



**Northumbria  
University**  
NEWCASTLE

# **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](mailto:debra.morgan@northumbria.ac.uk)**

# The research: Morgan (2019)

- **Background:** Study abroad generates positive learning outcomes<sup>1,2</sup>. 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<sup>3</sup>. N = 20 student nurses. X 2 semi-structured interviews per participant (return & follow up). Phenomenological Hermeneutical Method of Analysis<sup>4</sup>.

# The findings

- Learning is experienced within the context of difference.
- Study abroad is a journey of liminality<sup>5,6</sup>.
- The journey comprises preliminal, liminal and postliminal stages<sup>5,6</sup>.
- Students are 'liminal entities' as they are 'betwixt & between'<sup>6</sup>.
- 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<sup>7,8,9,10,11</sup>.
- At the end of the journey students experience transformation<sup>12</sup>: personal & professional development, progression toward cultural competence<sup>13</sup>; global graduateness<sup>14</sup>.

# 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

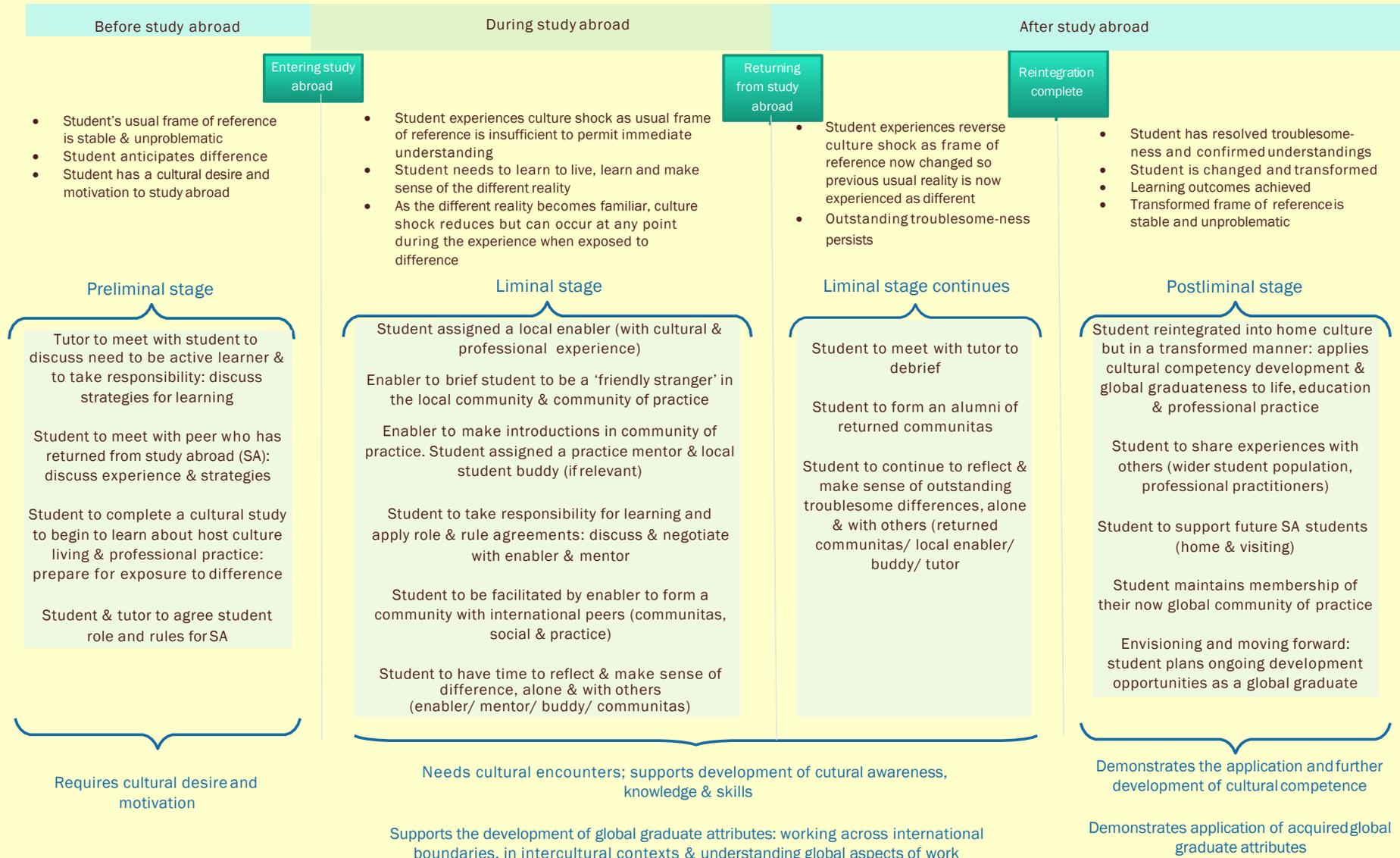
NB: See programme & study abroad specific material(s) for application & other processes

## Study abroad transformative learning framework

To support:

- Personal and professional development
- Development toward global graduateness
- Development toward cultural competency

read in conjunction with summary report\*



\*Morgan, D.A. (2018) 'Learning in liminality: student experiences of learning during study abroad: Summary Report' Northumbria University (summary acknowledges underpinning theorists).

# Before study abroad – preliminary stage

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

# During study abroad – liminal stage

Experience	Activity	Media
Student experiences culture shock <sup>15,16</sup> , as usual frame of reference insufficient	Student assigned local enabler	Face to face meeting(s)
Student needs to learn to live, learn and make sense of different reality	Enabler briefs student ‘friendly stranger’; makes introductions to community of practice <sup>17,18</sup>	Face to face meeting(s)
As reality becomes familiar, culture shock reduces (can re-occur)	Student assigned professional practice mentor & local buddy student	Face to face meeting and working
<i>Requires: cultural encounters<sup>13</sup></i>	Student continues to take responsibility for learning & apply rules set. Discuss & negotiate with enabler & mentor	Face to face Continue cultural study – online or hardcopy
	Student facilitated to form communitas <sup>6</sup>	Face to face Reflective activities (flexible)
	Reflect alone & with community	Online synch/ async - social media/ skype/ eLP blog share & comment/ discussion board

# After study abroad – liminal stage continues

Experience	Activity	Media
Student experiences reverse culture shock <sup>19</sup> as frame of reference changed	Student debriefs with tutor	Face to face meeting(s)
Outstanding troublesome-ness persists	Student to form ‘alumni’ of returned communitas.	Face to face meeting(s)
Requires: continued contact	Student to continue to reflect & make sense of troublesome-ness, alone & with others	Reflections on learning - PebblePad Face to face meeting(s) Skype/ Social media

# After study abroad – postliminal stage

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

# 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](mailto:debra.morgan@northumbria.ac.uk)**

# References

- 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.**
- 1. Keogh, J. & Russel-Roberts, E. Exchange programmes and student mobility: Meeting students' expectations or an expensive holiday? *Nurse Education Today* 2009;**29** (21):108-116.
- 2. Maltby, H.J., de Vries-Erich, J.M. & Lund, K. Being a stranger: Comparing study abroad experiences of nursing in low and high income countries through hermeneutic phenomenology. *Nurse Education Today* 2016. **45**:114-119.
- 3. Heidegger, M. *Being and time*. (trans J. Macquarrie & E. Robinson) Reprint. New York: Harper Perennial/ Modern Thought 2008.
- 4. Lindseth, A. & Norberg, A. A phenomenological hermeneutical method for researching lived experience. *Scandinavian Journal of Caring sciences* 2004;**18** (2):145-153.
- 5. van Gennep, A. *The rites of passage*. Chicago: Chicago University Press. 1960.
- 6. Turner, V.W. *The ritual process: Structure and anti-structure*. Reprint. London: Aldine Transaction. 2008.
- 7. Mezirow, J. An overview on transformative learning. In: Illeris, K. ed. *Contemporary theories of learning* London: Routledge 2009;90-105.

# References continued

8. Perkins, D. Constructivism and troublesome knowledge. In: Meyer, J.H.F & Land, R. eds. *Overcoming barriers to student understanding: Threshold concepts and troublesome knowledge* London: Routledge. 2006;33-47.
9. Meyer, J.H.F. & Land, R. *Threshold concepts and troublesome knowledge: Linkages to ways of thinking and practising within the disciplines*. ETL Project (Enhancing teaching-learning environments in undergraduate courses project) Occasional Report 4. Edinburgh: Universities of Edinburgh, Coventry and Durham May 2003.
10. Entwistle, N. Threshold concepts and transformative ways of thinking within research into higher education. In: Land, R., Meyer, J.H.F. & Smith, J. eds. *Threshold concepts within the disciplines*. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers 2008;21-35.
11. Land, R., Meyer, J.H.F. & Smith, J. (eds.). *Threshold concepts within the disciplines*. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers 2008.
12. Meyer, J.H.F., Land, R. & Baillie, C. (eds.) *Threshold concepts and transformational learning*. Rotterdam: Sense publishers 2010.

# References continued

13. Lave, J. & Wenger, E. *Situated learning. Legitimate peripheral participation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1991.
14. Farnsworth, V., Kleanthous, I. & Wenger-Trayner, E. Communities of practice as a social theory of learning: A conversation with Etienne Wenger. *British Journal of Educational Studies* 2016;**64** (2):139-160.
15. Diamond, A., Walkley, L. & Scott-Davies, S. *Global graduates into global leaders*. London: Council for Industry and Higher Education (CIHE) 2011.
16. Campinha-Bacote, J. The process of cultural competence in the delivery of healthcare services: A model of care. *Journal of Transcultural Nursing* 2002;**13** (3):181-184.
17. Oberg, K. Cultural shock: Adjustment to new cultural environments. Reprint. *Curare* 2006;**29**:142-146.
18. Pedersen, P. *The five stages of culture shock: Critical incidents from around the world*. Santa Barbara: Greenwood publishing 1995.
19. Presbitero, A. Culture shock and reverse culture shock. The moderating role of cultural intelligence in international students' adaptation. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* 2016;**53**: 28-38.