varied learner styles accommodated through Exp.Ed. more so than through traditional pedagogy. Exp. Ed. links experience, academic and learner and enhances learner.	Motivation increased in students can be kickstarted by critical reflection and introduction of engagement stimuli .	Principles for learning(Duke University, 1997) Critical values of learner readiness.	Learner Development/ Ongoing Program Development
Democratic Pedagogy	Students acknowledged their involvement through the research project. Recognised opportunities to engage through being heard.	Learners developed through facilitation .	Self assessment involves students to understand greater assessment practice, clarifying objectives of engagement .		Ongoing Program Development
Constructive Intervention	Student responded to critical reflection aspect of research.	Critical reflection teaching .	Introduction self evaluation via critical reflection enhances learning through the learner framing their development .		Learner Development/ Ongoing Program Development
Diversity, Cultural Engagement and Immersion	Preferred to happen autonomously, lead by learner. Homestays, language partnerships, internships,	Experience leads to higher contextual enagegemnt.	Higher engagement is correlated to higher overall performance .	Assessment based approach. (Duke University, 1997)	Structured Contextual enagement

	volunteering, Cocurricular events enhance learning. Formal intercultural development enhances learning.				
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Table 24: Emerging transferable findings

The next section presents the findings in the following order:

- 1. Action Research: Focus groups**
- 2. Introducing Experiential Education; a professional project**
- 3. Professional observations**

Project Findings and Analysis

The Project Inquiry, Action Research: focus group series

Project Inquiry

The study

This study took place in the form of in depth interviews with 12 students studying abroad at the arcadia center in Athens and lasted 4 full semesters (2 academic years). These 12 students had spent the previous semester studying abroad at various locations, studying for a semester in Athens and then continuing to study abroad at a 3rd location in the following year. The interviews took place in 3 iterations:

1. Focus groups during the initial week in Athens with dialogue focusing on their previous experience abroad
2. Focus groups towards the end of the Athens semester with a focus on their Athens experience.
3. At the end of their 3rd location semester abroad via independent Skype and telephone calls.

The starting point

The initial question leading this investigation is the same question on which my doctoral studies have been based: Are we offering students all that we can in creating a significant experience abroad and how can we capitalise on best practice in our effort to do so. The Athens arcadia center employs several techniques in programming and teaching to address this issue yet in terms of overall program assessments, there is room for improvement. Given the focus on performance assessment of recent years, I wanted to focus on the student learner perspective and need.

The study

From this point on, I present an analysis of findings from my in-depth discussions with the 12 students and demonstrate the key points emerging from these meetings related to enhanced learning. The participants raised a number of valuable issues in recounting each of the 3 study abroad experiences and meetings began with a focus on the most recent experience, then leading on to comparisons. Participants were invited to reflect through my guidance using a template of questions and I analysed these discussions by transcribing the recordings, categorising data and codifying in terms of emergent experiences, processes and correlations between the learner's experience and the study abroad program, in order to uncover the role of learning enhancement.

Emerging categories

An emergent 4 themes, **categories formulated based on the findings**, are apparent in analysing the 3 iterations of research with an identifiable 4 areas of clusters forming from student responses.

Student tended to begin discussion by either sharing an experience that had a significant impact on them or an experience lacking the potential to do so. Here, I name these categories:

Program weaknesses: What was missing from the experience; reflections refer to potential achievements and developments that were not followed through either due to program components or the learner's need for further direction and support.

Program Strengths: What contributed to the experience; students discuss experiences and processes that have had a significant impact on them personally, academically or culturally.

The last 2 emerging categories, below, are linked to how participants view their learning experiences and offer an insight into the learner perspective past the programming of study abroad.

Challenges experienced; students raised drawbacks to their broader study abroad experience in terms of the overall context.

Acknowledgment of learning; in this category of data, students account for their learning linked to the broader context abroad.

Each of these areas are interrelated and overlap and contribute to how we might contextualise the findings from this project and consider them in developing practice.

My process of Inquiry

The identifiability of these categories signalled to me the presence of a type of processing context; a conceptualisation of how learners account for an experience. Taking this significant context into account, I construct a process amplifying student response in order to inform our understanding. My process of creating meaning from these student accounts focuses on these 4 categories, how they are interrelated for the learner and what they tell us about learning enhancement.

Presentation of findings and analysis

The analysis and presentation of findings in the following section has been developed from the accumulation of data from the 3 iterations of research. This data is then considered in total in order to explore the issue of learning enhancement. These data sets have then been analysed as separate categories to demonstrate emerging data with the differentiated, and, in some cases, developing factors.

The 4 categories mentioned earlier above emerged from the findings and were then, consequently, used initially to separate the levels of data. These categories may be identifiable but they overlap in terms of learning process and study abroad program structure. For these reasons, during my analysis, I refer to the categories in order to highlight the existing links in order to define their role in learning enhancement.

Learning Enhancement Indicators

In breaking down student responses to identify the contributing factors to learning enhancement, a number of formal education mechanisms emerge. These mechanisms are used by study abroad programs, they have names, techniques and are generally recognised as significant program elements. A number of learner needs, gaps in learning, and suggestions for support mechanisms also emerge in relation to learning enhancement. I have developed this idea of emerging indicators to create a set of Learning Enhancement Indicators, signs that are proven through the research to have an impact on enhanced learning. For the following section, I group the findings according to themes referred to by students. These themes are developed further on to create the Learning Enhancement Indicators.

General student reflections

Participants openly shared evaluations of their study abroad experiences at each stage with a tendency to assess programs before evaluating their individual experiences. Overall students claimed to have been impacted by each experience with varying explanations of why and how this came to be. For the majority of the focus group, study abroad forms a degree requirement- the minority of participants have selected the unusual route of 3 semesters abroad for personal reasons.

From here on, the data is presented thematically with examples of discussion content.

Degrees of freedom

Participants referred to freedom commonly throughout the meetings indicating the prominence of the concept as well its value to them. Students discussed their experiences in terms of time restraints, cultural understanding and accessibility to resources. Intellectual freedom was mentioned by the more academic students in response to curricula, deadlines and the level of academic direction and instruction.

During the 1st meeting discussing participant study abroad experiences prior to Athens, students shared varying learner accounts indicating their want to explore culturally with greater freedom. This is demonstrated in the 3 participant accounts below:

1. *It felt like all my time in Chile was spent scheduling or writing my next assignment- you study abroad to see abroad not an abroad classroom.*
2. *The weekly cultural class taught us Israeli songs and about Hebrew language and tradition. I wish there had been more time for this. Each session felt as though I was taken to the beach and as soon I wet my toes it was time to go home.*
3. *When you study in London, you become aware of the political agenda of the university. You are taught a certain way, you are encouraged to think a certain way, your work is critiqued a certain way, your roommates dress a certain way. But parliament is not made up by that one group, neither is society. I found myself wanting to meet people thinking differently for a more general perspective.*

Controlled freedom

During the 2nd iteration of research, freedom was viewed as a crucial component when students identified scheduling issues, for example, that prevented them from using their time in more independent ways. Students tended to identify their autonomy within the learning context as controlled and related to restricted potential, as indicated in the following examples.

1. *The idea of Spolia¹¹ teaches you that the materials used in Ancient Greek architecture allowed for metamorphosis from one object to another. Sort of like recycling. I found the professor's lecture on the temple of Poseidon at Sounion inspiring- I think that I have experienced a metamorphosis in Athens. The ancient Greeks claimed that the landscape gave them the inspiration for this- I feel as though my metamorphosis is sign posted by classes on sites. What happened in between is something that I*

¹¹Recycling materials in architecture

Joanna Simos - *Developing a conceptual learning enhancement framework for study abroad programs; the role of action research in the participation of students*
am not sure about- I think I would have preferred the time to explore this in between these points but there are only so many weekends free in the program.

- 2. My research project for the Society class was based on my passion for helping vulnerable groups- when I realized I could explore this in Greece I got excited. At first the class syllabus and schedule acted as a guide to where I needed to be, planning my research etc. My research phase was fascinating but due to the controlled time I was permitted to spend on it, I feel as though the project is incomplete. Others in the class felt the same, others thought that 3 weeks was too long. For me, I feel like I didn't fill out the opportunity.*

Time in culture

Freedom emerged once again in the final set of interviews as a given right, an expectation for most participants. Although the various programmes structured the semester schedules in similar ways, participant considerations varied. Some participants felt the schedule allowed for adequate exploration and development independent to the classroom, others felt time was more than adequate with an experienced lagging, or boredom. Participants elaborated to uncover the difference of cultural contexts and the role of time within them. Free evenings in Brussels for example were made up of little to explore, empty streets, closed shops hence little to do outside. Free evenings in Barcelona posed an abundance of choices ranging from museum to social events, contrary to siesta time. These all point to the importance of context in planning the semester and the need to match the local time culture with program practicalities.

Time and adapting

Participants who expressed experiencing feeling homesick, culture shock and a difficulty in adapting were more commonly speaking about programs with heavier academic schedules. The majority of these students identified the significance of an attainable program routine in dealing with these issues.

Freedom as autonomous learners

During the research phase, participants were seen to respond to levels of program direction. Although a precise correlation between levels of direction and instruction and the impact on students could not be gauged, participants demonstrated their awareness of programming techniques to enrich their individual abilities. During programs with less of an opportunity for students to comprehensively transfer their learning and skills, however, students were more critical of practice and identified program short falls. In the cases where formal mechanism encouraged students to consider the skills acquired, develop them outside of the classroom through challenges and assignments, students spoke of their freedom to develop skills with greater clarity demonstrating a comprehensive understanding of their own learning process.

The Athens programme aims to encourage autonomous learning by providing stimuli to awaken the learner into engaging with the new Greek context. This seems to be successful with learners voicing their need to explore, the evidence of their battles in overcoming cultural barriers, their originality in approaching academics. Where we seem to fall short is in allowing them the time to do so. In practice, the momentum of learner activity is curbed by the restriction of time related to semester scheduling.

Academic classes

Participants highlighted the importance of venturing outside of the classroom and presented a set of drawbacks related to academics in each of the 3 meetings. Students tended to rate the academic workload as either too much or inadequate in planning with an impact on their experiences out of class. The majority posed time management as a common challenge indicating the difficulty to balance between classes and exploring the location.

Participants felt experiential academic activities held greater value if framed within the classroom theory- there were cases where experiential components were not understood in context with their relevance seeming unclear.

Overall, participants indicated that learning on site, problem solving and simulation activities had the greatest value and developed transferable skills and knowledge.

Experiential Learning

Overall, participants rated study abroad experiences as having had higher academic value when a higher level of experiential learning activities were present demonstrating acquired skills and knowledge in relation to the experiences via examples of transferability. Experiential learning components were seen to have stimulated subject interest and deepened comprehension- students involved in research demonstrated a critical eye which they attributed to the experiential components.

A small percentage of participants argued that experiential learning mechanism allowed them to bridge difficulties usually experienced in terms of their learning disabilities or learning restrictions. The student account below, demonstrates this,

During Greek key (in Athens) we have used the urban landscape to understand what makes Greeks who they are- I am a kinaesthetic learner and the heavy theory and readings seemed vague and impossible to understand. After the Anafiotika walk where we explored how the islanders from Anafi created a new community with island homes in the center of Athens, I had an epiphany and finally understood what is meant by collective history.

Cultural Immersion

Students tended to highlight their pursuit of cultural immersion while studying abroad at each location presented as experiencing with authenticity rather than accepting readily available options. In 67%¹² of cases, participants referred to this cultural immersion as separate from their abroad programmes indicating a nonalignment of this important program goal to student perceptions of it. In fact, participants often presented explorations independent from the program as cultural achievements. This stance further demonstrates the learner need to explore and find without assistance.

Discussing the various program strategies for cultural immersion, students identified 3 key goals:

1. -to spend time with local students and create relationships
2. -to experience the location through the eyes of the local population
3. to develop a sense of being at home on location

¹²A percentage based on the 3 iterations of research.

In the case of program strategies, students claimed that homestays, language partnerships, internships, volunteering and routine contact with local students facilitated cultural engagement. In the absence of these opportunities, students claimed the experience did not allow them to become fully culturally immersed.

Participants clearly referenced drawbacks to their abroad semesters in terms of not infiltrating the local culture to their aspired extent. Although students discussed the program components mentioned above as program weaknesses in their absence, when present, these components were not readily identified as programme strengths—there seemed to be an expectation that they form or should form a basic offering to students studying abroad.

Students involved in these mechanisms, clearly identified benefits, even where the process posed a challenge, and were able to draw from the experience in terms of enhanced learning related learned skills and knowledge to other experiences and the future.

Co-curricular activities

Participants raised the fact that activities planned by the programs formed the first cultural experiences and were often too few and too far between. In discussion, it was apparent that students benefit more from these activities during the first portion of the semester, during their acclimatisation period. These activities are perceived by students to

- serve as cultural introductions
- create social opportunities within the program
- capitalise on time available and bridge the gap between arriving and becoming familiar with the context

Participants gave examples of activities with an overburdened component of cultural theory and recounted culturally rich experiences as experiential with social components attached.

In some cases, participants engaged in activities purely on the mandatory basis and in retrospect expressed that this mandatory nature was crucial.

Visualising a co-curricular framework taking the above into account, the crucial first month of the semester could be made more active focusing on cultural immersion activities. The remaining months of a semester could offer optional activities.

Capitalising on skills

During the iterations of research and particularly during the 1st session, students displayed a restriction in the articulation of their prior experience. Although this can be attributed to the lack of prior exposure to the vocabulary, reflective mechanism and direction of reflection this stance is also related to whether the learner has been showed how to frame their learning.

Participants with experience of reflective technique, either in the study abroad context or separately, recognised their learning process and contributing factors with greater ease.

Student ownership

Participants displayed varying levels of ownership in terms of their learning experience, leading to a correlating between perceived freedom and support with student activity and autonomy.

Formal Intercultural Development

During their first week in Athens, students are required to complete the online Intercultural Development Inventory Index (IDI Inventory, 2015) as a means to facilitate their intercultural experience. They are then debriefed by a trained specialist on their outcomes and revisit these outcomes toward the end of the semester, offering the learner an opportunity to consider their development in retrospect.

In the case of study abroad programmes where there was not such a mechanism in place, students spoke of a vagueness and confusion surrounding their cultural positioning and interactions. A comparison between experiences containing such a mechanism and those without one was common- students recognised a value in the strategy. The execution of this mechanism was discussed by the majority of students who had prior experience expressing higher acceptance and identifying greater benefit. Students without prior experience of an intercultural inventory tended to recognise potential benefit and value though did not necessarily feel they acquired that benefit and referenced execution as the primary cause.

Overall, participants felt such a mechanism was pivotal in developing their intercultural awareness in ways that were not independently possible. A balance between such a mechanism and enough culture exposure to put it in lived, practical context was demonstrated by the majority.

Student voice

Although the dynamic of student interest in response to the invitation to formulate a Student Government each semester varies, students identify democracy within their study abroad experience as a right, often alluding to the extent to which they find it present.

Participants evaluated their program experiences as considerate or inconsiderate of their needs, indicating an appreciation of program responses to individual or group needs via student representation.

Where student voice did not form a practical program component, students expressed feeling of “not being heard or considered as individuals”.

Through the learner lens, participants demonstrated enhanced engagement within the academic context when addressed in a more democratic approach. For example, of the Athens experience, members of the group discussed their ability to suggest cultural activities or academic support and benefit from these suggestions materialising.

Summary of outcomes

Action research Process Outcomes

Participatory action research establishes development over time with greater engagement observed in participants.

Focus groups were more effective when coinciding with program activities that purpose to enrich student understanding of their learning process.

The 3 focus group demonstrated an enhanced ability in participants to link experience directly to their personal development path.

A sense of community was established from the first meeting followed by a developing sense of ownership during the cycle for participants.

Inquiry outcomes

The dominant themes referenced by participants as having a significant impact on their learning experiences are, in order of significance:

Experiential learning experiences

Ownership

Freedom

Time constraints

Cultural immersion

Student voice

Academics

Adapting

Intercultural development

Co-curriculars

Critical reflection sessions

Capitalisations on developed skills: putting them into practice

Culture of dialogic assessment and evaluation

Space and time for autonomy

Edifying dialogue

Addressing readiness to learn

Cultural immersion

Formal intercultural development

According to the participants, the following areas directly enhance learning for study abroad students if part of the program structure:

- Experiential Education strategy
- Student Engagement; Student Voice
- Internship
- Community involvement
- Inbuilt Learning Objectives and Learning Agreement

Experiential Education

So far, I have discussed the findings from my inquiry into student perspectives on learning enhancement.

Among other themes, the impact of Experiential Learning emerges frequently from these responses, depicting the significance of experiential methods and their impact for enhanced learning.

Part 2 presents my findings from a professional project, introducing Experiential Education to the Arcadia Center

Project Findings and Analysis

Experiential Education:

A professional project

Introduction

In this section I aim to ratify how experiential education can impact on learning enhancement using the bespoke accounts and documented experiences of faculty and students in the study abroad program. To do so, I build on the emerging findings from a professional project I was tasked with. The project had a clear objective: to train faculty on experiential education through a series of seminars and in doing so to assess our collective practice through action research. In my capacity as Assistant Director, I designed the study to match curricular developments and requirements of academic adjustments to our semester program as outlined by my supervisors. Experiential Education, I further analyse this impact in terms of implemented strategies by facilitators in the framework of an organisational structure addressing experiential education. The data demonstrates the impact following the introduction of Experiential Education as an official initiative in the study abroad context.

These findings are demonstrated in terms of verbatim accounts, surveys and focus groups. The dialogues created at the initial phase of the professional project *Introducing Experiential Education*, continue at the Arcadia Center officially in the scope of an internal dialogue addressing salience in practice and student needs.

The data was collected, analysed and gathered in similar fashion to the primary research inquiry: the interviews were recorded via dictaphone and I made notes on my observations. During the project timeline, I categorised and codified the data in order to offer presentable data with emerging themes. The consecutive analysis was the basis for me to formulate my interpretations and draw conclusions on the relevance of experiential education in our practice.

This section discusses my activity throughout *Introducing Experiential Education* and demonstrates the findings acquired from students and faculty during the process of inquiry. My work here consisted of 3 areas:

1. Introducing Experiential Education to faculty and documenting their practice, benefits and challenges over the months that followed through their own accounts.
2. Researching student impact and learner responses to experiential education program components.
3. Documenting the numerous classes and learner experiences where experiential components were already being used by faculty and investigating the relationship of students with these experiences through discussions with faculty and students.

Following a centralised directive for global study abroad centers to further integrate experiential learning components into the pedagogical strategy, I was asked to begin the process at the Athens arcadia center through the study abroad program. This project aimed to range from the program as a holistic experience to class syllabi and classroom practice. I designed the Introducing Experiential Learning initiative to take place over a semester at the Athens arcadia center, initially. This project was then further developed to encompass a total of 33 faculty members and 80 students from Arcadia University in Athens, the Erasmus Partnership Network and the Amrita School of Education in Coimbatore, India over a 3-year study. In total 56 interviews took place, faculty were interviewed individually while student interviews typically comprised of numerous interviews.

The role of Experiential Education

To offer further context, Experiential Education is at the front of a number of initiatives at the arcadia center including the Co-curricular Learning Certificate, the Athens Internship Programme, the Language Partnership. These 3 areas, though separate to the Introducing Experiential Education project, belong in my remit at the university and offer valuable information on our practice as pockets of information. They form formal Experiential Educations also leads my process of inquiry into the areas in terms of this research project and the arcadia center operations.

The study

The *Introducing Experiential Education* initiative informed this section of action research in response to an organisational need through my appointed role as Assistant Director, Experiential Education and faculty trainer for the project at the Athens Arcadia Center.

Experiential Education is an area given great focus by Arcadia University, it is present in curricular as well as cocurricular offerings and shapes the university mission for study abroad:

The College of Global Studies defines Experiential Education as purposeful learning opportunities that incorporate substantive engagement in/with the host community, beyond the traditional classroom. We use experiential education to describe both curricular and co-curricular options for students (Arcadia University, Engage with Culture, 2005).

Following the formation of the Experiential Education Assistant Dean's office at Arcadia University, strategic implementation of this mission at all global locations began with Athens.

In terms of the co-curricular components, I am responsible for the delivery of the Co-curricular Learning Certificate program for students; a project designed and selected by students culminating in a paper and certificate for successful candidates. The CLC is accreditation by form of a certificate for students documenting their independent research and experience on a topic of their choice outside the classroom during their study abroad semester. This initiative aims to allow students to formally capitalise on their interests, experiences and pursuits that take place, often entirely autonomously, outside the classroom.

In terms of academic curricular, my role has been two-fold with my responsibility as instructor to students via the *Thought in Work and Action* internship class and seminars and instructor to faculty for *Introducing Experiential Education*.

The aims for the latter included:

- Creating an understanding of Experiential Education and its significance in the study abroad context
- Providing for further development of EE components in classes offered
- Offering recognition of the many instances and examples of EE
- Support for instructors in terms of further development and good practice
- Documenting and evaluation of current EE practice on site

The interaction of professionals and faculty within *Introducing Experiential Education* has created a new dialogical dynamic and exchange of practice with a direct impact to the administration of the program. This dialogue consists of information exchanges and a culture of openness in terms of curricular activity has infiltrated the practical operation of the program following new collaborations between staff and faculty.

For the relationship between learner and facilitator this demonstrated an active engagement on the part of the learner as a by-product of the fine-tuned active engagement from the facilitator. Faculty accounts demonstrated this bridging of the common engagement gap during class discussions:

Class discussion seems richer, student contributions more carefully thought out.

A mutual dynamic leads conversation- a relationship of exchange has been created.

Could it be that I have infiltrated that barrier of "I won't speak up in case I make a mistake", "this does not apply to me"?

Experience is personal, when I as facilitator share experience or invite the learner to share their understanding there is an equal exchange.

While leading this project, an extensive study of the arcadia center, literature, and my position informed knowledge steered my path.

The 3-year study sample consisted of 33 faculty members and 80 students from Arcadia University in Athens, the Erasmus Partnership Network and the Amrita School of Education in Coimbatore, India **(56 interviews I total)**. Each of these groups studied or taught under the auspices of a formalised study abroad program in the initial research phase.

The premise underpinning the study tied into the long-term goals aimed for by study abroad institutions and educators as impact agents:

If nothing has changed by studying abroad, little has been achieved.

This premised informed the research questions:

- What has endured for students past their study abroad experience?
- What role do instructors play in this?
- Is our educative influence (McNiff, 1984) measurable?

The new role of the educator

The past decade has shown an increased interest in experiential education theory across organisations and learning institutions. ELT is estimated to be used across 30 disciplines for university level education (Kolb, 2013) and is categorised into the following components (Kolb, 2014):

- Service Learning
- Problem based learning
- Action Learning
- Adventure Education
- Simulation and Gaming

These categories form the possible implementation of experiential education. In my research, I uncovered another category in an effort to encompass the experiential facet of classes taught on site. These categories are considered, here, in terms of the range of subjects offered at the arcadia center¹³.

This category arose from experiential components in the disciplines of architecture, art, engineering and classics:

- Onsite study

Onsite study could, for example, take the form of an appreciation of the Parthenon as an example of Peripteral Octastyle architecture present only in Ancient Greece and now visible in the few standing remnants and archaeological sites of the Ancient Greek Era.

This distinct contribution to knowledge indicates the significance of the valuable interaction with place, space or object for the learner within the context of learning enhancement and experiential education.

Faculty responses

Reflecting on the time-period when these interviews were carried out, I was able to document a chain of reaction. Interestingly, the primary phases into inquiry interviewing faculty, for example, instigated a shift in practice. It created a chain of events, ultimately developing an experiential education culture. Addressing the subject of experiential education with faculty brought the topic into the collective consciousness and began to shape a collective purpose culminating in awareness and dialogue.

It was during these initial discussions that a need for an *onsite study* category became apparent.

The initial response to these discussion interviews was polarised with reactions to the theory as well as contextualising discussions ranging from reactive and closed:

As professors, we offer much more than a traditional classroom experience, we do all of this.

To consciously informed:

I had not realized the significance of what we do in between the classroom and setting assignments

Apprehensive of administrative responsibilities ELT may create:

¹³The subjects taught at the arcadia center include history, classics, conservation, modern languages, politics, economics, psychology, education architecture, archaeology, art.

I spend a lot of my personal time preparing for these classes. My role is to teach, not to reorganise and take on administrative responsibility past the agreed teaching hours and this includes a limit to my intervention.

Viewing an opportunity for growth:

It [ELT discussions and interviews] has shown me a fresh direction for making each lesson, or at least the syllabus, more actively experiential.

Through the faculty responses, I was presented with a different dimension of Experiential Education and the arcadia center context. These representative responses demonstrated 2 unexpected key points to me:

1. Introducing Experiential Education had the potential to evolve into a permanent developmental tool
 - My discussion interviews needed to be adjusted to refrain from a training perspective and develop into informing dialogue between myself and the faculty, and between faculty members. It has not been my intention to train faculty past the introduction of Experiential Education but my technique seemed to be sending this message and conflicting with my aim to document some of the experiential education techniques I knew were already being implemented by faculty.
2. To address this second point, following the official presentation by myself to a faculty group on Experiential Learning, focus meetings took the place of individual meetings creating the opportunity for a communal exchange of practice. This removed a perceived 'teaching' capacity from the initiative and invited active input into the collective introduction of Experiential Education.

The dynamic matching model, Kolb 2008

An interest to share dialogue and gain exposure to the techniques used by colleagues was a common response with 83% of faculty members expressing an interest.

Teaching Roles	Instructional Techniques	Learning Style
Facilitator	Journals, Group, Discussion, Brain Storming, Perspective Taking, Personal Examples	Experiencing, Imagining, Reflecting
Expert	Lectures, Readings, Written Assignments, Model Critiques	Reflecting, Analysing, Thinking
Evaluator	Laboratories, Case Studies, Simulations, Graded Homework	Thinking, Deciding, Acting
Coach	Field work, Site Visits, Applied Projects, Practicum Experiences	Acting, Initiating, experiencing

Table 25: The dynamic matching model (adapted from Kolb, 2008)

This highlighted the need for collaboration and more importantly a dialogue among faculty for action research in constructing a culture of shared knowledge in synchronisation with values shaped in their interactions with students. When interviews later took the form of focus groups, this dialogue evolved with little direction.

The meetings often included a practical consideration of Kolb's Dynamic Matching Model (Kolb, 2008) with the movement of instructors between roles often recognised collectively as a sense of achievement in embracing our rounded roles as experiential educators.

This dual responsibility of facilitating knowledge exchange as well as being a researcher in my professional role echoed faculty responses as avid contributors and explorers of experiential education.

The student role, moving towards a democratic pedagogy

Recent decades have shifted students into a new position with emphasis on their relationship with learning as active participants and not passive listeners. This position is further evolving to unleash the potential of student interaction with learning under the facilitation of instructors rather than their directed intervention.

This interesting concept of democratic pedagogy validated my understanding and drive to explore how student bodies can be better represented as live learning organisms and how I, as an educator, can use my role to facilitate interactions to support this.

If, as Giroux and McLaren point out, “empowerment is gained from knowledge and social relations that dignify one’s own history, language, and cultural traditions”(Giroux and McLaren in MacMath, 2008, p.229) and we have established the need for students to become empowered and autonomous learners, then the skills that contribute to this enriching knowledge must become a priority.

Moving past traditional themes of the university lecture hall to interactive classroom meetings where knowledge is constructed by both the instructor and learner, pedagogical methods begin from the meeting for example Involving students in classroom decision-making (Levin, cited in MacMath, 2008). More specifically, decisions can be made regarding which topics to study for an independent project (Hahn, Sorensen cited in MacMath, 2008) whether to work in groups, pairs, or independently (Poduska, 1996 cited in MacMath, 2008) and ranging across the institutional spectrum to components of program design such as internships. Co-curricular enrichment and student governments.

However, “students...do not always come to us ready to think critically, reflect on issues, make decisions, solve problems cooperatively, and feel a sense of ownership, educators must demonstrate and teach these activities to students (Sorensen in Macmath, 2008, p.231). This becomes apparent in the administering of autonomous projects for example when minimal direction is perceived by students as inaccurate, lacking.

During a simple orientation, cultural exercise, for example, students at the arcadia center are given a Greek proverb and invited to discuss what this quote might teach us about Greece. Apart from breaking the ice, this semesterly exercise aims to introduce Greece to students through popular culture, offer insight and invite them to respond

Joanna Simos - *Developing a conceptual learning enhancement framework for study abroad programs; the role of action research in the participation of students* with a personal view point and ultimately allowing them to begin their journey of making sense of their new location, Greece in reflection.

The first few minutes of the exercise are followed with numerous questions:

- *How long will we present for?*
- *What type of things should we think about?*
- *Should we make a comparison with the U.S., (home)?*
- *What would you like us to include?*

While each of these usual questions offers valuable insight in to the perception of students of the exercise, us as instructors, themselves as participants, they also demonstrate a barrier in terms of expression- understandable in the context due to the variables of a group meeting for the first time in a new country. A set of guiding questions is then distributed to facilitate these reflections having allowed the students to dwell in their thoughts of *how* to answer their assigned exercise. The discussion that follows is still contained, but now, there is more of a dialogue. This has been prefaced by the previous questions and disambiguation bringing in to focus the *what*, the information on each piece of paper, for example:

ἄνθρωποςμέτρον

Anthrōpos métron

Man, is the measure of all things

The initial degree of freedom is crucial to this exercise in beginning the process of how reality is to be constructed and how learners shape their path in validating their position in relation to it. The student questions, responses and dialogues critically inform the process for myself- the first time the exercise was administered, for example, my aim was for students to become accustomed to Greek proverbs as possible descriptors of their host society. The responses that did not follow the brief instructions and vocally expressed the state of uncertainty informed me of the value of that critical dialogue to the exercise and developed the facilitation of the exercise into a more democratic pedagogy in terms of the learner constructing knowledge by acknowledging their own position within the context.

Educative Influence: What endures?

The *Introducing Experiential Education* initiative resulted in findings for our learning institution in relation to instructors as well as students through action research and the adjustment of the process of inquiry based on the outcomes mentioned above.

Instructor Impact

In documenting the journey of educators as they became familiar with experiential education strategies, implemented them and further developed existing practice, I was able to ascertain the impact of the initiative on participating faculty. Over the 2 introductory semesters, faculty reflections indicated various challenges related to their evolving roles as experiential educators and outlined a sense of motivation in students.

- *Students hesitant to begin with but engaged to a greater level during the semester*
- *A more vocally active student group in the classroom often results in unexpected outcomes; the educator role becomes proactive*
- *Refreshing to have the same materials responded to in such different ways, my interest in the subject as an instructor has been refreshed*
- *Matching literature to classroom discussions used to be more challenging- simulation exercises and student lead dialogues seem to keep students more alert and aware of their ownership during class*

2 years later, these faculty members shared with me their reflections guided by my inquiry into if there had been evidence of a long lasting impact:

- *In modern languages ,there is always a level of disparity between students and instructor assignments- with simulation exercises in the form of role plays, opportunities to practice outside the classroom for example ordering in a café, purchasing the ingredients for a recipe ground is covered in terms of vocabulary at a faster pace and recollection of this vocabulary is increased in comparison to semesters with a weaker experiential presence.*

I use the terms onsite, experiential, more to show students that they are experiencing exactly what we have covered in the classroom.. For example,

- *I think this has created more of a link between site visits. Previously they may have viewed a visit to the acropolis as a fun outing more than an opportunity to explore the Doric order as modern day archaeologists!*
- *With an emphasis on experiential components it can be difficult to reign in the cohort for traditional study. For example after role play and creative writing exercises the group dynamic to studying narrative in Ancient Greek lost momentum. The experiential part seemed to disrupt. Could this mean that there needs to be a balance of components for each class to create a more equally shared class structure while keeping student interest?*

The project and professional observations

In this section, I have analysed the findings that emerge from the introduction of Experiential education at the arcadia center, student and faculty responses to suggested practice and my professional observations as change agent toward a culture of Experiential Education.

The project impact presents significant findings related to the introduction of an experiential education strategy:

- Ongoing dialogue on practice, in this case Exp. Ed., has a positive impact on the organisation collectively in terms of fostering a collaborative culture among faculty.
- Gradual enrichment of learner- facilitator engagement is observed by learners and facilitators.
- On-site learning emerges as a dynamic new category within experiential education and points to high engagement with academic areas.
- Experiential strategies had a significant impact on Language classes in improving engagement.

My professional observations regarding learning enhancement follow and serve to offer contextual insight into the learner experience at the arcadia center.

Project Findings and Analysis

Professional Observations

A tension to the balance of theory and practice

Student Impact

During midsemester evaluation meetings at the arcadia center, students are invited to reflect on their experience and often give feedback regarding their courses and program. This hourlong workshop is often later referred to by students as transformational during our final reflective meeting with them at the end of the semester. The structured setting in a reflective capacity seems to instigate a proactive handling of their remaining time abroad- the midterm meeting serves as a reminder to students that there is limited precious time ahead. Recorded over 3 years, the main challenges raised by students during midterm evaluations span from contextual, cultural, environmental and social to psychological. The table below demonstrates the primary categories for 184 students Fall of 2009- Spring of 2012¹⁴ .

Categories	Ranking	Examples
Contextual	2 nd 50 respondents 27%	Too much free time and feel bored, no drive I do not know what to do apart from go to class
Environmental	4 th 23 respondents 13 %	Athens is very urban, I am used to open Green spaces The heat is almost unbearable
Social	5 th 12 respondents 7%	Greek women are difficult to approach A small program means less contact with like minded people
Psychological and physiological	1 st 67 respondents 36%	I feel homesick Feel afraid to travel in case I get lost Difficulty waking up in the morning Do not feel motivated to do anything Overwhelmed Lonely
Cultural	3 rd 32 respondents 17%	Personal space Quiet times are a little restrictive

¹⁴The study lasted 3 years. Each meeting began with guided questions regarding positives and challenges faced. In reflection, students were invited to rank the outlined categories in terms of significance. An example of the questions can be viewed in the appendix.

		Locals can seem intrusive with questions and attention from men LGBT is taboo and I feel singled out
--	--	---

Table 26: Student challenges

The outcome in the table above show us that the 2 primary challenge areas for students are Psychological/ Physiological and Contextual. Both of these respondent groups referred to evidence of difficulties linked to motivation or a lack there of.

In my experience, students who face these challenges also face a disconnect in terms of knowledge and action.

Critical Incident Case Study: Kevin

A recurring example:

It is week 3 and Kevin¹⁵ has repeatedly asked for resources (Spring, 2012) , information and assistance on how to shop for food in Athens and how to come into contact with Greek students. Kevin has received an abundance of advice and information addressing both of these issues yet he does not use that information to move forward. During the preceding orientation week, Kevin quietly observed all meetings including the how to shop session at the supermarket when other students had prepared their shopping lists and were using accompanying staff to help them find their groceries.

Kevin is invited to follow the center cooking classes and Greek language teachers incorporate shopping for food into the classes of that week. Kevin remains unresponsive.

How can we bridge this diconnect? How can we help Kevin and every student of the many in his position?

Kevin represents one general student group of two. The second group interact differently within the program context and display a greater vocality in comparison.

During the mid term meetings (Spring, 2012), I observed a category of students emerging with a differing perspective to that of the findings above. Following another such meeting, I invited the 15 students to share their

¹⁵Actual name changed

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thoughts with me. Responses ranged from frustration with peers for their allegedly ungrounded complaints to empathic suggestions that peers were not engaging enough with their surroundings. I documented some of these thoughts over the next series of midterm meetings (Spring, 2012) with a sample outlined below:

- *Honestly, if I didn't plan my time to include all the things I want to do here, I would probably be bored out of my mind. I can't imagine letting the days go by without at least trying to infiltrate authentic Greece. Otherwise, you are here as a tourist and of course you run out of steam.*
- *My greatest goal while in Greece was to join the internship and experience working in a new environment- I don't know what the experience would be like if I didn't have that routine and contact with my colleagues.*
- *If you're bored, go out and do something. If you have enough free time, go to cafes, parks, make friends! Greeks are so welcoming. I have made it my daily plan to stop off at the bakery in Platia Varnava and then I go to Solonos street.*
- *By volunteering at the Horse Riding Center I have felt more at home since I am continuing my passion.*
- *I couldn't waste so much time by doing nothing! I don't know when I will be Greece again!*
- *There so many things on offer- Greek dancing, cooking classes, social events. And that is only what you can do in school.*

These testimonials hold some truth. There is a direct correlation of student motivation to the level of engagement within the local context.

Considering the midterm meeting groups, 83%¹⁶ of students experiencing and voicing the challenges demonstrated above were not participating in an engagement activity at the time. In addition to this, a small percentage of students participating in an engagement activity experienced the mentioned challenges- just under 3%. Within this 3%, students correlated the difficulties to the beginning of the semester and attributed them to culture shock, a need to acclimatise to the new surroundings and a period elapsing until they were aware of resources on offer. This engagement can take the form of participation in arcadia center events, volunteering, internships, language partnership participation, consistent social interactions through joining a gym, hiking group and the pursuit of personal interest; photography for example and was often explored under the auspices of the Co-curricular Learning Certificate. My consideration of the CLC as motivation for engagement was inconclusive with numerous

¹⁶During midterm meetings students were asked to record their activities.

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students pursuing an interest and maintaining the activity throughout the semester without completing a CLC paper.

This claim is further supported by my observations teaching two separate seminar classes over 2 semesters:

- The Greek Key class; a theoretical contextualising class for Greece taught within a classroom setting with minimal assignments.
- The Internship seminar¹⁷; an experiential weekly workshop alongside student internships blending business, culture and research with a heavy workload culminating in a capstone research project.

Students were observed to respond proactively to the activities of the internship class and maintained momentum in terms of involvement throughout the semester. Points where students lost motivation were evident sparsely and linked to the effects of onsite internship events. Here, students were more likely to question difficulty, discuss with colleagues.

During the semester, there were evident lapses for the Greek Key in terms of student motivation. Here, a greater sense of abandon was observed with assignments not being submitted and minimal participation.

What has endured?

In order to assess the experiential education impact for students past their time in Greece, I continued the dialogue with some of the 80 students once they had returned to their home countries via interviews:

- 53% of students state they still use skills accumulated such as navigation skills, observation skills, understanding different perspectives, intercultural communication, Language skills, Research skills, specialised skills
- 35% demonstrated retention of academic knowledge transferable to home classes/ as academic grounding/ as a basis for personal development
- 63% believe they have mastered subject area(s) while in Athens and can support this statement through measurable achievements
- 68% refer to the relationship between student and instructor as significant in the learning context

¹⁷Critical observations from the Internship class are discussed further in this chapter.

Linking student practice to student learning

The correlating relationship between student involvement in co-curricular activities and overall performance demonstrates the potential impact of the first on the latter and the link with learning enhancement emerges. In this section, my professional observations and analysis rely on student self-evaluation, overall performance grades and participation in co-curricular mechanisms and activities.

As per the mission statement for the Arcadia Center, each experience academic or not, has something to be learned. In order to frame the learning outcomes from study abroad into identifiable components, I use the skills and qualities outlined in the study by Trooboff et al (2008) through the investigation of employer attitudes towards study abroad. The listed qualities are enhanced by study abroad, according to the study (Trooboff et al, 2008, p.27):

- Listens and observes well
- Flexible, adapts well
- Curious, wants to discover more
- Non-judgmental toward other world views
- Willing to take risks to learn new things
- Recognises own world view is not universal
- Works well under pressure
- Analyses, evaluates, interprets well
- Works effectively outside comfort zone
- Communicates effectively in intercultural situations
- Understands global trends; economic, political, social
- Well informed regarding world events/ history
- Effective socialising
- Knowledgeable regarding other histories and cultures

This list is further enriched by the *Skills Gained from Study Abroad* package as developed by Nafsa used to create what is often named the International I.Q (2013):

- Broad and strategic thinking
- Intercultural competencies
- Diversity awareness
- Respect for protocol and hierarchy
- Leadership skills
- General travel and navigation skills
- Ability to set and achieve goals

The listed skills and qualities comprise a set of learning indicators which I use in the Correlating Practice and Learning matrix further down.

During the final week of study in Greece, I hold a workshop for semester students inviting them to document their learning and direct it into a transferable list. The final product of this meeting is an updated resume or CV containing their full accumulated skills and qualities to be used as an archive for future development. During this meeting, students evaluate their learning development through ratings of possible learning outcomes. The list used here to frame learning evaluation is identical to the list students used to assess their own learning during the workshop. Students are given the list and are asked to work through each section rating their development from 1 to 10 with 10 being the highest rating. Where ratings exceed 5, examples of the corresponding achievement are required.

The diagram below charts the student self-ratings for 10 students who agreed to participate in the research and gave permission¹⁸ for their data to be used. The students are represented by letters in order to maintain their anonymity.

Student Ratings categories	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	Average rating
Listens and observes well	8	9	6	7	8	8	9	8	8	8	7.9
Flexible, adapts well	4	7	9	5	6	6	5	9	9	6	6.6
Curious, wants to discover more	5	9	9	5	5	8	6	9	7	8	7.1
Non-judgmental toward other world views	8	9	8	8	9	6	6	5	6	5	7
Willing to take risks to learn new things	6	8	9	9	8	5	6	6	6	6	6.9
Recognises own world view is not universal	9	7	8	8	7	6	4	6	7	8	7
Works well under pressure	7	8	9	7	9	5	7	6	6	5	6.7
Analyses, evaluates, interprets well	8	9	7	7	9	6	4	6	6	7	6.9
Works effectively outside comfort zone	8	9	9	7	8	6	5	4	6	8	7
Communicates effectively in intercultural situations	9	8	9	9	8	7	6	4	4	6	7
Understands global trends; economic, political, social	7	7	7	7	7	5	6	5	7	6	6.4
Well informed regarding world events/ history	8	8	6	7	7	5	6	6	4	6	6.3
Effective socialising	8	6	8	7	8	6	7	4	5	6	6.5
Knowledgeable regarding other histories and cultures	8	8	9	9	8	6	6	6	8	7	8.9
Broad and strategic thinking	8	8	9	7	7	6	8	9	8	5	7.5
Intercultural competencies	8	8	9	8	9	6	7	7	6	8	7.6
Diversity awareness	8	9	9	9	9	7	7	9	5	7	7.9
Respect for protocol and hierarchy	8	7	8	7	9	7	6	6	7	6	7.1
Leadership skills	8	7	8	8	9	5	6	5	9	6	7.1
General travel and navigation skills	8	8	8	8	9	5	7	7	6	6	7.2
Ability to set and achieve goals	8	8	9	9	6	8	7	6	8	7	7.6

Table 5.4: Student self ratings

The ratings demonstrated in the table above show that students A-E rate themselves higher than student F-J in total.

¹⁸Permission sample can be viewed in the appendix.

In an effort to explore the relationship between co-curricular involvement and learning as expressed through this self-assessment, I introduce the list of co-curricular opportunities offered at the arcadia center below:

- The Co-curricular Learning Certificate
- Volunteering
- 3 Semesterly cultural activities

Two more dimensions are included in the matrix as they are considered to have an impact on student performance¹⁹:

Internship

Completion of the Intercultural Development Index

For the sake of clarity, the Internship, CLC and Volunteering experience are listed as Structured Contextual Engagement due to their positioning of the student within the local context. In order to compare the findings in the above self-ratings with participant involvement outside of the classroom, the matrix below displays student involvement within the program with an average grade per student based on their semester transcript grades for comparison. This final column serves to demonstrate measured overall performance in order to introduce an average data set, unbiased by the student. This column further depicts the link between co-curricular involvement and learning and, ultimately, whether these mechanisms enhance learning.

Student & practice	Structured Contextual Engagement	Completion of IDI	Participation in cultural activities of 3	Average overall grade* ²⁰
A	Internship, CLC	yes	3	B+
B	Volunteering	yes	3	A-
C	Internship	yes	2	B+
D	CLC, Volunteering	no	3	A-
E	CLC	yes	3	A-
F	-	no	0	B-
G	-	no	1	B+
H	CLC	no	2	A-
I	-	yes	2	B-
J	CLC	no	0	B-

Table 28: Student activity

¹⁹The Internship class and IDI are discussed further in this chapter.

²⁰This average grade is calculated in terms of a percentage for each class and then transferred once again to the grading system.

In analysing the data recorded in the matrix above, there is a clear identifiable difference between the cluster of students active in the co-curricular offerings, internship and IDI compared to the second half of student who display a lower level of activity. The evidence suggests that the students displaying a higher level of activity in these areas performed to a higher level as reflected in their average grades.

The chart below demonstrates this correlation.

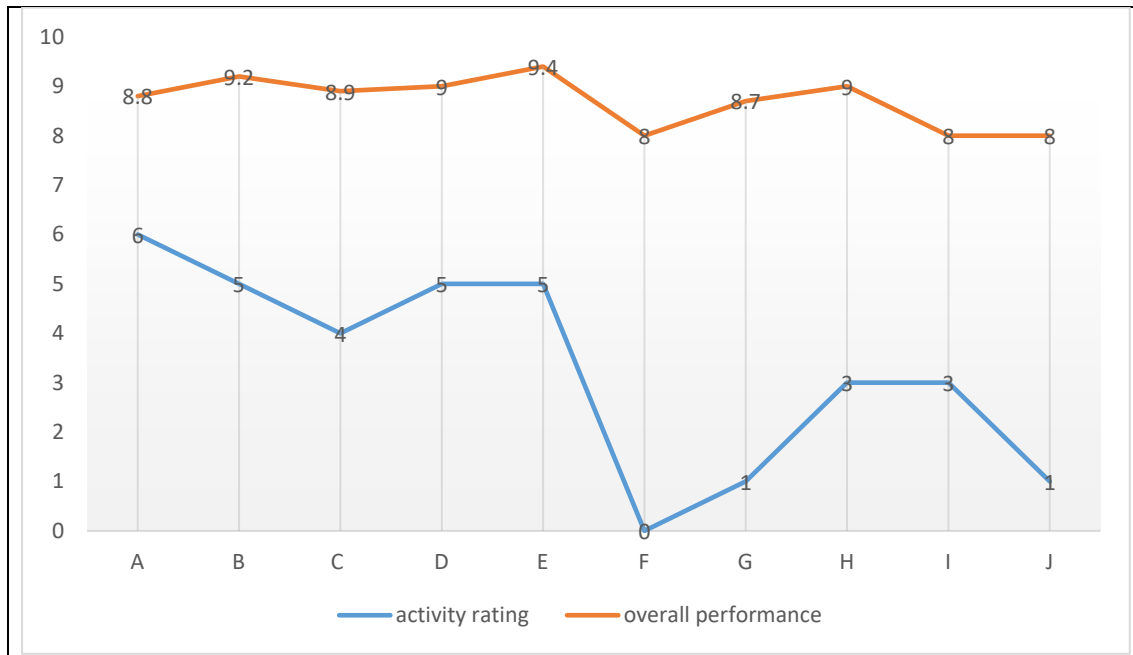


Chart 1: Correlation of student activity to overall performance

The horizontal axis is labelled by student and the vertical axis shows the 2 series of series 1, activity rating and, series 2, overall performance.

The activity rating has been calculated by adding a numerical unit of 1 to each activity in the participation table in order for us to visualise the correlation of learning performance and involvement. The grades have been transposed into their original percentage form.

The graph clearly indicates that students with a higher level of involvement achieve an overall higher grade.

This graph suggests that student involvement at a rating of 5 or higher is accompanied by A B+ and above.

Considering the numerical correlation significance it is important to consider a statistical analysis of Pearson's R Coefficient (Nicolic et al, 2012). A calculation of the R coefficient of correlation gives the value of R as 0.726.

This is a moderately positive correlation (Socistatistics, 2018) indicating that high values for activity performance are correlated to overall performance and the other way around²¹.

Critical Incidents

Internships; Student Development and engagement

Context

At the Arcadia Center, I lecture in classes related to Education Psychology and Intercultural studies. The Internship seminar accompanies a weekly internship and takes the form of a weekly workshop introducing theories of workplace culture, facilitating reflexive practice and research design. More specifically, I investigate the learner need for direct engagement and understanding of the important internship interaction in terms of the local, economic, cultural and ultimately personal context to my assertion to have initiated a stronger engagement and richer learning experience for internship students. I establish how this movement can be developed from an experiential level to an enduring educational level and finally in the long term professional progression.

The submission of weekly reflections is mandatory and these reflections are valuable in demonstrating and documenting the experience from the students perspective.

During 2011 and 2014, students taking the Internship were invited to submit their reflections for this research project. For those willing to do so, I created a permission document²² in order to accumulate the formal informed consent of participants. Once students were made aware of the research goals to develop learning and demonstrate how the learners can be further supported through learning enhancement, contributions from the participants were forthcoming²³.

Here, I use these reflections as valuable narrative demonstrating and documenting the learning and learner response to the internship class and experience. Following an analysis of findings based on student reflections from the internship class, the relevance of these findings to enhanced learning will be discussed.

²¹ Socistatistics Online calculator used for calculation of R value and explanation of correlation.

²²The permission slip can be viewed in the appendix

²³Student willingness to contribute to research has been observed to be active as a result of a willingness to support the learning of others. This is further discussed in the concluding chapter of this project.

In this section, once again, students are viewed as participants in this research offering insight into their responses to learning during the study abroad experience.

Internship final reflections; learner insight

During their final internship class reflection, students are encouraged to focus on their achievements and transferable skills. During these reflections, students contextualise their overall educative experience in terms of learning environment, Greece experience and their learning activity.

In analysing these reflections, a recurring series of class components are highlighted by students as having contributed to their overall learning and performance.

The identified components are discussed in the sections below.

Onsite experience

Primarily, learners argue that the internship offers them subject development and expertise. The value of experience is also raised by students in terms of an opportunity to infiltrate Greece socially and culturally due to their professional interaction on the job.

A student interning at an Athens Law firm tells us of their learning onsite,

Each day was productive. After being trained through shadowing, I completed tasks such as writing executive summaries on the week's court decisions. This process was followed for other tasks such as creating policy templates to be used by the solicitor's office. I was able to see these documents used- documents that I did not even know how to create 1 month ago.

Having spent the semester interning at a publishing company, another learner tells us,

Every day I became more familiar with the business department employees. I spent Greek Easter day with a colleague and then played football with his sons. This was my first authentic experience here, observing the Easter church ceremony and how families celebrate the Resurrection.

Interning at a local charity hospice, this student identified the links between language learning through the Arcadia program, his internship, and communications skills,

Whether it was being able to ask a registrant if they were married because we were doing family vocabulary in Greek class that week or I picked up enough vocabulary to know when someone was asking for spoons in the soup kitchen, I made solid steps to communicating in Greek. This also helped my other communication skills. I gained confidence to speak to registrants from francophone Africa using my basic French. I found myself using the same gestures and mannerisms as when trying to speak Greek and used them to communicate when my words failed.

Relating her business internship to the cultural context, the following student shares,

Through this internship I was able to become more immersed into Greek culture and life. By talking to my co-workers I found out things about their views and opinions on politics. They seemed hopeful that the Syriza government might change things and help with austerity measures. Coming from a conservative organisation this made me wonder about Greeks and how they have been affected by the crisis.

Interning at a polyclinic for vulnerable social groups, the following student relates his experience to the broader study abroad experience:

This internship allowed me to explore public health in Greece as well as the societal and economic forces that factor into a community's health. Everything from the economic crisis to current legislative practices regarding refugees became apparent at the polyclinic. For example, I observed that patients would come in for anti-depressants, in order to treat post traumatic stress disorder caused by experiences in illegal immigrant detention centers.

Weekly reflection journal

Learners identify these reflections as significant in documenting learning experiences as well as planning and organising development. According to their testimonials, students view these reflections as opportunities to contextualise subject matter and experience within the broader learning experience.

Interning at one of the leading Greek newspapers, this student tells us of the weekly reflections:

Following on from the introduction to reflection, I tried to develop a personalised framework within which I could conduct insightful, thought provoking and productive weekly reflections. I found that this not only helped me process my internship experience but also helped me set specific goals, while noting individual skills I had and then further developed within the paper environment.

Another student interning at an Athens magazine describes her development through the weekly reflections,

I found that the act of weekly reflections helped me to recognise my ongoing evolution within the internship atmosphere and facilitated a kind of cementing of the smaller details and skills into my memory and following actions. My previous internship at home was similar but it seems like I have kept more from the experience here.

Building on reflexive activity, an intern at a hospital in Athens explains,

At the beginning, this internship meant helping people in need, not helping myself. However, as the class progressed, I came to the realisation that a work based learning experience is a two way street. Beyond adding a new skill set, I have learned to look deeper into those skills. I can reflect upon a day of work. It may seem to others to be an average hospital day, full of repetitive tasks; however, it is a multifaceted job- with intent and understandings far beneath the surface. Understanding and acting on what makes the younger patients calm when it is time for a blood withdrawal for example; it is not a case of me inserting the needle with care but communicating in a way that makes them comfortable.

Peer assessment and review

The class was designed to facilitate a forum style of interaction between students fostering dialogue and support through peer review and assessment components. Students referred to these activities as valuable – primarily due to the activity of interaction and the benefit of feedback.

A student shares her experience of a forum feedback sessions among interns,

My project took on a new life as soon as I arranged and systematised my writing to make it clearer, more reader friendly based on the recommendations. My project became alive when I heard my colleagues telling me their feedback and responses to my findings. They supported my motivation to contribute at the clinic with my project.

The following student identified further benefits from peer review:

I found inspiration amongst my peers and was able to see my project from different perspectives. It was fascinating to hear how other projects were being developed. The emphasis on Ethical issues from a colleague opened up an area of research weakness that I wasn't aware of and the ways through which the group handled ethics helped me understand how to practically consider ethics while at the organisation as a researcher.

I left the peer review class with fresh ideas and excited to be moving forward supported by the class.

The sample²⁴ of reflections used for these observations contained varied responses to the learning experience with a majority of students attributing their enhanced learning to class components.

The chart below demonstrates the breakdown of student reflections within this sample and their views related to the experience and learning. In order to visualise this breakdown in terms of volume, I identified the 4 emerging categories of learner response within the reflection and transposed the presence of each category of the total sample into a percentage.

These 4 categories are demonstrated below.

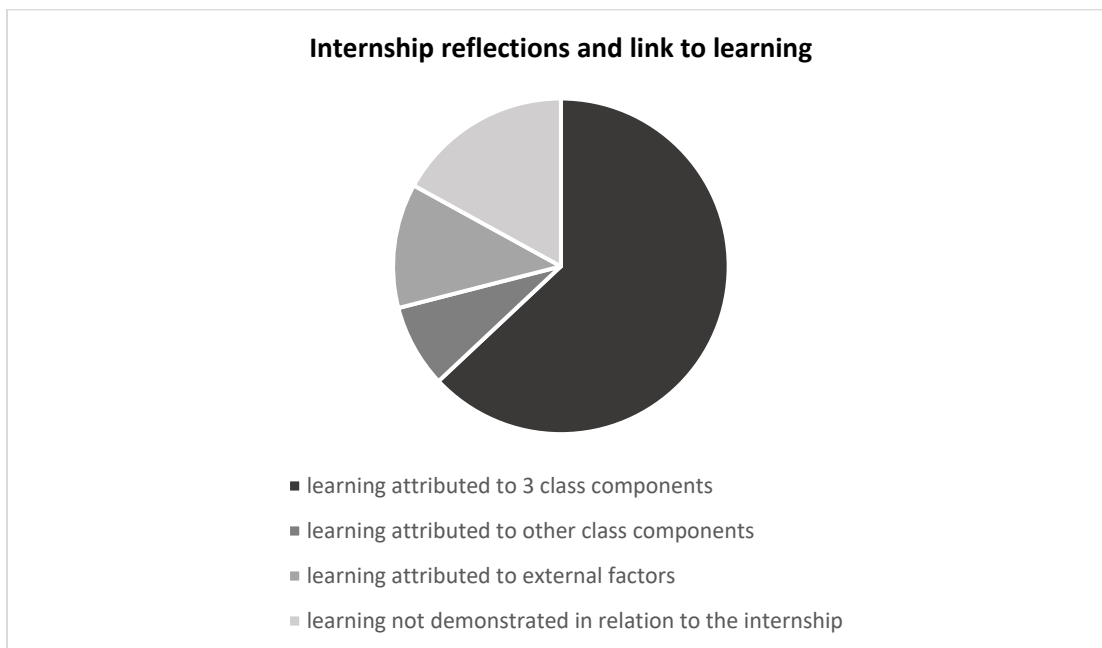


Figure 27: Correlating learning to experience

The chart shows that after the number of students demonstrating a link between the internship class, experience and overall learning, the second highest volume of student reflections do not contain a demonstrable link between learning and the internship experience.

Motivation in reflection

In a recent study (2006), Entwistle, McCune and Scheja correlate learner approaches to motivation.

According to the study, learner approaches are match with student motivation as per the table below.

²⁴Sample of reflections made by 24 students taking the Internship class from Fall 2010 to Spring 2015, written permission received for each.

Correlating approaches and student motivation diagram
Deep approach- intrinsic motivation
Strategic approach- extrinsic motivation
Surface approach- fear of failure

Table 29: Student motivation (adapted from Entwistle et al, 2006)

If we take the levels of reflection to express student motivation in the interaction of learner with experience, the link between motivation and learning reemerges.

Although this absence of demonstrable reflexivity could be attributed to writing skills and other differentiating factors to do with the student rather than the learning interaction, it is worth investigating this group of learners further to further understand the role of reflexivity within the internship class. The emerging questions, here, have to do with the potential correlation between demonstrable student reflexivity and performance.

Motivation, reflexivity and performance in the semester internship

It is evident through studying the reflections of 6 internship students during a semester²⁵ that the levels of reflective, reflexive narratives in contrast to descriptive responses vary. In an attempt to see if these reflections indicate a link between reflective practice and performance, I have categorised the narratives into reflexive and described – the two are clearly distinguishable within reflective practice and demonstrate the depth through which a student frames their experience and learning.

Reflection categories

Categorising these reflections uncovered an emerging spectrum on which each student is located based on their ability to articulate, contextualise and demonstrate learning. This spectrum of narrative ranging from descriptive to reflective also represents the location of the student in terms of their passive or active role as a learner identifiable the way the student recounts or accounts for actions with language playing an important distinguishing role.

Description → Reflection

²⁵Spring Semester 2012, permission given by students to use reflections for research.

Passive → Active

Using this visual spectrum, I discuss reflection excerpts below.

Reflection versus description

In the case of Lauren²⁶, the initial weekly narratives submitted took the shape of description, recording her weekly internship experience and , occasionally, her emotional response to these. For example, Lauren's submission in week 3 reads:

Once again, I spent my day at the clinic sorting through drugs in the pharmacy and speaking English when this was needed with patients. I guess I will just tell myself that I am helping a great organisation. I am sure that one day, when I am a nurse I will look back at this experience.

During these first weeks, Lauren's classroom participation was minimal with reflections continuing in the same motif. In the uncertainty of the cause, I arranged individual tutorials for students focusing on development within the internship- framed within reflective technique and personal development.

Following this session on how to be come more active a learner and practitioner, Lauren seemed to develop her work- academic and onsite.

The frustrations of inactivity within the workplace gave way to goals and plans to reach them.

Lauren tells us in week 7,

I finally asked the resident doctor if I could sit in on the emergency ward today and ended up spending half of the day there. They showed me how to prepare patients for blood withdrawal and asked me to spend some time with a young child who was upset and didn't want to be examined. I played with her a little and taught her to say hello. In no time she was ready. The doctor said I am a natural. I feel relieved that I am learning more about the clinic and useful to the doctors. Next week I will remind the doctors that I am trained in first aid and could be helpful if needed.

This period of development also featured a rise in Lauren's academic work from a C to a B+.

²⁶Name changed to maintain student anonymity.

Lauren represents a large portion of students who move through the spectrum indicating progress and motivation as they gain reflexive practice.

Motivation in reflection

The findings suggest that an active, reflective positioning of the learner indicate a higher degree of autonomy as intern and contribute to higher performance. Where there is a presence of reflection as opposed to description, higher motivation is observed in the narrative. Returning to the theory of approaches and student motivation (Entwistle et al, 2006) this would suggest that reflective practice encompasses strategic and deep approaches correlating to intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Reflective practice, then, can be seen to enhance learning as a contextualising, supportive mechanism. Further to this, an ‘incubating’ period has been noticed in reflections with momentum picking up in relation to intern experiences.

I must highlight, here, that it is not my intent to suggest that student motivation can be controlled. Studies (Boekaerts, M. and Martens, R., 2006) indicate that this is a highly problematic perspective often shared by instructors.

The evidence in this section suggests a correlation between the presence of reflexivity and higher performance within the internship context. This indicates that learning is enhanced by reflexivity. In this way, learning how to reflect emerges as a mechanism to enhance learning.

Empowerment through reflection and appointed academic value

During the introductory internship seminar, students are made aware of their potential contribution to knowledge. Verbal responses to the introduction range from disbelief to excitement.

During the final critical reflection at the end of the semester, students are asked:

What has motivated you throughout working on your internship project?

The majority of students reference a dimension of the discipline related to their contribution through research.

The student below demonstrates how the impact of her project motivated her throughout the semester.

It was difficult figuring out a research topic but as soon as I had spent a few weeks at Caritas²⁷, I knew I wanted to offer something back. Something more than my time over 3 months. My project created a new communication strategy for the organisation meaning that homeless people around Athens stood a better chance of hearing that there was food available at Caritas. I guess, the fact that I might make things better for these people and that this is why I want to become a social worker motivated me.

The empowered student voice and learner impact

Acknowledging student voice seems to facilitate engagement at the arcadia center. For example, following conflict between demonstrators and police in nearby central Athens, it has been important on a number of occasions to ensure all students are accounted for and safe. The initial strategy for this consisted of strong suggestions that students avoid the city center during protests.

Following the sad events of the Athens riots in December of 2008, when a school boy was shot and killed by an armed police officer for protesting in the Exarhia neighbourhood, students had adverse reactions to our advice and many insisted that it was their right to join the many protests against practices of the police forces.

In recognition of this collective student voice, a series of relevant workshops, lectures and classes were introduced regarding activism, protests and demonstration in Greece, the relationship of the police with the state.

Students did still attend protest marches, but now, they were aware of the cultural implications, had a deeper understanding of the political events and readily shared their experiences through a more critical lens. For the staff at the arcadia center, this taught us the value of involving students as contributors in terms of their own needs.

²⁷Caritas Hellas, Athens

Critical Incident; student evaluations

Program evaluations completed by students at the end of term during the Spring and Fall 2012 semesters demonstrated a series of findings in terms of developmental program potential. Students tended to identify that:

- academic classes did not allow for enough exploring outside the classroom
- the academic workload prevented them from substantial time to revisit places of interest
- help infiltrating the local community socially would have been preferred
- there seemed to be a missed opportunity in terms of exposure to local interest, volunteering for example
- the core class was too theoretical and could have been more geared to ‘understanding Greece’

Critical Incident; the CLC and Student Government

Following the introduction of the Co-curricular Learning Certificate and Student Government in 2013 the data from student evaluations changed with respective references to both program dimensions as program strengths.

Students claimed that the student government:

- Allowed for greater consideration of student interests and needs compared to other academic semesters.
- Showed the program acknowledges student opinion.
- In terms of the Co-curricular learning certificate, students expressed that:
- the paper offered official recognition for their unique interests and that this enriched their experience abroad
- through the CLC they were able to pursue topics not available through traditional academic choice
- they were able to further an academic interest

These outcomes related to the non-academic paper suggest that the CLC offers a type of academic advancement that enriches the study abroad experience- or in the very least that’s students perceive that it has this potential.

A summary of outcomes

These professional observations have aimed to offer insight into the learner experience with a number of interesting emerging outcomes:

- Statistics in this study suggest that the relationship between student and instructor is viewed as significant by learners and that during their time on the Athens program, students master a subject area. Half of students view their skills as transferrable.
- Observations suggest a correlation between diverse learning experiences and what students describe as a rich experience.
- There is a correlation between participation in formal intercultural development and learner assessment of a valuable learning experience.
- Students are forthcoming as peer reviewers and reviewees.
- There is a correlation between critical reflection motivation and performance.
- Students tend to be more responsive in components of the academic program when they have contributed in decision making.
- Students evaluating their time abroad tend to express that they feel they have missed opportunities for not being informed enough of options.
- Optional co-curricular opportunity with recognition is readily received as an opportunity to pursue an (academic) interest.

These professional observations present various related aspects of the learning experience and offer suggestions toward how this experienced is enhanced or restricted. The next section discusses the overall findings in relation to the literature review in order to demonstrate the reliability of these outcomes.

Project Findings and Analysis:

Linking the findings to the literature review

Study outcomes and the literature review

Research into the learning of youth populations and education research are frequently disconnected (Ziehe, 2009). In an effort to bridge the two and investigate how learning can be enhanced for the learners on study abroad programs, this study has explored learning as a process of active engagement (Wilson and Peterson, 2006). According to the literature reviewed, in order for learning to be transformative (Kegan, 2009) and for transferable skills to be cultivated, (Kegan, 2009), learning must be addressed as an outcome in education design and cannot be an assumed outcome based on contextual stimuli (Ziehe, 2009). In the previous sections of this chapter, this study has demonstrated the emerging findings that could be incorporated into study abroad program design in order to enhance learning for the study abroad student.

In order to highlight the distinct contribution of this work to knowledge and practice, this section links the overall findings with the literature explored in the Literature Review chapter before moving into the development of the emerging Learning Enhancement Framework. Building on the areas demonstrated to have a direct enhancing impact on learning, and emerging from the primary focus group study and the 2 supportive studies, these findings are framed within the relevant literature.

Program design

According to the literature, it is suggested that the study abroad learner benefits mostly from interactions with the immediate cultural environment (Dwyers and Peters, 2018). During this study, not only does the relationship between educators and peers (professional observations) appear to contribute to learner transformation during their time abroad but establishing a purpose led community fostering these interactions can have an even greater impact (focus groups). Each of the 3 studies suggest that in terms of the broader local cultural environment beyond the study abroad program, students tend to benefit from structured immersion and guided interaction. Dwyers (2004) suggests that language acquisition and academics are proportionately beneficial to learners according to the length of study. Although this study did not confirm this, the data does demonstrate a correlation between enduring skills developed during the program and classes that included experiential activities. Furthering

the fact that study abroad learning can have a long term impact, (Dwyers and Peters, 2018) it can be concluded that experiential learning activities equip students with longer lasting skills, such as language acquisition.

Constructivist learning

Emerging evidence in this study supports the assumption that learners create and recreate meaning through experience (Fosnot, 2005), pursue this meaning actively (Johnson, 2003) within impactful contexts (Vanderstraeten, 2002). Learners are observed to engage, advocate and plan their experiences all within the local cultural context and do so successfully using critical thinking resources offered to them. This activity of scaffolding learning (Vygotsky, 1978) is recognised and considered by students to help them engage with greater depth and to navigate their academic responsibilities with greater focus.

Action research

Considering education and teaching as shared work in the sense of collaborative learning exchange (Wilson and Peterson, 2006), this investigation developed using the principles of Action research as a basis. The study successfully demonstrated the results often associated with Action Research (Lomax, 2007 in Bell, 2010): my practice has further developed, based on my renewed understanding of learning enhancement in relation to our learners and this new knowledge can be used to improve our organisational practice.

Taking our understanding a step further, the focus groups were observed to be more successful when the group meeting took place after or close to program activities associated with critical reflection and emphasised student learning. This demonstrates clearly the correlation between Participatory Action Research and the supportive impact of learner focused program components as highlighted by Mckernon (2008): a benefit to the full learning institution and broader learning community. These focus groups took place within the university setting, in between the scheduling of daily classes and developmental seminars. Isolated group meetings in a setting with fewer structured critical thinking activities may have revealed a different student response. Further to this, it is clear that PAR can be enriched according to the culture and practice contexts surrounding the participants over time. This distinct contribution to knowledge and practice refers to the holistic perspective necessary in enhancing learning for the study abroad student.

The Introducing Experiential Education professional project demonstrated the beneficial constructive impact of practice development through ongoing reviews and of collaborative dialogue between the involved individuals, by adopting an Action Research Approach.

Each of the studies highlights the values associated to establishing organic learning communities based on Action Research principles and uncover the developmental potential for the study abroad context to benefit from applying these principles to review and readjust practice.

Experiential Learning

In terms of experiential education, the educator often makes an impact through incorporating and replicating learning community practice (Palinscar and Herrenkohl, 2002). Each of the 3 studies raised the relationship between learner and instructor as significant to their broader experience. For example, the professional project documented an increasing engagement between learner and facilitator during a semester where experiential activities took place frequently.

Emerging as a more prominent component to enhancing the learning experience, focus group participants linked experiential learning activities to a higher value academic experience with evidence of a correlation to increasing accessibility for students with learning difficulties. Experiential learning activities related to academic classes created additional learning stimuli and fostered in depth engagement compared to classes with less experiential content. In relation to specific class content, language classes saw increased language skills in students following experiential exercises while, on-site learning further developed student engagement with class content. This outcome is further supported by the suggestion that Experiential Education complements traditional practice (Montrose, 2002). Learners with a diverse learning experience including interaction with the local community are observed to describe a rich learning experience in comparison to students with smaller interaction.

According to Dwyers and Peters (2018), systematic experiential learning opportunities foster further development in students with internships and volunteering appearing to have the greatest impact. Students interning during their study abroad program demonstrated heightened development in several areas. The majority of student

interns linked their valuable learning experiences to critical reflection, the intern work based learning class and the internship itself demonstrating the value of all 3 as critical components to enhancing student learning.

Student engagement and student voice

It has been observed that each of the 3 studies presented a correlation between student participation in planning and decision making and growing ownership of their learning experiences. More specifically, the emerging evidence suggesting that students become more invested in their academic development following participation in decision making activities presents a link between student participation and academic performance and ownership. Cultivating a culture of openness, it is apparent that transparency necessary in transforming student participation (Freeman, 2014). Further to this, the particular areas where students participated in making decisions emerged as areas with higher performance of the involved students.

There is a demonstrable link between critical reflection, motivation and performance.

Evaluation

Assessment is a critical part of constructing personal meaning (Roeschl- Heils, 2003) and emerged repeatedly as a significant factor for students. Paired together, student voice and assessment create a greater sense of empowerment (Bain, 2010) for students. The study confirms this link when for example, students tended to show a higher level of engagement in classes including peer review compared to classes with a more traditional hierarchical communication between instructor and learners. In terms of the program evaluation, encouragement of student participation created a stronger sense of community. Built in assessment drawing together the full program rather than individual types of assessment was more effective as suggested by Harvey (2008) even though individual evaluations uncover discipline specific learner needs. The study suggests that individual assessment is still necessary in accordance with the position that tailor made needs must be shaped by learner needs (Piaget, 1973).

Further to this, intercultural development activities are noticed to have been experienced by students who are more eager to participate in learner assessment. This suggests that learners benefit from assessment couched within

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a process that includes practice and experimentation, memorisation, reasoning and reflecting (Jarvis, 2009). The two activities were mutually complimentary in creating a supportive environment.

The following chapter brings together the 3 studies and literature review and presents the conceptual framework for enhancing learning.

Project Findings and Analysis

Discussion of Findings: toward a conceptual learning enhancement framework

Introduction

Through the presentation of findings, it is apparent that learning enhancement has as much to do with the learner individually as with the various levels of academic practice. Drawing together the findings from each category of data, this section discusses the major findings and formulates the conceptual framework for learning enhancement.

Major findings

Evidence suggests that value can be further added to the learning experience for the student abroad: A number of indicators demonstrating the potential for enhanced learning have emerged from this study. This list of learning enhancement indicators is a major finding.

In addition, the documented development of the role of students in action research presents a dual impact: the value of students in education research and the impact of action research on participants.

Meaning and significance

As these identified indicators emerge from current practice and learner experiences, the findings suggest that practice could be developed to include enhanced learning in a more strategic manner. Consequently, this position argues that systematic consideration of these indicators could further enhance learning for the student abroad.

In this way, the formulation of a learning enhancement framework developed from the inquiry findings serves as a way for educators to enhance learning for students using this conceptual guide.

Synthesis of Outcomes: from Indicators to Drivers

The previous chapter presented us with the topics associated to learning enhancement, an emerging typology of characteristics pointing towards enhanced learning. These characteristics were enriched as learning enhancement indicators from the multiple sources of data that form this full doctoral study: literature review and 3 strands of research. The emerging list of learning enhancement indicators renamed drivers for learning enhancement was then considered and broken down into workable categories of practice within the education institution. These 4 categories are demonstrated in the conceptual learning enhancement framework presented below.

So far, the focus has fallen on emerging indicators demonstrating the presence of enhanced learning. The correlation of these indicators has been investigated in the previous chapters and outlined in the findings above.

At this stage, it is important to consider how these indicators can be utilised and developed from passive indications to active drivers of learning enhancement. This development can be described as a movement from theory to practice as the indicators are transformed into mechanisms using good practice frameworks and the research findings.

In considering these Learning Enhancement Drivers, I have formulated 4 categories of Learning Enhancement in order to encapsulate the emerging components and include the participation based nature of the proposed model:

- Experiential Education
- Learner Development
- Structured Contextual Engagement
- Ongoing Program Development

Learning Enhancement, a conceptual framework

The following principles for the implementation of the framework are based on research evidence and emerging good practice:

- Participatory nature- AR
- Documentation of implementation stages
- Evaluation and assessment at each stage in order to inform operational practice
- Evaluation and assessment at each stage in order to inform model implementation practice

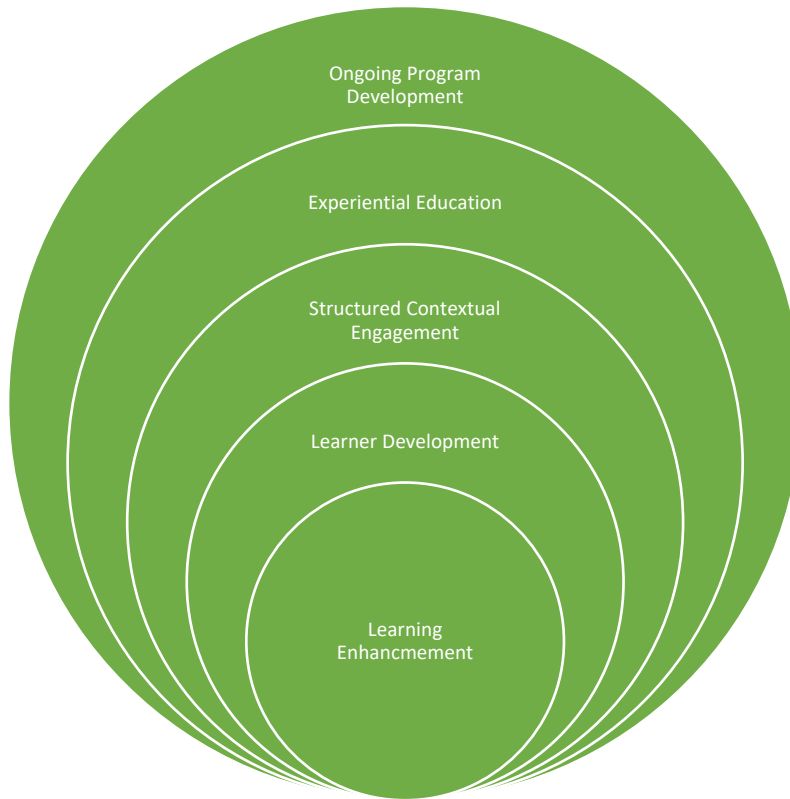


Diagram 28: The conceptual learning enhancement framework

Each Learning Enhancement Driver is visualised as cyclical representing the suggested cycle of trying out practice, including learner participation in evaluating this practice and adjusting the practice in an evolution based process to enhance learning.

The sections of the framework are often interlinked hence their visualisation withing the greater ongoing program development.

Returning to the functionality of the framework, the series of successful emergent mechanism for educative practice with an end to enhance student learning indicate the framework's operational level.

The matrix below presents these mechanisms as they arose from the study and brings together the 4 framework categories in relation to the areas of ongoing program development. In this way, the matrix is offered as model for practice.

Learning Enhancement Driver mechanisms for practice

Ongoing Program Development	Experiential Education	Structured Contextual Engagement	Learner Development
Ongoing evaluation	E.E strategy	Cultural immersion mechanisms (relatable to academic classes)	Framing of personal learning objectives and development
AR: Participation of students in program development	Training for faculty and staff Instructor dialogue/ forum	Engagement activities with critical reflection facilitation	Critical Reflection Inbuilt assesment and evaluation of transferable skills and knowledge acquired
Participative assessment culture	Incorporation of E.E mechanisms in academic practice	Formal intercultural development	Temporal and mental space allowance
Democratic involvement of students			

Table 30: Learning enhancement drivers

Driver frameworks

Frameworks for practice in relation to the learning enhancement drivers are readily available and users are encouraged to align frameworks with their own working context taking into account the dual set of users; the learners and the instructors/ program staff.

Transitioning from established practice to the proposed model

In transitioning from current practice to adopting the suggested model, users may want to initially assess practice in relation to the framework. This framework emerges from practice indicating that components of the model may already be in use. In this case, the model serves as a framework in adjusting practice demonstrating the model resilience and flexibility.

Challenges in using the Learning Enhancement Framework

In application of the model, there are a number of potential constraints. These include the experience of educators in employing a pedagogical method in this way (Sarason, 1990), the culture of the particular academic context and how the model is perceived by individuals and teams in each location (Ramsden, 2003). Each of these 3 issues, however, matches the aim that positions this model as a development tool and not only as a steadfast guide. The

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adaptable, expandable and comparative nature and use of this model triggered development in these ways past the use as a manual only.

Relevant studies

Bruner (2009) insists that the learning mind develops according to the tools and resources available. This perspective invites the study abroad sector to utilise the many successful tools available, in offering value adding resources to the learner experience. Alternative theories that disjuncture is necessary for learning to take place (Jarvis, 2009) are not in conflict with this practice: the typical study abroad student experiences some sort of challenge, conflict or change that contributes to their cognitive disjuncture for having arrived abroad. In this way, the scene is set for the student abroad to benefit from the careful design of redeveloped tools.

The GLOSSARI PROJECT (2010, cited in Sutton and Rubin, 2004) suggested that the common techniques of measuring study abroad learning outcomes tend to be driven by student satisfaction rather than actual learning. This tendency could be explained to the typical alignment of these measurements with evaluation completed by students in retrospect (Sutton and Rubin, 2004). In this respect, an action learning oriented approach built into practice allows for a more accurate gathering of information on student learning outcomes: with value in informing practice as well as offering the potential for greater student impact.

In terms of the desirability and value of this research in relation to the broader study abroad field, preoccupations with overarching education strategies in relation to field participation further validate the effort to redevelop learning for students. The direction in study abroad programs to remove focus from study abroad participation barriers (Loberg, 2014) to integrative academic curricula and learning experiences (Loberg, 2014) validates the need to reconsider practice, taking student participation into account and ultimately raising study abroad participation (Loberg, 2014).

Suggestions for further research

Ziehe (2009) outlines the disconnect between education research and the individual learner, and suggests a culture that fully contextualises learner characteristics. Similarly, this study has focused on addressing the student participant as a valuable primary source of information. Alternatively, Loberg's study into study abroad participation emphasised the perspectives of instructors and administrators (2014). A second study primarily

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addressing the perspective of professionals in order to combine the emerging indicators could further enhance the framework in terms of implementable practice as well as reveal additional technologies of practice that are successful.

Findings overview

Conclusion

This chapter has presented and analysed the research findings accumulated from the 3 levels of research and links these findings to good practice, literature and frameworks for implementation. Building on the emerging outcomes, a learning enhancement framework has been formulated. The active participation of students and the implementations of action research principles in program structure and instruction appear to play a significant role in learning enhancement. The findings suggest that the implementation of a learning enhancement model, such as the suggested framework in diagram 28, will add value to the study abroad experience for students, instructors and the study abroad institution.

Chapter 6

Conclusions and Recommendations

Introduction

In this chapter, I present my concluding remarks on this project drawing together the findings, inquiry process and project evaluation in order to frame this work on the research continuum. Beginning with a summary of the project developments, I continue to draw conclusions based on the research findings discussed at length in the previous chapter. Opportunities for further research emerge from this work, including the significance of testing out the proposed model in other contexts as do recommendations for a particular audience (Wilson, 2013). This section concludes with an evaluation of this research projects, benchmarking methods against recognised criteria and the learning outcomes of DPS Projects in order to demonstrate the effort to ensure rigor and robustness of this work.

A project synopsis

Beginning in early 2011, I began to collect data from students studying abroad in order to understand what they did and did not learn from their study abroad experience in order to ascertain how learning could be enhanced.

The methods I used consisted of:

- 3 sets of research with 12 students exploring 3 study abroad locations
- 2 focus groups and a last set of Skype call and telephone interviews
- Each iteration forming future practice

Through analysing the accumulated data, a series of identifiable factors impacting learning emerged as themes, activities and mechanisms.

Supportive research

In order to further understand these findings,

- I conducted an extensive literature review to become updated in current practice.
- I used my professional observations to analyse the findings
- Further informed the findings based on the emerging data from my professional project: Introducing Experiential Education

In response to these emerging factors, I have developed a conceptual learning enhancement framework leading to the potential implementation of the findings through a strategic, holistic method. This suggested conceptual framework applies mechanisms that have been investigated as factors of enhanced learning and can be used to enhance learning for the student abroad

What does this project tell us?

The emergent findings from this doctoral project are related to the project focus, learning enhancement, as well as the role of action research in this context of an educational institution. In summary, current practice contains a series of components that enhance learning for students studying abroad.

It is apparent that many formal mechanisms are employed by study abroad programmes to enhance learning in relation to these factors although the execution does not always allow for coherence and learner development. This demonstrates the need for a holistic approach taking into account the levels of the study abroad learning experience from programme administration to the individual learner.

Student engagement, participation and involvement emerge as key themes to learning enhancement with a suggested shift toward acknowledging student voice and the interactions between instructor and learner.

Experiential Education is observed to heighten engagement, offer learner stimulation and support and foster instructor development. Intercultural engagement tends to be more successful in the cases of experiential learning opportunities. Overall performance tends to be higher in students who partake in experiential activities.

The proposed framework for learning enhancement addresses these factors and provides guidance in ensuring learning enhancement is addressed collaboratively bringing together programme administration, learning instructors and the learner.

Action research is proven to have a direct impact on participants by enhancing learning and encouraging development through critical reflection: the method of guided critical reflection demonstrates high student engagement, an increased sense of learner ownership and a rapid development in critical awareness.

In addition to this, the role of students within this practitioner research approach demonstrates the value of student participants in offering valuable insights into the learning process as well as the impact of pedagogical practice.

Given the emerging importance of experiential education from this study, it is important to highlight the need for an assessment of Experiential Ed. Resources available in considering implementation. Although there is an abundance of guiding resources available in the public domain, this study demonstrated the value of an implementable experiential learning strategy including training. This study proposes that the introduction of such a practice holds high value.

Emerging Learning Enhancement Drivers

These drivers are grouped into 4 emergent categories of learning enhancement as below.

Experiential Education

- Experiential Education strategy
- Training for faculty and staff
- Instructor dialogue/ forum
- Incorporation of E.E mechanism into academic practice

Learner Development

- Framing of personal learning objectives and development
- Critical reflection
- In built assessment and evaluation of acquired transferable skills and knowledge
- Temporal and mental space allowance

Structured Contextual Engagement

- Cultural immersion mechanism
- Engagement activities with critical reflection facilitation points
- Formal intercultural development

Ongoing Program Development

- Ongoing evaluation
- Participative assessment culture
- Students informing practice through Action Research
- Democratic involvement of students

The conceptual Learning Enhancement Framework

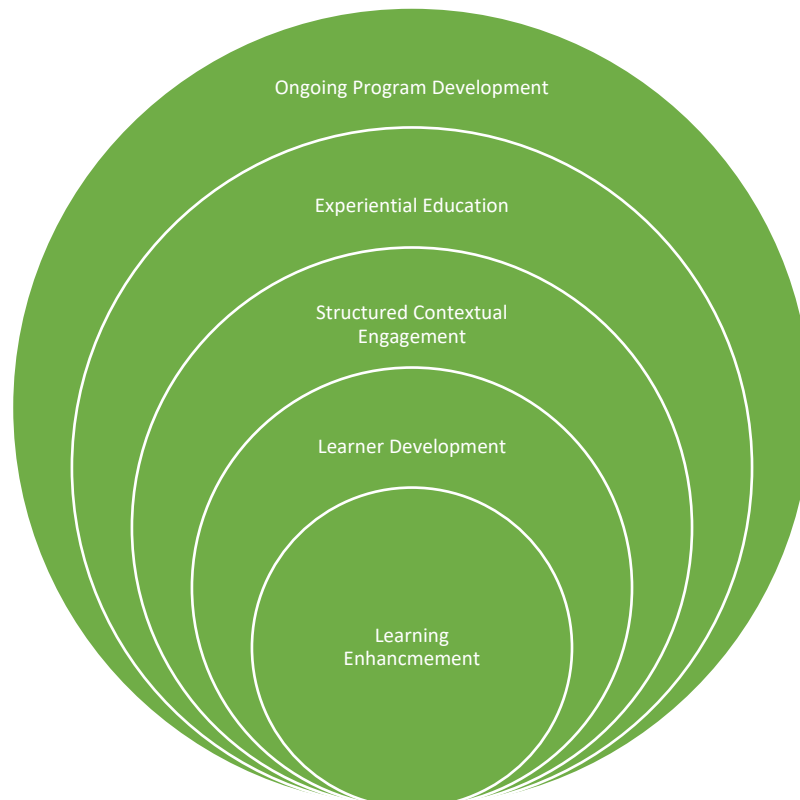


Diagram 28: The conceptual learning enhancement framework

Recommendations

This inquiry has presented useful outcomes in relation to how education practice can be further transformed for study abroad programs. The project also introduces a series of questions surrounding this area: there is much more that can be investigated.

This emerging model outlines the need for further evolution and contextual adjustment through action research. For educators in study abroad, the outcomes inquire further of the learning enhancement indicators

Joanna Simos - Developing a conceptual learning enhancement framework for study abroad programs; the role of action research in the participation of students and drivers and how each of these impact delivery for the learner experience. In relation to policy, the emerging findings suggest that more can be done to enhance learning for the student abroad while students can offer valuable insight into the gaps currently experiences, as well as the strengths of current practice. In terms of the framework, it is recommended that Arcadia University test the model across different study abroad locations to further establish implementability, flexibility and suitability.

I propose the setting up of a research community across Arcadia Centers in a consecutive post-doctoral study to create a scientific testing for the proposed learning enhancement model.

The study could include:

- Repeats of research activity in other centers to refine and evaluate the framework
- The introduction of the conceptual framework and evaluation of the emerging model of best practice at this culminating stage

This position would then further explore the underlying questions:

- What endures from study abroad?
- What endures from using the framework?
- How can the framework evolve to take new emerging findings into account?

Areas of future research

A prominent product of enhanced learning is the continuity of learning via knowledge accumulation and transferable skills; through 'lifelong learning'. At this stage, lifelong learning is considered as an element of learning enhancement and, so far, reference to it is made upon the premise of its inclusion. Further research could assess the duration of transferable skills and how these are further enhanced during study abroad. In this study, transferable skills are linked to contexts of experiential education. An extended study would demonstrate a charting of this development further contributing to our understanding of what endures following studying abroad.

Exploring project generalisability

Given the clearly outlined demographic of the participant sample for this study, it would be useful to investigate

further into the extent that the sample supports generalisability past the Arcadia community. The students in this study are representative of the student population in American universities by the many diversifying factors discussed in the methodology chapter. Exploring student backgrounds more deeply would uncover valuable insight with greater depth into areas such as motivation, income level, prior learning experiences, and prior study abroad experiences. With the exception of income level, these areas have been addressed as diversifying factors in the study so far. To take this a step further would offer a deeper understanding of the student interaction with the study abroad experience.

An evaluation of this action research project

Evaluating Action Research

Revisiting the 7 criteria for good research outlined by Bradbury Huang (2010), in this section, I demonstrate how the criteria have guided the in order to follow an approach of good action research.

1 Objectives and choices

Beginning in chapter1, the objectives-to investigate how learning can be enhanced-of this project are clearly outlined and referenced in each section that follows, clarifying the development of these objectives and how they are finally met in the development of a proposed learning enhancement framework. The rationale for the topic is supported by the analysis of the exploration as emerging from practice: evidence suggests that learning for the student abroad can be enhanced and that practice can be further informed to do so. The choices in research design were guided by theory and literature review with the approach and techniques selected based on an assessment of validity and relevance.

2 Partnership and participation

This project consisted primarily of participatory action research in order to present the student perspective of learning in study abroad as well as develop a democratised partnership between learners and the learning institution; a key element of the proposed framework. Pretesting of the focus group series and the choice to draw from professional observations opened up the findings to include a broader learning community therefore representing and reflecting broader participation. Further to this, project design took stakeholders and participants into account with a thorough consideration of ethical issues and responsibility and research impact.

3 Contribution to AR theory and practice

In terms of subject knowledge, this project offers an investigation in to how learning can be enhanced strategically for study abroad programmes taking into account the related variable of the intercultural context. In terms of Action Research, this project provides a documented cycle of participatory action research and presents the impact of this process on the participants and their relation to the educational institution.

More specifically, this project demonstrates the impact a democratic action research approach can have on students in terms of engagement, performance, ownership and transferable skills and offers an example of a framework that builds on this action research approach in order to inform practice. This suggests that action research, within the participatory university research context, can contribute to transformational education.

4 Methods and process

Theory and literature on research approach and methods has been used to justify the selection of the research process and presents the action research cycles. Building on theory and good practice, my approach and design have served to accumulate valid, useful data yielding valuable conclusions.

5 Actionability

This project presents a way to enhance learning and bring together components of good practice in a holistic, value added learning experience for study abroad students. The process of inquiry intervenes in order to uncover the potential of enhanced learning with a view to inform future practice and deepen understanding of the role students play within our learning strategies.

6 Reflexivity

Built into the focus group series, critical reflection of each cycle in terms of question design and emerging themes shaped practice in the steps that followed. In terms of my role as moderator, critical considerations of my technique contributed to frequent readjustments to my practice. Building on my role as a practitioner researcher and my educative values and how these factors into my research inquiry and personal learning process, the critical reflection chapter offers insight into the reflexive aspect of this work.

7 Significance

The primary outcome of this research project, the Learning Enhancement Framework forms a distinct contribution in the field as practice and praxis: substantial data indicating the potential to enhance student learning has been uncovered and has been presented as a workable conceptual framework.

Examining the participant level, this research facilitated the contextualising of learning for participants and offered a valuable experience furthering their level of learning and engagement. In this sense, participants benefitted in a developmental capacity, by adding to their study abroad experiences. To examine the researcher level, this research allowed me to flourish in my passion to enrich the study abroad experience by learning more about how this can be done and then viewing the impact of the action research cycles on the group of 12 students. Further to this, the acceptance from colleagues as specialist in this area developed during the research.

Earlier in this section, I discuss the impact of AR within the university context-I believe this research to contribute to the democratisation of the student-facilitator-institution interaction fostering an environment for the parallel, complimentary development of each.

Evaluating the thesis

Coghlan and Brannick (2014) identify key features necessary for a research paper based on action research.

Below, I discuss how these features have been met through this paper.

- Describing the context, there by fitting the purpose and intended value of the action research into its practical and theoretical context; the introduction chapter sets the context of research, with the literature review placing the research into the theoretical frame. The practical context is presented and acknowledged with its pivotal role on the research during the research approach chapter and is analysed further as the research findings emerge.
- Telling the story; the text offers a step-by-step account of the inquiry process of the focus groups series and emerging finds in temporal order with the visible identifiable focus on development towards a learning enhancement model.
- Showing how a rigorous methodology was applied; the chapter on research approach offers a critical account of methods and rationale and evaluates practice by benchmarking. The method was further evaluated in the section above in terms of the 7 criteria of good action research. Each of these evaluations are culminations of a process guided by these benchmarks.
- Sense making directed towards the generation of useful knowledge which must produce outcomes which are of value to others- useful for practice and robust for scholars. The emergent nature of the findings previously discussed uncovers data to enlighten our understanding of how students learn as they study

abroad and how this learning can be further enhanced. Given the robustness of research and the applicability of the proposed model, this research is useful in offering a tool for further comprehension.

Coghlan and Brannick (2014) continue to suggest an academic action research paper include a series of characteristics related to the practitioner researcher. They tell us of the expectation that the text includes

Reflection on the story in the light of the experience and the theory and extrapolation to a broader context and articulation of practical knowledge. There would also be self-reflection and learning of the action researcher (Coghlan D. and Brannick T., 2014, p.11).

Throughout this project, I draw together existing theory, my investigation and discovery and discuss the impact of the proposed learning enhancement model on the broader academic community. By positioning myself within the text and acknowledging this position, I acknowledge my own development as part of the inquiry activity.

The following chapter presents a critical reflection of this process documenting my learning through the research journey.

The following section discussed my learning in terms of the programme learning outcomes.

An evaluation of my demonstrated learning

Throughout the duration of my research inquiry, the level 8 descriptors (DPS Projects Handbook, 2011) set out by Middlesex University Institute for Work based Learning have served as guidance in facilitating my development of this work to reach doctoral level enquiry and knowledge contribution. Here I address them individually and demonstrate how they have been met in my work of the past 4 years.

Knowledge and Understanding

A1-Evidence that the candidate has depth and range of knowledge in a complex area and is currently working at the leading edge of practice underpinned by theoretical understanding.

My knowledge of learning in higher education, pedagogy and practice is demonstrated throughout the text and in forms my process of study framed by the literature review. Each of these dimensions presents the area of learning enhancement and participatory research with students as innovative, emergent areas in the field of education.

Joanna Simos - Developing a conceptual learning enhancement framework for study abroad programs; the role of action research in the participation of students
A2 – Demonstrates effective and critical selection, combination and use of research and development methods; can develop new approaches in new situations and contribute to the development of practice based research methodology.

Through the justifying and design of my research approach and method, I demonstrated my comprehension and have developed a complimentary method of inquiry into investigating how learning can be enhanced. The research iterations, cycles of action research, were adjusted after each cycle as I acted on emerging data. This demonstrates my ability to redevelop my research approach in new contexts and my contribution to practice based research.

A3 – Demonstrates awareness of ethical dilemmas and conflicting values which may arise in professional practice and work situations; able to formulate solutions in dialogue with superiors, peers, clients, mentors and others.

In working with students daily, I was able to tap into professional frameworks and codes of practice in relation to arising ethical issues and developed these concerns into solutions by using these frameworks as guides. My peer network served as a further resource in shaping the robustness of my ethical considerations with the ongoing dialogue with my supervisor and consultant framing my actions. Work conflicts were explored with the help of my work supervisor and resulted in agreements forming parameters of research and practice.

Cognitive (thinking) skills

B1 - Demonstrates ability to analyse and synthesise complex and possibly conflicting ideas and information in order to redefine knowledge and develop new approaches.

This skill is demonstrated in my development of good practice based on my varied findings and sources of information – my course of action, for example, was informed by an analysis of literature for and against interventions in intercultural education (outlined in my literature review) when I developed my own agenda on the intervention related to educative influence.

B2 – Provides evidence of work with ‘critical communities’ through whom a new or modified paradigm is being established. Habitually reflects on own and others practice so that self-appraisal and reflective inquiry are intertwined, thereby improving the candidate’s own and other’s action.

This project investigates the critical learning community at the Arcadia Center through participative action research, reflecting on practice continually in order to develop practice based on the research itself.

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B3 - Is autonomous in management of own learning; makes professional use of others in support of self- directed learning and is fully aware of political implications of the study.

The implications of this research project in relation to stakeholders, the Arcadia Center and broader learning community are discussed in the research approach chapter, demonstrating the link between impact and research design. I have successfully managed my personal learning journey through this degree, benefitting from my professional network toward my personal development.

B4 - Can independently evaluate/argue a complex position concerning alternative approaches; can accurately assess/report on own and other's work; can critique and justify evaluations as constituting bases for improvement in practice.

This project provides a case for and develops an alternative approach to student learning through the proposed learning enhancement model; the reflexive component demonstrates my skills in assessment and critique of evaluation related to work of my own and others.

C1-Can take into account complex, unpredictable, specialised work contexts requiring innovative approaches, which involve exploring current limits of knowledge and, in particular, interdisciplinary approaches and understanding. Is able to translate and disseminate theoretical knowledge into workable frameworks and/or models for practice.

This professional skill is demonstrated in my ability transfer findings and theory to practice, formulating the model for practice by the broader study abroad community.

C2- Effective use of resources is wide ranging, complex and is likely to impact upon the work of others.

In the findings chapter, I discussed the Experiential Education project in terms of dialogue fostered between instructors and the sharing of resources and good practice fostered by this exchange. Through the facilitation of this exchange, I was able to facilitate the forming of an environment where the creative use of resources is shared.

C3-Can engage in full professional and academic communication with others in their field and place of work; can give papers/presentations to 'critical communities' for developmental purposes.

Presentations of my findings so far have taken place within my work environment to develop an awareness of critical points relevant in how we address learning and how these perspectives can be enhanced- the critical input of colleagues has developed practice further. My presentation at the Middlesex Summer Research Conference served to develop my own skills and helped me revisit my research based on peer-review and feedback.

C4-Autonomy within bounds of professional practice with high level of responsibility for self and others. Ability to provide leadership

In leading my research project and managing the process of participatory action research, I demonstrate my leadership skills as a researcher practitioner with dual responsibilities. The research process was developed by me autonomously, developing knowledge and developing my understanding of practice in relation to others in the learning community.

Conclusion

This concluding chapter has demonstrated the overall dimensions of the emerging learning enhancement framework and establishes the position of this thesis on the research continuum. Recommendations propose that further research would be of value in order to further understand how study abroad students could benefit from adjustments to practice in the area of learning enhancement.

In conclusion, this project has presented a number of areas ways in which learning is enhanced for participants in study broad programs. Learning is enhanced by an abundance of good practice and there is room for further adjustment. By considering students as the valuable resource that they are in investigating the impact of our pedagogical practices, educators can refine practice and enrich the study abroad learning process, in this way coming closer to the wealth of potential the rich experience offers students and educators alike.

Chapter 7

Looking back, a critical reflection

The role of reflective practice in this thesis

Critical reflection forms a crucial part of action research (McNiff, 2013), theories of which (Schon, 1983 and Kolb, 1984) inform the critically reflective lens throughout this thesis. The conclusion chapter ends with a reflective critique of the project in terms of Level 8 learning outcomes, for example, and the project activity chapter documents the development of my role as moderator through critical reflection while the findings section presents critical points in relation to the significance of emerging data.

In this section, I reflect further on my personal Dprof journey by demonstrating key points during the process in relation to my own learning and development. Building on the reflective model proposed by Rolfe et al (2001), this chapter presents my critical learning emerging from the Middlesex University Doctorate in Professional Studies program and the completion of this thesis.

Action research and reflection

The nature of this final DPS module has meant that critical reflection is incorporated throughout the research process of inquiry and therefore built into this thesis. Reflecting on the module, here, I critically review the greater project outcomes and use the following reflective questions set out by Rolfe et al (2001) as a guide: What? So what? Now what?

The impact of my role as researcher preoccupied my perspective from the point of developing methodology up until this reflective narrative. In forming practice by means of evaluation, critical reflection allowed me to realign my method and approach in practical terms—for each research iteration, I documented responses and made adjustments to address emerging questions for example. During the investigation stage of my project, I took particular care in shaping my critical reflection in order to evaluate practice per cycle of action research. This practice has become part of my professional context.

Broader project impact

Reflexivity refers to the extent to which the self is acknowledged as an instrument of change among change agents and stakeholders (Bradbury Huang, 2010, p.34) we are told, presenting the importance of positioning myself as a researcher with impact on the research environment. My aim during the project has been to propose a way to enhance learning in a holistic manner, therefore, bringing about change for development in study abroad education. This position

has been greatly informed by my own principles and educative values. In practice, by conducting the action research cycles, I have developed a way of facilitating student participation in organisational, professional and student specific learner development. My informed perspective has culminated in a suggested learning enhancement framework.

Emerging changes to practice

The completion of this project offers an opportunity for strategic change at the arcadia center building on good practice. The emerging learning enhancement drivers and conceptual framework are significant in the area of program development as sign posts, indicating the potential of re-evaluating practice to address learning enhancement for our students. The prominent changes following the research phase of the project are in the areas of the conceptual framework itself, experiential education and knowledge transfer.

Development of the conceptual learning enhancement framework

The emerging framework demonstrates that there is room for improvement in practice in relation to the learning process for students as part of the broader programming structure and that students should be given a more prominent role by way of action research and participation. Further research and peer review of the proposed conceptual framework would add to our understanding of how we enhance learning within the study abroad sphere and this could be done through distribution of the model within the Arcadia network pointing to a reconsideration of education discourse.

Considering the consequences of the proposed framework, it important for me to consider how I can make this proposition and take into account the impact of suggested change for my peers and broader professional community.

Experiential Education

Evident in the project findings and onsite impact suggest that this research project has created a shift in culture and practice at the organisational level. This is demonstrated in the adoption of Experiential Education by the majority of faculty following my professional project, further demonstrated in collaborative practice and evaluations. This fact emerges as proof of the value in experiential curricular and programme components and invites practice to be revisited and perhaps readjusted to encompass this valuable development. In terms of my

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own practice in the classroom, this has led to a reconsideration of how I address experiential learning and how I invite students to account for these experiences. On a strategic level, I have made efforts to formally include such practice within the center mission and guides for practice as part of the conceptual learning enhancement framework. Moving forward, synergy with particular departments could improve strategic implementation as well as further inform the strategy itself.

Knowledge transfer

I have shared elements of my research with colleagues in order to broaden our understanding of learning enhancement through training and lectures. My own pedagogical technique has developed and is evaluated at higher ratings by students I teach. I have a sounder understanding of the student experience and have become more analytical and aware of the learning process. The challenges of teaching are still there. The difference is that as a critical thinker, I am now able to rationalise student challenges within a broader learning context and consider my own practice as 'adjustable'. This knowledge has exponentially enhanced my own practice and has developed this new skill set adding to my confidence as an educator. My future practice could be further enhanced by maintaining a commitment to ensuring I am up to date with relevant literature and recognising students as a valuable source of information.

Positive Outcomes

An overall positive response to practice has been perceived in stakeholders so far and I believe that these examples attest to the benefits of the project process and outcomes and highlight the project value. Here, I consider the impact for the inquiry participants as well project impact for me personally.

Participant impact, focus group series

Student/participants claimed that participating in the focus groups developed their awareness in terms of learning and heightened their engagement with new cultural settings. Student participation is therefore identified as a useful experience inviting the question of how this activity can be built into my future practice with students.

Personal impact

The process of this research project has been of immense value to me as a learning process and opportunity for professional development. Building on the critical awareness that I gained through the literature review and inquiry, the study into how learning can be enhanced has equipped me with critical skills including a sound,

comprehensive understanding of how our students learn and are challenged in their learning experiences while they study abroad. Sharing parts of my research resulted in recognition of my work by Arcadia University and the formation of a regional working group with a focus on pedagogy, experiential education and learning enhancement. This in turn opened up a number of collaborations with colleagues and my professional development into the role of Assistant Director Experiential Education. The emerging learning enhancement indicators and framework demonstrated to me a possible way to further enhance learning for our students.

This indicates on an organisational level, that action should be taken by me in proposing considerations of the conceptual model and how we interact with students in terms of their participation in education research and that I should take a more active role in collaboration with colleagues in future research.

Conclusion

This chapter documents my growth and development in relation to this doctoral thesis. I observe my development from reflections of technical skills, to a more articulate depth and breadth of critical engagement demonstrated by the more comprehensive incorporation of reflective practice, the acknowledgment of my contributions and claims to knowledge and the development of my work to satisfy the criteria of level 8 doctoral work. My progress from project design to a useful framework for suggested practice is presented through this thesis. With these developments of knowledge came my professional development at the arcadia center and my new informed perspective as a confident, skilled, driven educator- to which this doctoral journey contributed immensely.

Word Count

66,008

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Research Ethics form (REf)

If you place an "X" in any of the white boxes, please provide further information if it is not already contained in your proposal. Please answer all of these questions

Research Ethics form		Yes	No	NA
1	Has the draft project proposal and ethical considerations been completed and submitted to the adviser?	X		
Participant's wellbeing				
2	Does your proposed activity involve the participation of human/sentient beings?	X		
3	Have participants been given information about the aims, procedure/processes and possible risks involved in easily understood language?	X		
4	Will any person's position or treatment be in any way prejudiced if they choose not to participate in the project?		X	
5	Can participants freely withdraw from the project at any stage without risk or harm of prejudice?	X		
6	Have all necessary steps been taken to protect the privacy of participants and the need for anonymity?	X		
7	Will the project involve working with or studying minors (under the age of 16 years)?		X	
8	If Yes, will signed parental consent be obtained?			X
9	Have you considered the ethical implications of selecting data and the obligations to accurately represent participants' views?	X		
Research methods				
10	Are there any questions or procedures likely to be considered in any way offensive or inappropriate?		X	
11	Does your research involve access to confidential/personal records?	X		
12	If Yes have you sought permission from the individuals concerned/ followed the protocols required.	X		
13	Have you made yourself aware of intellectual property issues regarding any documents, materials you wish to use?	X		

Research Ethics form continued/...		Yes	No	NA
14	Have you clarified with participants the ownership of data?	X		
15	Is there provision for the safekeeping of written data and video/audio recordings of participants?	X		
16	Are there safekeeping strategies for electronic data and correspondence. Refer to the Data Protection Act on keeping personal information on computers.	X		
17	If any specialised instruments, for example psychometric instruments are to be employed, will their use be controlled and supervised by a qualified practitioner, such as a psychologist?			X
Effects/Impact				
18	Have you explored the impact of change that may result in your project activity on any participants/people/sentients involved directly or indirectly in the project?	X		
19	If applicable is there provision for debriefing participants after the intervention or project?	X		
20	Have you engaged with your sponsor/employer about any ethics relating to how this research will be used?	X		
Ethical approval from other bodies				
21	Does your project require ethical approval from another body?		X	
22	If Yes have the proper approval documents been attached ?			X
General				
23	Is there any ethical issue/potential issue you have/may have difficulty managing on which you would like more input? If Yes please attach a summary		X	

Appendix 2

Focus Group participant consent form

Research purpose

To create a learning enhancement model for study abroad students emerging from student testimonials of the study abroad experience.

Participant responsibility

To participate in 3 focus group meetings (physically or via telephone) and maintain contact with Joanna Simos until the end of the study.

To keep all discussions related to the focus groups strictly confidential.

I understand that my contributions as participant will be recorded, transcribed and used in this research project. I give my consent for future use of this contribution by Joanna Simos.

Joanna Simos has clarified that I will remain anonymous in all references to my testimonial and that I reserve the right to leave this research project should I decide I do not want to continue. In this case, I must justify my departure from the research project with adequate reason.

Participant name

Signature

Date

Appendix 3

Information consent form for participants of Introducing Experiential Education

Date

Information Consent Form

I consent to the use of my recorded data by Joanna Simos as part of research into Experiential education. I have been made aware that my data will be handled in confidence and will feature in a doctoral study.

Name Signature.....

Appendix 4

Faculty email exchange regarding Introducing Experiential Education

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **XXXXXXXXXX**
Date: Sun, Oct 27, 2012 at 4:14 PM
Subject: Re: Introducing Experiential Education
To: Joanna Simos <simosj@arcadia.edu>

Dear Joanna,

This sounds like a brilliant opportunity and I am more than happy to participate.

XXXXXXXXXX

On Fri, Oct 25, 2012 at 1:13 PM, Simos, Joanna <simosj@arcadia.edu> wrote:

Dear all,

As you are aware, we will shortly begin addressing Experiential Education at the arcadia center through a series of workshops. I have been in touch in a separate email with the dates available and look forward to seeing you at these meetings.

We share such diverse, effective practices and these meetings will also be a forum for an exchange of ideas and practice.

For now, however, I write with a separate request.

I am hoping to document the introduction of experiential education at the arcadia center as a study on the impact experiential education has on our students and us as instructors. My ultimate goal is to establish if experiential education enhances learning- this will form part of my doctoral research.

Participants will remain anonymous and confidentiality will be maintained regarding our discussions.

If you are happy to take part in this research, please email me and confirm.

Best wishes,

--

Joanna

Joanna P. Simos

Assistant Director, Experiential Education
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In accordance with Greek Law 2472/1997 and Directive 95/46/EC the information in this email and in any attachments, is confidential and intended solely for the attention and use of the named addressee(s). If you are not the intended recipient, you must not disclose, copy, distribute or retain this message. If you are not the intended addressee, or if you receive this message by error, please notify the sender and delete this information from your computer.

Σύμφωνα με τον Νόμο 2472/1997 και την οδηγία 95 /46 / ΕΚ, οι πληροφορίες σε αυτό το email και τα συνημμένα είναι εμπιστευτικές και προορίζονται αποκλειστικά για την προσοχή και τη χρήση του συγκεκριμένου παραλήπτη (ες) . Εάν δεν είστε ο προοριζόμενος παραλήπτης , απαγορεύεται να αποκαλύψετε, αντιγράψετε ή να διανείμετε αυτό το μήνυμα . Εάν δεν είστε ο παραλήπτης , ή αν λάβετε αυτό το μήνυμα κατά λάθος , παρακαλούμε να ενημερώσετε τον αποστολέα και να διαγράψετε αυτές τις πληροφορίες από τον υπολογιστή σας .

Appendix 5

Permission for research at level 8

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **Jan Sanders** <sandersj@arcadia.edu>
Date: Thu, Dec 6, 2012 at 1:19 PM
Subject: Re: Doctorate
To: "Simos, Joanna" <simosj@arcadia.edu>

Joanna,

Confirmed!

Jan

απότο iPhone μου

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **Simos, Joanna** <simosj@arcadia.edu>
Date: Thu, Dec 6, 2012 at 1:00 PM
Subject: Doctorate
To: Jan Sanders <sandersj@arcadia.edu>

Dear Jan,

As you are aware, I have successfully completed the penultimate module to my doctorate which means I am now moving into the research phase.

Following on from the many forms you have signed over the years (and for which I am grateful for!)

there is one more permission request.

This will consist of me documenting and referencing a series of professional observations, critical incidents. I am hoping to interview staff and faculty at the arcadia center and more importantly to conduct 3 focus groups with a set group of students beginning this semester- I have identified them and hope to begin following orientation week in January.

I hope to use our gathered secondary data, student grades, program evaluations, midterm evaluations as well.

I will handle all information with care and in good practice as outlined by the data protection act. Participants will also sign a consent form.

Please kindly confirm via email with your permission,

--

Joanna

Joanna P. Simos
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Appendix 6

Focus group 1; 1st iteration of research (my notes)

Hello and thank you for agreeing to join me on what is usually an afternoon off for each of you. As you are aware, today we will be discussing your previous study abroad experience as part of my doctoral research into how learning can be enhanced for study abroad students. I am hoping to gain your perspective in how the study abroad experience can be improved.

Each of you have studied abroad previously, and, following the semester here in Athens will spend a 3rd semester abroad. So, I invited you to participate based on your repeated study abroad experiences.

Please treat our meeting today as a discussion. I will be asking you some questions that I have prepared and would like to hear your opinions and perspectives. Our discussion will remain confidential and I am interested in hearing your responses whether they are positive, negative or neutral. If at any time, you want to contribute to the discussion or ask a question of your own, please signal to me.

As we talk, I will be recording the discussion using the Dictaphone in the center of the table if that is alright with you? I am hoping to keep accurate records of our 3 meetings and will be using the Dictaphone and my notes to do so.

Before we begin, please take a moment to read through the permission document²⁸ and, if you are happy to continue, sign and hand back to me. Don't forget to help yourself to some tea and cake.

Why don't we start with getting to know each other a little more- let's move around the table and share our favorite meal eaten abroad.

1, Thinking about your academic selection of classes at the previous location:

How were the classes useful to you?

What aspects of the classes were particularly useful?

2, Focusing on your experience with the host culture:

What aspects of the program helped you engage with the host culture?

Could the program have helped you more in engaging with the host culture?

²⁸²⁸Participant permission document can be viewed in the appendix

3, To think more about your academics:

What helped you perform academically?

What restricted your academic performance?

4, In terms of your general study abroad experience,

What was missing?

How would this have impacted on your overall experience?

5, What has changed for you looking back at the semester in retrospect?

6, Are there any thoughts you would like to add? As you know, I am exploring learning enhancement in relation to study abroad.

.....

Summarise! (mention something from each)

Thank you, please stay and help yourself to the snacks! If you think of anything later that you would like to add to our discussion, please do not hesitate to email me.

***** These notes form 1 set from the 3 iterations of research. The additional sets and my responding notes are available upon request. *****

Appendix 7

Midterm Reflection Questions; a sample

- How are you doing in classes?
- Are you struggling with anything in particular?
- Is there any way we could help?
- Do you have any suggestions at this point regarding the semester?

Appendix 8

Name:

I have been informed about and give my consent to the use of my weekly, first and final reflections from the INPR 310 class for research purposes related to the doctoral thesis of Joanna Simos.

I understand that my information will be handled with care insuring my privacy and anonymity within the final text.

Signature:

Date:

Appendix 9

The appendices aim to support this doctoral thesis by offering a sample of supporting documents in relation to my findings and claims. The audio files, transcriptions and hand written notes recorded during this 5-year study are available upon request and have not been included in this document due to their volume.

-Final Page-

