Empowering Study Abroad Students through Online Support

Prof. Jane Jackson, Ms. Chan Sin Yu & Ms. Tongle Sun
Department of English, The Chinese University of Hong Kong
Outline of presentation

• Rationale for intercultural interventions in SA

• A case study of a fully-online IC intervention for outbound international exchange students from a Hong Kong university

• eLearning/online resources for SA students in Asia and other contexts
Study abroad (SA) myths

• Recent SA research challenges idealistic notions of ‘immersion’ and the ‘automatic transformation’ of student sojourners; a range of internal and external factors can lead to divergent outcomes (Jackson, 2012, 2018; Kinginger, 2009; Vande Berg & Paige, 2012).

• While some student sojourners experience gains in host language proficiency, intercultural competence, and global-mindedness, others do not, and have very limited contact with hosts. Sojourns are highly variable.
The imperative for IC interventions

• Bolstering participation rates in study abroad programs and increasing the number of international students on campus does not necessarily lead to meaningful IC interactions, IC competence, and global mindsets;

• Hence, more and more researchers advocate **theory-based, research-based IC interventions** both at home and abroad (e.g., Deardorff & Asaratnam-Smith 2017; Jackson & Oguro 2018; Jones *et al.* 2016; Vande Berg *et al.* 2012).
Intercultural interventions are...

‘intentional and deliberate pedagogical approaches, activated throughout the study abroad cycle (before, during, and after) that are designed to enhance students’ intercultural competence’ (Paige & Vande Berg 2012: 29-30).
Intercultural competence

• A complex construct that is difficult to pin down (Deardorff 2009; Spitzberg & Changnon 2009);

• The fundamental acceptance of & respect for people who are different from oneself in terms of ethnicity, social class, language, religion, etc.;

• The ability to interact effectively and appropriately with people who have a different cultural background (e.g., in a genuinely constructive manner free of prejudice, apathy, aggression, etc.) (Byram 2012; Fantini 2012; Jackson 2014).
IC communication & engagement abroad

This online course is designed to help students make the most of education abroad by enhancing their intercultural sensitivity as they explore the host environment and interact with locals and other int’l students. Through exposure to relevant theories, readings, and other resources, this course aims to help students develop a deeper understanding of what it means to be interculturally competent and global-minded. While critically reflecting on their second language/intercultural interactions and sharing their experiences with peers, they are encouraged to become more curious, open-minded, and actively engaged in the world around them.
Intercultural communication and engagement abroad was developed to . . .

• enhance the intercultural sensitivity & sociopragmatic awareness of international exchange students and encourage them to use their L2 to engage in meaningful IC interactions in the host environment;

• foster a deeper understanding of what it means to be interculturally competent and global-minded through exposure to theories, readings, and other resources, and online sharing;

• encourage reflective, critical engagement with the world around them through online coaching (guided, critical reflection).
Research-driven & Theory-based

• Ethnographic & experimental-design studies of sojourners (Jackson, 2008, 2010, 2011, 2012);
• Reflective, experiential Learning (Bennett, 2008; Kolb, 1983; Meyer-Lee, 2005; Moon, 2004, 2008);
• M. Bennett’s (1993) Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity, DMIS333;
• Adult education as potentially transformative (Kauffmann et al., 1992; Mezirow, 2000);
• Poststructuralist notions of identity expansion (Block, 2007).
Pedagogy: (Inter)cultural coaching or mentoring

‘an intercultural pedagogy in which the mentor provides ongoing support for and facilitation of intercultural learning and development’ (Paige 2013: 6)

• The mentor serves as a facilitator, motivator, resource, guide, and fellow explorer instead of an authoritative, distant ‘sage on the stage’.

• Building a climate of respect and mutuality is crucial in a constructive mentoring relationship.
Course material & activities

• Readings (intercultural communication text), data excerpts, PPT files & YouTube links on Blackboard (weekly theme)

• Intercultural mentoring (structured reflection linked to the participants’ level of intercultural competence as measured by the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) (Hammer, 2012)

• Fieldwork tasks/sharing related to weekly theme (Small groups with similar IDI scores)

• Discussion Board: Posts related to weekly theme (Full-class)

• Reflective essays (gradually linking sojourn experience with readings/relevant theories and constructs)
Weekly Forum (Discussion Board)

- Core elements of culture & enculturation
- ‘Transition shock’, adjustment & re-entry
- Language, communication, culture & power
- Nonverbal communication
- Language, culture & identity
- Otherization/stereotyping
- ‘Cultures of learning’
- Intercultural friendship/romance & conflict
- Global/intercultural citizenship
- Marketing international experience
Fieldwork (small-group sharing)

• Introductions/interactions with host nationals
• Food & culture (history, meaning & taste of local dish)
• Adjusting to a new environs (interview int’l Ss)
• Observation of a local cultural scene (NVC)
• Chats with locals/non-locals about identity issues and intercultural relationships
• Experiences with diverse ‘cultures of learning’ (Interviews with local & int’l students)
Assessment scheme

• Discussion board (Full-group sharing) 30%

• Fieldwork (Individual tasks with small-group sharing) 40%

• Reflective essays (2) 30%

• Rubrics to assess reflective writing/Discussion Board posts & Fieldwork

**Students were encouraged to submit a polished reflective essay to CUHK’s Annual Study Abroad Writing Contest**

www.apaie2018.org
Course participants (N = 22)

Gender: 4 (18.2%) male      18 (81.8%) female
L1: 17 (77.3%) Cantonese    4 (18.2%) Putonghua
   1 (4.5%) Korean
Status: 16 (72.7%) Local     6 (27.3%) non-local
   (5 PRC & 1 Korean)
Year of study:  2 (9.1%) 2nd yr   20 (90.9%) 3rd yr
Faculty:
   9 (40.9%) Arts           8 (36.4%) Business
   2 (9.1%) Education       1 (4.5%) Medicine
   1 (4.5 %) Social Science 1 (4.5%) Science
### Sojourn duration & destination

**Duration:**
- 10 (45.5%) Semester
- 12 (54.5%) Academic year

**Destination:**

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<td>5 (22.7%)</td>
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Intercultural Development Continuum (Hammer, 2012)

Monocultural Mindset

Denial (55-70)
disinterest & avoidance

Polarization (70-85)
Defense / Reversal
“us” vs “them”

Minimization (85-115)
overemphasis on similarity

Acceptance (115-130)
understands & values differences

Adaptation (130-145)
able to adapt thinking & behaviors to achieve goals

Intercultural Mindset

www.apaie2018.org
A comparison of pre- and post-course IDI results

• The group as a whole shifted in the direction of greater intercultural sensitivity, gaining **11.41 points on the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI)**, moving from ‘Polarization’ (84.52) to ‘Minimization’ (95.93), a transitional phase. While reduced by 7.01 points, the orientation gap revealed that they retained a very inflated perception of their level of intercultural competence (34.27 to 27.26).

• In the previous year, the semester-long international exchange students who were abroad without any intervention (N = 134) gained only **0.33 points**, suggesting that the course was effective in propelling students to a higher level of intercultural competence.
The analysis of the qualitative data found that most students became...

• more knowledgeable about core elements in intercultural communication (e.g., identity negotiation);
• more mindful of the impact of their attitudes and behavior (e.g., L2 use) in intercultural interactions;
• more familiar with strategies to employ to enhance IC communication, manage IC conflict situations, & build IC friendships;
• more willing to use their L2 to initiate intercultural interactions.
A closer look at online IC learning

1. How do the participants perceive stereotyping and Otherization before, during, and after this intercultural intervention?

2. To what extent does the asynchronous Forum foster collaborative learning, critical reflection, and intercultural learning in relation to stereotyping and Otherization?
Combatting the negative consequences of Stereotyping & Otherization

‘...the cognitive activities of categorization and generalization that occur normally in the human brain are an important way of making sense of the world around us. Although such categorizations are useful as sense-making strategies for human behavior, if unchecked, they can lead to more extreme understandings of cultural difference, such as ethnocentrism, stereotyping, and prejudice—the roots of racism’ (Holmes 2012: 468).
Forum #6: Stereotyping & Othering
Forum #6 prompt

• What is meant by the ‘culture as nation’ perspective? What are the dangers of this?

• Have you come across any stereotypes of people from your in-group? If yes, how did you respond?

• Do you think that you engage in stereotyping? What steps can you take to try to reduce the normal tendency to put people into boxes (e.g., stereotype)? Why is it important to try to push beyond this common habit?
Thread: *Stereotyping as first impression*

I think I engage in stereotyping because it can quickly give me an impression of the new people and situation that I meet. I can have a simplified assumption on others. Then, I may not be too surprised when I meet someone new. For example, when I see the American girls playing crazily in a party, I won’t be shocked. (S22, m, Ireland)
Thread: *Why we have to discriminate others?*

More or less, I think I have engaged in stereotyping. This is because we all rely on limited clues to guess or preview a person’s personality to ‘know’ a new friend. Just as we may trust in horoscopes, stereotyping is the way we find ‘tips’ about a new person. Although it does not make any logical sense, people tend to trust these ideas. (S15, f, Canada)
Thread: *Try to reduce stereotyping!*

When I react negatively to someone, I need to reflect on what may be the source of my discomfort. That would be a good way to reduce the tendency of putting people into a box. I should be more open-minded to intercultural contacts. If a friend from Africa greets me with a light punch or hug, I would not consider this as a rude act but a way of expressing friendliness. Putting aside the cultural bias would definitely help eliminate stereotyping. To build a genuine relationship with others, I need to try to push beyond this habit so that I can truly understand and appreciate the way they are. (S8, F, Australia)
Thread: *Why discriminate others?*

To reduce stereotyping, I will remind myself: Is it that all Chinese possess some core personalities? If not, I do not have the right to stereotype others. I will also ask myself: How do I feel when I am stereotyped? I feel I am not respected when people act as if they know who I am because they know something about the Chinese. As we are all different individuals, we should respect each person as a distinctive person. This is very important as stereotyping will affect the way we treat a person. (S15, f, Belgium)
Thread: *Unavoidable stereotypes*

Even though stereotypes are something ingrained in ourselves, it is important to remove them in order to build meaningful and long-lasting intercultural relationships. I need to remind myself to see international students as individuals rather than as representatives of a particular cultural group. Stereotypes are hard to break but let’s try to do so and change our world! (S17,f, USA)
Thread: *Breaking the frame*

• In Singapore there are a lot of Blacks and Indians. It seems that they are incompatible with the Singaporean Chinese as you seldom see any interracial group sitting together to have a chat or tea in a restaurant or canteen. I also discriminate against the Indians since I do always smell a strong and stinky odor whenever they come across me. Although many times I tell myself not to view them in that way, I cannot stop myself from avoiding them. I think I need to be braver to come across that smell of spicy. (S17, m, Singapore)

• Dear X, I guess we can think in another way. While we can smell their strong curry smell, they can also smell our Chinese smell that we may not be able to smell ourselves... Our smell should consist of garlic and ginger... ha ha. (S16, f, S Africa)
Learning outcomes

• Most participants became more sensitive to the ways in which stereotyping can hamper the development of constructive intercultural relations and potentially lead to prejudicial, racist behavior, if unchecked;

• More sensitive to diversity within cultural groups, including their own, they began to move beyond polarizing ‘us vs. them’ orientations, opening up more possibilities for constructive intercultural dialogue. This shift was reflected in their work and IDI results.
Online intercultural mentoring can...

- raise awareness of ethnocentric practices;
- foster positive intercultural attitudes;
- promote more self-awareness/mindfulness;
- bolster L2 self-efficacy & the willingness to initiate intercultural interactions;
- encourage meaningful intercultural dialogue & the diversification of social networks;
- encourage the setting of realistic goals for further intercultural development.
Negative course elements

• Heavy workload

• Technical difficulties (e.g., uploading photos)

• Delayed feedback

• Preference for face-to-face meetings (more challenging to build relationships online)
Forum: Participant views

• Since we exchanged our ideas on a particular topic every week, I got to know more about the advantages of studying abroad. It’s not only to experience the lifestyle and culture in another country but also to learn how to build a good relationship with people from other nationalities, extend your social network, and know more about yourself. (F, Economics major, Australia)

• Most of us were quite responsive and asked questions, and this helped me reflect on issues that I would have ignored. This interaction also led to more sharing of ideas. I enjoyed reading others’ posts as I could learn more about their cultural encounters in other countries. (F, English major, S. Africa)
Fieldwork: Participant views

• The fieldwork actually encouraged me to talk more frequently with people. By interviewing local and international students, I got to know how people think in different ways. It also encouraged me to be a participant observer and to study local people’s lives in a different way. (F, business major, USA)

• The good thing about the fieldwork & debriefings is that we were in a small group. We got to know each other very well and from our posts we developed a more detailed understanding of others’ cultural experiences as well as our own. (F, English Education major, Canada)
Reflective essays: Participant views

• I was able to use the theories that I learnt from the course when reflecting on my fieldwork and intercultural experiences in the past few months. It enabled me to think deeper about the sojourn. (M, Science major, U.K.)

• The essays opened up an opportunity to reflect more deeply on my experiences and talk honestly about what was going on with me so I could get some advice. (F, Business Administration major, Canada)

• The essays helped me to organize my thoughts better. They are a record of my difficulties, confusion, and frustration. When I wrote about these negative things, I could better set goals and know what to work on. (F, Chinese major, Belgium)
For online courses of this nature...

• Anticipate technical problems & provide adequate support for the use of the eLearning platform;
• Recognize that most students will be new to critical reflection and fully online courses so clearly explain the nature of the course and demonstrate what it means to be reflective and engaged;
• Hold a pre-sojourn workshop to provide an opportunity for a F2F meeting to review the course aims, format, roles and responsibilities and use of Blackboard;
• Be mindful of the participants’ L2 proficiency and intercultural competence when sequencing/devising material/tasks and providing feedback;
• Allow sufficient time for course tasks (with specific deadlines for primary posts and other comments);
• Provide feedback on posts, drawing attention to common themes & issues as well as elements that have been overlooked; raise questions to stimulate deeper reflection & connections to core readings;

• Develop rubrics (evaluation grids) to provide constructive feedback on all course elements (e.g., midterm & end-of-course);

• Recognize that a fully online course of this nature is much more intensive and time-consuming than a regular course, but **well worth the effort!**
Advances in technology

• eLearning platforms (e.g., Blackboard, Moodle)
• Social media (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, YouTube)
• Hypermedia/hypertext (e.g., Wikis, blogs)
• MOOCS (e.g., IC communication courses with a wide audience) & SA-dedicated websites

Enabling diverse forms of intercultural interventions at home and abroad (e.g., mixed-mode or fully online IC transition courses or workshops)
Intercultural SA websites

• *The Global Scholar* (free online courses and resources primarily targeting American students at all phases of SA: pre-sojourn, sojourn & post-sojourn) ([http://www.globalscholar.us](http://www.globalscholar.us))

• *iStudent 101: Online learning for inter-national students* (free online SA courses and resources designed for international students) ([http://istudent101.com](http://istudent101.com))
Intercultural SA websites


• **What's Up With Culture**: On-line Cultural Training Resource for Study Abroad ([http://www2.pacific.edu/sis/culture/](http://www2.pacific.edu/sis/culture/))
Study Abroad Blogs

• http://www.studyabroad.com/b/default.aspx

• http://abroadblogs.newpaltz.edu/

• http://studenttravel.about.com/od/studyabroad1/a/study_abroad_bl.htm
Thank you for kind attention!

jjackson@cuhk.edu.hk
cherrychancuhk@gmail.com
tonglesuncuhk@gmail.com
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