Enhancing learning during the liminal journey of study abroad: Developing a study abroad transformative learning framework

Dr Debra Morgan, Senior Lecturer in Nursing, Northumbria University
debra.morgan@northumbria.ac.uk
The research: Morgan (2019)

- **Background:** Study abroad generates positive learning outcomes\(^1,2\). Experiences of learning, & processes during unaccompanied study abroad are unclear.

- **Aim:** To investigate student experiences of learning during study abroad (comprising a professional placement) in all contexts (formal & informal) in order to gain empirical understanding.

- **Methods & Participants:** Hermeneutic phenomenology\(^3\). N = 20 student nurses. X 2 semi-structured interviews per participant (return & follow up). Phenomenological Hermeneutical Method of Analysis\(^4\).
The findings

- Learning is experienced within the context of difference.
- Study abroad is a journey of liminality\textsuperscript{5,6}.
- The journey comprises preliminal, liminal and postliminal stages\textsuperscript{5,6}.
- Students are ‘liminal entities’ as they are ‘betwixt & between’\textsuperscript{6}.
- Learning processes and strategies comprise students taking responsibility and undertaking active sense-making activities. This learning is also influenced by others.
- Students may struggle to make sense and troublesome-ness continues until a threshold of understanding is crossed\textsuperscript{7,8,9,10,11}.
- At the end of the journey students experience transformation\textsuperscript{12}: personal & professional development, progression toward cultural competence\textsuperscript{13}; global graduateness\textsuperscript{14}. 
The innovation

- Development of a study abroad transformative learning framework

- Blended approach – face-to-face interactions/activities & online supported learning activities & interactions

  - Stage 1: Programme of learning developed as a framework
  - Stage 2a: Development of teaching and learning materials
  - Stage 2b: Develop online programme and interactive content
  - Stage 3: Implementation
  - Stage 4: Evaluation
**Study abroad transformative learning framework**

**Before study abroad**
- **student to be facilitated by enabler to form a community with international peers (communitas, social & practice)**
- **Student to have time to reflect & make sense of difference, alone & with others**

**Preliminary stage**
- **Student assigned a local enabler (with cultural & professional experience)**
- **Enabler to brief student to be a ‘friendly stranger’ in the local community & community of practice**
- **Enabler to make introductions in community of practice. Student assigned a practice mentor & local student buddy (if relevant)**
- **Student to take responsibility for learning and apply role & rule agreements: discuss & negotiate with enabler & mentor**

**Liminal stage**
- **Student experiences culture shock as usual frame of reference is insufficient to permit immediate understanding**
- **Student needs to learn to live, learn and make sense of the different reality**
- **As the different reality becomes familiar, culture shock reduces but can occur at any point during the experience when exposed to difference**

**Liminal stage continues**
- **Student meets with tutor to debrief**
- **Student to form an alumni of returned communitas**
- **Student to continue to reflect & make sense of outstanding troublesome-ness persists**
- **Student to continue to reflect & make sense of outstanding troublesome differences, alone & with others (returned communitas/ local enabler/ buddy/ tutor)**

**Postliminal stage**
- **Student reintegrated into home culture but in a transformed manner: applies cultural competency development & global graduateness to life, education & professional practice**
- **Student to share experiences with others (wider student population, professional practitioners)**
- **Student to support future SA students (home & visiting)**
- **Student maintains membership of their new global community of practice**
- **Envisioning and moving forward: student plans ongoing development opportunities as a global graduate**

**To support:**
- **Personal and professional development**
- **Development toward global graduateness**
- **Development toward cultural competency**

**During study abroad**
- **Student’s usual frame of reference is stable & unproblematic**
- **Student anticipates difference**
- **Student has a cultural desire and motivation to study abroad**

**Needs cultural encounters; supports development of cultural awareness, knowledge & skills**

**Supports the development of global graduate attributes: working across international boundaries, in intercultural contexts & understanding global aspects of work**

**After study abroad**
- **Student has resolved troublesome-ness and confirmed understandings**
- **Student is changed and transformed**
- **Learning outcomes achieved**
- **Transformed frame of reference is stable and unproblematic**

**Reintegration complete**
- **Student experiences reverse culture shock as frame of reference now changed so previous usual reality is now experienced as different**
- **Outstanding troublesome-ness persists**

**Liminal stage continues**
- **Student’s usual frame of reference is stable & unproblematic**
- **Student anticipates difference**
- **Student has a cultural desire and motivation to study abroad**

**During study abroad**
- **Student experiences culture shock as usual frame of reference is insufficient to permit immediate understanding**
- **Student needs to learn to live, learn and make sense of the different reality**
- **As the different reality becomes familiar, culture shock reduces but can occur at any point during the experience when exposed to difference**

**Additional notes:**
- **Students’ usual frame of reference is stable & unproblematic**
- **Students need to anticipate difference**
- **Students have a cultural desire and motivation to study abroad**

**Requires cultural desire and motivation**

**During study abroad**
- **Student experiences culture shock as usual frame of reference is insufficient to permit immediate understanding**
- **Student needs to learn to live, learn and make sense of the different reality**
- **As the different reality becomes familiar, culture shock reduces but can occur at any point during the experience when exposed to difference**

**NB:** See program & study abroad specific material(s) for application & other processes

## Before study abroad – preliminal stage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Media</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student’s usual frame of reference is stable &amp; unproblematic</strong>&lt;sup&gt;12&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Tutor meet with student - discuss need to be active learner &amp; take responsibility: discuss strategies for learning</td>
<td>Face to face meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Online learning - eLP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student anticipates difference</strong></td>
<td>Student meet with peer returner from study abroad (SA): discuss experience &amp; strategies</td>
<td>Face to face meeting(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Social media establishment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student has a cultural desire</strong>&lt;sup&gt;13&lt;/sup&gt; and motivation to study abroad</td>
<td>Student commence cultural study to begin to learn about host culture living &amp; professional practice: prepare for exposure to difference</td>
<td>Online learning activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Storyline. – creative approach – Reflections. PebblePad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pre-requisite: cultural desire</strong>&lt;sup&gt;13&lt;/sup&gt; &amp; motivation **</td>
<td>Student &amp; tutor agree student role and rules for SA/ learning contract</td>
<td>Face to face meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Upload online. PebblePad</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## During study abroad – liminal stage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Media</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student experiences culture shock as usual frame of reference insufficient</td>
<td>Student assigned local enabler</td>
<td>Face to face meeting(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Enabler briefs student ‘friendly stranger’; makes introductions to</td>
<td>Face to face meeting(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>community of practice</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student needs to learn to live, learn and make sense of different reality</td>
<td>Student assigned professional practice mentor &amp; local buddy student</td>
<td>Face to face meeting and working</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student continues to take responsibility for learning &amp; apply rules set</td>
<td>Face to face</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Discuss &amp; negotiate with enabler &amp; mentor</td>
<td>Continue cultural study – online or hardcopy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student facilitated to form communitas</td>
<td>Face to face</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reflect alone &amp; with community</td>
<td>Reflective activities (flexible)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Online synch/ async - social media/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>skype/ eLP blog share &amp; comment/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>discussion board</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Requires: cultural encounters
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Media</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student experiences reverse culture shock(^{19}) as frame of reference changed</td>
<td>Student debriefs with tutor</td>
<td>Face to face meeting(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outstanding troublesome-ness persists</td>
<td>Student to form ‘alumni’ of returned communitas.</td>
<td>Face to face meeting(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Requires: continued contact</td>
<td>Student to continue to reflect &amp; make sense of troublesome-ness, alone &amp; with others</td>
<td>Reflections on learning - PebblePad, Face to face meeting(s), Skype/ Social media</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## After study abroad – postliminal stage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Media</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student has resolved troublesome-ness &amp; confirmed understandings</td>
<td>Student reintegrated into community in a transformed manner.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student is changed and transformed</td>
<td>Student shares experiences with others</td>
<td>Face to face / presentations/ eLP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning outcomes achieved</td>
<td>Student to support future students</td>
<td>Face to face meeting(s)/ Social media establishment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transformed frame of reference is stable &amp; unproblematic(^{12})</td>
<td>Student maintains membership of global community of practice</td>
<td>Face to face/ social media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Envisioning &amp; moving forward: student plans ongoing development as a global graduate(^{14})</td>
<td>PebblePad</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In conclusion

- The study abroad transformative learning framework is underpinned by research findings and aims to maximise student learning during each stage of the study abroad journey.

- The framework necessarily requires a blended approach to meet the requirements of students who study remotely from their home university. And promotes inclusion of a global community of practice.

Thank you
debra.morgan@northumbria.ac.uk
This paper is an impact output from my doctoral research. Further details of this research can be found online in Morgan, D.A. Learning in liminality: Student experiences of learning during a nursing study abroad journey: a hermeneutic phenomenological research study. Nurse Education Today 2019; 79: 204-209.

References continued


