LANGUAGE AND CULTURE LEARNING ABROAD: MEDIATING PRE-SERVICE
WORLD LANGUAGES TEACHERS’ DEVELOPMENT OF INTERCULTURALITY

A Dissertation in
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by
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The development of intercultural understanding and the ability to interact appropriately and effectively with people from other cultures has become extremely important in today’s globalized, multilingual world. Given the inextricable link between language and culture, one place where this intercultural learning and development might take place is in the world languages classroom. If this is to be the case, then language teachers must first experience their own learning and development in this area so that they can provide necessary expertise and support to their students. One natural site in which teachers can learn and develop interculturally is during a study abroad experience. During this time abroad, however, participants cannot be left to their own devices with the assumption that they will learn just by virtue of being in another culture. Rather they must be supported in ways that allow them to develop skills, such as those of reflection and analysis, which will help them better understand themselves and their target language and culture so that they can interact successfully in various intercultural contexts.

Employing Vygotskian sociocultural theory, where development is understood not as a natural process internal to learners and driven by internal individual factors but rather as a result of dialogic social interactions with others, as well as the constructs of intercultural competence and symbolic competence (brought together in the notion of interculturality) for the design of the course and analysis of the data, this study attempts to learn more about the impact of specific kinds of mediation on students’ intercultural development while abroad. Specifically, it looks at the forms and functions of mediation provided in an online course that was designed to facilitate students’ engagement with their host cultures and dialogic interactions between students and a facilitator around a variety of intercultural topics. The study also attempts to fill a gap in the existing research by looking specifically at learners’ processes of development during study
abroad, as opposed to the results, and how mediation that is focused and systematic mediation might impact that development.

Using qualitative data from students’ written responses to blog prompts and classmate and facilitator feedback as well as other assignments and activities, this study looks at the different types and foci of the mediation provided by the course structure and how those worked together to help students in the process of developing interculturality. The study also looks at two case studies to examine how different students experience their time aboard, how they engage with particular mediational foci and how that engagement with the mediation might impact their development.

The study illustrates how both the structural and dialogic elements of the course work together to mediate students’ experiences and their intercultural learning and development. It also illustrates the importance, for their processes of development, of the ways in which students engage with mediation offered toward their understanding of language use, communication, and culture and toward their abilities to move beyond emotional responses to analytical ones and to make connections between and across the variety of experiences that they have while abroad.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Background

The field of language teaching and learning has traditionally emphasized students’ acquisition of grammatical structures and vocabulary knowledge as one of its main objectives. While these aspects of language are, of course, important and necessary, the focus on them has at times been to the detriment of an understanding of language as a system for meaning making that is highly tied to the context (i.e., culture) in which it is spoken. Fortunately, the field has in recent years moved toward more communicative approaches to language teaching, where meaning and form are both given value and attention in the language classroom. This shift to the communicative has allowed for movement toward the view that language and culture are connected and that, in order to become proficient in a language, students must also understand the cultural contexts in which the language is spoken. In fact, the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) has shifted its focus to require much more than grammatical accuracy or near-native pronunciation as an indicator of proficiency and now includes in its standards the notion that to be a truly proficient user of a language requires understanding of cultural contexts:

“Through the study of other languages, students gain a knowledge and understanding of the cultures that use that language and, in fact, cannot truly master the language until they have also mastered the cultural contexts in which the language occurs” (Standards, 1996, p. 3).

This shift in understanding the relationship between language and culture requires, then, that students develop more than grammatical or lexical competence, but that they develop in their understanding of culture and of intercultural interactions as well.
Students can, and should, be explicitly trained in the knowledge and skills necessary for the development of intercultural understanding in second language (L2) classrooms. While not the only sites in which this explicit instruction can take place, of course, language classrooms are extremely well suited for this type of instruction given the inherent connection between the learning of language and the learning of culture. As Sercu (2005) points out, “[f]oreign language education is, by definition, intercultural […] connecting learners to a world that is culturally different from their own” (p. 1). Thus, the language classroom (along with related sites such as travel or study abroad) provides a ready-made site for the introduction of culture and intercultural learning.

The development of intercultural understanding is a desired outcome in language learning because it allows for the possibility of effective communication not just on the linguistic level (i.e., using the ‘correct’ words for exchange of information), but also on the cultural and contextual level (i.e., using the ‘appropriate’ words for the given situation). The L2 classroom is a natural site in which students can come to see this interconnectedness of language and culture. This is important because, without this understanding, students may view the speaking of other languages as merely using different words for saying the same things as they do in their first language (L1) and they may miss the subtle ways in which those words take on different meanings when used in different cultural contexts. For example, while the Spanish word amistad may translate into English as ‘friendship’, the way amistad is understood and acted upon in a Spanish-speaking culture is not necessarily the way that ‘friendship’ is understood and acted upon in an English-speaking one. That is, the context in which a word is used and the culture of the person using the word necessarily has an impact on its meaning and value. Being able to understand and interpret these contextually bound meanings, then, may allow language learners to better understand their interlocutors and to interact more successfully during intercultural interactions inside or outside of the classroom.
If the development of intercultural understanding is to take place within world language (WL) classrooms, then teachers of world languages need to have had their own opportunities to develop interculturally. If they haven’t developed the understandings and skills necessary for interpreting and interacting interculturally then it is highly unlikely that they will be effective in creating environments for their own students that allow for this type of development. If they want their students to experience some level of intercultural development, they themselves need to have expertise (i.e., specific knowledge, skills and attitudes) and relevant experiences (i.e., have gone through the intercultural developmental process). As Sercu (2005) points out,

“in order to support the intercultural learning process, foreign language teachers need additional knowledge, attitudes, competencies and skills to the ones hitherto thought of as necessary and sufficient for teaching communicative competence in a foreign language” (p. 5).

This is in part what makes this study a unique contribution to the field, then, because it is not looking at university students going abroad for their own personal development; rather the stakes are higher because the participants are future teachers who will play a role in shaping the intercultural learning and experiences of perhaps generations of language learners in K – 12 classroom settings.

One site in which teachers have the opportunity to gain the necessary knowledge, attitudes and skills and go through the process of intercultural development is a study abroad (SA) experience. Many K – 12 language teacher education programs require their teacher candidates to study abroad as part of the learning and certification process. As will be mentioned briefly below and discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2, SA is often a required element because it has traditionally been viewed as a ‘magic’ time in which participants develop linguistically and culturally just by virtue of being in a different culture with people who speak a different language. Because of this view, most programs provide little or no support to participants, particularly when it comes to their developing of the understandings and skills necessary to
interact appropriately and effectively in the intercultural contexts in which they find themselves. The course being looked at in this study, however, has specifically as its focus the pre-service teachers’ intercultural development and the support of that development.

This study looked at the experiences of one group of world languages education (WL ED) pre-service teachers at a large research-based university in the Northeastern U.S. during their participation in a semester-long online course that co-occurred with their mandatory SA experience. The course, to be discussed in greater detail in future chapters, is now offered annually and involves weekly readings and/or cultural participation assignments along with blog discussions geared toward helping students develop in their understanding of the cultural contexts in which they are situated and how those contexts shape and are shaped by language. Assignments are related to topics such as cross-cultural (mis)communication, gender and culture, linguistic variation and students’ identities as language users. The course is also geared toward helping students to use the understandings that they gain as a way of organizing their participation in the culture and toward helping them think about how they will use their new understandings both while in the cultural context and once they have returned home and are working in language classrooms.

Unlike most previous research into students’ experiences during SA, which has tended to emphasize expansion of their vocabulary and grammar knowledge, the present study investigates participants’ development of sensitivity toward language use in culturally appropriate ways. It also investigates students’ process of developing intercultural attitudes, knowledge and skills and how those might be impacted by the support (i.e., mediation) provided by the course. The conceptualization of intercultural development in this study is influenced primarily by the research around intercultural competence (e.g., Byram, 1997, 2000, 2009, 2010; Deardorff, 2006, 2008) and more recent investigations framed as symbolic competence (Kramsch, 2006, 2009, 2011; Kramsch & Whiteside, 2008). Both of these concepts are useful in understanding the
experiences and development of second language learners, particularly of those living in another
country. As will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2, these two concepts taken together
underscore the types of knowledge, skills and attitudes that learners may develop when engaging
with individuals from a different cultural background while also highlighting the ways in which
individuals understand and present themselves as language and culture learners and ‘doers’.
Moreover, intercultural and symbolic competence allow for a focus on language as a tool for
communication and interaction, going beyond the aforementioned – and anachronistic – notion
that language study is simply about the mastering of grammatical structures and knowledge of
vocabulary.

   Intercultural competence (ICC), in particular, has been the topic of considerable
discussion and study in the last few decades, with debate particularly focused on efforts to define
it and on whether and/or how it might be assessed. According to Byram (1997), ICC refers to
specific knowledge, skills and attitudes (particularly critical cultural awareness of both one’s
home and host cultures) that a learner may develop through interacting with members of another
culture. In addition, Deardorff has expanded the model to include internal and external outcomes
as well as more of a focus on the process of development that takes place. Symbolic competence
(SC) refers, in part, to language learners distancing themselves from their usual ways of being
and behaving and reflecting upon those usual ways of being through the new, potentially complex
and conflicting, contexts (Kramsch, 2009, 2011). While the field continues to investigate these
concepts to understand and further develop them, the present study drew on both in
conceptualizing the experiences of WL ED students during their time abroad.

   While the concepts contained in these constructs are quite useful, the terms themselves do
not necessarily convey the understanding of learners and their experiences that framed the present
study. First, use of the word ‘competence’ suggests that these constructs are fixed or static traits
of individuals rather than, as was conceptualized in the current work, context-dependent, context-
created and negotiated during interactions. Moreover, use the term ‘competence’, connotes that these represent a particular ‘level’ that can or should be ‘reached’ or fully ‘attained’ after a period of time spent participating in the language and/or culture if presented with the right kinds of experiences. The goal and focus of the current research, however, was not to look at traits that individuals may ‘possess’ or at whether the learners can or do ‘attain’ these competences; rather, focus was on the process through which learners might be mediated as they reflected upon intercultural experiences (their own as well as others’) during SA. For reasons that will be further elaborated in Chapter 2, the current work will use the term ‘interculturality’ to represent the construct that the mediation is working to help students develop through their participation in the course.

1.2 Purpose of the dissertation

The purpose of the present study is to examine pre-service teachers’ development of interculturality during SA. Specifically, the purpose is to look at how that development is impacted as they participate in a course in which readings, activities, and discussions have been purposely designed with specific, intentional and dialogic mediation (through guided reflection and analysis) of intercultural development in mind. As mentioned earlier, this is in contrast to how SA has been traditionally understood, where it is an experience in which learners are left to their own devices and it is assumed that they will develop on their own. This study adopts a Vygotskian theoretical perspective (to be explained in Chapter 2), according to which it must not be assumed that learners are necessarily in a position to fully and independently direct their own learning. Rather, within a Vygotskian framework, such autonomy is instead a potential outcome of a process in which learners first benefit from mediation made available by dialogic interaction with others.
The multiple forms of mediation provided by the course are examined for the ways in which they support and encourage students’ intercultural development. Ways in which specific pre-service teachers oriented to the mediation are also examined, as is the impact of shifts in the mediation provided by the course facilitator based on her understanding of the students’ orientations and responsiveness to mediation. This research provides insight into students’ intercultural development understood as a mediated process, with particular attention to how course resources and interactions may function to guide students to reflect on and critically analyze their experiences abroad.

1.3 The need for this research

While quite a bit of research has been done on learners’ development, particularly their linguistic development, during study abroad (Bacon, 2002; Elola & Oskoz, 2008; Jackson, 2009; Lee, 2011, 2012; Marx & Moss, 2011; Vande Berg & Paige, 2009), comparatively little of the work has focused specifically on the processes of intercultural development that learners go through and/or on how those processes may be mediated by others such as a teacher or peers or by purposefully designed activities (see Arrúe, 2008; Lou and Bosley, 2008; Municci, 2008; and Smolcic, 2011, 2013 for a few examples of work that has been done in this area). The study being discussed here attempts to fill that gap in the research by looking specifically at both how the students develop in their new contexts and the ways in which the mediation provided may support them in that development.

The research presented in this dissertation is important because it focuses on ways in which different types of mediation may be provided in order to help students studying abroad to develop interculturality. While, as just mentioned, previous work has been done looking at students’ development (linguistic and/or cultural) as an outcome, little has been done to look at
specific factors that might impact that development, including any mediation provided to the students, and how it impacts their development. Based on previous research (see Aguilar Stewart, 2010; DeKeyser, 2010; Jackson, 2008), it is clear that it is not necessarily the case that students develop either linguistically or interculturally just by virtue of being abroad. Crucial to the discussion of development in SA, both linguistic and cultural, is the idea that students cannot simply be left to their own devices during this time, but rather they must be assisted in their development by a more experienced person, often a teacher or program director. As Byram (1997) notes, having an SA experience “does not necessarily lead to learning, however, unless it is related to the reflection and analysis of the classroom” (p. 69). This study is important, then, because it looked specifically at the forms of mediation provided by the course, including systematically guided reflection and analysis, and attempted to determine the ways in which that mediation impacted students in their intercultural development. Looking at the process of development as impacted by specific and intentional mediation is important because it allows for a greater understanding of ways in which particular students can be supported in particular ways as they are attempting to become participating members of the new culture through their L2. This, then, has the potential to impact the ways in which SA course instructors and program coordinators interact with and support students in their intercultural interactions and development.

Another area lacking in current research is how the intercultural development that takes place may orient pre-service teachers’ future actions and interactions, both while abroad and once they have returned home and are working within a classroom context. While it was beyond the scope of this project to look at the impact of this development in the pre-service teachers’ classrooms, there was focus on how the mediation provided impacted, or at times did not impact,
students’ subsequent interactions and behaviors within the host culture. This adds to the richness of understanding of how mediation can be implemented and adjusted in order to impact students’ development to the greatest and most positive extent possible.

1.4 Research Questions

As the goals of this study were to look at the emergence and development of WL pre-service teachers’ interculturality, as supported by reflection and mediation from a Vygotskian theoretical perspective (to be discussed in Chapter 2) and to discover the ways in which this development may be externalized and used for orientation to future settings, the research questions are as follows:

1. In what ways does student participation in the course serve to co-construct opportunities that mediate their critical reflection on, and reorientation toward, the linguistic and cultural contexts in which they are situated?
2. How does the students’ thinking about themselves and the language and culture(s) in which they are participating evolve during the course, as evidenced through their completion of course assignments and participation in interactions, and what does this suggest about their development of interculturality?

These questions look at different aspects of what may be taking place during the course, using Vygotskian theory, ICC and SC (brought together as ‘interculturality’) as guiding principles for designing the course and for understanding the data produced by the pre-service teachers.

1.5 Outline of the dissertation

In Chapter 2, the theoretical framework used for development and implementation of the course and analysis of the data is discussed. Research done on study abroad, particularly that with a focus on mediation and reflection, is first reviewed in order to situate the current study. Relevant elements of Vygotskian sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978, 1986) are then discussed,
including development, conceptual knowledge, mediation and the zone of proximal development. All of these are discussed with relation to their importance to the design of the course, the mediation provided through the course, and as a way of understanding the data from the students’ participation in the course. The notions of intercultural competence (Byram, 1997, 2000, 2009, 2010; Deardorff, 2006, 2008) and symbolic competence (Kramsch, 2006, 2009, 2011; Kramsch & Whiteside, 2008) are then drawn on to explain the specific construct being looked at in the students’ participation data. Finally, interculturality (James, 2007) is further defined and presented as a way of bringing together ICC and SC into one concept that removes the connotation of the term ‘competence’ and allows for a melding of the ideas included in both constructs.

Chapter 3 describes the objectives of the course and provides detailed information on the course structure, organization and participants. The sources of data used in the analysis are discussed along with the methodology used for data analysis. Chapter 4, the first of two data analysis chapters, looks specifically at the types of mediation provided by each of the different elements of the course. This chapter includes data from all of the students taking the course during the semester in which the analysis was carried out. Each course element is discussed separately and then one student’s complete dialogue, around a single topic and with both a classmate and the course facilitator, is discussed as a whole so that the reader can see how all of the course elements worked together to provide different types of mediation that impacted students’ development.

Chapter 5, the second of the data analysis chapters, presents the cases of two students whose orientations to the mediation and to learning in their SA experiences differed and whose development of interculturality played out in different ways. A rationale for choosing each of the cases is provided and then the experiences of Samantha and Michael are examined. Within each case, the foci of the mediation provided to each student are discussed and analyzed, along with
the impact that the mediation had on the students’ experiences abroad and in the course. In particular, foci in the following areas are discussed: students’ orientations to learning, perceptions of self as a user of the L2, emotional versus analytical positioning, and making connections across experiences. Ways in which the mediation in each of these areas provides insight into the students’ intercultural experiences and the process of their development are discussed along with ways in which the course facilitator attempted to mediate the students’ development of interculturality by focusing her mediation on these areas.

The final chapter provides a synthesis of the data as well as insights that have been gained into the mediation provided by the course and how that mediation impacts students’ development of interculturality. In addition, contributions of the study to the field of SA are discussed, along with limitations of the study and directions for continued research.
Chapter 2

Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, some of the previous research done in the area of study abroad is reviewed, with particular focus on the themes of mediation and reflection. In addition, the conceptual framework that underlies this study is outlined. In particular, the works of Vygotsky and Davydov are drawn from to make the case for a sociocultural theoretical approach to understanding how mediation impacts students’ development during study abroad. The works of Byram and Deardorff are drawn from to explicate the researcher’s understanding and application of the concept of intercultural competence, and the relevance to the current work of the construct of symbolic competence, as conceived of by Kramsch, is also discussed. Finally, a combining of the constructs of ICC and SC into the term ‘interculturality’ will be explicated and its application to the current study will be provided.

2.2 Research on study abroad

2.2.1 The study abroad context

The SA context is one in which learners have excellent opportunities to begin to develop a new understanding of culture and the ways in which culture and language interact. Research reveals that it is becoming increasingly common for students of a variety of disciplines, whether studying a world language or not, to participate in short-term (generally from two-week to one-
semester) SA programs. According to the Institute for International Education’s 2014 Open Doors Report, the number of American students studying abroad has more than doubled over the past fifteen years. The Report states that during the 2012-2013 academic year an all-time high number of American students, 289,408, studied abroad for academic credit; an increase of about two percent (2.1%) over the previous year. Currently about nine percent of American students study abroad at some point during their undergraduate programs (IIE Open Doors Report). While this is admittedly still a small portion of the entire population of US undergraduate students, the fact that the numbers are continuing to increase each year means that more and more students will have this type of experience during their college years. As mentioned above, studying abroad is not limited to those students studying or majoring in a language. Of the students who studied abroad during the 2012-2013 academic year, those majoring in STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) made up the largest percentage, with 22.5% coming from that discipline. This dropped the previous top field of social sciences to second with 22.1%.

Somewhat surprisingly, students majoring in a world language made up only 4.9%, a drop of 5.5% from the previous year, while, particularly relevant to the current study, those studying education comprised only 4% of the population of students studying abroad (IIE Fast Facts 2014, p. 2).

Given the fact that students from multiple disciplines make the choice to study abroad, it makes sense that they may do so for a variety of reasons, including the desire to experience new ‘adventures’, meet new people, improve their resumes, learn about a new culture, or progress in their language skills. For those students who go abroad to improve their language and culture skills, this experience, as mentioned in the previous chapter, is often seen as a ‘magic’ time in which they will automatically improve in these areas simply by virtue of being in and around the target language and culture. It is the case, however, that students cannot be expected to develop particular knowledge, skills or attitudes simply because they live and study in another country for
a period of time. In looking at what actually happens during most experiences, where students are often left to their own devices, Aguilar Stewart (2010) calls the SA semester “the ‘black hole’ semester when educators lose contact with students for a 6-month period just when their language and personal identity as an L2 speaker are undergoing the greatest change” (p. 141). Maintaining contact, then, is key since, as Jackson (2008) observes, “[w]e cannot assume that language and cultural learning will take place simply because the participants are residing in the host culture” (p. 237). Similarly, DeKeyser (2010) comes to the “inescapable conclusion […] that no magical implicit learning process takes over when students go abroad” (p. 90).

It may be the case, at least in part, that learning/development does not take place automatically because, as Kinginger (2010) points out, American students who go abroad are often not really required to step out of their own social groups or engage with people in the local communities in which they are living and studying. This is because they very often stick within groups of students who speak their same first language and do not attempt to interact with people in the host culture. The ubiquitous availability of technologies such as Skype and FaceTime as well as the use of social media for staying in touch with friends, family and events in their home cultures also impacts students’ interactions abroad, particularly their willingness and/or ability to decrease home connections and increase host community connections (Keck, 2014). This lack of engagement with the culture or in the language means that they miss out on opportunities to improve not only their linguistic abilities, but their intercultural abilities as well.

2.2.2 Mediation and reflection in study abroad

After examining this research, it is clear that opportunities must be provided for students that allow for mediation of and reflection on their experiences, particularly their experiences with the culture in which they are living, so that they can develop knowledge and skills that allow
them to interact successfully not only in their current context but also in other intercultural contexts in which they may find themselves in the future. Mediation, that is, the social process through which learners are guided toward the ability to understand and transform their own thinking, is necessary to help students go beyond surface-level understandings of the cultures in which they find themselves to a deeper conceptual level (this will be discussed in greater detail below). This is important because having a greater understanding of the culture potentially allows students to interact more appropriately (i.e., according to established norms and values and avoiding violating valued rules) and effectively (i.e., achieving particular objectives) than they would be able to if they were unaware of these underlying constructs.

The mediation is also necessary because students may not have the required skills to be able to do this on their own and may tend to focus solely on what they see or directly experience. As Kramsch (1993) points out, “students usually have little or no systematic knowledge about their membership in a given society and culture, nor do they have enough knowledge about the host culture to be able to interpret and synthesize the cultural phenomenon” (p. 228). Through mediation students may be more likely to be able to interpret their cultural experiences and to think about the underlying beliefs and values of the host culture (and of their home culture) that might be influencing the situations in which they find themselves. They must, then, be mediated toward developing this requisite understanding for successful interaction. The mediation can also guide students toward thinking analytically and critically so as to allow for the possibility that they will be able to take what they have learned both about the culture that they are living in, and about culture in general, and apply that knowledge in future situations.

In addition to mediation, reflection must be a key component of SA experiences so that students can develop the skill of stepping outside of themselves and viewing situations and themselves from others’ perspectives, an important aspect of intercultural development. As defined by Zuckerman (2003), reflection is the ability to consider one’s own and others’ goals
and motives for actions and thoughts, to take other people’s points of view, and to understand one’s own strengths and limitations. This can be done as a way of examining and rethinking past events and also as a way of anticipating future events and how one might react in particular situations. Reflection, then, is true examination of situations and people, including oneself, rather than simply repetition of unexamined experiences. This is necessary for intercultural development in SA because it requires students to think about what they are experiencing in systematic and ongoing ways and to learn to think outside of themselves. As Savicki (2008) points out, the skill of reflection is not one that is necessarily natural and he notes that while studying abroad “students can, for a variety of reasons, merely skate through the experience at the surface level with no deeper appreciation for what they may gain from the experience” (p. 76). What they need, then, is the opportunity to “step back from the intensity of involvement with the experience to draw more general conclusions” (ibid.).

As noted in the last chapter, Byram (1997) argues that learning in SA needs to be related to the reflection and analysis of the classroom. Again, this reinforces the idea that students abroad cannot simply be left to their own devices and expected to be able to fully understand and appreciate their experiences. As Jackson (2008) notes, reflection can deepen students’ “language and intercultural learning as they revisit their lived experiences” (p. 232) and that by reflecting on their stories, students can become more aware of ‘being in the world’ and of their responses to intercultural encounters (ibid.). This reflection, then, has the potential to help students to develop the knowledge, attitudes and skills that will allow them to be more mindful of their experiences and orient their responses and/or actions in future interactions. Effective reflection is a skill that can be learned and is one in which students should be guided so that they are able to develop new patterns of thought throughout their SA experiences and beyond.

As previously stated, this ability to analyze, reflect on and interpret a different culture is especially important for the pre-service WL teachers in this study to develop if they are to be able
to help their students work to develop it in their future classrooms. The reader is reminded that intercultural development is a desired outcome in language teaching and learning because it allows for the possibility of effective communication not just on the linguistic level, but also on the cultural and contextual level. The WL classroom is also a natural site for students to learn more about their own culture along with the culture(s) of the language that is being learned, which is an important first step to being able to think about and understand others’ perspectives. The main goal of the course to be described here is to bring all of these elements (mediation, reflection and intercultural development) together for the purposes of helping future WL teachers experience SA in ways that allow for personal and professional learning and transformation that can be applied in their future intercultural and teaching contexts. The conceptual framework that guided the creation and implementation of the course, particularly that which informed the researcher’s understanding of mediation, reflection and intercultural development, will be discussed in the following section.

2.3 Conceptual framework

The creation and development of the course and the analysis of the data were guided by work done in several fields, particularly those of Vygotskian sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978, 1986; Davydov, 1988), intercultural competence (Byram, 1997, 2000, 2009, 2010; Deardorff, 2006, 2008) and symbolic competence (Kramsch, 2006, 2009, 2011). Each of these areas provides a rich way of thinking about the issues that students studying abroad encounter and also provides a basis from which to analyze the data that has been gathered. The main perspective from which this study has been carried out is that of Vygotskian sociocultural theory (SCT), which was used both as a set of guiding principles in the design of the course itself and as a way of understanding the process of development of the students in the course. SCT is key in these
areas because the focus is on the mediation provided by the course assignments and facilitator, the externalization of students’ thinking through the reflective assignments, and the development of students’ ways of thinking conceptually and, thus, their ability to apply what they are learning to future contexts. The concepts of intercultural competence (ICC) and symbolic competence (SC), are central to the current work because they are the areas that have shaped the researcher’s thinking about and analysis of what it is that students are developing as a result of their participation in the course. For reasons that will be discussed in detail below, for the purposes of this dissertation these two constructs have been brought together under the term ‘interculturality’, which is defined briefly here as “a dynamic process by which people from different cultures interact to learn about and question their own and each other’s cultures. Over time this may lead to cultural change” (James, 2007, p. 1). This term will be further defined and discussed in greater detail in the final section of this chapter.

2.3.1 Vygotskian sociocultural theory

As mentioned above, Vygotskian SCT was the main conceptual framework used for developing the course and for the related research design. According to Vygotsky (1978, 1986), humans interact with the world in a mediated, rather than direct, manner using both physical (e.g., hammers, axes, computers) and symbolic (e.g., graphs, formulas, language, concepts) tools to understand and transform the world through concrete activity. Also key to SCT is Vygotsky’s assertion that social interaction plays a crucial role in human development. This is because he believed that higher-level cognition is developed through participation in social activities. Thus, cognitive development is not something that occurs inside a person’s head, but rather it is a process that occurs when humans interact with each other, using tools such as language to come to an understanding of the world. This interaction allows humans to verbalize their thoughts,
making them concrete and accessible both to the hearer and to the speaker him- or herself. This takes place because verbalization, or thinking aloud, helps a speaker to come to a better understanding of what he or she is thinking, thus rendering their thoughts/understandings more open to examination, and therefore change, through interaction with others.

Importantly, interaction and verbalization are not limited to spoken communication, but can take place in written form as well. In fact, Vygotsky (1986) argues that the composing of a coherent text for others is in itself a type of mediation. The act of verbalization/explication in writing requires a person to mediate their own thinking to form it in such a way as to be understandable to another person and, it could be argued, to the writer him- or herself as well. As Vygotsky notes, “written language demands conscious work” (1986, p. 182) because it must explain the situation fully in order to be intelligible. He also notes that writing brings awareness. The act of writing about experiences brings the writer, as well as the reader, to a new awareness of, and perhaps a new perspective on, the situations that they experience. These notions of development as the result of interaction and of verbalization and awareness through writing relate directly to the course in that its dialogic structure was designed to allow for each of these (interaction and verbalization) to occur continuously throughout students’ participation.

These and several other principles of SCT have been applied to the structure of the course and the analysis of the data, including the genetic theory of development in SCT, the notion of conceptual knowledge, the idea of movement from abstract to concrete concepts and the constructs of mediation and the zone of proximal development. First, regarding development, Vygotsky took a genetic approach, viewing it as the historical process of how abilities emerge and noting that “behavior can be understood only as the history of behavior” (as cited by Cole & Scribner, 1986, p. 8). He also notes that “the psychological development of humans is part of the general historical development of our species and must be so understood” (Vygotsky, 1986, p. 60). For Vygotsky, then, it is necessary to look at development as a mental process that is
understood historically, meaning how it has emerged over time through social interaction. It is, then, the process and not necessarily the outcome of development that is essential. This is relevant to the course because the work done therein seeks to provide opportunities that allow for analysis and understanding of the processes of student development as evidenced by the changes in students’ externalizations of thought through writing as they interact with their classmates and the facilitator over the entire length of the course. In other words, while the hope was that students would be able to develop interculturally as a result of their participation in the course, analysis of the data did not focus on ‘proving’ that students had developed to a particular level but rather focused on what the data revealed about the process by which they arrived at whatever level of development they were able to reach in the course.

The second principle of SCT being applied in this research is the notion of conceptual knowledge. Haenen, Schrinjinemakers and Stufkens (2003) note that “[c]oncepts are the building blocks of human thought; they reduce the complexity of the environment and enable us to respond to it efficiently” (p. 255). Conceptual (abstract) knowledge, for Vygotsky, provides resources (i.e., building blocks) that individuals can draw upon to guide their activity in the world. Formal education, where concepts are taught, is then necessarily a transformational activity, allowing a person to take what they learn in school and use it to orient future activity both in school and outside of it.

Vygotsky (1986) distinguishes between two types of concepts: everyday (spontaneous) and scientific (academic). Everyday concepts are related to experiences in the world and are developed informally, that is, unsystematically through lived experience. Scientific concepts, on the other hand, are structured and systematic and attempt to go beyond direct experience or what may be learned through observation of a phenomenon. While everyday concepts often remain unexamined, scientific concepts are derived from formal instruction and result in conscious awareness of the nature of an object of study (e.g., a culture or some specific aspect thereof). This
conscious awareness allows for intentional and volitional use (control) of the concept and enables the learner to reapply their knowledge of the concept to a new situation (Negueruela, 2008).

The notion of concepts is applicable to the current research because an attempt has been made through the various elements of the course to help students move from relying on their everyday lived experiences (and perhaps things like stereotypes and/or preconceptions) within the culture in which they are living and studying to the ability to use abstract concepts presented in the course readings and assignments in order to be able to organize their participation in a variety of contexts within the culture. This conceptual way of thinking may provide students with a greater understanding of the underlying beliefs and values of the culture, thus allowing students to see events or situations from a culture member’s perspective rather than holding to their own ways of thinking. This can allow students to move from merely having emotional responses to these lived experiences to being able to analyze the underlying beliefs and values and use the insights gained to interpret both current and future experiences. It may also help students to gain a greater understanding of how the culture may be impacting the linguistic choices made by expert speakers of the language and the consequences of they themselves choosing to make or not make similar choices in their own language use. Finally, developing this way of thinking may allow students to apply what they have learned in their particular SA context to future contexts such as different SA experiences or even the teaching contexts in which they will find themselves once they have returned home.

The point here is not that the everyday concepts that students have about the culture should be ignored, but rather that they should be examined in conjunction with more theoretical or abstract understandings of culture. In fact, it is a key tenet of SCT that everyday and scientific concepts work together to help students develop higher-order thinking skills that can be internalized and used in a variety of different contexts. As Ausubel (1968, cited in Haenen et al., 2003, p. 247) notes, “the most important single factor influencing learning is what the learner
already knows.” Thus, the course allows the students to use their own everyday concepts as a basis for understanding, but also requires them to examine those everyday concepts in structured and systematic ways, employing scientific concepts as orienting bases for understanding and for future activity.

Building on the notion of concepts and concept-based instruction, Davydov (1988), an important interpreter of Vygotsky’s educational theories, argues for the importance of theoretical (i.e., scientific) thinking as the basis for development in education. Like Vygotsky, Davydov saw scientific concepts as tools for carrying out practical activity. The point of education, for Davydov, is to help learners connect abstract theoretical knowledge to concrete activity guided by this theoretical knowledge. As Davydov notes: “It is not because of the concept that the child is capable of acting conceptually, but, on the contrary, he acquires concepts because he starts to act conceptually, because his practical acts are ‘conceptual’” (1988, p. 181). This is often referred to as MAC pedagogy, that is, ‘movement from the abstract to the concrete’ (Ferreira & Lantolf, 2008). Within this type of education, then, students are presented with abstract conceptual knowledge and then guided (i.e., mediated) by an instructor to make this knowledge more practical within concrete contexts that are relevant to their own interests.

Also important in this approach to pedagogy is that the conceptual knowledge must be materialized in a way that is easy for students to access and digest. One of Davydov’s suggestions was to do this through visual representations that he called germ-cell models. While this type of visual model was not particularly relevant or feasible within the structure of the course, an effort was made to require a level of movement from the abstract concepts discussed in the weekly readings to students’ own lived, concrete activities and experiences. This was done through the blog prompts themselves as well as the interactions and mediation that took place in the students’ and facilitator’s responses. This relates to a MAC model of pedagogy because, as Leont’ev points out, “[b]asic to the scientific concept is the discursive activity of the child, allowing him ‘to
possess the concept in its verbal expression” (1965, as cited in Davydov, 1988, p. 181, emphasis in original). As will be seen, the interactions that took place within the course were extremely discursive and allowed for extensive verbal expression of students’ understandings of the concepts presented.

The scientific concepts that have been chosen for the course, to be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3, are: ‘language as negotiated activity’, ‘perceiving through language and culture’ and ‘self as language learner and user’. These are all based on topics with which students have some everyday experience (language, perceptions and identity), but which they have most not likely not examined deeply or in a systematic way, especially within the context of a different culture. The readings and activities associated with each of the concepts present abstract ways of thinking about the concepts and then the prompts build on students’ everyday experiences and provide them with different ways of thinking about and understanding themselves and their contexts. This more ‘scientific’ treatment of the topics gives students greater insight into notions that they may not have thought much about before and also gives them tools for understanding and action that they can potentially use to mediate their own relation to the target language and host culture. Linking the more abstract scientific concepts to students’ everyday concepts, then, can help students develop and begin to mediate their own thinking and problem solving and, thus, reorient their future thoughts and actions.

A third tenet of SCT that is extremely useful to this work is the concept of mediation. This is really the central concept of the theory, as Vygotsky notes that all human understanding of the world (i.e., cognition) is mediated. Mediation is the process by which humans develop higher-level mental functions from elementary (i.e., biologically endowed) ones. According to Lantolf and Thorne (2006), “in the same way that a person interacts within socioculturally organized activity and artifacts, elementary functions are transformed and come under the control of the person through the use of external, self-generated, but culturally rooted mediation” (p. 28).
Vygotsky notes that mediation can be defined as the setting up of “connections in the brain from outside” (1997, as cited in Lantolf & Thorne, 2006, p. 60). This means that mediation in social interaction (the ‘outside’) can help humans to develop new connections in their brains (i.e., internalization) and, thus, new ways of thinking about and doing things. Human mediation (in conjunction with mediation through psychological tools) is central to the transformative process of internalization in that it provides a way for a learner to move from an understanding of the world based solely on concrete experiences that are only meaningful in one context to one based on abstract concepts that can be applied to different contexts.

The notion of mediation is important to this study because each of the course elements was designed to mediate students’ relations to, and understandings of, their new language and culture in ways that would allow for them to develop new ways of thinking about and acting within the language and culture that could be applied in various other contexts. Mediation was particularly important in relation to the facilitator’s work in the course because she attempted to carry out intentional and systematic mediation with the students aimed at helping them analyze, reflect on and interpret their everyday experiences in the culture through the lens of the abstract concepts presented in the course readings and assignments, thus allowing them to use what they learned to orient their future actions and interactions in intercultural situations.

The final tenet of SCT that is applicable to this research is the zone of proximal development (ZPD), which has often been described as a dynamic, metaphorical ‘space’ within which learners interact with experts such as teachers or more capable peers. Vygotsky introduced the ZPD as an approach to understanding the relationship between learning and development (Palinscar, 2005) and he defined it as the difference between what a learner can do individually and what he or she can accomplish in collaboration with someone more expert. He also notes that “what is in the zone of proximal development today will be the actual developmental level tomorrow (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 87). This means that what a learner is able to do in collaboration
with a more experienced other is an indication of what the learner will be able to do him- or herself in the future, though it is, of course, not necessarily a linear or fixed path from proximal to actual development.

One critical point to understand about the ZPD is that it was not intended to be conceptualized as something specifically quantifiable (Newman & Holzman, 1993). The ZPD is not a student space waiting for the teacher to enter, but rather a symbolic space that surrounds all participants during interaction. That is, being “in the ZPD” in this context means that the teacher (or other expert) and student are thinking and acting in ways that are fostering the still ripening conceptual development of the student. The ZPD is created and recreated with each activity or interaction. If any of the participants becomes disengaged and the activity of learning and teaching ceases, the ZPD ceases to ‘exist’. Using mediation, a teacher or peer can provide efficient, targeted and goal-oriented intervention to help students both develop an orientation to the task and begin to appropriate the teacher’s (expert’s) understanding of it (Johnson, 2009).

The conceptualization of the ZPD as it applies to the current study, then, is as an activity, rather than a space, that is created as the learner and the expert(s) co-construct meaning and understanding. In the course, the ZPD was an activity that the facilitator attempted to create through the dialogic mediation that was offered in the context of the different elements of the course. As discussed above, students’ development (linguistic and/or cultural) during SA is not something that will take place automatically simply by virtue of being in another culture or even by interacting with people in that culture. Rather, it is a process that must be purposefully mediated. This is central to the course because the mediation that the facilitator provides attempts to guide the students’ thinking in particular ways and help them to orient to the task of intercultural interaction in an analytical and critical way. Vygotsky’s notion of the ZPD also provides a useful framework because it is with an understanding of where the students are and what they are just about ready to be able to do on their own that the facilitator must work to
provide the mediating activity. Thus, she must be aware of each individual student’s ZPD and work to provide mediation that is geared toward facilitating that student’s development.

### 2.3.2 Intercultural competence

This section will describe in more detail the construct of ICC and the particular ways of thinking about it that have been used in the development of the course and in analysis of the data. This is a central concept to the current study because it represents a large part of what it is that the facilitator attempts to help students develop through their participation in the course. It is one of the constructs that the facilitator’s mediation is aimed at guiding and supporting in students. As defined by Byram (2000), ICC is a person’s ability to critically understand the cultural origins of his or her own and others’ perceptions. A person who is interculturally competent is able to understand relationships between different cultures and possesses a

“critical or analytical understanding of (parts of) their own and other cultures- someone who is conscious of their own perspective, of the way in which their thinking is culturally determined, rather than believing that their understanding and perspective is natural” (1997, p. 10, emphasis added).

Key elements of ICC are knowledge, skills and attitudes that lead a person to be able to operate from a critical cultural perspective, thus allowing them to see value in other cultures and to interact effectively and appropriately in a variety of intercultural contexts (i.e., contexts in which interaction takes place between people of differing languages and/or cultures). In Byram’s model, the knowledge involved is that of self and other along with knowledge of the processes of interaction at both the individual and societal levels. This knowledge allows learners to gain a greater understanding of themselves, of other people and of the ways in which interaction might differ in various contexts. It also allows for movement toward greater success when interacting with people different than oneself.
The skills involved include skills of interpreting and relating and of discovering and interacting. The skills of interpreting and relating draw upon individuals’ existing knowledge about language and culture and the skill of discovery becomes salient when the individual has little or no existing knowledge about particular linguistic or cultural contexts. This skill of discovery builds up context-specific knowledge as well as understandings of beliefs, meanings and behaviors that are essential to the context. Discovery can be carried out through different modes, including reading about the culture and through actual social interaction, as was the case in the current study. The skill of interaction is the ability to manage all of the issues that may come up during communication with someone from another culture, including linguistic issues, and differing or mutual perceptions and attitudes.

These elements are interdependent, with attitudes being particularly salient to the development of knowledge and skills. The attitudes included in Byram’s model of ICC are those held specifically toward people considered culturally different. Someone who is interculturally competent will have attitudes of openness and curiosity toward these differences and they will suspend judgment and disbelief with respect to others’ beliefs and behaviors. They will also be able to suspend belief in their own beliefs and behaviors. That is, as mentioned in the definition above; they will cease to see their own beliefs and behaviors as natural and begin to understand and accept that there are multiple ways of being and believing in the world that each have value.

While the relationship between attitudes and knowledge cannot be argued as cause and effect, having the attitudes mentioned has the potential to allow a person to compare the knowledge that they have about their own culture with the knowledge that they gain of a new culture without feeling that their own ways of thinking and being are threatened. Rather, they can be open to the aforementioned idea that there are multiple ways of being and doing in the world. In relating attitudes to skills, as Byram points out, “the skills of discovery and interaction are less difficult to operate, less likely to involve psychological stress […] if the person involved has
attitudes of openness and curiosity” (1997, p. 35). In other words, having these types of attitudes makes it easier for a person to develop the skills necessary to understand, and interact appropriately within, a new culture.

A person developing ICC, according to Byram, will become an ‘intercultural speaker’, which he defines as a person who is “involved in intercultural communication and interaction” (1997, p. 32) who has “the ability to see and manage the relationships between themselves and their own cultural beliefs, behaviours and meanings” (ibid., p. 12). This person will also have the ability to ‘decentre’ themselves (ibid., p. 34); that is, to suspend disbelief and judgment with respect to other people’s cultures and with respect to their own culture. An intercultural speaker, then, is able to interact in intercultural situations by analyzing and reflecting on the underlying cultural values and histories that may be impacting those situations, rather than simply seeing different cultures as strange or even as less valuable or less ‘correct’ than his or her own culture. Again, the knowledge, skills and attitudes that they are developing allow them to attain outcomes that have an impact on both their thinking and their interactions.

In general, then, the goal of ICC is two-fold; encompassing both desired internal and external outcomes. The first aspect of the goal is “to develop, extend and elaborate upon students’ interpretive frames of reference through experiencing and reflecting upon communication in increasingly complex intercultural contexts” (Scarino, 2009, p. 69) (e.g., the desired internal outcomes). Secondly, it refers to the ability to “relate effectively and appropriately in a variety of cultural contexts” (Bennett, Bennett and Allen, 2003, p. 244) (e.g., the desired external outcomes). Successful language use is an intercultural phenomenon contingent upon an understanding of the meanings and values of one’s own and one’s interlocutor’s cultures, and negotiating the area between the two. As J. Bennett (2009) suggests, in order to interact successfully in intercultural contexts “we must step outside of our own frame of reference and interact meaningfully with different cultural realities” (p. 122). If a person has developed some
level of ICC, then, s/he has the potential to ensure that these are positive interactions that allow both parties to be understood and valued and that they are able to interact meaningfully in a multitude of intercultural contexts, no matter where they take place.

2.3.3 A process model of ICC development

A more recent development in the research on ICC, and one that has direct implications for conceptualizing how ICC development may be supported, is the process model of ICC associated with the work of Deardoff (2006, 2008). Building on the work of Byram and other ICC researchers, Deardoff has endeavored to go beyond descriptions of what characterizes ICC and has proposed a model of how the various features of ICC may develop, with particular attention to interactions among the features. This model continues to encompass the elements of knowledge, skills and attitudes, but has been expanded to include the internal and external outcomes just discussed. This leads to a more nuanced sense of the development that takes place toward ICC. Figure 2-1 shows Deardoff’s model:
Though a person can enter the process at any point, attitude is again the fundamental starting place in this model, as the person moves from an individual level through to an interactional level. Attitudes both interrelate with the other factors and are of foundational importance:

"After all the books have been read and the skills learned and practiced, the cross-cultural effectiveness of each of us will vary. And it will vary more by [the attitudes] we bring to the learning than by what we have learned." (Lynch & Hanson, 1998, p. 510, as cited in Deardorff, 2008, p. 37).

In this model, the definitions of the knowledge and skills necessary for the development of ICC have been expanded and clarified from earlier models. Within knowledge, cultural self-awareness is a person’s understanding of the ways in which they view the world; that is, awareness of their own cultural norms. This is crucial for intercultural development because a person must be able to understand that they have a culturally constructed (rather than natural)
frame of reference from which they approach interactions with others and that others also have their own frames of reference that may be slightly or even entirely different. Knowledge in this model also includes culture-specific knowledge such as the underlying values and beliefs of a culture, and sociolinguistic awareness; this is, knowledge of how language is used within different social contexts.

The development of particular skills (in this model: listening, observing, evaluation, analyzing, interpreting and relating) are also important because, as Deardorff points out: “knowledge, which is constantly changing, is not sufficient in the development of intercultural competence”, which means that it is important for individuals to use these “necessary cognitive skills to be able to acquire and apply cultural knowledge on an ongoing basis” (2008, p. 38). The key skills of analysis and critical thinking, then, enable individuals to process the cultural knowledge that they acquire.

The addition of desired internal and external outcomes to this model takes into account the shifts in thinking and acting that are desired in individuals as a result of intercultural development. As a result of an increase in the desired attitudes, knowledge and skills, the hope is that individuals developing ICC will also be able to shift their internal frames of reference to become more adaptable, flexible, and empathetic and that that will, in turn, help them to have appropriate and successful communication and behavior within a variety of intercultural interactions. Deep cultural knowledge and the ability to see from the other’s perspective are necessary for this type of shift in thinking and behavior. While the process does begin with students’ attitudes toward other people and cultures, it is important to note that this is not a linear model where students first develop one element, then the next and then they are ‘magically’ able to have effective and appropriate interactions at the end. Rather, the elements interact with each other and everything is cyclical in nature, continuing to further develop with each new intercultural experience.
As stated before, the argument is not that success in the course being discussed is equated to reaching a specific ‘level’ of ICC that is measured through a test or the like. Rather, it is the aim of the course to mediate students’ negotiation of the target language and their new cultural contexts in order to support them through a process of developing the sorts of attitudes, knowledge, and skills associated with ICC. It is these that will ultimately be most valuable to them in their time abroad and in their lives moving forward as teachers of world languages. Deardoff’s model in particular underscores a commitment to the process of developing these attitudes, abilities, and knowledge and it understands this process as ongoing and emergent rather than teleological. As Deardorff explains, “[…] the model allows for degrees of competence. As the number and degree of acquired competency elements increases, so does the probability of a greater degree of intercultural competence as an external outcome” (2008, p. 40).

As will be explained in greater detail in the next chapter, Deardoff’s framework for conceptualizing the development of ICC was especially relevant to the design of the course. The construct of intercultural development as a dynamic process involving interrelations among various forms of knowledge, abilities, and attitudes resonated well with the researcher’s practical experience and observations as facilitator of the course during previous iterations. In addition, the foundational role of attitudes in Deardoff’s model related strongly to the Vygotskian notion of learner orientation, and specifically the idea that how an individual understands the purpose of an activity and engages in it will likely affect the forms of mediation that s/he will require. Finally, in subsequent chapters it will become clear that the elements of this model also were valuable in the analysis of data collected during the course.
2.3.4 Symbolic competence

In addition to ICC, the construct of symbolic competence was also relevant and important to the design of the course and the analysis of the data. Working within a humanistic tradition, Kramsch (2006, 2009, 2011) has proposed the term symbolic competence in response to the traditional emphasis on communicative competence in language learning environments. Communicative competence, she argues, is not sufficient for becoming a fully-fledged speaker of a language. She proposes SC not as a substitute for communicative competence or ICC but rather as a reframing of these concepts in multilingual terms. According to Kramsch, SC refers to a distancing of a person from his/her usual ways of being and behaving and striving to reflect upon those ways of being from a perspective embedded in the person’s new, potentially complex and conflicting, context. The key elements of SC in Kramsch’s model are 1) awareness that human communication is more complex than just “saying the right word to the right person in the right manner” (2006, p. 251); 2) tolerance of ambiguity, which allows learners to be aware of potential contradictions between what people say and what they do; and 3) a focus on form as meaning because SC “focuses on the meaning of form in all its manifestations (i.e., linguistic, textual, visual, acoustic, poetic)” (ibid). According to Kramsch, within SC the role of the teacher is to help students put the emotions that they feel in relation to the language (and culture) into words so that they can be later recalled and translated into action.

While resemblances between ICC and SC may be apparent, Kramsch maintains that there are important distinctions between the concepts. Specifically, she argues that the notion of ICC does not accurately portray culture as discourse and production of meaning and that, because it defines culture in terms of underlying beliefs and value systems, it “presupposes a lack of understanding due to divergent subjectivities and historicities” (Kramsch, 2011, p. 356). By defining culture as discourse in the context of activity, as is the case in SC, an interculturally
competent person, for Kramsch, understands the symbolic nature of language as well as different systems of thought and their related symbolic power. They also question the subject positions of speakers as well as the contexts and prior discourses being indexed in any given conversation.

For the purpose of the present study, Kramsch’s attempts to reframe ICC in this manner aided in the design of the course and its instructional goals in three respects. First, SC, as should be clear, places a strong emphasis on language use in communicative contexts. Indeed, Kramsch considers symbolic forms, of which languages are a quintessential feature, as vital for any “ability to produce and exchange symbolic goods in the complex global context in which we live today” (Kramsch, 2006, p. 251). Moreover, Kramsch and Whiteside (2008) understand languages not only as situated in context but also as an inherent part of the construction of contexts. They explain that SC concerns the appropriation of symbolic forms, including new languages, as well as the “ability to play with various linguistic codes and with the various spatial and temporal resonances of these codes” (p. 664). This focus on language aligns well with the intent of the course to improve not only students’ proficiency in the target language but also their awareness of the target language as a non-monolithic entity, and specifically of the variability of language use in particular contexts and the interweaving of various languages around them.

A second feature of SC that relates strongly to the present study is the use of language as a metacognitive tool to recall and reflect upon experiences with the ultimate aim of translating these reflections into subsequent action. One of the primary goals of the course is for students to use the virtual space created by the online blog system to verbalize (i.e., put into words) their experiences and to engage in collective reflection on their experiences and those of their classmates. These blog discussions, along with readings and inquiry assignments, are aimed at supporting students’ efforts to continually draw on what they are learning about themselves and their host cultures to orient their future action (i.e., recall and translate into action).
Finally, and related to the above, is the role of ‘decentralization’ of one’s perspectives in SC. According to Kramsch (2009), language learners should be able to develop SC as a “dynamic, flexible, locally contingent competence” (p. 199), allowing them to “find appropriate subject positions within and across the languages at hand” (p. 200). She explains that doing so requires learners to be able to understand what might be termed an ‘emic’ perspective; in this case, the perspectives of members of the local community. In Kramsch’s view, this is important for understanding the symbolic value of language and the cultural memories evoked by language use as well as for (re)positioning oneself between languages. Developing SC means, then, that language learners are able to understand events differently as well as position themselves differently within different languages and cultures. It also means that they can access multiple perspectives on social realities and interact successfully in a globalized, multilingual world.

This ties to the current study because, according to Kramsch, a key part of developing these understandings and abilities is through critical and systematic reflection, or putting themselves into other people’s shoes and being able to see themselves from another person’s perspective. Critical reflection requires “a decentralization and discomfort and ‘making the familiar strange’” (Luke, 2003, as cited in Kramsch, 2009, p. 193). This critical reflection and decentralization allows learners to be “conscious not only of the outside world, but also of [their] own experience of the outside world” (Kramsch, 2009, p. 71). As should be clear from previous discussion, one of the main objectives of the course is to facilitate students in their critical reflection in order to help them see themselves from the other culture’s perspective as well as to see the culture from its own perspective (i.e., understanding the culture on its own terms—historically, linguistically, socially, etc.). In addition to course readings and regular blog discussions, inquiry activities are aimed specifically at this goal. In particular, interviewing members of the local community and observing and participating in local (cultural) events provide points of entry into an emic perspective on the language and culture. Required
subsequent reflections engage students not in embracing this other perspective, nor in solely comparing it to their own cultural perspective, but rather in understanding both as alternate cultural views of reality.

2.3.5 Interculturality

While the constructs of ICC and SC were, as discussed above, quite important in the development of the course and in the data analysis that has been done, the researcher believes that the terms themselves do not necessarily convey the understanding of learners and their experiences relevant to this study. Because both include the term ‘competence’, they connote that these are constructs that are fixed or static within the learner and that can or should be ‘reached’ or fully ‘attained’ after a period of time spent participating in the language and/or culture. In fact, Byram (1997), Bennett (1993) and Deardorff (2006, 2009, 2011) at times all seem to argue that ICC is actually something that language learners can attain a particular ‘level’ of if presented with the right kinds of experiences. As mentioned previously, the goal and focus of the current research, however, is not on whether the learners can or do ‘attain’ these competences, but rather on the dynamic process by which they might begin to develop these ways of thinking and behaving and on the ways in which social interaction and systematic mediation might impact that process. While this notion of process is present in Deardorff’s (2008) model of ICC discussed above, the label itself still carries with it the idea of a fixed, ultimately attainable trait or goal. In order to avoid perpetuating this goal-oriented connotation, the term ‘interculturality’ will be used throughout the remainder this dissertation when discussing learners’ development. As mentioned previously, this term is defined as “a dynamic process by which people from different cultures interact to learn about and question their own and each other’s cultures. Over time this may lead to cultural change” (James, 2007, p. 1). Use of the term, then, allows for a focus on the ongoing
and dynamic process of learning and development that students are going through while abroad. The term will also be used in order to bring together the ideas presented in both ICC and SC in a succinct way, as will be discussed below.

Others in the field have used ‘interculturality’ to highlight the notion that language and culture are inextricably linked and that successful and appropriate intercultural interaction requires critical awareness of other cultures and of one’s own culture (see Barrett, 2008; Bott Van Houten, Couet & Fulkerson, 2014; Murphy-Lejeune, 2003; Trujillo Sáez, 2002). As Barrett points out, interculturality demands “the capacity to experience cultural otherness and to use this experience to reflect on matters which are normally taken for granted within one's own culture and environment” (2008, p. 1). In addition, interculturality requires “both the awareness of experiencing otherness and the ability to analyse the experience and act upon the insights into self and other which the analysis brings” (Alred, Byram & Fleming, 2003, p. 4). To tie this into the work being described in this dissertation, then, the critical awareness of other and self relates directly to elements of ICC and, directly related to SC, the ideas of reflecting on matters that are usually taken for granted, thus distancing oneself from usual ways of being and behaving and potentially acting in new ways based on insights gained.

While they have thus far been separated for the purposes of discussion, it is the belief of the researcher that these ideas, in fact, overlap and that the two constructs can be simultaneously at work in students’ intercultural development. In other words, ICC and SC are not seen as mutually exclusive constructs, but rather as ones that can enhance and elucidate each other when taken together, particularly when looking at students’ developmental process during their SA experiences. Because of this, the term ‘interculturality’ will be used as a term that incorporates elements of both.

For the purposes of this study, then, interculturality brings together the concepts of ICC and SC and is conceptualized as including knowledge, skills and attitudes that allow for the
following: 1) an understanding of culture as both an underlying set of beliefs, values and attitudes and as discourse and production of meaning; 2) an understanding of language use as both impacting and being impacted by different cultural and communicative contexts; 3) the ability to critically reflect on and analyze experiences in order to orient future action; 4) the ability to understand (i.e., interpret and relate to) the perspectives of the host community; and 5) a decentralization of self on the part of the learner (i.e., the learner is able to move outside themselves, problematize their own culture, and position themselves differently vis-à-vis the host community). As the first element suggests, the current study employs interculturality as a way to highlight the importance of various understandings of the notion of ‘culture’ that may be at play in students’ experiences while abroad. This will become particularly salient during the analysis and discussion of the case studies in Chapter 5.

2.4 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the Vygotskian sociocultural theoretical framework that was used in the development of the course and in the analysis of the data. Research previously done in the area of study abroad was discussed as well as the importance of mediation and reflection in students’ study abroad experiences. Sociocultural theory was discussed, with particular focus, again, on mediation, as well as on conceptual development and understanding, movement from the abstract to the concrete and Vygotsky’s notion of the zone of proximal development. The constructs of intercultural competence and symbolic competence and interculturality were also discussed in this chapter, making specific links between each of these and the creation and analysis of the course.

These topics will be revisited again in future chapters, particularly in Chapters 4 and 5, where specific links will be made between the concepts of SCT, ICC and SC (merged into the
notion of interculturality) and the data that came from the work that the students did in the course.

The following chapter will discuss the course in greater detail and will provide further background on the development of the course and on the ways in which the data was analyzed.
Chapter 3

Methodology

3.1 Introduction

As discussed in the previous chapter, while research has been done on learners’ development during study abroad (Bacon, 2002; Elola & Oskoz, 2008; Jackson, 2009; Lee, 2011, 2012; Marx & Moss, 2011; Smolcic, 2011; Vande Berg & Paige, 2009), little of the work has focused specifically on the processes of development that learners go through and/or on how those processes may be mediated by others such as a teacher or peers (see Arrúe, 2008; Lou and Bosley, 2008; Municci, 2008; and Smolcic, 2013 for a few examples of work that has had more of this type of focus). Another area lacking in current research is how the development that takes place may orient learners’ future actions and interactions, both while abroad and once they have returned to their home cultures. This study attempts to fill these gaps in the research, looking specifically at both how the students develop (linguistically, interculturally and contextually) in their new settings and at the ways in which the mediation provided may support students in that development and give them a basis for future interactions and negotiations within the host community. Again, this study looks specifically at WL ED pre-service teachers during their participation in a blog-based online course during their SA experience. This chapter will discuss the research context and then provide detailed information about the course, including the objectives, structure, organization and participants. After that, the methodology for collection and analysis of the data will be discussed.
3.2 Research Context

As noted, this study focuses on pre-service WL teachers’ development of interculturality during an online course (described in detail below) that takes place as part of their required coursework at a large, research-oriented university in the Northeastern U.S. that has longstanding programs in teacher education. This course is taken concurrently with the pre-service teachers’ mandatory study abroad experience. The body of research in the area of SA and blogging, while still relatively small, has begun to increase in recent years (see Elola & Oskoz, 2008; Lee, 2011, 2012; Lee & Markey, 2014; Pitman, 2013) because blogs are seen as useful tools for reflection (Kramsch, 2009) and as sites in which students can exchange cultural perspectives and raise their awareness of cultural issues (Lee, 2012). Blogs can also provide spaces in which SA participants can remain connected to educators at their home institutions, thus avoiding SA becoming a ‘black hole’ into which students disappear while abroad (Aguilar Stewart, 2010). The blog-based course in which this research project was carried out attempts to provide students with frequent opportunities to be connected with the course facilitator at their home institution and with their classmates in other cities and/or countries. It also works to provide students with opportunities to gain insights into their host culture as they analyze, reflect on and interpret their experiences both in terms of the target language/culture and their own home cultures and as they share their reflections with their classmates and the facilitator.

Importantly, the goal of the course is not merely for students to have a more appropriate framework for understanding their actions and experiences but it is intended that students will use this emerging collective base of expertise as they continue to negotiate life in the host community and that they will use it to reorient their actions and interactions within the host community and beyond. The course was initially developed and offered during the spring semester of 2010 and has since gone through further iterations with readings and assignments being added, revised and
expanded each time it has been offered. The iterations in 2011 and 2012 are considered pilot studies to the one being discussed here, the data for which was gathered during the spring semester of 2013.

3.2.1 Objectives of the course

This required 15-week, 3-credit course is designed specifically for students in the WL ED major and, as mentioned, is taken while they are completing their mandatory study abroad semester, which is usually in the spring of their third year of university study. As it is concurrent with the students’ abroad experiences, making traditional classroom meeting unfeasible, the course is facilitated through both a blog platform and through videoconferencing technology, currently Skype. The platform of blogging was used because it offers an excellent virtual ‘space’ in which the students remain part of a community comprised of their cohort in the WL ED major and the course instructor. This enables the desired connectedness, reflection and mediation to be established and maintained throughout the students’ time abroad.

As previously mentioned, the field of second language teaching and learning now includes a substantial body of research that attempts to examine the gains that students make in language proficiency and cultural understanding during study abroad (cf. Back, 2013; Bacon, 2002; Binder, 2008; De Keyser, 2010; Goldoni, 2013; Lee, 2011, 2012; Lee & Markey, 2014; Magnan & Back, 2007; Shively, 2010). This research points to the need for additional forms of support to ensure that students are able to benefit from their time abroad to the fullest extent possible. It has become increasingly clear that some students make considerable gains during SA while others develop comparatively little (Deardorff, 2008; Hunter, 2008; Kinginger, 2010; Savicki & Selby, 2008). Experience in the field of second language teacher education also indicates that even those students who benefit significantly from their time abroad are not always
well positioned to integrate their insights, knowledge, and experiences into their classroom teaching. As discussed in the previous chapter, reflection can play an important role in helping learners to process their experiences and understand the cultural nature (both home- and host-culture related) of any issues and struggles that they may have. Engagement with members of the host culture is also key in providing students with a rich and transformational SA experience, both linguistically and culturally.

The objectives of the course, then, are 1) to facilitate students’ collective discussions of, and reflections on, their experiences during SA and 2) to prompt them to engage with the host culture, including members of their local community, with the aim of documenting norms and variation of target language use and gaining insights into the host culture through activities such as dialogues with native speakers, observations of cultural practices, and examinations of cultural artifacts. These objectives tie directly to the conceptual framework discussed in chapter 2 because students are developing interculturality through critical analysis of their experiences and through the use of language as a metacognitive tool for reflecting and for potentially translating those reflections into subsequent action. The students are also asked at times to systematically reflect on ways in which the insights that they gain while abroad may be brought into their subsequent teaching experiences, which ties their SA experience to their future goals and plans and has the potential to help them develop their emerging identities as language and culture teachers and also helps them use their current experiences and understandings as a basis for thinking about future action.

3.2.2 Course structure

As the different SA programs that the students participate in begin at different dates during the semester, not all students are at the same point in the course at any given time.
Students are asked to begin their official participation in the course at the end of their third week abroad in order to give them some time to secure internet access, begin to get situated in their new culture, figure out their class schedule, etc. This means, then, that some students begin the course in the middle of January while others begin in the middle or at the end of February, depending on when their SA program begins and when they are required to arrive in their host country. As a result, the course is organized by week number (e.g., Week 3, Week 9, Week 14) rather than by date. Part of the responsibility of the course facilitator is to help ensure that all students remain on schedule with their blog contributions and assignments, regardless of when the course begins or ends for them.

There are five required blog-based elements of the course¹ (see Appendix A for full course syllabus). The first is the students’ weekly posts about insights gained through personal experiences, assigned readings, interactions with native/expert speakers, and cultural and/or linguistic observations on a variety of topics as required by the prompt posted by the course facilitator. Readings and other activities are assigned that are organized around specific topics, and students are encouraged to relate these to their particular experiences in their initial blog post. Table 3-1 shows the topics of the blog discussion for each week of the 2013 iteration along with any related reading or other activity that students were to complete.

Table 3-1: Weekly blog topics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SA Week</th>
<th>Blog Topic</th>
<th>Reading/activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Week 3</td>
<td>Arrival: What was expected, unexpected, challenging, etc.</td>
<td>Response based on personal experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 4</td>
<td>Dealing with country/culture shock</td>
<td>Storti (2001), Chapters 1 &amp; 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 5</td>
<td>Observation and analysis of language use (interaction patterns)</td>
<td>Cultural observation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 7</td>
<td>Linguistic variation (including attitudes and stereotypes)</td>
<td>Observation/interaction with native speaker</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Also required are weekly responses to assigned classmates’ posts. Students are assigned (in a schedule posted on the blog) which classmate to respond to each week so that each student is guaranteed to have a classmate that is commenting on their blog post every week and so that, as much as possible, students have the chance to respond to, and be responded to by, all other students at least once during the course of the semester. In these responses, students read each other’s posts and then ask questions, offer suggestions/advice, compare and contrast their experiences, etc.

After the students respond to each other, the facilitator then posts her own responses, being careful to ask different questions and comment on aspects other than those that had been commented on by the classmate so as to offer a broader range of ideas for the students to think about. This then leads to the next required element: weekly ‘last word’ responses. These are responses by the students to the questions and comments made by their classmates and the course facilitator on their original posts. In these ‘last word’ responses, students answer the questions that have been posed and respond to comments made. They also discuss further thinking they have done on the topics and share new insights that they have gained. While these are called ‘last words’ it is communicated to the students in the course syllabus that the hope is that dialogue

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week 8</th>
<th>No blog topic this week</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Week 9</td>
<td>Cultural and personal perceptions</td>
<td>Novinger (2001) Ch. 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 10</td>
<td>Gender and culture</td>
<td>Case study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 12</td>
<td>The multilingual social actor</td>
<td>Excerpt from Kramsch (2009)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 13</td>
<td>Impact of study abroad on future classroom practice</td>
<td>Response based on personal experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 14</td>
<td>Intercultural competence in World Languages Education</td>
<td>Byram (2009) “Intercultural competence in foreign languages”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
around one particular topic will flow into dialogue around other topics, thus making this element not the end of a conversation but rather just a continuation.

In addition to the weekly posts, responses and ‘last words’, students are required to complete three inquiry assignments throughout the semester. One assignment is a participant observation, in which students are asked to participate in an event of their choosing (e.g., a visit to a school, hospital, or other government institution; a cultural holiday or festival; the celebration of a host family/friend’s birthday or wedding, etc.) and then reflect on the event and discuss how it was similar to and/or different from a similar event as it would take place in their home culture and why any differences might exist. Another inquiry assignment is an interview with a member of their host culture (e.g., a host family member, friend, person working at the institution at which they attend classes, etc.), in which they are asked to elicit a biography of the interviewee, including details of his/her life and experiences as well as insights into his/her views, values, and beliefs. In their written report, students then share this biography along with a commentary on how this individual’s life experiences and perspectives compare with those that might exist in the U.S. The third inquiry is a linguistic landscape analysis in which students are required to undertake a careful analysis of language used in both formal and informal signs that they encounter in their daily lives. They photograph the signs and include the images in their report, along with a discussion of how language is used in the signs and a comparison of the signs with similar ones in their home culture. There are specific due dates for these assignments (i.e., during particular weeks of the students’ programs), but they can be completed in any order in which the students choose.

The final required blog-based element of the course is a ‘blogfolio’; a portfolio collection that draws upon students’ blog entries, responses to and exchanges with other students and the course facilitator, and inquiry activities. The purpose is to have an archive of students’ development during the course as well as their reflections at the end of the experience. For this
assignment, students are required to compile exemplars of the work that they have done throughout the semester and to provide rationales for their choices of exemplars along with discussion of what they see as their progress and/or change as a result of their participation in the course.

It is important to note that the blog space is a protected one that users must log in to with user IDs and passwords in order to be able to read or post. This means that the students and facilitator all have access to posts and responses, but no one from outside of the course is able to view the content. This is done so that students can feel free to share their true thoughts in their reflections and responses (e.g., challenges, frustrations, anger and other negative emotions they may be feeling toward the language and/or culture) and be assured that what they write is being viewed only by people that they know, allowing them to feel safe in being as open and honest as possible.

In addition to the blog-based assignments, students are required to participate in two video conferencing sessions with the course facilitator during the semester. These sessions are video and audio recorded. In addition to conversation addressing topics such as places they are planning to travel, any issues with host families, classes, etc. all students are asked a set of question related to things such as challenges in the host culture, their perceived successes and/or struggles with the target language, their attempts to become part of the host community, perceived changes in identity as a result of the SA experience and how they see the SA experience as helping prepare them for their future teaching (see Chapter 4 for a list of the general questions asked in each session). These sessions are also used as a way for the facilitator to respond verbally, rather than in written format, to what the students have written in their blog posts during the weeks in which the Skype conversations take place. For example, if the facilitator speaks with a student on Skype during his or her Week 9 of the course, she would discuss the student’s blog post from that week in addition to the general questions that are asked.
of all students. This is done in place of posting written comments for the student onto the blog. This allows for more in-depth and extended conversation between the facilitator and the students around the topic for that week. The student is then only responsible for writing a ‘last word’ response to his or her classmate that week.

### 3.2.3 Activity and organization of the course

As it is structured, there are three levels of activity required by the SA experience and by the course. The first is the students’ activity of participating daily in the host culture with expert speakers of the target language (i.e., lived experience). The second is the activity of articulating, through their blog responses, their thinking about connections they are making: 1) between their concrete personal experiences abroad (everyday concepts) and the abstract theoretical (i.e., scientific) concepts presented in the readings; 2) between their own experiences and those of other students in the course; and 3) between their experiences abroad and their future classroom language teaching experiences and practices. The final activity is that of reconsidering their initially articulated thinking in response to remarks from the other students and the facilitator. The combination of the second and third activities can be considered to be contributions to a collective discussion that has the potential to help lead students in the process of developing interculturality as they interact with each other and the facilitator as part of the dialogically mediated ZPD activity.

In order to facilitate students’ development and critical analysis, the course has been organized into five different sections (see Table 3-2).
The first section provides students with opportunities to share their initial experiences in the host culture and to begin to develop the skills of looking at themselves and their relationship to/interactions in the culture. The final section asks students to look back on their entire experience throughout the course and determine for themselves what they have learned, how this may apply in their future teaching careers, and any progress they think they have made toward developing interculturality.

The ‘meat’ of the course resides in the three main sections in the middle of the course, which are organized around the following: ‘language as negotiated activity’, ‘perceiving through language and culture’ and ‘self as language learner and user’. In essence, these three sections each require a level of abstraction from readings and from the discussions among the students, with the aim of developing broad conceptualizations that enable them to interpret their own experiences in the host culture and also help classmates make sense of their experiences. These three areas also align with key elements of interculturality, particularly those of understanding language use in different contexts, the ability to interpret and relate to perspectives of the host community, and the ability of students to ‘decenter’, that is, step outside themselves and view themselves through the lens of the host community and to “problematize their culture’s representation of the world” (Smolcic, 2013, p. 78).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course organization</th>
<th>Topics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Part I: Developing a beginning awareness of your new culture</td>
<td>Arrival, dealing with country/culture shock</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part II: Language as negotiated activity</td>
<td>Analysis of language use, cross-cultural (mis)communication, linguistic variation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part III: Perceiving through language and culture</td>
<td>Cultural and individual perceptions, gender and culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part IV: Self as language learner and user</td>
<td>Identity and language use, the multilingual social actor, impact of SA on classroom practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part V: Course conclusion</td>
<td>Intercultural competence in WL ED</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Table 3-2: Topical organization of the course. |
In the section on ‘language as negotiated activity’, students are asked to look closely at the language use that is taking place around them and relate it to cultural elements such as native/expert speakers’ perceptions of different accents or word choice. They also look at miscommunications that they have experienced and are asked to examine the cultural issues that may be at play in triggering those miscommunications. In this section, then, they are reflecting on, and potentially being transformed by, the contextual aspects of the language and the culture in which it is being used.

The ‘perceiving through language and culture’ section asks students to continue to look at the culture in-depth and to realize that perceptions and understandings of events are not simply ‘natural’, but rather closely tied to cultural histories and memories. The goal of this section of the course is to help students understand that people of different cultures (including their own) are highly influenced by where they have been socialized and to help them think about the ways in which the cultural nature of their and others’ perceptions might affect their ways of thinking about and being in the world.

Finally, the ‘self as language learner and user’ section asks students to look not only at the culture in which they are situated but also within themselves; at who they are as language learners, users and future teachers. Here they are also asked to attempt to step outside of themselves and to view themselves as they may be viewed by members of the culture in which they are living. They are also asked to problematize their previous understandings and perceptions of self toward the goal of being able to begin to reposition themselves between languages and cultures based on this new understanding.
3.3 Participants

During the spring semester of 2013 there were twelve pre-service WL ED teachers enrolled in the course: three males and nine females. Eleven of them were in their sixth semester and one was in his eighth, having spent a year taking courses outside of WL ED in order to obtain a dual major. Table 3-3 indicates the SA locations and the students who studied there.

Table 3-3: Students by study abroad location.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Student(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Seville, Spain</td>
<td>Kimberly, Thomas, Shania</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Granada, Spain</td>
<td>Katherine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcalá de Henares, Spain</td>
<td>Tara</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quito, Ecuador</td>
<td>Melinda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Santiago, Chile</td>
<td>Madalynn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marburg, Germany</td>
<td>Tyler</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alicante, Spain</td>
<td>Dolores, Samantha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montpellier, France</td>
<td>Cathy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vienna, Austria</td>
<td>Michael</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is important to note that the facilitator of the course was a vital part of the WL ED program and had pre-established relationships with all twelve of the students as a result of having served as an instructor in their previous coursework. In addition, all but one of the students (Michael) had been in the same cohort for three semesters and knew each other well.

As part of the prompt for the first week that the students participated in the course they were asked to complete a survey posted on the website SurveyMonkey® (www.surveymonkey.com), which asked students about their demographic information as well as about things such as their motivation for becoming a language teacher, motives for participating in SA, prior experiences abroad, the type of living arrangement they were in, goals for themselves while abroad and expectations from the blog course (see Appendix B for full survey). Information regarding students’ individual motives, goals and expectations will be discussed in further detail in later chapters, but in terms of general information it is useful to note that all but two of the
students (Michael and Tyler, who both lived in apartment-style dormitory settings) lived with host families while abroad and five of the students (Melinda, Cathy, Tara, Michael and Tyler) had been abroad previously, for periods from three to six weeks at a time.

Before leaving to go abroad, the participants had been presented with information about this research study and had been given an informed consent form on which they could agree or decline to have their data included in the study. A person other than the researcher/facilitator kept the forms in a secure location during the course and she did not know which of the students had agreed to have their data included in the study until all students had completed the course and grades had been submitted. At that point, it was determined that all twelve of the students had, in fact, agreed to allow their data to be used in the study. The informed consent was done this way in order to ensure that no bias existed in any way toward those students who had agreed to participate in the study and that all students would receive the same mediation throughout the course.

### 3.4 Data Sources

The data for this study comes from students’ responses to questions on the background survey, eleven written blog postings, ten responses to classmates (each student was given a week ‘off’ from responding to a classmate because of the way the course and response schedule were structured), and eleven ‘last word’ responses. The two Skype sessions, generally between 25 and 45 minutes each, were recorded (both audio and video were captured) using a paid service called “Call Recorder for Skype” which turns Skype calls into .mov QuickTime® files that can be saved and revisited. The sessions were then transcribed and included as part of the data analysis. The students’ three inquiry activities (participant observation, linguistic landscape analysis and interview with a member of the host culture) and the exemplars and rationales included in their
final blogfolio assignments were also included in the data. Finally, the facilitator's blog and Skype feedback to the students was also considered data, as the types and foci of mediation that were provided was to be systematic and specifically geared toward helping students in their development of interculturality.

3.5 Analysis of the data

As demonstrated by the research questions in Chapter 1, the main research interest was to learn how (i.e., in what ways) students’ thinking about and interacting in the host culture changed over the progression of the course and to develop an understanding of how and/or what types of mediation may encourage students’ critical reflection and reorientation toward the contexts in which they are situated, as well as in future contexts. Thus, the analysis of the data was aimed at trying to understand how the course design (e.g., blog topics, interactions, assignments, etc.) mediated students’ engagement with the host culture and focused on 1) the forms of mediation (i.e., opportunities for reflection on and reorientation toward participation in the culture) provided by the course; and 2) the emergence of students’ interculturality as demonstrated by the development of particular knowledge, skills and attitudes, as well as any shifts in frames of reference, as revealed in their blog writings and interactions with the facilitator over the duration of the course.

In the initial round of analysis, descriptive coding of the data was used to analyze the data sources mentioned in the previous section. As Turner (1994) notes, this type of coding allows for “the development of ‘basic vocabulary’ of data to form ‘bread and butter’ categories for further analytic work” (p. 199, as cited in Saldaña, 2013, p. 88). Thus, this coding allowed for a broad view of the types and focus of mediation provided and the various ways in which the students talked about themselves and their experiences, which then lead to more detailed analysis.
Similar coding had been carried out with data from the two pilot studies, which provided a general sense of the foci of the mediation (e.g., on students’ development of a more responsive orientation to learning during SA, movement from emotional to analytical stances and perceptions of themselves as users of the L2) and of the types of student responses that would arise in the data of the current study (e.g., emotional responses, analytical responses, suggestions, questions, cultural observations, plans of action, etc.). Thus, some of the codes used in this initial part of the process came from previous coding of pilot study data; however, because individual students and the group of students as a whole differ from semester to semester, some of those codes were eliminated and other new codes added to accurately capture the thinking, actions and interactions of the students in this iteration of the course.

In terms of the specific research questions for this study (see Chapter 1), analysis of the data to answer the first question (In what ways does student participation in the course serve to co-construct opportunities that mediate their critical reflection on, and reorientation toward, the linguistic and cultural contexts in which they are situated?) was based on coding for the types of mediation that are offered in the course (e.g., the assigned readings, the weekly prompts, questions/suggestions from classmates and/or the facilitator) and how the students engage with the mediation based on their externalization through writing and/or Skype discussion (e.g., changing their thinking about a topic, becoming more analytical, struggling to overcome language difficulties, etc.).

For the second question (How does the students’ thinking about themselves and the language and culture(s) in which they are participating evolve during the course, as evidenced through their completion of course assignments and participation in interactions, and what does this change suggest about their development of interculturality?), individual students’ blog posts, assignments and Skype sessions were analyzed, coding for their ways of talking about themselves, their experiences, the host culture, the target language, their reactions to the assigned
readings, etc. Students’ interactions with the facilitator and their engagement with the mediation she provided were also analyzed. Movement from more emotional or stereotypical ways of orienting toward/experiencing the culture (which, it is important to note, are completely normal and valid for those in a new culture, especially at the beginning of the experience) to more analytical and self-reflective ways was seen as development. A change in the ways the students positioned themselves and members of the host culture was also seen as development because the idea behind developing interculturality is that students are transformed by the subjective (i.e., affective) and contextual aspects of the language and that they can carry out critical reflection that helps them see themselves from the other culture’s perspective as well as to understand the culture from the perspective of its own norms, beliefs, values and discourse.

Once initial coding was completed, the data was analyzed again with a focus on noticing the patterns and themes of the mediation and the ways of speaking/writing that arose, both within and across individual students. Those themes were grouped together into categories (e.g., analytical behavior/response, emotional reaction, suggestion/advice, interaction with member of the host culture, etc.) in order to begin to understand the general structures that arose and how they related to the development of interculturality. Analysis focused specifically on students’ development of abilities to critically reflect on their experiences and to ‘decenter’ themselves, on their abilities to interpret and relate to the host community and their development of an understanding of language as essential to the constructing and enacting of different contexts. This provided data that allowed for an analysis across all of the students and revealed the general types of mediation provided by the structure of the course and the responses of students’ classmates and the facilitator. It also allowed for an analysis of how that mediation impacted students’ understandings of, and experiences in, their particular contexts (i.e., how it impacted their process of development toward interculturality). In order to look more closely at this development in particular learners, two case studies were then chosen to analyze in further detail.
Because of the number of students that participated in the course it was not possible to focus in a detailed way on the development of every single student, so in-depth analysis was carried out using a case study method. A case study method was used because, as noted by Dyson and Genishi (2005) it allows researchers to look at “the meaning people make of their lives in very particular contexts” (p. 9) and “they aim to construct interpretations of other people’s interpretations” (ibid, p. 18). What is being looked at in this study (i.e., the development of interculturality) is not easily ‘viewed’ by a researcher, or even by participants themselves, but rather it is constructed through the ways that students interpret and employ the social interactions of mediation and reflection provided by the course as well as those social interactions that they experience while in the host culture. These “sociolinguistic tools can help [the researcher] gain some sense of how social activity organizes—and is organized by—time, space, and human action” (Dyson & Genishi, 2005, p. 25).

Based on the coding that was carried out on the full set of data, two particular cases were chosen for further analysis. Detailed discussions as to the rationale for choosing each of the students can be found in Chapter 5, but to provide some general background here, the two pilot studies had demonstrated that there are generally two ways in which students in the course tend to orient to learning during SA. Some students orient to the course, and to their SA experiences in general, in ways that allow them to more easily engage with members of the host culture and the cultural practices that they encounter. These students tend to be highly responsive to the mediating activities in the course, understanding them as important opportunities for their own engagement with, and understanding of, the host community.

Other students, however, orient to learning during SA in ways that exhibit less engagement with the host community and/or its practices or some uncertainty about how to understand their new experiences and use them to become more active participants in the community. These students are often less responsive to the mediating activities provided by the
course and may tend to view those activities simply as course assignments to be carried out and checked off rather than as opportunities for personal growth. These differing ways of orienting to, and engaging with, the course and its mediation were again evident in the data for the current study, so the cases of two students were chosen for further examination: Michael, who seemed to orient in ways that allowed him to more easily engage with the host community and with the mediation in the course; and Samantha, who seemed to have more difficulty engaging fully with the mediation provided throughout the course and with the host community.

To be clear, neither student oriented in exactly the same manner every time to similar experiences or mediation, but their responses and interactions in general seemed to indicate certain ways of thinking and acting. It is also important to note that neither of these ways of engaging with the course and the host community was seen as better or worse than the other. The point is simply that they were different and that the facilitator had to take this into account when providing mediation to the students toward the development of interculturality. Particularly, she had to work harder to help students with a less responsive orientation, like Samantha, do things such as develop the ability to see and experience the course activities as opportunities for development rather than as tasks to be checked off.

During analysis of the data, students’ orientation to learning was, in fact, revealed to be one of the most salient aspects of their experiences and one of the most important mediational foci as well. That is, this was one of the areas on which the facilitator most often focused her mediation of the students in the course, particularly using students’ orientations as the basis for mediation that attempted to meet the students where they were in order to then push their development. Other areas related to interculturality that were revealed as important mediational foci included students’ perceptions of themselves as users of the L2, their movement from emotional to analytical positioning and their abilities to make connections between different experiences. The experiences of Michael and Samantha were quite different in these areas as
well, thus the examination of these two cases allows for a better understanding of the ways in which the facilitator used her understanding of the students’ responses to their experiences as part of the process of mediation and how she worked to meet them where they were and to insert herself between them and their experiences, thus mediating their relation to the experiences and, consequently, to their learning and development of interculturality. Because of the differences in how students oriented toward learning and toward their experiences and how they perceived themselves and their host cultures, this process had to be much more explicit and intensive with some students than with others.

Through examination of cases, then, the ways in which each of these students interpreted and engaged with the mediation and how that impacted their experiences abroad can be understood. Using case studies of a small number of participants allows for a beginning understanding of some of the ways in which they were interpreting the cultures in which they are located and how those interpretations changed over time (i.e., throughout their SA experience) as a result of their participation in the course. While this does not demonstrate every possible way of reacting to the opportunities provided, it does begin to shed light on the possible effects of mediation and reflection in the development of interculturality that can be useful in the creation, evaluation and modification of this and other SA courses.

### 3.6 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed specific details of the course including the objectives, structure, organization and participants. It has also provided information on the sources of the data as well as a description of, and rationale for, the data analysis that was carried out. The following chapters will detail the findings of the data analysis described in this chapter. Chapter 4 will discuss a broad cross-section of the data, using excerpts from multiple students in the course.
to demonstrate the ways in which students were mediated toward interculturality by the structure of the course, their responses to the assignments/prompts, their responses to their classmates and their classmates’ responses to them, as well as the feedback given by the facilitator. Chapter 5 will then detail the cases of Samantha and Michael and explicate the most salient foci of the mediation provided to them, how they engaged with that mediation, how it impacted their experiences, and how that played out in their overall development of interculturality throughout the course.
These assignments are all carried out in the students’ L1 (English) in order to avoid the possibility that limited linguistic ability would impede the communication of insightful cultural reflection and analysis and also to account for the fact that students of different languages (e.g., French, German, Spanish) are participating in the course at the same time.

In this iteration of the course, ‘last words’ to classmates and to the course facilitator were initially done as separate blog posts with different due days, but, upon the request of the students and the facilitator’s evaluation of the time required by the course, this was changed to one blog post, with a later due day, that encompassed responses to both the classmate and the facilitator.

All names are pseudonyms.
Chapter 4

Mediational activities of the course structure and dialogue

4.1 Introduction

This chapter looks at the assignments and activities of the course along with the various types of mediation that were made available through the dialogic interactions of the course. It also discusses how those types of mediation impacted the students participating, particularly with regards to their development of interculturality; that is, their development of particular knowledge (e.g., of language and its impact on culture, of culture as beliefs and discourse), skills (e.g., of critical reflection and analysis, of interpreting and relating to the host culture) and attitudes (e.g., of willingness to ‘decenter’ oneself, of openness and curiosity) that help them to act and interact appropriately in intercultural contexts. While the next chapter will look more closely at the two students chosen for the case studies, this chapter looks at the course as a whole, examining data from various students to give an overview of how course activities and interactions attempted to mediate students’ development of interculturality.

4.2 Mediation

As discussed in Chapter 2, mediation is the social process through which learners are guided toward the ability to understand and transform their own thinking. This course seeks to mediate students’ engagement with the target language and culture during study abroad with the ultimate goal of helping them more fully develop intercultural ways of thinking and being than would likely be possible if they were left to interpret the uses of language, communicative practices, and social conventions of their host country on their own. To briefly reiterate, for the
purposes of this study interculturality encompasses students’ abilities to question and analyze their own and other cultures, to reflect on experiences of cultural otherness and to act upon insights gained through analysis of self and other in future interactions and contexts. In line with this view, mediation in the course is intended to prompt students to learn about and develop an understanding of, and respect for, the underlying meanings, beliefs and values of their host cultures that might be motivating the situations in which they find themselves and to develop the types of knowledge, skills and attitudes that have the potential to allow them to act and interact appropriately (i.e., according to established norms and values) within their host community.

There are several different types of mediation provided by the course. While the person-to-person mediation may seem to be most important, given that it is overtly social, all of the forms of mediation have the potential to have an impact on students’ thinking about and understanding of their host cultures, target languages and of themselves and their own home cultures. They also require students to critically reflect on their experiences and encourage reorientation of their thinking and behaviors. Table 4-1 shows the different types of mediation provided by the course and the primary activity that each requires of the students to push them towards a more critical perspective on their host culture and language and on themselves and their own culture.

Table 4-1: Mediation and activity in the course.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of mediation</th>
<th>Primary required activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The prompt and related readings and activities</td>
<td>Students closely examine and reflect on their own experiences of participating in the host culture and language with expert speakers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students’ initial responses (in writing) to the prompt</td>
<td>Students articulate their thinking about, and make connections between, their everyday lived experiences and the abstract concepts presented in the readings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responses to classmates’ posts</td>
<td>Students make connections between their own experiences and those of their classmates in different cities and/or countries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The facilitator’s responses</td>
<td>Students are asked additional questions about their responses and are pushed to think more analytically about the cultural roots of the experiences they are having</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
While these are listed separately for the purposes of discussion and analysis, it is important to note that they do not occur in isolation of each other and that, in fact, they work together to provide overarching mediation throughout the entire length of the course. These can be seen as the elements of ‘dialogue’ that take place and that give students a space in which to share their thoughts and that push them to examine those thoughts critically. In the rest of this chapter, each of these forms of mediation will be discussed in further detail, with excerpts from the data provided to demonstrate specifically how they functioned with this group of students and how they worked together to help students in their processes of developing interculturality.

### 4.3 The prompt and student responses: Foundations of the dialogue

#### 4.3.1 Weekly Prompts

The main content of the course consists of the weekly prompts (beginning in week three of the students’ SA programs and ending after week fourteen) that are posted to the blog by the facilitator. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the weekly prompts deal with a variety of topics and are divided into five sections: 1) developing a beginning awareness of the new culture; 2)
language as negotiated activity; 3) perceiving through language and culture; 4) self as language learner and user; and 5) course conclusion. As the topics vary, so, of course, the content of the weekly prompts also varies (see Appendix C for a complete list of the prompts used in the course).

The prompts for both weekly blogs and for inquiry assignments are intentionally designed to require students to carry out particular kinds of activities: that is, to closely examine and reflect on a) the experiences that they have within the host culture; and b) their thinking about those experiences and/or the insights they gain into their host culture through those experiences. Some prompts are designed to require students to observe specific aspects of the language and/or culture (e.g., physical signs, interactions between members of the host culture, special cultural events), while others ask students to have particular types of interactions with native or expert speakers (e.g., discussions about linguistic variation, personal interviews).

The ways in which the prompts are written require different thinking and activities of the students each week. For example, some prompts require students to perform a critical examination of themselves (see excerpt 4.1), of the target language (see excerpt 4.2), and/or of the host culture (see excerpt 4.3):

**Excerpt 4.1**

*Do you think that your identity (or any aspect thereof) has changed at all during the time that you have been abroad? If so, how has it changed and what do you think has brought about that change?* (Week 11)

After having done a reading on identity and SA (Kinginger, 2004) students are asked to compare the ideas and experiences discussed in the article with their own. In this question students are asked to closely examine themselves and their own identities and to discuss whether they believe that being abroad has in any way changed their identity and how/why they believe that change has occurred. Here students are being asked to look beyond themselves as merely visitors to the host culture and to begin considering that their time in the culture has the potential to impact them
at the core of who they are and what they believe. This, then, contributes to their development of interculturality because it helps them to think about themselves and their experiences in greater depth and to realize that culture is something personal in which individuals impact, and are impacted by, the things that go on around them each day. It also helps students to see that multiple perspectives exist and that it is possible and acceptable to shift their frames of reference to begin to encompass new perspectives.

In Week 5, students are asked to observe, but not participate in, a communicative event within their host culture (e.g., an interaction in a restaurant, in their host family, on public transportation). In addition to describing the event (setting, participants, patterns of interaction, etc.), students are asked to address the topic in excerpt 4.2.

Excerpt 4.2
Then, and most importantly, discuss your observations of the language itself, including metaphors, euphemisms, clichés, repeated formulaic "chunks", specialized vocabulary, expressions and grammatical construction, as well as non-verbals, such as body language, gestures, volume, etc. (Week 5)

Through this prompt the students are required to closely examine and discuss specific aspects of the target language and how it was used in the observed interaction. This is related to interculturality in that it requires students to think about the multiple aspects of language, including nonverbal ones, that impact interactions and that are impacted by different cultural and communicative contexts.

Finally, in Week 10 students are asked to discuss what they have noticed about particular kinds of interactions (those between men and women) in their host culture and then compare that with what they have experienced in their home culture.

Excerpt 4.3
What have you noticed about the ways that males in your host country treat/interact with females? How does that compare to the way that males in the US treat/have been socialized to treat women? What might be the cause (cite specific cultural values, norms, etc.) of any differences that you have noticed? (Week 10)
The key element of this part of the prompt is the examination of the possible underlying reasons for any differences that they have noticed between the two cultures, taking as but one example relations between men and women. This requires students to go beyond the emotional reactions they may have initially had to the differences in interactions to a critical examination of why those differences might exist. The hope is that this will allow the students to suspend any judgment or disbelief that they might feel toward the host culture and move toward a more critical understanding, not only of the host culture but of their own culture as well.

Readings are also provided during the course that are designed to help students continue to make connections and gain understandings of their host and home cultures through focus on abstract concepts such as culture shock, identity, gender relations and cross-cultural communication. The prompts in the course that are related to the specific readings ask students to do different things in relation to the readings, including to share their general thoughts on the readings and/or to relate particular parts of the text to their experiences:

Excerpt 4.4
What is something that stood out to you in the chapter (perhaps something that you particularly agreed or disagreed with)? Please explain and share your thoughts/impressions. (Week 9)

Excerpt 4.5
In chapter 1, Storti notes: "Some other consequences of adjusting to so much that is new and different are frustration, anger, irritability, and impatience. And from time to time you may also feel threatened, vulnerable, anxious, incompetent, and foolish. Your self-esteem and self-confidence, in short, take quite a beating" (p. 19). How do you see this relating to your own experiences so far? Have you experienced any or all of these emotions? When and why? What have you done, if anything, to try to make the situation better for yourself? (Week 4)

Excerpt 4.6
Which of Tannen's levels of communication difficulties might actually have been at the root of the issue that you had? (Week 6)

Prompts like these afford students the opportunity to discuss in general the things that the readings have made them think about (excerpt 4.4) and also require them to relate something specific from the reading to their own experiences (excerpts 4.5 and 4.6). This allows for the
potential of students moving from the abstract (the ideas presented in the readings) to the concrete (students’ everyday experiences), connecting the two and gaining a deeper understanding of their experiences and the contexts in which they are having those experiences. This then gives students the ability to organize their participation in a variety of contexts within the culture as they become able to take their abstract conceptual knowledge and apply it to their everyday knowledge in multiple situations.

It is important to note that, as can be seen in the excerpts above, the prompts do not require these activities (analysis of self, analysis of the host culture, making connections to the readings, etc.) in isolation of each other, but rather in concert with each other. For example, one prompt may require students to compare and contrast some element of the host culture with their home culture while it also asks them to share their own experiences and to directly address a point made by the author of that week’s reading. Thus, students are being asked to examine and reflect on many different levels each week within a prompt as well as throughout the course of the semester across all of the prompts. Two full prompts will now be examined in order to see this at work more clearly.

As already noted, the weekly prompts, along with any related readings, are a main type of mediation because they provide the framework within which the students think and interact for that particular week. One of the main goals of the prompts, because of the focus of the course on helping students through the process of developing interculturality, is to attempt to mediate students to think critically rather than to simply react emotionally to the things that they are experiencing, while still giving them a space in which to discuss their initial feelings and reactions. An example of this can be seen in Table 4-2, which contains the prompt for Week 6:
Prompt: Cross-cultural (mis)communication

This week's reading (Tannen, 1984) brings into focus some of the many aspects of communication that can cause issues, especially when communicating with someone in/from another culture.

In your post this week, please do the following:
1) Describe, in detail (who, what, when, where), a communication difficulty that you have had during your experience abroad and then discuss the following:
   a) What did you think was the cause of the problem at the time that the difficulty occurred?
   b) Which of Tannen's levels of communication differences might actually have been at the root of the issue that you had?
   c) Now that you are aware of these potential difficulties how might you approach future instances of cross-cultural communication?

2) Discuss any changes (in style, language used, non-verbals, etc.) that you have found yourself making in your communications with people in your host country. Specifically, please answer the following questions: What changes have you made? Why? What have been the results of such changes? How did/do you feel about making such changes?

Drawing students’ attention to this issue of miscommunication in a critical way (i.e., asking them to think about and apply Tannen’s levels of communication differences to their own experiences) has the potential to take a situation that they may initially have reacted to in an emotional and potentially negative way (e.g., saying to themselves something like, “that person/culture is just weird/stupid/wrong”) and instead help them look at the interaction from the point of view of the other person, or at least from the point of view of an ethnographer, trying to understand what it is about themselves and the other person and/or their cultures that may have contributed to the communication difficulty that occurred. Asking students to talk about how they might apply what they have learned to future experiences may help them to think and react differently in future situations (in this case in future cross-cultural interactions). This may then help students to develop Byram’s (1997) knowledge of interaction, attitudes of openness and curiosity and skills of discovery and interaction. It may also solidify for them awareness that communication is more complex than the vocabulary and grammar structures used, but rather
that, as Kramsch (2006) asserts, it is also dependent upon the context in which it is used and the roles and histories of the people involved in the interaction.

Also as demonstrated above, another goal of the prompts is to encourage students to think about their own personal experiences, perceptions, motivations, associations and even identities. Learning, particularly learning in a new context, is a process of transformation, both intellectually and personally. As mentioned in Chapter 2, Byram (1997) notes that students who are interculturally competent should be able to ‘decentre’ themselves; that is, to suspend disbelief and judgment with respect to other people’s cultures as well as to be able to analyze their own meanings and behaviors. Kramsch (2009) also stresses the importance of ‘decentralization’, which for her is students’ ability to understand events differently and to position themselves differently within different languages and cultures. Students cannot begin to analyze and suspend disbelief in their own cultures and belief systems or to position themselves differently if they remain unaware of what their beliefs entail. The prompt for Week 11 (see Table 4-3) attempts to help students become more self-aware by asking them to think about themselves as language learners and participants in a study abroad program, paying close attention to their motivations, relationships and conceptions of self.

Table 4-3: Week 11 prompt.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prompt: Identity and language use</th>
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This week's reading presents the topic of identity in relation to the study of foreign languages and participation in study abroad. It also offers insight into the experiences of one individual, Alice, and how her experiences (re)shaped her identity. [For our purposes we will define identity generally as a (fluid) sense of self related to who you are (physically, emotionally, etc.), what you do, where you live, who you are with, etc.]

Please address the following questions in your response:
*What stood out to you most in this chapter and why? (Most interesting, surprising, new, different, etc.)

*In terms of your background, motivation (for language study and studying abroad),
The questions in this prompt ask students to think about and discuss the experiences, motivations and affiliations of the student they have read about (Alice) and then apply a similar discussion to their own experiences, both in general (as language learners) and in particular (their motivations, affiliations and personalities). This prompt, along with the reading, requires students to think about themselves in ways in which they may not previously have done. It also requires them to take notice of how the choices that they are making (e.g., which groups to be a part of and which language to speak within those groups) may be impacting their language learning and their experiences abroad, thus making students aware of their own beliefs and actions in ways in which can then be critically analyzed and applied in future contexts.

Once these prompts have provided the foundations and the framework for the dialogue to take place each week, the next step in the dialogue is for the students to post their thoughts about these questions and activities through their initial written responses. This is where students have the opportunity to reflect on the ideas presented in the prompt, along with the related reading or activity, and to share their initial understandings and ideas. This is the second phase of the dialogue and is the place, through verbalization and the conscious work of writing (Vygotsky, 1986), in which students’ thinking becomes clear not only to the other members of the course, but also to the students themselves.
4.3.2 Responding to the prompt: Initial contributions

As discussed in Chapter 2, Vygotsky (1986) argued that the composing of a coherent text for others is itself a type of mediation. The act of verbalization/clarification requires students to mediate their own thinking to form it in such a way as to be understandable to another person and, it could be argued, to themselves as well. This demands “conscious work” (ibid, p. 182) because it must explain the situation fully in order to be intelligible. Vygotsky also notes that writing brings awareness to speech. Thus, students may not have thought about a topic in a particular way, or even at all, until being presented with the prompt and/or related activity (e.g., reading, observation, interaction) and being asked to articulate it in writing for the facilitator and other members of the course.

The activity of formulating their thoughts and composing them as text to be shared with others on the blog holds potential to mediate students’ intercultural development. Specifically, the act of having to write about what they are experiencing brings students a new awareness of, and perhaps a new perspective on, the situations that they experience. It allows them to reflect on the things they are going through in a more critical way and to put into words their feelings and thoughts that might otherwise have remained unexamined. The act of responding to the prompts, then, goes beyond simply writing about the events that happened in the style of a log (i.e., chronologically and on a surface level) and pushes students to think about particular aspects of, and reasons for, their experiences. Indeed, there were many examples throughout this cohort’s data of instances in which students seemed to be able to come to a new or different realization as a result of having to respond to the prompt or where they were able to see a situation more clearly or critically when looking back on it.

For example, in Week 6, as shown above, students were asked to read a paper by Tannen (1984), in which she discusses the pragmatics of cross-cultural communication and provides eight
levels of communication differences that could potentially lead to miscommunication. Students were then asked to respond to questions related to the reading and to their own experiences, including discussion of an incident where they had encountered their own difficulties in communication (see above or Appendix C for full prompt). One student, Tara, discussed an incident in which she felt she could not thank her host mother for a favor in the way that she wanted to:

Excerpt 4.7
I was not satisfied with my thanks to her because I felt like she deserved more for all her hard work for me. **Thinking about it now, I could have tried saying** “it wasn’t necessary” or something like that, but I was trying so hard to directly translate, that I couldn’t find the words. **I think the level of Tannen that could explain this is 2.7- Indirectness.** […] Americans, **as the reading said**, rely so much on the main message during communication and being able to get that message across, and when I was left speechless with what I truly wanted to say, I think this is where my conflict came into place. […] **Now that I am aware of these cross-cultural differences, I can become less frustrated and work around my problems.** […] I am going to relax and think of alternative ways to say what I really want to. (Week 6)

As shown in this excerpt, Tara was able to look back on the interaction, which she viewed as a miscommunication, and realize what she could have done differently (“I could have tried saying ‘it wasn’t necessary’ or something like that”). She was also able to apply the issue that she had to one of Tannen’s levels of communication differences (Indirectness) and to the reading in general. She then noted that she had gained a greater awareness of these differences and discussed some ways in which she could change her attitude and actions to avoid having this same issue in the future.

Responding to this prompt allowed Tara to think about the topic in a new way and to examine what might have been at the root of the misunderstanding. Without this reading and the prompt she most likely would not have examined the interaction in this critical a manner and she almost certainly would not have known about, or had easy access to, Tannen’s levels of difference and to the possibility of using an understanding of those differences to orient her future cross-cultural interactions, which she had the potential to do after addressing this prompt.
Responding to the prompts also gives students a platform in which they can communicate ideas and thoughts that they would not have otherwise had the opportunity to share. For example, in Week 10 students were asked to read a case study in which there was a difference in perception of sexual harassment between American female students and a Spanish institution’s director. At the very beginning of her initial response, addressing her comments to her classmates and the facilitator who would read them, Cathy indicated that she thought her comments might be a bit offensive to some. She also noted that the obligation of writing on the blog was requiring her to share her potentially controversial ideas on this topic that she did not believe she would have shared otherwise.

Excerpt 4.8
Hey everybody, I'd just like to apologize in advance for how my post might make you feel. I like to be as concise as possible when responding and to tell things in the way that I see them, so please try not to take offense. If it wasn't for the blog requirement, I'd probably keep my thoughts to myself. Thank you! (Week 10)

Throughout the rest of her post she discussed American girls abroad in a realistic, though not always positive, light, sharing experiences that she had in France with other American girls. This demonstrates that writing for this prompt had given her the chance to talk honestly about an issue that she had been dealing with and thinking about but that she may not have ever talked about unless pushed to do so. Here she was required to put the emotions that she felt into words for further examination and to examine those emotions in a different, perhaps more critical, light.

The fact that the course prompts require students to think and reflect in new ways was also made clear in their responses to a specific question in the very last prompt of the course (Week 14). As part of this prompt students were asked to answer the following question: ‘What do you think was most valuable about the course?’ Responses from three students follow:

Excerpt 4.9
I think that this course helped me reflect on the things that I was learning and observing and forced me to have to think critically about what these things meant in relation to language teaching. (Kimberly)
Excerpt 4.10
I think that this course was valuable in that it made me think about the experiences that I was having. I think that some of my experiences meant more to me because I was able to use the blog to reflect about them. (Katherine)

Excerpt 4.11
The most valuable part of this course was simply being made to reflect on things. More so than a journal, which would list the things I had done and how I felt about them. Rather, it called to mind theoretical perspectives that we have read about, and made us apply our experiences abroad to them. […] A lot of my responses to blog prompts were the [beginning] to thoughts I might not have begun to have had I stuck with living the unexamined life. It’s interesting how many new ideas I began to have because I was made to think about my experiences in more than the sense that I had simply experienced them. (Michael)

These responses reveal that the students viewed the prompts and related assignments that they completed throughout the course as catalysts for their reflection on and understanding of the experiences that they had and the situations in which they found themselves. As Kimberly noted in excerpt 4.9, the prompts required students to reflect on their observations and experiences and they also required students to think critically about those things, particularly as they related to their future teaching careers. For Katherine (excerpt 4.10) the course made her think more about her experiences and even made some of those experiences more meaningful because of the fact that she was required to reflect on and talk about them. Finally, in excerpt 4.11 Michael also mentioned the value of the reflection required by the course and how it necessitated thinking about new topics as well as deeper thinking and analysis than simply describing events and feelings might require. He also specifically tied the readings, and their related theoretical perspectives, to the experiences that he had.

The reflection and critical examination required by the prompts and the verbalization through students’ initial responses to the prompts provided mediation toward students’ development of interculturality in that they helped students to develop knowledge about the host culture, the target language and about themselves. Reflection and examination also helped students to develop the ability to understand the perspectives of the host culture and the members
within it and to discover the beliefs, meanings and behaviors that were essential within their host
cultures. Through these activities students were also encouraged to develop attitudes of openness,
curiosity and a willingness to act upon the insights they were gaining through their experiences.

In answer to this same final question (‘What do you think was most valuable about the
course?’) students also often pointed out the fact that, in addition to the explicit reflection and
thinking that they did for the course, their interactions with each other and with the course
facilitator (Dorothy) were extremely valuable. Two examples follow:

Excerpt 4.12
I think the most valuable thing to me about the course was being able to read about my
fellow classmates' experiences abroad. Sometimes that is what got me to think the most
about my own experiences and to further explore an aspect of the culture or something
that I experienced. The responses from others and [Dorothy] helped me to think more
about certain situations or even just rethink an idea I already developed. (Tyler)

Excerpt 4.13
I definitely benefitted from reading other people's blogs and learning about their
experiences abroad and comparing them and contrasting them to my own. I also
enjoyed answering the response questions from my classmates and [Dorothy] and feel
that the blog was set up in a great way to encourage communication among our cohort
while we are all studying in different countries. I have learned so much from my
colleagues. (Madalynn)

As can be seen in these excerpts, the interactions between classmates served different purposes
for different students throughout the course. For example, for Tyler (4.12) they served as catalysts
for his own thinking and as impetus for him to further explore a topic or an aspect of his host
culture. They also helped him to continue the reflection that he had begun in his initial response
and even to change the way that he had initially been thinking about a topic. For Madalynn (4.13)
the interactions allowed her to keep in touch with the other members of her cohort and to
compare and contrast her own experiences with those of her classmates in different countries,
thus giving her even greater insights into various cultures and helping her to expand her
knowledge and understanding of differing cultural perspectives.
These excerpts give just a small glimpse into the ways in which the classmate and facilitator responses helped to mediate the students in the course. Worth noting is that the initial student response to a blog prompt served as a necessary extension of the dialogue, but it did not complete the discussion. That is, the course blog became a virtual dialogic space only as students responded to one another and the course facilitator entered the exchanges to offer additional thoughts, questions, and remarks intended to mediate students’ thinking about the issues raised. This dialogic interaction between classmates is the focus of the following section. It will also look at the facilitator’s mediation as well as mediation provided by the students’ ‘last word’ responses to their classmates and the facilitator. These forms of mediation will at first be discussed separately, for the purposes of defining and giving examples from the data, and then as a whole, for the purposes of demonstrating how all of these pieces worked together to form cohesive mediation of students’ intercultural development.

4.4 Classmate, facilitator and ‘last word’ responses: Continuing and enriching the dialogue

As part of course requirements, students respond to assigned classmates’ posts every week. These responses are assigned by the facilitator in order to ensure that each student receives a peer response to each of his or her posts. Responders are assigned in a rotating manner so that all students have the chance to respond to, and receive a response from, all other students at least once over the course of the semester. The purpose of having the students respond to each other is to allow them a ‘space’ in which to share their experiences with each other and in which they can gain knowledge, insights and ideas from each other. These interactions also allow the students to push each other’s thinking and to potentially go beyond the initial thoughts that they had about the prompt and their experiences. This is closely monitored by the facilitator, who then posts additional comments or questions that serve to draw connections between the student and his/her
classmate, to point out discrepancies between their thinking or experiences that may need to be reconciled, to direct them to consider their remarks in relation to course readings, or to prompt them to further develop their ideas. The facilitator’s responses are given on each student’s post after that student’s scheduled classmate has responded. In this way, students have an opportunity to individually reflect on the blog topic of the week, compose and share their thoughts on the blog, and receive a response from a classmate (while also reading a classmate’s post and formulating a response to that) before the course facilitator enters the discussion. This ensures that students have already struggled with the ideas and questions posed during a particular week and have begun to dialogue about them before being guided or challenged by the facilitator. It also allows the facilitator the chance to glimpse students’ thinking and to tailor her responses to their emerging understanding of the topic.

Finally, the ‘last word’ responses are completed in response to these other two types of feedback. They provide an opportunity for students to answer the questions posed by their classmate and the facilitator and to otherwise continue the discussion raised by the initial post and the responses by clarifying points, discussing ideas shared, etc. The intent, of course, is that this is not actually the last word on a topic, but rather that students continue to think and dialogue on the topics throughout the course.

Each of these forms of mediation, as they applied to the 2013 iteration of the course, will be described and discussed below, separately, with examples from the data showing the types of responses that were frequently given in each area. This should not give the impression, however, that they functioned independently of each other. Rather, they formed a cohesive dialogue in which students shared their thoughts, received feedback, and extended or revised their ideas. As such, data will also be provided that give examples of how these forms interacted with each other to mediate students’ thinking and their development of interculturality in particular ways.
4.4.1 Classmate responses

The focus of this section is on considering how students’ feedback to one another, including comments they made and questions they posed, functioned as forms of mediation in the course. In this case, it is important to recognize that the responses from classmates did not necessarily represent a more expert understanding of issues relevant to intercultural development, as was the case with the contributions from the course facilitator. Rather, all students in the course were struggling in areas related to interculturality. Thus, unlike the carefully designed blog prompts and the systematic and focused remarks and questions of the facilitator, which were both planned to push student thinking in particular ways, students’ responses to one another were based on their own experiences and emerging intercultural abilities. Moreover, the mediation was not necessarily carried out by someone more ‘experienced’ (i.e., had spent more time abroad), although this could have been and, in fact, was the case at times depending on students’ prior experiences. Rather, it may be appropriate to consider classmate responses as holding mediating potential that at times was attuned to the addressee’s emerging intercultural understanding but at other times was not. Similarly, classmate responses sometimes functioned to promote student thinking in a manner similar to the facilitator’s contributions while in other instances it only led to intervention from the facilitator to keep the discussion on track. Nonetheless, as will be clear in the examples that follow, the sharing and considering of multiple perspectives and experiences as students worked collaboratively to interpret their new cultural contexts frequently generated serious, extensive contemplation. Again, while these types of mediation will be demonstrated separately for ease of discussion, it is important to keep in mind that multiple forms of mediation existed and worked together in each response, functioning collectively to help students in multiple ways.
One of the main ways in which students responded to each other was by asking questions. The most common, though certainly not the only, categories of questions that this group of students asked of each other in their responses, as emerged during coding of the data, are shown in Table 4-4. It should be noted that the blog topics for a given week may have made it more likely that some of these kinds of questions would surface more than others because a prompt might have explicitly directed students to think about a particular topic; however, these were also recurring types of questions and ideas that seemed to arise throughout all course topics and that impacted students’ interactions and development.

Table 4-4: Types of questions in classmate feedback.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question types</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clarification/information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compare/contrast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language use with host culture members</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following are representative excerpts of each category from within the data along with some discussion of each. While the excerpts may fit into more than one category, they are discussed under the category in which they seemed to be most salient.

Clarification/information questions often took a form similar to the following excerpts:

Excerpt 4.14

*I was wondering exactly what you mean* by a subclassification of the schema theory? *Can you further explain what you mean?* (Dolores to Shania, Week 12)

Excerpt 4.15

*Have you experienced* the directness of a European and their willingness to say exactly what they are thinking? *Can you give me an example?* (Dolores to Cathy, Week 10)

In addition to using questions for simply clarifying something that the responder did not understand about the post or asking for an example of something (as can be seen in excerpts 4.14 and 4.15), the clarification/information questions that students asked each other helped them to learn more about each other’s thinking and experiences. They also helped to push each other’s
thinking about a particular topic mentioned in the initial response and required them to think about their own actions and interactions. Even questions that seemed to ask just for more information or explanation had the potential to push the classmate’s thinking because, in their ‘last word’ responses they then had to clarify that thinking to make it understandable to another person (Vygotsky, 1986).

Some of the clarification/information questions asked students to share more about things such as their daily routines in their cultures, as is the case in excerpt 4.16:

Excerpt 4.16

*Does your mom* pack you a lunch when you go to school? *[What]* does your daily *school/food routine look like?* (Tara to Katherine, Week 3)

Through these types of questions, students were compelled to specifically think about and articulate aspects of their host cultures for their classmates. This reflection on and articulation of their experiences pushed them to think in more depth about these aspects of their host culture, rather than just taking them for granted, and also allowed them to share the cultural knowledge that they were gaining. The classmates who had asked the questions could then, through the ‘last word’ responses, learn about ways of doing things and/or interacting in their classmates’ host cultures that might have been different from what they themselves were encountering. This potentially helped them gain new culture-specific knowledge and, by broadening their knowledge base, mediated them toward interculturality by opening them up to the multiple perspectives and behaviors that exist in different cultures.

Students also mediated their classmates toward the development of interculturality by pushing their analytical thinking through asking classmates to give and/or clarify their opinions on situations mentioned in the readings or initial posts. By asking classmates to give their opinions on things they had noticed such as language, societal roles or their own thinking, students were mediating each other toward reflecting in more depth on the things that they had discussed in their initial responses to the prompts. For example, in excerpt 4.17, Cathy pushed
Madalynn to reflect on and further discuss the impression that she had given in her post about the way language is used in Chile to put speakers on equal social planes.

Excerpt 4.17

**From your post, it seems like** the locals like being very informal and sometimes vulgar for the purpose of putting everyone on the same level of familiarity and to make a "comfortable and at home" environment. **Would you tend to agree** or do you think that the language reflects something else? (Cathy to Madalynn, Week 7)

Here Cathy asked for Madalynn’s opinion on Cathy’s interpretation of what Madalynn had said, but also gave her the opportunity to think and talk more about how language reflects cultural attitudes and values (“do you think that the language reflects something else?”). In excerpt 4.18, Melinda pushed Dolores to consider whether the behaviors she had noticed in her host mother were more rooted in individual or societal values.

Excerpt 4.18

**As far as the gender roles in your family, do you think your mom does what she does** because she loves your dad and wants to see him happy? **Or do you think** she is simply a product of long-rooted gender roles? (Melinda to Dolores, Week 9)

This had the potential to help Dolores go from thinking something like, ‘that’s just how my host mom is’ to thinking more deeply about why she might be acting in a particular way (i.e., what might be the cultural roots). Finally, in excerpt 4.19, Kimberly attempted to push Thomas’ thinking about the use of tone in the English language.

Excerpt 4.19

**You mention at the end of your blog “I like the way that tone of voice can imply different meanings with the same words although I haven't really thought of whether or not that happens often in English.” Do you feel as though** the tone of voice doesn't make a difference in English **or [you] just never have noticed** how it affects things before? (Kimberly to Thomas, Week 6)

Because Thomas had made a relatively vague statement about this in his initial response (“I haven’t really thought about whether or not that happens often in English”), Kimberly attempted to get him to clarify his thinking. This required him to think specifically about what he had said at that point and to expand upon and clarify his initial response. This type of question required Thomas to clarify his thinking not about his L2 in this case, but about his own L1.
mind that knowledge of oneself is just as important as knowledge of another in the development of interculturality, Kimberly’s question had the potential to help Thomas to reflect on his own language in a way that he had not done before, thus exposing it for critical analysis rather than just allowing it to remain seen as natural and taken for granted.

Another important aspect of interculturality as it applies in this study is students’ ability to act on knowledge and insights that they gain in future and/or different contexts, thus reorienting their thoughts and actions. By asking each other clarification/information questions about actions that they were planning to take or had taken, students drew each other’s attention to this as well.

**Excerpt 4.20**

You say that you “should probably be less indirect” in the future. In other words, you think being more direct will solve some of your miscommunication problems. […] How do you think these kinds of direct comments could be integrated into your speech in a way that fits your L2 culture? Also, how exactly do you plan on “being less indirect,” as you put it? (Melinda to Shania, Week 6)

In her comments and questions in this excerpt, Melinda focused on a topic that Shania had brought up in her initial post: her desire to be more direct. Shania had mentioned that she wanted to learn to be more direct in order to have fewer communication issues, but she had not mentioned specifically how she would do so. Melinda’s questions, then, required Shania to think very specifically about how she would go about becoming more direct *and* about how communicating in this style might be perceived by her host culture. By being required to reflect in this way on her actions in this area Shania then had the potential to apply this way of thinking (‘how will I go about doing X and how will it be perceived?’) to future contexts. It can be seen through all of these excerpts that, even when seemingly ‘just’ asking questions for clarification or information, students were actually requiring each other to think in more depth about the experiences that they had described and/or the behaviors that they were employing within their host cultures.
In addition to questions for clarification/information, students very frequently asked each other questions that required them to make comparisons and contrasts. Students most often asked each other to compare and contrast their host countries with their home country as well as their own host cities or countries with each other’s. These types of questions had the potential to mediate their classmates’ intercultural development because they encouraged attitudes of curiosity and openness as well as an understanding of the perspectives of other cultures. Developing and employing these attitudes, then, had the potential to allow the students to compare the knowledge that they had about their own culture with the knowledge that they gained of new cultures without feeling that their own ways of thinking and being were threatened. This could then allow for more effective and appropriate exchanges with members of different cultures any time they found themselves interacting in intercultural contexts.

Through these types of questions, students were also pushed to develop and extend upon cultural self-awareness (i.e., an understanding of the ways in which they view the world), as well as to develop an understanding that they have a culturally constructed (rather than natural) frame of reference from which they approach interactions with others and that others also have their own frames of reference that may be slightly or even entirely different. By asking their classmates to compare and contrast their home country with their host country, students were mediating each other’s abilities to look at what they were experiencing while abroad in terms of their previous experiences in their home countries and to realize that the way they experienced things at home was not the only way in which to experience those things. This can be seen in the following excerpts:

Excerpt 4.21
Did you notice anything in how they responded to the situation [the announcement of a much-hoped-for pregnancy] that might be culturally different from how we would respond in the United States? (Shania to Kimberly, Week 12)
Excerpt 4.22
Do you find that people generally keep to themselves in most situations or is it similar to the United States, in such circumstances that strangers speak to each other on the street? (Tyler to Madalynn, Week 6)

In both excerpts, Kimberly and Madalynn were being asked to think about and discuss how the experiences that they were having might take place if they were experienced at home in the States rather than in Spain (4.21) or Chile (4.22). This had the potential to draw their attention to the fact that ways of responding or interacting that are different from their own are not 'wrong', but are, in fact, simply different and just as valuable and `correct` as what Kimberly and Madalynn had experienced at home throughout their lives.

By comparing and contrasting their experiences with those of their classmates in other cities or countries, students were able to extend this to even broader contexts because they were comparing not just home and host cultures but adding another culture (that of their classmate) into the equation.

Excerpt 4.23
Here, if you look at a male, it can be an instant invitation to more than a simple friendship! Often, it is easy to read the people from their body language and facial expressions whether or not a person is genuinely interested in making a friendship or something else here. I wonder if it is just as straightforward where you are as well, or are you left guessing? (Cathy to Melinda, Week 3)

Again, thinking about and responding to this type of question required students to shift their frame of reference from one that focused on the ways they had always done and experienced things to one that allowed for multiple perspectives on ways of being and doing.

In addition to focusing on questions and issues related to culture, students also frequently asked questions to each other about their experiences with language. Given that language and culture are inextricably linked, linguistic competence and understanding that language impacts and is impacted by different cultural contexts are important elements of the development of interculturality. Successful language use is an intercultural phenomenon contingent upon an understanding of the meanings and values of one’s own and one’s interlocutor’s cultures.
Sociolinguistic awareness, that is, of how language is used within different social contexts and how it shapes those contexts, is a key aspect of interculturality as it is being defined for this study. As Byram notes, exchange of information is dependent not only on linguistic elements such as vocabulary and grammar, but is also “dependent upon understanding how what one says or writes will be perceived and interpreted in another cultural context” (1997, p. 3).

Students most often asked questions that related to their classmates’ interactions with members of the host culture and how those impacted their linguistic and/or cultural understandings. It should be noted that this was not the only type of question that students asked related to language. For example, they also asked each other about specific aspects of the target language like word meanings or common phrases, or about how they were progressing in their own language learning/use. However, as questions related to social interactions are most salient for the current study those are the ones that will be discussed here.

The following excerpts offer examples of the ways in which students asked each other about language use and interpretation in social contexts, both as they had experienced it themselves and in relation to the norms of the language/culture in which they were studying. In excerpt 4.24, Tyler responded to Madalynn’s discussion of a misunderstanding that she had had with a man on the bus. The man had asked Madalynn for the time, but she did not understand what he was asking at first and initially misinterpreted his question as a demand for her watch.

**Excerpt 4.24**

*What do you think your initial lack of understanding of his question was? I mean do you think besides intonation the man was speaking a dialect or shortening a common phrase to the point it is difficult to understand? Or did he actually say what you thought he said and you just weren't sure how to interpret it?* (Tyler to Madalynn, Week 6)

In his response, Tyler asked Madalynn to name specifically which linguistic issues might have been at the root of her misunderstanding (intonation, dialect, shortening, etc.). Beyond the potential linguistic roots of the misunderstanding Tyler also asked whether or not the misunderstanding could have been caused by the fact that Madalynn had heard the words
correctly, and understood their meaning, but, because she was not a member of this culture, did not know how to interpret them accurately. These questions required Madalynn to think about how various aspects of language work together and how a breakdown in one area could cause an entire interaction to be misinterpreted, particularly when one of the interlocutors is not a member of the culture in which the interaction is taking place.

In excerpt 4.25, Katherine, who was studying in Granada, focused on the issue of how particular dialects of a language, in this case Spanish, might be interpreted by people who do not speak that dialect. This came about because in Tara’s initial post she had shared a discussion that she had had with her host father about his views on linguistic variation in Spain. Tara had not specifically mentioned dialects of Spanish other than those in Spain, but due to her own experiences, Katherine extended the conversation to include the topic:

Excerpt 4.25

*Have you encountered any stigmas to “Mexican Spanish” in Madrid?* On several occasions I have used words like “carro” [car] and “jugo” [juice] and I have been quickly told by native speakers to not use those words because the words sound very South American. *Does that same stigma take place in Madrid?* (Katherine to Tara, Week 7)

By raising this topic and asking whether Tara had experienced the same thing in her own SA context, Katherine brought to light for reflection and discussion the fact that not only does language use vary within certain social contexts (and by geographical area as well), but also that use of non-standard or non-accepted ways of speaking can negatively impact a speaker. When addressing Katherine’s questions in her ‘last’ word’, Tara then had the potential to continue to develop her sociolinguistic awareness and to extend it to a broader context of the entire Spanish-speaking world rather than simply her own host city and country.

As can be seen from the excerpts above, the questions that the students asked of each other in their responses provided opportunities for much reflection, analysis and discussion and, thus, quite a bit of mediation toward the development of interculturality. In addition to the questions that they asked, the students also furthered the discussion and provided forms of
mediation by offering comments of various types. Again, the comments fit into several different categories that work together to further the dialogue of the course, but that have been separated here (see table 4-5 below) simply to illustrate a particular ‘type’ of comment that occurred during the blog discussions.

It must be noted that, just as was the case with questions, students offered many more types of comments on each other’s initial responses than will be discussed in detail here. For example, students offered advice to help each other get through difficulties that they were experiencing and encouragement to continue working to learn as much as possible and to have successful experiences and interactions. They also shared their own personal experiences with each other (those both similar to and different from their classmates’ experiences) and sympathized/empathized with negative experiences. While all of these types contributed to the students’ dialogue within the course they did not necessarily directly relate to the development of interculturality. Those categories that did relate directly to the topic are listed in table 4-5 and will be discussed below.

Table 4-5: Types of response in classmate feedback.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comment type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Compare/contrast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language-related</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact of reading classmate’s post</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The reader will note some similarities between the categories of student comments identified and the question categories just discussed. Given that the categories identified were selected from the blog dialogues, the back-and-forth nature of student-student and facilitator-student interactions meant that certain types of comments and questions were recurring as interactions unfolded and student thinking about a given topic developed. One of the main differences in categories between questions and comments was in the final ‘impact’ category. In
this category, as will be demonstrated below, it was actually the responding classmate who seemed to have been mediated toward interculturality through the act of reading their classmate’s initial response.

Again, as was the case with the questions discussed above, comments directed toward comparing and contrasting were quite prevalent in the classmate responses. Also as was the case with the questions, the areas of comparing and contrasting students’ host countries with their home countries as well as comparing students’ own host cities/countries with their classmates’ were most common, as demonstrate in the following excerpts:

Excerpt 4.26
I do notice the calm culture of Spain. It seems like everyone is always running around trying to do something in the U.S. but here, people are happy just to be walking around. (Samantha to Tara, Week 5)

Excerpt 4.27
And what you said about the nicknames [how personal attributes such as fat, skinny, crazy, etc. are often used to assign epithets to people] is really interesting. Do you think any cultural conclusions can be made from this? It definitely sounds so different from the U.S., where nicknames based on personal attributes would be considered rude, or judgmental! (Shania to Melinda, Week 6)

By comparing and contrasting their home country with their host country, students were able to continue to develop their cultural self-awareness as well as culture-specific knowledge about their host countries. This then also served as a point of discussion for the facilitator in her comments as well as in the students’ ‘last word’ responses, as will be seen below. This development of cultural self-awareness and culture-specific knowledge was again expanded upon when comparing and contrasting their own host cities/countries with those of their classmates. This was particularly salient when the responding student was studying in a culture whose language was also different than the student whose blog they were responding to.

Excerpt 4.28
It's so interesting for me to read about the Spanish culture regarding gender roles, because they are quite different in Germany (different compared to Spanish culture). (Tyler to Katherine, Week 10)
Excerpt 4.29
I know what you mean about making friends with males versus females [in Ecuador]. In this particular part of France, it's the opposite! I've met other age-mates easily at the conversation groups, but there's always some sort of tension between the Americans and the French men. (Cathy to Melinda, Week 3)

Because of the differences noted between the cultures, students again had the chance to be exposed to multiple ways of experiencing situations and, thus, to continue to add to their repertoire of cultural awareness and knowledge, potentially leading to attitudes of openness and respect with regards to different cultures and the ability to understand the perspectives of others.

Given that all of these students were studying to become language teachers it is natural that, as was the case with questions, language was also an important topic in the comments that students gave to each other. Most relevant to the discussion of interculturality is that of language use in context, which is demonstrated in the following excerpts:

Excerpt 4.30
I find it interesting that you say it can be difficult to express yourself (in regards to your feelings) in Spanish because I sometimes run into that problem as well. After two months of being in France, I have finally mastered "being angry" because the French really know how to be angry. Expressing sadness or disappointment is an entirely different story though. […] It is always a little bit difficult to make things come out correctly. (Cathy to Kimberly, Week 6)

Excerpt 4.31
In fact, I think being direct is easier because it doesn’t require the beating around the bush talent – that is a talent to be mastered in an L2. For me, I tend more towards direct statements in the L2 because I’m not always sure sarcasm or indirect statements will translate right or come across. (Melinda to Shania, Week 6)

In these excerpts Cathy and Melinda responded to comments that their classmates had made regarding the difficulties that exist when trying to express oneself in another language. What is key here is that they did not discuss issues with the language itself (i.e., particular vocabulary or grammar), but rather they focused on issues of how the language is used and potentially perceived in different cultural contexts. As was the case with questions related to language, these comments had the potential to push the classmates’ thinking on the social aspects of language, thus mediating the development of sociolinguistic awareness and understanding culture as discourse.
Finally, as mentioned above, a new category that emerged while analyzing students’ comments to each other was that of the impact of reading and responding to a classmate’s blog on the responding student him- or herself. This demonstrates that it was not necessarily only the student being responded to who received the mediation but rather that the student who was doing the reading and responding could be mediated by the interaction as well. The responding students were mediated toward gaining new ideas and/or understandings and they also were able to take ‘advice’ from the classmate’s post that helped them reorient their behaviors and/or ways of thinking in their host cultures. Mediation toward new ways of thinking is demonstrated in the following excerpts:

**Excerpt 4.32**
We are the one's stepping into their culture, and so we should not feel like the men need to change their ways to cater to what we are accustomed too. **I never really thought of it that way before reading your blog.** (Kimberly to Dolores, Week 10)

**Excerpt 4.33**
**Reading your post made me think even more so into the perceptions** that could have been formed due to such [WWII] events, or even the perceptions that we have as Americans and how they play into our thoughts that it was okay to bomb cities for no apparent reason. (Tyler to Michael, Week 9)

In these excerpts both Kimberly and Tyler stated that what they had read in their classmate’s original post either made them think of something in a new way, as was the case with Kimberly (4.32), or made them think even more deeply about a topic that they had already been thinking about, as was the case with Tyler (4.33). In both cases, the original posts pushed the responding student to think in new and perhaps more analytical/critical ways, thus pushing them in their intercultural development.

In excerpts 4.34 and 4.35, the responding students had focused on something that they read in their classmate’s post that they thought would be useful for their own situations. For example, Melinda noted that the idea that Cathy stated in her initial response (joining clubs to
meet people) was an activity that she herself now wanted to take part in order to form friendships with members of her own host culture:

Excerpt 4.34

*Your blog actually gave me the idea of joining the salsa club here.* That way I can hope to meet a smaller group of people and form close friendships, hopefully with females. (Melinda to Cathy, Week 3)

In Tara’s case, she noted that the attitude that Melinda had toward thinking about her time in the host culture (focusing on the positive things she could experience) was opposite from the way that she herself had been approaching her SA experience. After reading Melina’s post, Tara became cognizant of her own way of thinking and decided to try to adopt Melinda’s way of thinking so that she could have a more positive experience:

Excerpt 4.35

*I tend to always think about things I miss when I get depressed over here, but I want to use your advice and think about the awesome things I can experience here* that won’t be at home whenever I return for good. (Tara to Melinda, Week 4)

In both cases the responding students were mediated toward participating in activities or adopting attitudes that would help make them more open to participating in their host cultures and developing attitudes of openness and respect and the skill of interacting.

### 4.4.2 Facilitator responses

As stated above, once the students had responded to each other the facilitator then posted her own comments on the student’s blogs. She waited until this point so that the students had had the chance to grapple with the ideas and questions posed by the blog prompt and had begun to dialogue about those ideas and questions with their classmates. In this way, the facilitator did not influence or detract from the classmates’ feedback in any way but rather she added to the richness of the dialogue that had begun taking place with her own comments and questions. In this section the different types of feedback that the facilitator provided to the students are discussed, with
particular focus on the types of feedback that attempted to mediate students’ development of interculturality. It is important to note that the facilitator’s feedback sometimes had the same or similar functions as the feedback provided by the students’ peers, given that some of the response and question types were similar (e.g., sympathy/empathy, questions about planned actions, compare/contrast). The majority of the time, however, the facilitator’s responses functioned on a different level, given that they were related to her ‘expert’ status as previous study abroad participant and as experienced language teacher and experienced course facilitator. In addition, her comments were written systematically with the specific goal of helping students develop interculturality, which was not, of course, the case with classmate feedback.

Table 4-6 contains the types of feedback, both questions and comments, that the facilitator gave most often throughout the course in order to support students in their intercultural development. Again, it must be noted that these were not the only kinds of feedback given, but they are the most salient for the current study. One type of feedback that contributed to the dialogue but that was not necessarily directly related to the development of interculturality, but that had an impact on the overall dialogue of the course, will be discussed briefly, but the main focus in this section will be on facilitator feedback with a direct relation to students’ intercultural development.

Table 4-6: Types of facilitator feedback.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feedback type</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reference to classmates’ responses</td>
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<tr>
<td>Comments/questions pushing generalizations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comments/questions compelling more analytical thinking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questions related to language use</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The type of feedback included in the chart that did not necessarily relate directly to interculturality, but that was still important to the facilitator’s participation in the dialogue, is
‘reference to classmate’s response’. Exemplars of this type of response can be seen in the following excerpts:

Excerpt 4.36
I had the same question that [Kimberly] did about why this difference in conceptualization of lines might exist between the two cultures. (to Katherine, Week 12)

Excerpt 4.37
I think that [Michael] asked you a couple of great questions at the end of his response and I am particularly curious to read your answer to his question about the way your host brother acted being more culture or family-based. I also wondered the same thing he did about how you feel about the difference in personal space. (to Thomas, Week 5)

While it did not relate directly to pushing students’ development of interculturality, it is important to highlight this type of feedback because it was used by the facilitator as a way of including everyone in the dialogue, demonstrating to students that their classmates were important and equal contributors to their experiences in the course. It also made clear to the students that their classmates had questions and comments that were valuable in helping them to think about and understand the experiences that they were having in their host countries with members of their host cultures. As can be seen in excerpts 4.36 and 4.37, these comments made by the facilitator also served to highlight what she felt were the important things that the classmate had said/asked, therefore helping students to focus their thinking and their ‘last word’ responses on particular topics. Thus, while these types of comments in themselves might not have been directed at mediating interculturality, they did help students to focus on the mediating questions or comments that had been offered by their classmates.

One of the most important types of feedback offered by the facilitator that was meant to help students in their intercultural development was related to pushing generalizations that the students had made in their initial responses and helping them to make connections across and between experiences. These comments and questions were meant to help students go beyond broad, or even stereotypical, thinking, which often occurs when someone spends time in a
unfamiliar environment, to begin to develop a more critical and nuanced understanding of experiences they had in the host culture. Two examples follow:

Excerpt 4.38
You describe a German person as: "Someone who drinks beer, speaks somewhat loudly, is punctual, keeps to him/herself in public, talks about politics a good bit, and eats a lot of meat (beef, pork, or anything of the sort)". Do these things seem stereotypical to you? Have you widely experienced the people acting in these ways? Do you think Germans would be ok being described in this way? (to Tyler, Week 12)

Excerpt 4.39
Finally, you say that Spanish people tend to exaggerate things a lot and that their speech is also exaggerated. Why do you think they exaggerate things? Do you think this could be a somewhat stereotypical view on some level? Have you seen this in other areas of Spain that you have traveled to? I wonder whether your classmates in other areas like Granada or Alcalá would say the same thing. (to Kimberly, Week 13)

In both of these excerpts, the facilitator pointed out the potentially stereotypical statement/idea that the students had presented and directly asked them whether they thought this could actually be a stereotype rather than what they had perhaps thought was a general statement about people in their host country. This then opened up the students’ thinking for critical examination, by both themselves and other members of the course, rather than just allowing them to assume (without examination) that what they had said was true about their host culture or the members thereof. In this type of feedback the facilitator also required the students to think about multiple experiences they had had and whether those might provide more ‘evidence’ to support their statements or not. For example, she asked Tyler (excerpt 4.38) whether he had experienced many German people acting in the ways he had described and she asked Kimberly (4.39) whether she had seen the tendency to exaggerate in people in other areas of Spain. This required the students to think not only about one experience, but about multiple ones in order to question and/or think more critically about what they had said, thus making connections between experiences that helped them to further their understanding of their host culture.

As can also be seen in these excerpts, through this type of feedback the facilitator encouraged students to think about and/or involve other people’s perspectives as part of their own
development of knowledge and interculturality. In her response to Tyler, for example, she asked him directly to think about how a German person might feel if they were to hear this description of themselves. This required him to step out of his usual way of thinking (i.e., from his own perspective) and to try to take on the perspectives and feelings of members of the host community. In her response to Kimberly, the facilitator highlighted the fact that Kimberly’s classmates in other parts of Spain may potentially have differing insights to provide on this same topic. This was a way for the facilitator to encourage Kimberly to use the resources that she had available to her (e.g., her classmates) in order to dig more deeply and critically into the things that she was experiencing in the part of Spain where she was studying. It also invited those classmates directly into the dialogue around this topic for further discussion and analysis.

This type of facilitator feedback was not the only one aimed at developing students’ abilities to think critically. She also offered comments and questions that specifically required students to find out more about the underlying beliefs, values and attitudes of their host cultures in order to gain cultural knowledge and develop more analytical ways of thinking about and understanding their host cultures. Given that critical reflection and analysis are integral parts of the development of interculturality, this was one of the areas on which the facilitator most often focused her feedback to students. Students’ responses often contained information about their host culture/language, or members of the host culture, that was on the surface level (i.e., simply describing that something or someone was a particular way). While this noticing of aspects of culture and gaining of general knowledge is an important first step in the development of interculturality, the facilitator aimed to compel students to think about what they had described on a more critical and analytical level (i.e., not just that something was a particular way, but why it might be that way). The purpose in doing this was to help students understand the perspectives of their host community and also to help them focus on their own assumptions and roles within their new community.
Most of the feedback given in this category asked students to compare and contrast underlying beliefs, meanings, values and norms of their host country with their home country, as in the following excerpt:

Excerpt 4.40
In your response to [Kimberly] you mention that [the different conceptualization of lines in Spain] might have something to do with personal space. Are there any other reasons you can think of, using what you have learned about the underlying values of the culture? Could it, perhaps, have something to do with the cultures (Spanish and US) valuing order or respect in different ways? Or might there be a difference because of more individualistic vs. collectivist natures of the cultures? (to Katherine, Week 12)

This type of feedback was given in order to lead students to examine/question their home cultures as well as their host cultures. Sometimes the facilitator made specific suggestions for aspects of the cultures that the students might focus on to learn more, as was the case in the above excerpt (“valuing order or respect in different ways”, “individualistic vs. collectivist”) while other times the facilitator asked the question in a broader way. This can be seen below in excerpt 4.41 when the facilitator asked, “Is there a particular cultural belief or attitude that might be at the root of this difference?” Here, Kimberly is being asked to generate her own ideas as to which aspects of culture might be at play in this context.

Excerpt 4.41
You say that you think people in the US would have gotten annoyed [about someone speaking loudly on their cell phone at the next table in a restaurant] and said something to the waiter but the people there in Spain seemed not to mind. I wonder: do you have a sense as to why these two different attitudes might exist? Is there a particular cultural belief or attitude that might be at the root of this difference? Also, do you think that Americans would always get upset about something like this or would it be on more of an individual basis? Likewise, might it be more individual in Spain as well? (to Kimberly, Week 5)

Also of interest in this excerpt is that the facilitator focused Kimberly’s attention on the fact that, while overarching cultural attitudes could be at play a situation like this one, it is also possible that individual beliefs and differences might have an impact as well. By giving feedback such as this, the facilitator was attempting to mediate students’ understanding that, while culture certainly impacts the way events take place and are perceived, individual preferences and experiences must
also be taken into account and analyzed. The point, then, was to remind students that they should not essentialize individuals and assume that they all subscribe to general cultural beliefs.

Another way in which the facilitator’s feedback required students to think more analytically was by asking them to look at a cultural institution (e.g., the education system) with which they had contact and in which they had experiences and use what they learned there to develop an understanding of the cultural values that impact how that institution functions and to analyze how the institution may reflect cultural values. In excerpt 4.42, for example, the facilitator asked Kimberly to use what she had experienced in the education system in Spain to think about how she might extrapolate that to the broader cultural values that might have an impact on the way the educational system is set up.

Excerpt 4.42
One of the differences that you mention between Spain and the US is that in Spain there are a lot fewer small assignments and that the grades rely mainly on larger tests and presentations. What clue does this give you as to the cultural values that drive the Spanish education system? How are they different than the values in the US? (to Kimberly, Week 13)

In addition to feedback that required students to look more deeply at aspects of culture, the facilitator also focused some of her mediation on students’ language and sociolinguistic development. Students’ language learning and use of language with members of the host culture was, of course, one of the most salient aspects of their study abroad experiences. They were concerned about learning as many new things about the language as possible as well as expanding their capacities to understand the people with whom they interacted and to make themselves understood by those people. With regard to language, the facilitator’s focus was mainly on mediating what students were learning about how language was used in particular ways for particular purposes within the context of their host cultures. Two such examples were about the contexts of congratulating a couple when they found out that they were going to have a baby
(excerpt 4.43) and expressing condolences and support for someone whose family member had passed away (excerpt 4.44)

Excerpt 4.43
Did you learn anything new linguistically about what you say to congratulate someone when they find out that they are pregnant? (to Kimberly, Week 12)

Excerpt 4.44
Despite this [the death of her grandmother at home in the States] being such a negative experience I think it provides an opportunity for a different kind of insight into the host culture than you might otherwise have gotten and I am really interested in what you have learned about how Spanish people talk about death and how they support those who are going through the loss of a family member. (to Samantha, Week 6)

In both of these excerpts the facilitator attempted to draw the students’ attention to thinking not only about the situations as they experienced them but on what they might have been able to learn about the language that is used in those contexts. This mediated the aspect of interculturality that is related to understanding language as impacting and being impacted by differing cultural contexts.

Again, while these were not the only types of feedback provided by the facilitator, they were the ones that had the most potential to mediate students toward the development of interculturality, particularly towards critical ways of thinking about their own culture, their host cultures and the target language. Students’ responses to both their classmates’ feedback and the facilitator’s feedback then made up their ‘last word’ responses, which will be discussed in the next section.

4.4.3 ‘Last word’ responses

This section examines students’ ‘last word’ responses to comments made by their classmates and the facilitator on their initial posts. As mentioned above, the ‘last words’ provide an opportunity for students to answer the questions posed and to otherwise continue the
discussion raised by the initial post and the responses by doing things such as clarifying points and discussing ideas shared. Through these responses, students had the opportunity to solidify and/or reconsider their initially articulated thinking in response to the remarks from their classmates and the facilitator. While these were the ‘last words’ for a particular week’s prompt, it is worth stating again that the course design had an iterative logic, which meant that students were compelled to revisit questions and topics throughout the course and to examine them in light of new readings, discussions and experiences. Thus, the dialogue and activity were not meant to actually end when the students started work on a new week’s prompt.

As was the case with the classmate and facilitator responses, not every type of ‘last word’ response will be discussed here. The main activity that occurred in these responses was, of course, that of the students directly answering questions that had been posed by their classmates and by the facilitator. Through these questions students were, among other things, required to think more specifically and/or analytically about something that they said, to clarify/explicate their thoughts and experiences and to share more specific cultural information. Two examples follow:

Excerpt 4.45
Hey [Cathy]. Thanks for reading my blog. Now to start, you asked me if I think that my cinema and Quichua classes clearly demonstrate the education system at the college level in Ecuador. I read that question to the effect that you were asking me if said classes are reflective of the current education system in Ecuador. I would say no because our class sizes seem more or less small at my university and in these classes. I think the public education is more crowded… (Melinda to Cathy, Week 13)

Excerpt 4.46
Anyhow, continuing with [Dorothy’s] question: from what I can understand, dialects are now prized by the people who speak them, and there is a push to teach the ones that haven’t survived as well. Either way, dialects are more “trendy” today than they used to be. (Michael to Dorothy, Week 7)

In both cases the students were directly responding to questions that had been asked about their initial blog post by their classmate (4.45) or the facilitator (4.46). The question asked by Cathy required Melinda to look more deeply at her experiences in the Ecuadorian education system and
determine whether what she was experiencing was representative of the system as a whole or whether it was more of a local experience particular to her specific context. The question asked by the facilitator required Michael to discuss how dialects, which he had talked in-depth about in his initial post, were viewed in Austria during his time there as opposed to historically, thus requiring him to gain and share further knowledge on changing attitudes toward linguistic variation in his host country.

In addition to directly answering questions, students continued to compare and contrast experiences and cultures (home, host and classmates’) and also noted when classmate and facilitator questions had made them think more about what they had said in their initial posts. This aspect of these responses is relevant because it demonstrates clearly the fact that they had been mediated, at least to some extent, by the responses that they had received, which was, of course, one of the main goals of creating the course and its related dialogue. One example of this can be found in excerpt 4.47, where Shania responded to questions asked by the facilitator about whether how/the Spanish culture values family.

Excerpt 4.47

*I have been under the impression that family is more important here, but that could be a stereotype. But thanks for asking those questions, because hopefully now* I can keep my eyes open and really look out for it. *(Shania to Dorothy, Week 3)*

In this case, the ‘last word’ response reveals that the questions asked have prompted Shania to potentially rethink a cultural assumption that she had been making. It also reveals that the questions have made her want to be more aware of this topic in the future in order to gain more knowledge and insight about it. This potential shift in thinking and willingness to examine the topic further both demonstrate aspects of interculturality that Shania may be developing as a result of her participation in the dialogue on this topic.

The other types of ‘last word’ responses that were most relevant to students’ development of interculturality are presented in Table 4-7.
It was often the case that students would state in their ‘last word’ responses that, as a result of the feedback they had been given by other members of the course, they realized that they needed to rethink and/or clarify something that they had said in their initial post. An example can be seen in excerpt 4.48 where Madalynn realized that the statement she had made in her initial post ("Therefore, from my observations, it seems that a lot of Chileans have a negative attitude toward the way in which they use the language.") had come across in a way in which she did not intend.

Excerpt 4.48
I think that although they admit to speaking poorly, they do not look down upon their own way of speaking. I should have rephrased the “negative attitude” part of my last post. I feel that they understand that others have a negative attitude toward the Chilean way of speaking, yet I believe that Chileans accept their language and its exclusiveness with no intentions to make it sound closer to standard Spanish. (Madalynn to Dorothy, week 7)

In response to the questions from the facilitator ("You mention that Chileans as a group seem to look down upon their own way of speaking. Did I understand that correctly? If that is the case, are they trying to make a change in their language in any way in order to be viewed differently by other Spanish speakers?"), Madalynn acknowledged the potential for confusion and clarified what she wanted to say. This required her to think more critically about the linguistic/cultural observations that she had made and also to verbalize them more succinctly.

In addition to giving students the opportunity to examine and clarify their ideas and explanations, the ‘last word’ responses provided students the opportunity to share with each other more of the cultural and linguistic knowledge and understandings that they were gaining, both through experiences and through the other courses that they were taking while abroad. Excerpt 4.49 provides an example of an instance where Dolores used historical cultural information to

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>‘Last word’ response types</th>
<th>Rethinking/clarifying something in initial post</th>
<th>Sharing further cultural/linguistic information</th>
<th>Plan for further learning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Table 4-7: Types of ‘last word’ responses.
answer Michael’s question about discrimination based on linguistic variation (“When you say you understand the discrimination that some Spaniards have undergone only from language, do you mean discrimination against people who speak a certain dialect?”).

Excerpt 4.49
[Michael], I do mean the discrimination from speaking certain dialects. **Franco, a former dictator in Spain, made everyone speak Castilian.** You could be arrested or beaten for speaking another dialect. **Many people who speak other dialects will [still] refuse to speak to somebody who is speaking Castilian** or will just talk in their own dialect. (Dolores to Michael, Week 13)

In her response, Dolores shared historical information that helped her clarify what type of discrimination she was talking about in her initial response. This allowed her to tie historical events to both past and current social and linguistic issues that impact Spanish culture. The information that Dolores provided also allowed Michael (who was studying in Austria) to learn about aspects of Spanish culture that he most likely would not have had the chance to learn otherwise, thus expanding his understandings of cultures other than his home or host cultures.

In relation to the idea of sharing further cultural and linguistic information, students at times went beyond what was expected and brought in outside sources to clarify their point or to provide examples. This was most often done through the use of audio clips or YouTube videos. Excerpt 4.50 demonstrates the use of audio clips, which Tyler had included in his response in order to help Madalynn get a better sense of the dialects that he was talking about.

Excerpt 4.50
It was really odd for me to hear that she took classes to lose her dialect as well. **I will add two links to this post.** The first is a link to a page where you can play an audio clip with a dialect that will sound close to my professor's dialect: [http://www.dw.de/deutsch-lernen/sächsisch/s-12468](http://www.dw.de/deutsch-lernen/sächsisch/s-12468). The second is that of the North Germans (Hamburgerisch): [http://www.dw.de/deutsch-lernen/hamburgerisch/s-12466](http://www.dw.de/deutsch-lernen/hamburgerisch/s-12466). **You can listen to parts of the audio clips and maybe (without understanding) hear different sounds.** (Tyler to Madalynn, Week 7)

He understood that she would not understand the words that were being said (given that she was studying Spanish in Chile), but his hope was that she would still be able to get a sense of the sound differences. Both excerpts 4.49 and 4.50 demonstrate the resources that students used when
they attempted to make their thinking and their discussion more accessible to other members of their dialogic community.

A final type of ‘last word’ response that relates to students’ development of interculturality is the type in which they mentioned cultural aspects that they had not learned much about yet, but that they wanted to have the opportunity to find out more about. This displayed the attitude of curiosity, which is a key element of interculturality and which demonstrates students’ openness to learning about new cultures and to understanding what members of their host culture think about certain ideas or other groups of people. For example, in excerpt 4.51, Katherine had responded to Thomas’ questions about the stereotypes of American college students that they both had found to exist through their interactions with members of the Spanish culture.

Excerpt 4.51
It is really unfortunate that American college students are given such bad stereotypes about drinking. I have not had many conversations with people other than my senora about drinking and American students but I want to hear some more Spaniards opinions about this. (Katherine to Thomas, Week 9)

In this portion of the response, Katherine noted that up to that point she had not had much exposure to the general way of thinking of Spanish people on this topic, but that she was interested in knowing more and was planning to speak with other Spaniards so that she could learn about their thoughts. Again, this demonstrates her attitude of curiosity and her desire to be able to understand things from the perspective of her host community.

One final interesting aspect of students’ ‘last word’ responses was the fact that while they were answering questions, students occasionally also asked questions back to their responders. For example:

Excerpt 4.51
Why do you think you haven’t experienced the “rich” U.S stereotype? Do you think it’s because Sevillanos [residents of Seville] are rich themselves? Quizas otro motiveo [perhaps another reason]? Thanks for your thoughts [Thomas]– they gave me some food for thought. (Melinda to Thomas, Week 9)
In this ‘last word’, Melinda tried to push Thomas to think more about why (rather than just stating that) he had not experienced a particular stereotype and even offered a possible answer for him to consider. This asking of question in ‘last words’ allowed the potential for the desired continued dialogue to take place on specific topics rather than simply continuing as the course and topics progressed. Unfortunately this continued dialogue was not often taken up by the classmates, most likely because it was not required. It could also be the case that this did not happen because students were moving on to the next week’s topic or because they had many things other than the course that they were doing.

This also brings up the question as to whether the facilitator continued to attempt mediation if a student’s ‘last word’, particularly their answers to the questions asked, was off the mark (e.g., didn’t answer the questions, demonstrated thinking that continued to require more specific mediation, etc.). In general it did not occur very often that students were off the mark and so was not much of an issue. If it did happen, the facilitator usually used her videoconferencing sessions with the students as a site for clearing up any issues or furthering deeper discussion on the topic in question. Ideally, of course, back and forth dialogue (i.e., continued questions and answers) would continue taking place throughout the semester on every topic. However, given that the students are only required to respond once and given that all members of the course have limited amounts of time, it is unfortunately not possible to realistically expect this to happen. Certainly greater mediation could take place in that case, but the structure of the course as it is currently organized does allow for at least some mediation and intercultural development to occur, which is more than happens in cases where students studying abroad are left to their own devices.
4.5 Looking at the dialogue as a whole: putting the pieces together

In order to get a better sense of how these elements all worked together to create dialogue and mediate the students in the course, this section provides excerpts and discussion from a full exchange in which the relevant part of the prompt is provided and the student’s initial response is discussed, followed by the classmate response, facilitator response and ‘last word’ response. This particular dialogue, drawn from Tara’s data, was chosen because it is highly representative of the ways in which interactions took place and of the ways in which the forms of mediation discussed above were employed. For example, through her initial response Tara was able to demonstrate what she had learned about differences between her home and host cultures and how the experiences that she had had would potentially impact her future actions (in this case, her future teaching). In the classmate response, Kimberly both asked questions and shared her own experiences, as was typical of the ways in which the students interacted with each other. She also attempted to push Tara’s thinking by asking her to extend her discussion and hypothesize further about the topic. The focus of the facilitator’s feedback was pushing Tara toward more analytical thinking, which, as discussed above, was the focus of much of the feedback given to all of the students. Finally, in Tara’s ‘last word’ response she shared further knowledge that she had gained on the topic and clarified her thinking and understanding. Again, this was typical, as discussed above, of the focus of these responses.

The topic for this week (13) was “Impact on classroom practice”. The prompt in general asked students to reflect on their experiences abroad up to that point and to think about how those experiences might impact their future work as World Languages educators. As part of that reflection students were asked to discuss topics such as their experiences in the education system of their host country, insights/ideas that they had gained from specific teachers or classes, how their ideas about the relationship between language and culture had developed and how they
intended to use their new understandings, along with artifacts that they were planning to bring home, in their future classrooms (see Appendix C for the full prompt). The following discussion and excerpts will focus on Tara’s answers to these two sets of questions: “What insights, if any, did you gain into the educational system of your host country? What are some similarities and differences that you have noticed between the system in the US and the system in your host country? How did any differences impact your learning?” and “What, if anything, did you learn about teaching from the teachers that you had in your courses while abroad? Are there any methods or activities that they used that you plan to try in your own classroom? If so, what are they and why do you want to try them?”

In response to the first question set, Tara discussed the fact that she had noticed several differences between the educational systems of Spain and the U.S. Particularly, based on her experiences, she felt that school was taken more seriously in Spain. As she stated:

Excerpt 4.52
All of my professors are always on task, and when a student tries to get them off topic, they don’t let it interfere with the given time for the lecture. We can’t even eat or drink in the classroom. When I have gotten exams back, my professors have been very critical, and I feel like they expect more out of you here. […] I also feel like professors here have more of a barrier between their professional and personal lives. In the U.S., I know a lot about my professors, but I don’t know any personal facts about anyone here.

She also noted in her post that she had discussed this topic with some of her American friends taking classes there and that they also noted that teachers in their program seemed to have very high expectations and that they became disappointed with their students if they felt that they had not tried their best.

In answer to the set of questions about whether she had been able to take away any activities or teaching methods from her teachers, Tara felt that she had seen teaching styles that she would like to employ in her own classroom and those that she would not:
Excerpt 4.53
I have learned a lot about how I feel as the student from my teachers’ styles, and I know what I want to practice in my own classroom. I have teachers here that always ask if we understand what is being said, and I like how they want to be on the same page as us. […] However, I have had one teacher put down a lot of people in class and treat us like we were stupid if we didn’t know the answer, and this is something I do not want to carry with me in the classroom.

It is these two parts of Tara’s initial post to which both the responding classmate, Kimberly, and the facilitator addressed most of their comments.

In her classmate response, Kimberly, who was studying in a different city in Spain, focused on Tara’s thoughts about how seriously education is taken in Spain (see excerpt 4.52). She both asked questions and shared some of her own observations on the topic:

Excerpt 4.54
I thought it was very interesting that you said people take school a lot more seriously in Spain. Do you think it is just the professors or the students too? How do you think professors who teach both student abroad students and actual Spanish students have to vary their lesson? From what I have observed, I feel as though the students here actually are never stressed or worried about school, only around exam times.

Kimberly also went on to state that she believed that Spanish students were not as stressed about school because they did not have a lot of daily assignments, whereas in the States she felt that students constantly need to do homework. She also asked Tara whether she agreed that education seemed to be more valued in Spain given the fact that Kimberly had seen students in the States go to expensive schools but spend their time partying rather than studying, which she seemed to suggest did not happen as often in Spain.

In her ‘last word’ response to Kimberly, Tara said that she felt that the students she was taking classes with treated school in Spain the way they would treat it at home, where some cared about it more than others did. In response to Kimberly’s question about whether professors needed to vary their methods between Spanish and international students Tara shared what some of her professors had said on the topic:
Excerpt 4.55

[...] professors who have to teach Spaniards and us **have to vary the difficulty, I’m sure!**

*A lot of my professors say,* “If I talked in my normal voice you wouldn’t be able to

understand me,” haha—so **I think they definitely adjust their volume, pace, and word**

*choice to make it easier for us to learn.*

Tara also addressed Kimberly’s question about whether she agreed that university students in the

States tended to waste their money. She noted that she did agree with this statement and she even

took it a bit further and noted that American students waste their money not just by partying but

also by skipping class when attendance isn’t mandatory.

Through these interactions Tara and Kimberly were able to compare and contrast their

experiences in Spain as well as compare and contrast education in their host culture (as far as they

had experienced it) with education in the home culture. While a lot of this dialogue remained on

the surface of what the girls had been able to experience in Spain, the potential for developing

interculturality was still present given that they were questioning their own and other cultures and

that they were working together to try to understand the perspectives and practices of their host

country.

The facilitator’s feedback was also on these same two sets of questions, but attempted to

push Tara beyond surface-level thinking about her experiences and assumptions to a more

analytical mindset. For example, in her response to Tara’s comments on the teaching styles that

she had experienced, the facilitator encouraged Tara to think about whether this had more to do

with culture or with individual styles and personalities:

Excerpt 4.56

*Was your professor who put students down the exception rather than the norm for you

there? Have you ever had a teacher like [that] here in the US?*

In this case, the facilitator tried to encourage Tara to look at this experience critically rather than

emotionally so that Tara did not attempt to equate this negative experience with the host culture

as a whole. Her question about whether this might also happen in the U.S. was meant to remind
Tara that different teaching styles and personalities exist in all cultures and countries and that her negative experience could happen at home as well.

The facilitator also attempted to mediate more analytical thinking in response to Tara’s comments about education being taken more seriously in Spain.

Excerpt 4.57
I was interested in what you had to say about education seeming to be taken more seriously in Spain than it is in the US and that the teachers there expect more out of their students. **Why do you think there might be this difference between the cultures? Do you think that education is not taken seriously at all in the US or is it just taken even more seriously in Spain?**

Here the facilitator attempted to push Tara to say not only that she believed this was the case, but to explain why (i.e., due to what possible underlying cultural beliefs, values, attitudes, etc.) this might have been the case. She also pushed Tara again to look more deeply at her home culture and to examine her assumptions about attitudes held there. In both of these parts of her response, the facilitator was working systematically to help Tara develop interculturality through questioning her home and host cultures and through critical analysis and reflection.

In her ‘last word’ response to the facilitator, Tara noted that she did think that the professor with whom she had had the negative experience was due to individual, rather than cultural, characteristics:

Excerpt 4.58
[Dorothy], **yes I think she is an exception.** I have come to know her personally outside of class, and all I can say is she is not a very nice person in general.

Tara also stated that she had not had any professors such as this in the U.S., but acknowledged that there could be some, noting, “I guess I have been lucky enough to have very nice ones”. With regard to the topic of people in Spain taking education more seriously than in the U.S., Tara recognized and admitted that her perspective was limited and that she did not know how culture could be impacting this difference:
Excerpt 4.59
As far as Spain taking education more seriously, it’s hard to know for sure because I only see this reflected in my own school. I guess I should ask around for Spaniard’s opinions because I am not sure how culture could be affecting this. But, I definitely think the U.S. takes school seriously, I just think the environment is more relaxed and easier to get off topic.

The fact that she stated “I should ask around for Spaniard’s (sic) opinions” is very important in this excerpt because it demonstrates development of interculturality in her willingness to question her host culture and to have an attitude of curiosity, as well as to interact with members of the host culture and get their perspectives. If the facilitator had not asked her these questions it is possible that Tara would have left this assumption unexamined and not tried to find out any more on the topic.

As can be seen when taking a whole dialogue into account, students were mediated in different ways and to different degrees by each element of the course design and organization. This means, of course, that the level of interculturality developed by the students in the course was different for each individual depending many factors, including on how he or she oriented toward the mediation (using it to reorient their thinking and/or behavior or not) on any given topic. This will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5, which examines the development of the two students chosen for case study analysis.

While the elements of the course described and discussed up to this point were arguably the ones that had the most potential to provide specific and systematic mediation toward interculturality, the other elements of the course (i.e., the inquiry assignments, videoconferencing sessions and blogfolio) also played a role in students’ development and will be discussed briefly in the following section.
4.6 Other course elements: further supporting student’s intercultural development

The final aspects of the course to be discussed in this chapter are the three inquiry assignments that students are required to complete, the two videoconferencing sessions that take place between the facilitator and the students and the culminating blogfolio assignment. Each will be described briefly with connections made to the ways in which they support the intercultural development that students experience through the main elements of the course.

4.6.1 Inquiry assignments

As discussed in Chapter 3, the students in the course are required to complete three inquiry assignments during the semester. While there are specific due dates for submission (Weeks 8, 11 and 14 for the 2013 cohort), students may complete the three assignments in any order that they choose, giving them flexibility in terms of time and availability of events and/or members of the host culture. As is the case with the blog prompts, these assignments are designed to require students to carry out particular kinds of activities within their host cultures. Abbreviated versions of the prompts can be found in Table 4-8 (see course syllabus in Appendix A for full prompts).

Table 4-8: Descriptions of inquiry assignments.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Linguistic Analysis</td>
<td>Students undertake a careful analysis of language use in both formal and informal signs that they encounter in streets, at restaurants, at stations, etc., are asked to photograph several examples of language used in signs and to discuss questions they have regarding the signs with a member of the host culture. In their analysis, students comment on how language is used in the signs and compare that with similar signs they are familiar with from the U.S.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Through the linguistic analysis students are required to pay close attention to the things around them, particularly the signs, in order to gain a greater understanding of how culture and language are linked and how language use is impacted by, and has an impact on, the contexts in which the language is used. Development of interculturality takes place when students begin to cultivate this critical awareness and apply it in other types of situations. Interculturality may also develop as a result of performing the required analysis where students examine both their host and home cultures and interact with members of the host culture.

Through the interview, students are required to directly interact with a member of the host culture in order to find out about his or her life history, beliefs, experiences, etc. This assignment allows for the development of interculturality by virtue of having to interact with someone of a different culture and ask questions about his or her life and culture. It also helps students learn about and begin to understand the different perspectives that are held by people who live in cultures different than their own. It should be noted that students are reminded in the full prompt that their role as an interviewer is not to agree or disagree with the individual’s views, nor to share their own perspectives, but rather to try to understand what the interviewee thinks and why (i.e., what values or beliefs their views suggest). By comparing their interviewees’
experiences and histories with their own or with that of someone that they know in their home culture the students are able to understand that their own way of experiencing life events is not the ‘natural’ or only way of experiencing them.

Finally, through the participatory observation assignment students are required not just to watch a cultural event from the sidelines but to fully experience it and to analyze it in the role of ethnographer, working to understand the behaviors, norms, customs and interactions that are related to the event. Students are mediated toward interculturality through this assignment by experiencing otherness; that is, participating in an event that is perhaps not like one that they have participated in in their own culture and, at least to some extent, in which they may not know how to appropriately participate or interpret what is going on. Once they experience this otherness (whether it is mild or more extreme) they have the opportunity to reflect on and analyze it both in terms of the event itself and in terms of whether/how a similar event might play out in their home culture.

**4.6.2 Videoconferencing sessions**

The two required videoconferencing sessions between the students and the facilitator are specifically designed to allow the facilitator to gain more in-depth information about students’ contexts and to question students on aspects related to their linguistic and cultural experiences and their development of interculturality. As mentioned in Chapter 3, during the videoconferences the students are all asked the same general questions by the facilitator. In addition, the facilitator also asks questions of each student related to events that she knows are going on in their lives (e.g., travel, difficulties with homestays, homesickness, etc.) as well as questions related to the students’ blog posts on a given week. During the 2013 iteration of the
course, the first session took place in roughly Week 6 or 7 of the students’ SA program and the following questions were asked of all students:

Table 4-9: Videoconference session one questions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Videoconference Session 1 Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tell me about your living arrangements, experiences with food, classes, weather, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What has been a highlight of your time so far?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What has been the most challenging thing for you and how have you worked to overcome it?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How are you feeling about your language skills to this point? Where do you still want to improve?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What have you done to attempt to become a part of the community in which you are living?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How is this experience so far helping prepare you for your future teaching? What artifacts are you collecting?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The questions went from finding out general information about the students’ experiences up to that point to more specific and analytical questions regarding linguistic issues and participation in the host culture. Given that the students were all future teachers, the focus was also on how their SA experience was helping them prepare for the time in the not-so-distant future when they would be entering the classroom.

Questions in the second session, which took place generally in Week 11 or 12 of the students’ programs, were somewhat similar, but focused more specifically on some of the areas only touched on briefly in the first session:

Table 4-10: Videoconference session two questions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Videoconference Session 2 Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How do you think you have changed during this experience, if at all?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What have you learned about culture (in general and specific to your location)? What have you learned about the relationship between language and culture?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are you feeling integrated at all into the culture? Why/why not?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How are you feeling about your language skills now that you are almost finished? What are you most proud of? What is still a struggle?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How has this experience helped prepare you for your future teaching? What are some specific ways that you are thinking of integrating what you have learned?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Questions in this session allowed the facilitator to gain a greater sense of students’ thinking about themselves as language learners and culture members/participants as well as to gauge the knowledge and understanding that they may have gained about the concept of culture (both global and local) and about the relationship between language and culture. These related directly to students’ intercultural development and gave the facilitator insight into how to focus her mediation of each student for the final weeks of their course participation.

When discussing the students’ blog responses as part of these sessions the facilitator was able to get a greater understanding of students’ thinking on a particular week’s topic as well as to mediate students more directly than she was able to when responding to students in writing. This was the space in which the facilitator cleared up confusion, on her part or the students’, about their thinking and/or experiences and also where she could attempt to help students further process things with which they were struggling.

4.6.3 Blogfolio project

The culminating project for the course is designed to allow students to pull together work that they have done throughout the semester in order to demonstrate the ways in which they have participated in the dialogue and the role that that has played in their learning and development. It is also designed to require students to revisit the major questions and issues of the course for final reflection and analysis. For this project, students resubmit their inquiry assignments and must also gather exemplar blog entries, exemplar classmate response postings and exemplar ‘last word’ postings. These exemplars are meant to be of representative quality of the entries and postings that the students have submitted throughout the course. A brief description of each element follows (see Appendix D for the full project guidelines provided to the students).
Blog entry exemplars are to address students’ initial posts in the following areas, which encompass the main themes of course prompts and activities: a) reports of interactions they had with native speakers, understandings or misunderstandings that occurred, and how meaning was negotiated; b) insights they gained into the host culture through interactions, literary/cultural texts or other media, or through any other aspect of their experience; c) comments they made concerning the target language itself, including varieties of the target language that were encountered as well as reflections on how the target language is used in specific contexts; and d) reflections on connections between insights they gained into the target language/culture and their future classroom practice.

Exemplar classmate response postings are to represent the quality of their responses/comments to their classmates throughout the course, including responses where they pointed out interesting observations, drew connections to their own experiences, and/or did some sort of comparison or contrast between the classmate’s experiences and their own. Similarly, exemplar ‘last word’ postings were to represent the quality of those they had posted throughout the course, including answering questions, clarifying their thinking, providing cultural information, etc.

With every set of exemplars students are also required to submit rationales that explain why they have included each exemplar and a reflection on what they believe these exemplars reveal a) about the development of their thinking/learning throughout the course (for entry exemplars); b) about the types of responses they provided to their classmates over the course of the semester (for classmate response exemplars); and c) about the learning/thinking that is demonstrated by each ‘last word’ exemplar. These exemplars and rationales allow the students to not only demonstrate the growth and learning that they have experienced throughout the semester but also require them to think again about the main course topics and how their thinking and behavior has changed during their time abroad. Through this assignment, then, students are
demonstrating and discussing their own interculturality; that is, their ability to question their own and other cultures, to see the relationship between language and culture, to analyze and reflect on the perspectives of others and to understand culture as a set of meanings, values, beliefs and attitudes that impact things such as interactions, institutions and events. While students may not have the label ‘interculturality’ to put on their development, they are able to understand, through this assignment and all the other elements of the course, that they have been developing abilities to participate in the dynamic process by which people from different cultures interact to learn about and question their own and each other’s cultures, to reflect on those interactions and to use what they have learned in order to reorient their thinking and behaviors to become even more successful at subsequent interactions and in subsequent contexts.

4.7 Conclusion

This chapter has provided an in-depth analysis of the forms of mediation toward interculturality provided by each element of the course, examining data from many of the students in the course to demonstrate the ways in which the elements worked together and promoted intercultural understanding and development in the participants. Specifically, the blog prompts functioned to require students to critically examine and reflect on themselves and their experiences of participating in the host culture and language. Students’ responses to the prompts functioned to allow them to verbalize their thinking, thus making it explicit and open for examination, and to make connections between their lived experiences and the readings and activities required by the prompts. Through their initial responses to the prompts, students were also mediated to examine topics in new ways and to communicate ideas and thoughts they might not otherwise have had the chance to discuss.
As was seen in the classmate responses, these functioned to mediate both the student being responded to and the student doing the responding. These functioned mainly to allow students to expand their cultural knowledge by learning more about each other’s experiences in different cities and/or countries, to push each other’s analytical thinking through the questions that they asked, and to learn more about language use in context, both in their own and their classmates’ target language/culture. They also functioned to provide new ideas and ways of thinking about topics and as sources for advice/useful information that could be applied in the classmates’ own contexts.

The facilitator’s responses functioned in several different ways as well. First, they functioned to push students to think beyond generalizations that they were making about their host culture and/or the people and language within that culture and to make connections between experiences as a way of further examining their thinking and interpretations in relation to the language and culture. These responses also functioned to compel students toward more analytical thinking, that is, explaining not just that something had happened or was a certain way, but also why that might be the case. In addition, the facilitator’s responses mediated students’ understanding of the target language. Finally, the ‘last word’ responses functioned to allow students to clarify and/or rethink aspects of their initial posts, to share further cultural or linguistic information that they had gained and also to discuss aspects of the culture that they wanted to learn more about along with how they intended to go about achieving that learning. Each of these mediating elements of the course worked together to provide students with multiple opportunities for dialogic interaction and for development of interculturality in a variety of ways.

The following chapter will look in greater depth at the experiences of Samantha and Michael, who responded differently to, and benefitted differently from, these types of mediation. Specific focus will be on the impact of the mediation provided by the facilitator to each of the students that attempted to help them develop in the areas of perceiving themselves as competent
users of the L2, moving from emotional to analytical positioning and making connections between experiences. Focus will also be on how that mediation impacted their experiences within the host culture and target language and on the ways in which it affected their developmental processes and their overall development of interculturality.
Chapter 5

The cases of Samantha and Michael: Focusing mediation on students’ experiences of developing interculturality

5.1 Introduction

Two case studies were chosen for this project in order to examine and understand how different students’ development toward interculturality might manifest as they engage in course activities during their time abroad and how their intercultural experiences might be mediated. Choosing two case studies also allowed for further examination of the mediational foci that became salient in students’ interactions with the facilitator and for examination of how that mediation impacted the students’ development of interculturality. In this chapter, the cases of Samantha and Michael will be examined to demonstrate the ways that each of these students engaged with the mediation made available and to determine how this connected to the experiences that they had in their host cultures and with other speakers of the target language. Also examined are the specific foci of the mediation provided by the facilitator that was aimed at supporting specific aspects of Samantha and Michael’s intercultural development. A rationale will be given for the choice of these two cases, then each case will be examined separately with a synthesis to follow that links the two cases together and to the broader notion of interculturality.
5.2 Rationale for the cases

One important thing to keep in mind while looking at students’ development of interculturality during SA from a Vygotskian point of view is that it is not assumed that development is driven solely by some set of traits internal to an individual learner. Rather, development is understood to emerge from the interrelation between engagement in activities and the forms of mediation available to learners in those activities. Given variability among learners’ histories and goals as well as their experiences in the host culture, it is not expected that every student will develop in precisely the same way, along the same trajectory or at the same rate. As Kinginger (2013) points out, research on students’ development during SA has “revealed striking individual differences; some students thrive while others founder” (p. 341). For the present study in particular, this meant that some students were able to learn about and engage with members of the host culture in ways that allowed for the process of developing interculturality to be ‘smoother’, while others struggled with learning and engagement, at least in some areas, making their process of developing interculturality more challenging. The reader is reminded that for the purposes of this study it was not assumed or expected that learners would ‘end up’ at a specified ‘level’ of interculturality, but rather that it was the process of development that was most important. While it was unlikely to be the case that students would not experience the process of development at all, it was the case that some more easily and fruitfully engaged with the host culture and with course activities than others, thus impacting their development of interculturality.

During analysis of the data several mediational foci were revealed as salient to the facilitator’s support of the students and their learning and development during their experiences abroad. That is, it was determined that the facilitator had focused her mediation of the students on specific facets of their experiences that directly affected their learning in the course as well as
their intercultural experiences and development. This was seen to some extent in the discussion of the facilitator’s responses in Chapter 4, but will be further elucidated here. Each of the foci will be discussed in greater detail in the following section, but are mentioned here briefly for the purposes of introduction. The first mediational focus was students’ overall orientation to learning in the course and in their SA experiences. Students who readily engaged with the mediation and who saw the course activities as opportunities for learning were considered to have a responsive mediation. Students who struggled to engage with the mediation at times and who tended to see the course activities as items to be checked off of a list were considered to have an instrumental orientation. The second focus of the mediation was the students’ perceptions of themselves as users of the L2. That is, the focus was on helping students move from seeing themselves as deficient interlocutors, seeing language as discrete elements that should be mastered to seeing themselves as capable communicators and language as a tool for interaction and for learning more about the host culture and even the language itself. The third focus area was the students’ ability to move from a position of emotional response with regard to aspects of the host culture and language and their experiences within them to a more analytical position. The final mediational focus was on helping the students to make connections across events, phenomena and experiences. For example, connections between the online course and their other SA courses, between their experiences and their classmates’ experiences or between various experiences that they had within their host culture. It is important to note that these were the foci of the facilitator’s mediation because they were the aspects of the students’ intercultural development that seemed to have the most impact on the experiences that they had in both the course and in their SA contexts.

The data revealed that all of the students in the course experienced these aspects of their intercultural development in different ways. That is, some oriented more responsively to the mediation than others, some had greater issues with language use and communication in the L2,
some struggled to move beyond a position of emotional response to the culture more so than others and some were more easily able to see connections between the different experiences they were having while abroad than others were. Samantha and Michael were chosen as the two case studies because, as will be made clear below, they very often represented stark contrasts in the ways in which they experienced their time abroad and the ways in which they responded to the mediation made available by the facilitator, particularly in the focal areas mentioned above. For example, Samantha’s orientation to learning was more instrumental while Michael’s was much more responsive. In addition, Samantha was often preoccupied with issues of discrete language skills, consistently viewed her own language skills as lacking and saw communication difficulties as negatively impacting her experiences while Michael was less focused on discrete language skills, was able to overcome an initially negative view of his language skills and was more able to see communication difficulties as opportunities for learning. Samantha also had more of an emotional positioning and often struggled to take up mediation that was aimed at helping her become more analytical while Michael was able to get beyond the emotional reactions that he had to a more analytical way of viewing the culture. Finally, Samantha often focused more on the here-and-now aspects of her experiences while Michael was able to make connections across experiences and to future experiences as well. In other words, these two students were chosen because they were starting from quite different places (i.e., different orientations), so working to meet them where they were in order to support their development meant that the mediating process—and their development—was quite different. The case of Samantha was chosen, then, because the facilitator had to do quite a bit of work to help her through the process of developing interculturality. The case of Michael was chosen because there was less work to be done to help him through the process. It is extremely important to point out, however, that even though Michael seemed well positioned to benefit from the experiences that he had abroad on his own he still required mediation to help him through the intercultural developmental process.
Looking at these two specific cases, then, allows for a greater understanding of the aspects of experience and interaction that required the greatest mediational focus and that seemed to most significantly impact students’ intercultural development. It also allows for greater understanding of how students who experience these things differently may also experience and respond differently to available mediation. This has the potential to provide intercultural educators with information that can help them better understand their students’ experiences as well as to focus their mediation on the areas that are most salient to their students’ experiences and development (i.e., meeting the students where they are). This, then, allows the educators to support their students in ways that allow for the students to thrive in, rather than struggle through, or founder in their SA experiences.

5.3 The foci of the mediation provided to the students

As mentioned above, analysis of the data revealed that the facilitator had focused the majority of her mediation on several specific aspects of the students’ SA experiences and of their participation in the course: their orientation to learning, their perceptions of themselves as users of the L2, their ability to move from an emotional to analytical positioning and their ability to make connections between experiences. She chose to focus on each of these areas with her mediation because she believed they were important to facilitating students’ development of interculturality in the course. For example, she focused on helping students to see the course and the experience as opportunities for development and not as tasks to check off so that they could develop a more responsive orientation to learning and engage with members of the host culture to further their learning and development. She focused on students’ perceptions of themselves as users of the L2 because the ways in which they perceived themselves could either facilitate or inhibit what they gained from their intercultural experiences. In other words, if students had
negative perceptions of themselves as language users they might feel inhibited and be less likely to engage with members of the host culture and, thus, less likely to gain linguistic and cultural knowledge that would increase their development. Finally, she focused on mediating students’ interpretations of their intercultural experiences and on helping them make connections between experiences so that they could move from an emotional stance to a more analytical one, which is a key aspect of the development of interculturality.

While the foci being discussed here are not, of course, the only foci of mediation that may be necessary or salient to experiences that students have while abroad, they are ones that will be relevant to many SA participants, no matter their background or their reasons for studying abroad. This is due to the fact that they relate to topics such as language, culture and emotions, which are often some of the most salient elements of the experience for those who study abroad as they attempt to learn to interact with people from different backgrounds using a language that is not their first. These particular foci were especially relevant to the facilitator and the students in this course because the required activities of the course and the systematic mediation provided by the course were aimed at helping students to develop a greater understanding of language use in context, to move from emotional responses to their experiences in the culture to more analytical ones and to make connections across the experiences that they were having. Thus, the organization and focus of the course made these areas salient for the students in order that they could examine them analytically and experience them with the assistance of dialogic mediation rather than being left to their own devices. These, then, were aspects of the SA experience that the course facilitator intentionally worked to mediate as part of her interaction with the students. In each of these areas she attempted to meet the students where they were and to help them go beyond that in order to try to push them further in the process of developing interculturality. The foci and their impact on the facilitator’s mediation will be discussed in further detail in the rest of this section.
5.3.1 Orientation to learning

As previously discussed, two very broad orientations to learning that students frequently adopted and which impacted their engagement with mediation and their development of interculturality had been identified in pilot studies with earlier cohorts of students. Some students in the course oriented toward it, and their SA experiences, in ways that presented some challenges for understanding and interacting with the host community and/or some of its practices. Other students displayed an orientation to learning that allowed them to more easily engage with members of the host community and the cultural practices that they encountered. To be clear, these are not two clear-cut classifications that course participants fit neatly into, but rather students’ comments on the blogs as well as their responsiveness during exchanges with classmates and with the course facilitator revealed overall leanings toward one or the other of these orientations. That is, some students in this cohort, as in previous ones, appeared responsive to the mediating activities in the course from the outset, understanding them as important opportunities for their own connections with, and learning from, the host culture, while other students tended to view the course activities less as mediating activities and more as assignments to be carried out in fulfillment of the instructor’s requirements and to earn a good grade. This meant that the facilitator had to focus her mediation differently with these students.

Students’ orientations can and do, of course, shift over the course of their time abroad, and indeed might vary in response to particular topics or with periods of time where their attention is focused on other matters. Be that as it may, it is perhaps an unavoidable dynamic that when academic requirements (associated with grades) are imposed upon students an orientation to learning will emerge that might be referred to as instrumental; that is, one that views course discussions and activities as assignments to be ‘checked off’ each week without perhaps recognizing these as opportunities for their own and others’ development. This phenomenon is
certainly not unique to SA contexts, and it is likely familiar to experienced classroom teachers. In contrast, a responsive orientation is marked by openness to reflecting on experiences, participation in course discussions, and engagement in mediation (both mediating others as well as accepting mediation from classmates and the course facilitator). While evidence for both orientations could perhaps be seen in any given student, Samantha and Michael were selected precisely because they typify each of these orientations (i.e., Samantha for instrumental and Michael for responsive).

As will be seen below in the discussion of the cases, students’ orientations to learning had a major impact on the ways in which the course facilitator attempted to provide mediation. Students with a more instrumental orientation required, of course, a different type of mediation than those with a more responsive orientation. In other words, for students whose focus was less on seeing the course and its activities as beneficial to their intercultural development, the facilitator had to work harder to make that aspect of the course visible to the students and to help them see that the interactions taking place in the course and in their SA context had the potential to help them learn more about their host culture and how to engage with its members. The facilitator also had to work harder in general (i.e., try different forms of mediation in a variety of different ways) to mediate students with more instrumental orientations because they were not always immediately willing or able to respond to the facilitator’s mediation in ways that allowed them to move forward in the process of intercultural development.

5.3.2 Perception of self as user of the L2

Another aspect of intercultural development on which the facilitator focused her mediation was students’ perceptions of themselves as users of the L2. As demonstrated by their responses to the initial survey asking about the goals they had for themselves while abroad, some
students revealed themselves to be particularly focused on improving specific, discrete areas of their language skills (e.g., a particular grammar construction, an aspect of pronunciation, etc.) during their time abroad. As future language teachers, all of the students had improving their language skills as a goal, but for some this seemed to be much more of a prominent goal than for others.

For students who were highly focused on discrete language and their own language abilities, their participation in the course was often marked by a preoccupation with the topic in their activities. That is, the focus of their posts, classmate responses and ‘last words’ was often on their perceived lack of language skills and/or on communication difficulties they were having with members of the host culture. These students’ perceptions of the importance of language and their language abilities also at times negatively impacted their experiences with members of the host culture, making them less likely to engage with host culture members and, consequently, less likely to have experiences that helped them to practice their language skills and to learn more about the host culture, thus potentially inhibiting their development of interculturality.

For other students, language skills and communication issues were important and were sometimes the topic of their participation in the course, but those did not seem to be the main area of focus, nor did they seem to impact the students’ experiences in negative ways. In other words, these students focused more on general issues of understanding and interacting in the host culture, and less on discrete language skills or on how their language ability impacted those interactions. And even when communication difficulties were the focus of students’ participation, these seemed to be viewed not as negatively impacting the SA experience but rather as opportunities for learning and growth. Despite the issues that they had, these students were still willing to interact with members of the host culture, thus potentially facilitating their development of interculturality.
The course facilitator’s mediation in this area for all students, but particularly for students who were highly focused on the issues and difficulties that they were having with language and communication, first validated the students’ experiences and feelings, but then also attempted to encourage the students to learn from and look beyond these issues, providing the students with ideas on how to continue to try to engage with members of the host culture so that their problems did not stop them from becoming participating members of the community. For students who were less focused on difficulties, the facilitator worked to support these students in continued interactions with members of the host culture as well as to push their developing understandings of the relationship between language and culture, as was seen in the discussion of the facilitator’s responses in relation to the students’ sociolinguistic awareness in Chapter 4.

5.3.3 Emotional versus analytical positioning

One of the main goals of the design and mediation of the course was to help students move from a position of emotional response with regard to aspects of the host culture and language, and their experiences within those, to a position of analysis of the same. The reader is reminded that one of the main characteristics of interculturality as it is defined for this study is being able to critically reflect on and analyze one’s experiences. Being able to do so, then, is one of the ways in which students in the course may demonstrate that they are moving through the process of developing interculturality. Some students in the course seemed to struggle with this, staying more focused on the emotions produced by a situation than on understanding why (e.g., based on what aspects of culture or language) the situation may have occurred even when the mediation attempted to help them shift from this type of position to a more analytical one. Other students, however, were more able to begin to think about and understand the underlying causes, thus learning to move beyond this type of emotional reaction to a more analytical way of looking
at their experiences and to using the knowledge that they gained to help them in future situations and interactions.

It must be noted that emotional positioning was not viewed as a negative aspect of students’ experiences abroad, rather it is being discussed because students’ abilities to move beyond this kind of positioning, or not, had a direct bearing on how they participated in the course. For example, students with a more emotional positioning often focused on their own feelings about the host culture and the experiences and interactions that they had in their posts, classmate responses and ‘last words’. Those with a more analytical positioning were often able to go beyond the emotions that they felt and to look for the reasons why they might be having these feelings, particularly those reasons that had to do with differences between their home and host cultures.

Emotional responses are, of course, to be expected when a person experiences new situations and particularly when difficulties are experienced in those situations. Entering into new contexts, particularly when the language and culture of discourse are not one’s own, often produces feelings of uncertainty, frustration, anger, fear, etc. It is the job of the SA program director or, in the case of this study, the course facilitator, to help participants process these emotions and to know that they are completely normal when having such feelings. When working to develop interculturality, these emotions must be examined and validated as part of the natural process of learning to live in a new culture. However, SA participants must also be mediated to try to go beyond these emotional feelings and reactions because emotions such as these may make it more difficult for an SA participant to step back from his or her lived experiences and view the new culture and language more objectively, reflectively and analytically, which is necessary for intercultural development to take place.

Both this validation of students’ emotions and mediation toward more analysis were part of the course facilitator’s interactions with, and mediation of, the students throughout the course.
She attempted to help students understand why they might be feeling the way that they were feeling and, as seen in excerpts 4.38 through 4.42 in Chapter 4, tried to push them to develop understandings about their host culture and language that would help them to understand the perspectives of the host community both with regard to that particular situation and to other situations that may arise in the future, thus attempting to help them to think about ways in which they might act upon the insights that they had gained.

An aspect of this area of intercultural development that emerged as particularly salient to students’ experiences and to the mediation provided was how the students understood the concept of culture and how that impacted their relation to, and understanding of, the host culture. For example, some students seemed to have a relatively surface-level understanding of culture; that is, viewing it mainly as comprising observable elements such as art, music, events, holidays, etc. On the other hand, other students seemed to have an understanding of culture which accounted more for the less observable aspects of culture such as beliefs, attitudes and values. In terms of the impact that this had on their participation in the course, students with a more surface-level view of culture seemed to focus more on the emotions that they had in relation to the culture and to talk about culture as part of their course participation, noting that things happen in the culture, but not often looking more analytically to try to understand why those things happen. On the other hand, students with a view of culture as discourse and as underlying meanings, attitudes and beliefs were often able to go beyond the initial emotional reactions that they had and to talk about not only that things happen in their host culture but also to analyze why (i.e., which cultural beliefs might be at the root).

This understanding of culture as values, attitudes and beliefs and as discourse and production of meaning (Kramsch, 2011) as opposed to solely visible aspects disconnected from language was another aspect of interculturality on which the course was designed to focus. As a result, the mediation provided by the facilitator with regard to students’ movement from
emotional to analytical responses and with regard to their conceptualizations of culture attempted to help those who focused more on the visible aspects to look more deeply at the underlying elements. It also attempted to help those who had somewhat of a deeper understanding already to go even further, learn more and put the knowledge that they gained to use in subsequent experiences and interactions.

5.3.4 Making connections across experiences

A final area of student’s experiences on which the mediation was focused was their ability to make connections across experiences; that is, to identify relationships among events, phenomena and experiences in ways that would help them further understand the situations and interactions in which they found themselves. This is related to the previous discussion of emotional versus analytical positioning in that students who were able to make these connections often adopted a more analytical positioning when working to describe and understand their experiences. These students attempted to make connections between the readings and/or activities of the online course with topics that they were learning about or discussing in the other classes that they were taking while abroad or those that they had taken prior to SA. In addition, they worked to make connections between their own experiences and those of their classmates in different cities or countries and to their future intercultural and teaching. Making these connections afforded the students the opportunity to understand their experiences from multiple perspectives and using a variety of different resources (e.g., other course content, classmates’ experiences).

For students who struggled to adopt a more analytical positioning, making these connections was more difficult and was not necessarily a significant part of their participation in the course. These students remained more entrenched in the immediacy of their experiences as
opposed to looking outside of those experiences to better understand them. Students who were not able to make these connections as easily tended to focus almost solely on talking about their own contexts and experiences in their posts, classmate responses and ‘last words’. With regard to mediation, in this area the facilitator worked to encourage the connections that the students were making as well as to help students see connections that they might be missing. For example as was seen in Chapter 4, the facilitator often encouraged students to make connections between their experiences in different parts of their host cultures in order to help them question their assumptions and to learn about the culture more broadly. In addition, the facilitator also used students’ focus on self and immediate situations as a starting point for her mediation. That is, she adjusted her mediation to include students’ immediate experiences as a way of providing them with a familiar starting point for their thinking and discussion, thus meeting them where they were in order to help them go further in their development.

Before continuing, it is worth noting again that just because a student was strong in one particular area did not mean that they did not struggle in any of the other areas, or vice versa. In other words, it could be the case that some students might have had a high level of responsiveness to course activities and to mediation, but still struggled to make connections between experiences. It could also be the case that students might make progress in becoming more analytical but still have problems with their self-perception as users of the language. Again, the developmental process that students go through is neither static nor linear and must be mediated based on where the students are in the process at any given time in relation to any given aspect of their experiences. This will be seen in the following two sections when the cases of Samantha and Michael are analyzed and discussed, with a focus on their experiences in the areas just discussed, on how they engaged with the mediation provided by the facilitator and on how their levels of engagement with the mediation impacted their development of interculturality.
5.4 “It’s part of their culture”: Samantha’s experiences of developing interculturality

5.4.1 Background

Samantha studied abroad during her sixth semester at the university. A WL ED major-Spanish option, she was also pursuing a certificate in Teaching English as a Second Language, which she attained by completing coursework in addition to that related to her WL ED major. Her study abroad experience took place in Alicante, Spain, which she had chosen, according to her answers on the initial background survey, because she wanted to be in a city that she knew had very few speakers of English. This was important to her because she wanted to be able to get as much practice with the Spanish language as possible during her time there and she felt that being in a city with relatively few speakers of English would require her to use the target language more, thus improving her language learning experience. She had studied both Spanish and Latin in high school, taking three years of Latin and four years of Spanish. She then continued to take Spanish at the university level as part of her major. She stated in her background survey that she took Latin in order to improve her vocabulary and that she took Spanish in order to study a language that she would be able to use to speak with other people. She also noted that she had chosen Spanish because it was close to Italian, which was spoken by her grandparents.

This experience abroad was Samantha’s first extended period of time out of the country other than short vacations that she had taken when she was younger. She stated: “I have only left the country on vacations to the Dominican Republic and Mexico, even then I was too young to really understand anything that had to do with the language- other than that I couldn’t understand. I wish I could have been able to, though” (background survey, 2/6/13). Despite her lack of experience outside of her home country she had long believed that studying abroad would be important and useful to her, noting: “I decided that I wanted to [one day] study abroad [during]
my senior year of high school when my teacher was telling us how beautiful it was when she studied in Spain and how, in her words ‘it is the only real way to learn a language’” (ibid.).

In terms of living arrangements, Samantha chose to live with a homestay during her time in Alicante. She made this choice because she thought it would help her “become more familiar with the culture and how things are done in a Spanish family” (background survey, 2/6/13) and also because she thought it would help her to use the language more, particularly in a social context. The host family that Samantha lived with consisted of a divorced older woman and her twenty-nine-year-old daughter, who had been a physical education teacher but was unemployed because of the economic crisis in Spain at that time.

Samantha took all of her classes through her study abroad program and was grouped with other international students. Her classes consisted of two grammar courses, cinema and literature, anthropology, linguistics, and composition and creative writing. She was originally registered for just one grammar course, but added the second one once her classes had already started because she felt that she was not learning enough or getting enough practice with the language in the first grammar course.

5.4.2 Samantha’s orientation to learning

It was evident from her posts and responses that the case of Samantha was illustrative of a more instrumental orientation to learning that at times created obstacles to both her understanding the mediation made available and to her ability to make use of it to further her insights into the culture and her engagement with it. This was visible from the very beginning of the course when she was asked to fill out the background survey as part of her Week 3 blog prompt (see Appendix B for survey questions). Some of the questions on the survey ask about students’ expectations for their time abroad and for their participation in the blog course itself.
Some of Samantha’s answers to these questions revealed quite a lot about her initial orientation to learning in SA and the course and about the aspects of SA that were most significant to her. For example, in response to the survey question: “What are the expectations and goals (social, academic, linguistic, cultural, etc.) that you have for yourself during your time abroad?”, Samantha’s stated academic goal was to not receive below a grade of ‘C’ in any of her classes. This demonstrated the importance of academic grades and a focus on completion of assignments, which indicated that she had entered the course and her SA experience with an instrumental orientation, focused on checking items off of a list rather than using her courses, both the online course and the courses in her program, as opportunities to engage with the target language and members of the host culture. This primarily instrumental orientation to SA was also born out in her Week 3 initial blog post, completed at the same time as the survey, when she stated, “I thought I would come here and just study”. Her instrumental orientation to the course was evident even at the end of the course where, in Week 14, when asked whether there was anything she would change about the online course, she stated that she sometimes found it difficult to meet deadlines and that she also found it frustrating to rely on other students to be able to meet her own course deadlines on time:

Excerpt 5.1
One thing I would change […] is the amount of due dates, it was really hard to sometimes complete them with traveling and such. Also, if someone you were supposed to respond to didn’t write, then it was a bit frustrating. (Initial post)

This makes it clear that her focus was on completing the required tasks on time to be able to receive full marks for the assignments, thus further demonstrating her instrumental orientation toward the course. It should be noted that the facilitator was extremely flexible with due dates when students were traveling and had allowed Samantha to complete several assignments either before or after the due date, but this was something that still proved to be difficult her because of her orientation.
In addition to her goals for the course, Samantha also identified certain refinements to her Spanish abilities that she hoped would come from her time abroad. Specifically, she said that she wanted to be able to trill her ‘rr’, which she related not only to her own abilities but also to the abilities of her future students: “I think linguistically it is an important part of the Spanish language and if I am going to expect my students to speak properly, then I need to speak properly as well” (background survey, 2/6/13). While this trilling of the ‘rr’ is a seemingly minor and discrete aspect of the language, her statement revealed her belief that there are specific requirements that must be met (i.e., ‘checked off’) in order to speak the language “properly”. This demonstrated that a focus on her language skills and abilities was quite a salient part of Samantha’s SA experience. This focus on language and her own language ability, or perceived lack thereof, also became quite an important part of Samantha’s participation in the blog course, as will be discussed in greater detail below. Finally, in terms of social/cultural experiences, Samantha had the stated goal, as previously noted, of becoming “more familiar with the culture”, which she stated she would try to accomplish by attending different events such as sports, festivals and church masses.

Based on these stated goals it is actually possible to see elements of both orientations on display. An instrumental orientation is visible in Samantha’s stated academic and linguistic goals but a potentially more responsive orientation; that is, willingness to engage with the host culture, seems to be visible in her stated social/cultural goals. This reminds the reader that, as noted above, students do not always fit neatly or firmly into these orientations, but rather they may display elements of each one at different times or with regard to different topics. It is the case, however, that one type of orientation often ends up being more prevalent and salient as students’ SA progresses. In Samantha’s case it was the instrumental orientation that seemed to be at work more often in her participation in the course, though there were times that she oriented more responsively as well.
The fact that Samantha was broadly adopting a more instrumental orientation to her SA experience and to the course meant that she was not always receptive to the mediation provided by the course activities and facilitator, nor was she consistently able to take up that mediation and use it to rethink her experiences or reorient her future interactions and/or behaviors. As a result, the course facilitator had to work harder with Samantha than with some other students to mediate her interactions with the culture and language. Despite the fact that mediation was available from the facilitator, the other students and course activities and readings, Samantha sometimes struggled to make connections between that mediation and what she was experiencing in her abroad setting. In other words, the tools were there, but she was not always using them optimally to further her intercultural development.

One example of this occurred in Week 13 when students had been asked to talk about the types of artifacts they planned to bring home to share with their future students and whether those would help give the future students a better understanding of aspects of big-C Culture (the visible), little-c culture (the invisible) or both. In her response to the prompt, Samantha had stated that she would be bringing back artifacts that she had gotten from traveling, which she felt would “be helpful for teaching ‘travelling’ terms and such. I think that it will give the students a better understanding of both the big and little C” (initial post). She did not, however, elaborate on how or why she felt those items would address both aspects of culture. The facilitator, then, attempted to learn more about Samantha’s thoughts on this in her feedback:

Excerpt 5.2

[Y]ou say that the things that you are bringing back will help your students get "a better understanding of both the big and little C" and I am wondering if you can say more about this. How will the items demonstrate aspects of big-C culture to your students? How will they (or you through them) demonstrate aspects of little-c culture?

In her ‘last word’ Samantha’s response to these questions was a follows: “In regards to big C and little c, I am going to want to analyze the differences in culture thoroughly and these artifacts will help because they are real-life examples.” This response demonstrates her less responsive
orientation because, while she addressed the question in order to meet the requirements, she still
did not elaborate and also did not really answer the specific questions that the facilitator had
asked. In this case, then, she did not use the mediation to examine her thinking or to make
connections between her experiences abroad and her future teaching experiences, as the facilitator
was trying to help her do.

As previously noted, Samantha at times demonstrated both more- and less-responsive
orientations in her participation in the course. One example of a time in which she struggled with
responsiveness in one area but demonstrated it in another was in response to the mediation
offered in Week 6. During that week Samantha’s grandmother had, unfortunately, passed away at
home in the U.S. In the weeks prior to this exchange, the facilitator had been encouraging
Samantha to interact with members of the host culture both in order to increase in her language
proficiency and to gain more insight into the culture with comments such as: “I just encourage
you to keep putting yourself out there and trying to practice both listening and speaking” (Week
3) and, “I strongly encourage you to ask questions, especially about cultural incidents that you
experience (and about language as well)” (Week 4). In her initial post for Week 6, as required by
the prompt, Samantha described a communication difficulty that she had had. In this case the
difficulty was in conveying to her host mother that her grandmother had just passed away:

Excerpt 5.3

I tried to tell her that my grandma passed away but she kept understanding that she
has been passed away. She didn't understand that it happened that day. I think that the
cause of this problem was that I didn't know how to express that she had just passed
away. I kept using the verb estar because I knew that that's the verb Spaniards use to
celebrate death, but I didn't know what tense to use or anything like that. (Initial post)

After expressing her condolences and offering to help Samantha in any way possible, the
facilitator turned to the fact that, while this was a very sad situation, the interactions that she had
with her host mother could perhaps still offer her some insight into the language and culture:
Excerpt 5.4
Despite this being such a negative experience I think it provides an opportunity for a different kind of insight into the host culture than you might otherwise have gotten and I am really interested in what you have learned about how Spanish people talk about death and how they support those who are going through the loss of a family member.

Despite the earlier encouragement to use her engagement with members of the host culture and the facilitator’s suggestion in this feedback, Samantha was not able to share any linguistic insight in her ‘last word’. She did attempt to share some cultural insight, however, stating:

Excerpt 5.5
However, one thing I did notice through this experience is that my host mom didn’t really seem to sympathize much with me, she basically treated it as something you have to deal with. Which it is, but in the U.S. I think people become more upset about it and give more sympathy.

While she was not really able to give specific cultural information about how Spaniards support those who are going through a loss, she did talk about her perceptions of what she had experienced directly (“my host mom didn’t seem to sympathize much with me”) and made a connection between that experience and what she might experience in her home culture (“in the U.S. I think people become more upset about it and give more sympathy”). She had not been asked specifically to make this connection between her home and host cultures in the Week 6 dialogue, though the facilitator had attempted to mediate her to make comparisons between her home and host cultures in prior weeks, asking questions like, “Have you noticed and differences in the gym in Spain and the gym in the U.S?” (Week 3) and “Do these things [interruptions and close physical contact] seem to be more ‘normal’ in Spanish culture than in U.S. culture?” (Week 5). While it is clear that she was making a generalization from her host mother’s response about the culture of Spain more broadly, which could be problematic, in this interaction she was still able to demonstrate some level of responsiveness by using prior mediation to compare her home and host cultures. Again, this demonstrates that, while students often tend more toward instrumental or responsive orientations, there is variability within students and across contexts and topics. Thus, while Samantha frequently struggled to orient responsively, there were times
when she was somewhat successful at using the mediation available to her as a tool for reflecting on her home and host cultures, working through the process of developing interculturality. The topic of communication difficulties in the excerpts above is also relevant to Samantha’s perception of herself as a user of the L2, which will be discussed in the following section.

5.4.3 Samantha’s perception of self as an L2 user

As previously mentioned, some students’ experiences in the course and in SA were highly focused on language and their own language abilities (e.g., their abilities to employ discrete language skills and to use language in communication and interaction), so much so that their participation in the course was marked by a preoccupation with their perceived lack of language skills and with communication difficulties that they encountered. This type of preoccupation was a highly salient aspect of Samantha’s experiences. This was evident in her focus on her language ability, more specifically on her perceived lack thereof, throughout much of her experiences abroad and in the course (both in her own responses and in her responses to her classmates). The importance of language learning and use to Samantha was evident even in her choice to study in Alicante, which, as noted earlier, had been made because of her perception that studying in a city with few English speakers would allow her to improve her language skills by requiring her to use the target language most of the time. In addition, the fact that she remembered, and mentioned on the initial survey, her high school Spanish teacher’s suggestion that studying abroad was “the only real way to learn a language” (survey, 2/6/13) demonstrated that she saw SA as the best, and perhaps only, opportunity that she would have to learn and practice the language as much as possible so that she could live up to the standard that she had set in her mind for speaking Spanish “properly”. Finally, the importance of language learning was
also evident in the fact that Samantha enrolled in an extra grammar course when she felt that she was not learning enough in the one in which she had initially enrolled.

Samantha’s survey responses and her blog posts throughout the course made it clear that she approached SA, both at the outset and throughout her time abroad, with very high language learning expectations for herself and also with a low opinion of her language abilities. This greatly impacted the way she thought about herself and her participation in the host culture and in the course. In fact, she mentioned language in the majority of her posts and classmate responses, even for the prompts that did not require students to specifically think or talk about language.

Samantha’s perception that her abilities in Spanish were lacking, and thus her low opinion of her own language ability, were visible from her very first blog post. In this post she described the first interaction that she had with a native speaker: the attendant on her flight between Chicago and Madrid who asked whether Samantha would like chicken or beef for dinner. About this interaction Samantha stated, “It was at this moment that I realized how hard the language barrier would be to overcome. I had no idea what she was saying. […] I was so embarrassed” (initial response, Week 3). Later in the same post, in response to a prompt question that asked about the biggest challenge students had faced up to that point in their time abroad, Samantha again revealed her feelings about her language ability when she noted that she had “been facing a huge challenge. I feel like everyone already speaks Spanish so well, and I’m the embarrassing student who never knows what’s going on” (ibid.). In her initial response to Week 4 she also noted, “When I speak to native speakers I feel as though they think I am stupid. I think I sound stupid.” While over time she did begin to speak less negatively about her language skills, and in fact even occasionally highlighted some successes that she had, these were the feelings that most strongly seemed to impact her experiences.

That attitude of worry, fear and anxiety in relation to her language ability continued to manifest itself through Samantha’s use of negative words to discuss her language learning and her
interactions with native speakers in the host culture. For example, with regard to her speaking ability she noted, “I overanalyze, because I don’t have enough confidence in my Spanish speaking, it’s extremely frustrating” (initial post, Week 4). When talking about interactions that she had with her host mother she stated, “It’s frustrating because sometimes I know everything she is saying but I literally don’t know what she’s describing” (initial post, Week 9). In one post she discussed the fact that she was not using Spanish as much as she wanted to with her fellow SA program participants: “This contract [to speak only Spanish] is to help us, not hurt us, yet we all break it one way or another. It’s actually really frustrating” (initial post, Week 11). These excerpts all reveal that Samantha experienced a lot of frustration with her ability to learn and use Spanish. In addition to this, in her responses to her classmates Samantha reported feeling several other negative emotions. For example, she noted that she was “petrified to come home and take the PRAXIS [Spanish teaching exam]” (to Madalynn, 3/18/13) that she felt “intimidated and fear that I’m not learning as fast as everyone else” (to Michael, 2/25/13) and also that she felt “completely overwhelmed with how much Spanish I have to speak on a daily basis” (to Kimberly, 2/11/13). While her language anxiety did seem to lessen over time and she came to focus less on it in her posts, her doubts about her ability remained. Even within a few weeks of the end of her program she noted to Thomas, “It still frightens me sometimes when I hear people speaking Spanish really fast because I doubt my own Spanish speaking” (4/14/13).

Samantha’s feelings about her ability to use the language seemed to have an impact on the ways in which she interacted and communicated with native speakers, though, contrary to what might be expected, she did report having engaged with members of the host culture relatively often, especially as the course progressed. In other words, her doubts about her language ability may have had an impact on the quality of her interactions but not, perhaps, on the quantity. The biggest impact that Samantha’s lack of confidence had on her interactions seemed to be when she did not understand what the other person had said. She stated several
times throughout the course that she more often smiled and nodded than negotiated for meaning through asking questions. For example, in her response to Michael, who had mentioned that he was not always comfortable making it clear to native speakers when he did not understand them, Samantha noted that she had had similar experiences:

Excerpt 5.6

I do not ask a lot of questions, and I’m infamous for the smile and nod. I think that it is because I’m intimidated and fear that I’m not learning as fast as everyone else. I also need to be more comfortable asking questions, because sometimes I walk out of a conversation having no idea what I just answered or agreed to. Obviously not good. (2/25/13)

Here she made it clear that her fear and uncertainty were impacting her ability to understand the interactions that she had. Rather than asking questions to be sure that she understood what was being asked of her, she simply pretended to understand and tried to figure things out later.

Samantha clearly understood that this was inhibiting her learning and her experiences ("Obviously not good") and that she should ask more questions so that she could understand what was going on, but subsequent posts revealed that this was an issue with which she continued to struggle, at least to some extent, throughout her time abroad. For example, in her initial response to the Week 4 prompt, she noted, “When I don’t understand something, I don’t ask questions. I just say ‘sí’ and then the speaker realizes I have no idea what is going on”. In Week 6 she noted that she was gaining confidence in this area “I have more of a tendency to ask questions and try harder now that I feel more comfortable”, but in Week 9 she revealed that she was still not completely past her struggle: “Sometime I am still uncertain, it’s extremely frustrating. Instead of asking more questions, I simply give up and say yes”.

Again, while the quality of her interactions seemed to be somewhat negatively impacted by her language issues, Samantha still reported interactions with members of the host culture throughout her time abroad, particularly as she had spent more time there. This suggests that her fear and frustration were not enough to keep her from becoming involved with native speakers, particularly those with whom she had the most contact like her professors and her host family.
For example, in Week 4 she noted that her professors had been good at “filling us in on hand gestures and social language” (initial post) and also that one of her professors had told her that “learning a language is like climbing a mountain, and every once in a while there is a flat part” (‘last word’). Her host sister was also often a resource for Samantha when she was going to travel to different cities: “Every time I travel with my program she has a fun fact about the city, and her opinion on it. Which is awesome because I’m able to know what to expect” (initial post, Week 7).

While these were reports of general interactions that she had about common issues (language and travel), Samantha also sometimes made an effort to get advice or information from members of the host culture on specific things she had noticed or problems that she had experienced. For example, after traveling to Germany for a weekend she stated that she had noticed many Spanish speakers there. Because she was surprised by this and unsure of why it was the case, she asked her host sister, who told her that “it’s because their [Germany’s] economy is better so a lot of Spanish people go there to work!” (‘last word’, Week 9). In addition, when facing the issue of catcalls and unwanted advances from men, Samantha was able to get some helpful advice on how to handle it from one of her professors: “When I was talking to my professor about it, he told me to ignore it, keep walking, and they’ll leave you alone. That’s what I do now and I have no problems” (initial post, Week 10). These instances of specifically reaching out to members of the host culture demonstrated, again, that while she was unsure of her language abilities she was still willing to interact with certain native speakers in order to gain information, insight and advice, which had the potential to facilitate her development of interculturality. It could be the case that Samantha was willing and open to having these types of interactions, despite her linguistic struggles, at least in part, because she was acting upon the mediation that the facilitator had provided.

Because of Samantha’s preoccupation with her language abilities and her communication difficulties, the course facilitator focused a good deal of her mediation of Samantha on this topic.
Specifically, as mentioned in the previous section, she provided mediation that was aimed at encouraging Samantha to talk to members of the host culture when she had questions or struggles with language or cultural issues. For example, in Week 3 the facilitator acknowledged Samantha’s discussion of feeling down about her language skills and stated, “I encourage you to keep putting yourself out there and trying to practice both listening and speaking. […] Try not to pressure yourself too much, but just let things come naturally”. In Week 4, in response to Samantha’s admission that she was hesitant to ask questions when she did not understand something, the facilitator again encouraged her to interact with members of the host culture:

Excerpt 5.7
I know it’s really difficult to put yourself out there and risk losing face, but I strongly encourage you to ask questions, especially about cultural incidents that you experience (and about language as well). Getting into the habit of doing this will really help you get as much as possible out of your time in Alicante. Don’t give up, you can and will be successful!!!

This mediation was aimed at encouraging Samantha to be willing to interact with members of the host culture even when she was uncomfortable doing so and to develop the habit of doing so throughout her time abroad so that she would be able to practice her language skills and learn as much as possible about the culture from the people who know it best.

When Samantha demonstrated that she was, in fact becoming more comfortable with using the language for interaction and that this was impacting her experiences in a positive way, “I am becoming more familiar and comfortable with the language. I have more of a tendency to ask questions and try harder now that I feel more comfortable” (initial post, Week 6), the facilitator acknowledged this and once again encouraged her to keep having these kinds of interactions: “It is also great that you are now more open to asking questions and trying harder and I hope you are able to continue that way throughout the rest of your time there”. Each of these instances of mediation were aimed at helping Samantha develop interculturality by encouraging her to interact with and ask questions of members of the host culture, to understand
the perspectives of the host community and to see language as impacting and impacted by different contexts. The fact that Samantha seemed, at least to some extent, to take the advice/encouragement offered by the facilitator to overcome her negative perceptions of herself as a user of the L2 and interact with native speakers added to her development of interculturality by allowing her to gain insights and information into the language and culture that she would not have gotten without those interactions.

5.4.4 Attempting to move from emotional to analytical positioning

Another aspect of intercultural development that was particularly salient for Samantha, and for the facilitator’s mediation of her, was the way in which she responded to the experiences and difficulties that she had within the host culture and with members of the culture. As should be clear from the data in the last section, Samantha tended to focus on the personal emotional responses that she had to her interactions and to the cultural differences that she encountered. As mentioned previously, having emotional responses and reactions to situations when studying abroad is a natural part of the process. However, if an individual is to work through the process of developing interculturality, movement from this emotional stance to a more analytical one is a necessary component. This favoring of emotional responses over more thoughtful, intellectual and analytical ways of responding was part of what the mediation in the course, both in the course structure and through the facilitator’s interactions, was attempting to help students, including Samantha, to overcome.

Samantha’s emotional positioning with regard to the experiences that she had within the host culture and with native speakers was evident throughout her participation in the course. Her responses to course readings and especially to the experiences and interactions she had, particularly in the first several weeks or so of the course, but really throughout, contained many
emotionally charged words and phrases that clearly conveyed the struggles that she often had or felt in relation to those experiences. For example, she described new experiences such as going through customs at the airport, being away from friends and family and communicating in Spanish as “intimidating” and “overwhelming” (initial posts, Weeks 3 and 4; responses to classmates, 2/11/13 and 2/25/13). She also very frequently used the word “frustrating” to describe her experiences with aspects of her host culture. For example, when responding to comments made by Tara about the siesta and what she (Tara) saw as Spain’s slower pace of life, Samantha stated, “I do like it a lot, sometimes it’s frustrating because I want to get things done, but the calm culture won’t allow it” (2/17/13). In addition, in response to Tyler’s post on the topic of culture shock, Samantha noted that getting used to a new culture is a process that takes time and that can be difficult: “I think it’s hard not to be frustrated, everything that happens teaches you something, but it is extremely frustrating to accept that when it first happens” (3/23/13). This word was also one that she frequently used to describe her experiences of interactions in the target language with members of the host community, as was demonstrated in the previous section.

When sharing her thoughts on elements of culture that she and/or her classmates had experienced Samantha also used words such as “odd” (Weeks 3, 7, 9), “shock(ing)” (Weeks 4, 5, 7, 11), “disbelief” (Weeks 4, 7) and “crazy” (Weeks 3, 6, 7, 9). For example, when discussing how the atmosphere of the gym in Spain was different than that in the U.S., Samantha noted that, “the girls love to wear the nicest clothes to the gym. It’s actually really odd” (‘Last word’, Week 3). When responding to Tyler’s discussion of issues that he was having in understanding the ways in which lines are formed and adhered to or broken in Germany, Samantha stated, “The “lines” situation really shocks me, how did you realize that this occurs? […] You’re trying to get used to the new culture, but it’s such a shock because everything happens at once” (3/23/13). In Samantha’s initial post for Week 4, she discussed an incident that had happened on a bus: “one time on the bus I got up to let an older woman sit down, and a young boy sat down in the seat. I
was in disbelief.” Finally, when responding to Kimberly’s discussion of the fact that Spanish girls seemed to be jealous of the attention that Spanish men were giving to American girls, she noted that “it's crazy to think that the Spanish girls judge the American girls in this way” (4/1/13).

Not only do these statements demonstrate the emotional responses that Samantha had, but they also suggest implicit judgments that she was making. She was not simply noting differences between her home and host cultures, but she was also emphasizing her personal emotional responses to those differences. This revealed a degree of ‘unmediated’ response, which, for the course facilitator, was the essential starting point for the mediation process of Samantha toward a more analytical positioning. Thus, as will be discussed in greater detail below, she was not left to struggle with these thoughts and issues on her own, without mediation, as occurs in most SA programs, but an attempt was made to help her understand what she was experiencing and to use the insights that she gained in her future experiences and interactions.

As mentioned previously, students’ understandings of the concept of culture was an important part of their ability to engage with mediation that encouraged them to move from an emotional to analytical positioning because it seemed to have an impact on the ways in which they understood and reflected on their host culture and the experiences they had within it. Students who seemed to have a surface-level understanding of culture (i.e., focusing on the visible aspects) talked about it in particular ways that differed from the ways in which students with a deeper understanding (i.e., focusing on the underlying elements) talked about it. Not only did the students with a surface understanding respond more emotionally to their experiences, but they also tended to focus their discussion on talking about the culture (i.e., that something took place or was a particular way in the culture) rather than trying to go deeper in order to understand why these things happened or why they were having particular reactions to this aspect of the culture. In talking about culture in this way it seemed that they struggled to understand that these
situations and/or experiences were potentially impacted by the underlying attitudes, values and beliefs of the people involved, including their own.

As mentioned earlier, Samantha began to talk about culture and the learning/understanding of culture on the initial background survey. It is important to point out that while Samantha stated several times on the survey that she wanted to learn more about Spanish culture, her intended way of going about this was mainly through experiencing the more observable aspects of a culture (e.g., attending sporting events, festivals and church masses) rather than through talking to people and learning about their underlying values and beliefs. She also at one point on the survey described culture as “customs”, which revealed that her focus with regard to culture was on things that could be seen and/or experienced. Relating this to the work of Seelye (1993), Samantha seemed to be focused on the notion of Big-C Culture (the visible aspects such as art, holidays, music, etc.) rather than on little-c culture (the invisible aspects such as values and beliefs that influence social norms and interactions).

The fact that Samantha had this conceptualization of culture as surface-level elements, rather than as being integrated in language use and interactions, particularly as she started her SA experience and the course, was confirmed by statements that she made towards the end of course. First, in Week 13, students were asked to talk about the relationship that they saw between language and culture and how that may impact their future work as language educators. In that post Samantha revealed that her “ideas about language and culture have definitely changed over my time abroad. When I was in the U.S. I didn’t think that culture was important at all, to be honest” (initial post). Then, in one of the rationales for an included exemplar in her blogfolio, she noted: “Before coming abroad I thought that culture could just be a unit, basically a filler in a lesson plan” (blogfolio, 5/5/13). Samantha having approached culture in this way when beginning her participation abroad and in the blog course meant that she might not have understood the
importance or value of learning about the underlying values and beliefs because she may not have seen them as relevant to her learning and experiences.

This conceptualization of culture was, in fact, one of the most important aspects of Samantha’s participation in the course, given that, even when the facilitator, and sometimes her classmates, tried to mediate her to think more critically and learn more about invisible aspects of the culture, she often continued to focus her discussions of culture on the emotional reactions that she had. These discussions also often remained at the level of explanation rather than going deeper into analysis. In other words, she was able to say that she had experienced something or that the culture seemed to be a certain way (i.e., the visible aspects), but she often struggled to take up mediation that encouraged her to learn, understand and talk about why that might be the case (i.e., the underlying values and meanings at work).

One example of this occurred in Week 4 when students were responding to a reading on culture shock (Storti, 2001) and sharing how their own experiences abroad up to that point related to the issues and ideas that were talked about in the reading. As part of her response, Samantha had talked about the economic crisis in Spain at that time that had many Spaniards out of work, including her host mother and sister:

Excerpt 5.8
This crisis hasn’t really affected me but I do recognize that it is an issue. I think what shocks me more is the difference between Americans and Spaniards goals in working. My professor told us yesterday, “Spaniards work to live, and Americans live to work.” After thinking about it, I could not agree more with this. (Initial post)

Here Samantha mentioned that a difference exists between people in Spain and the U.S. with regard to their goals for working, thus sharing information about the culture (i.e., something that she believed was part of the culture). However, she did not make an attempt at that time to talk about why these differences may exist, so in response to this part of Samantha’s post, the facilitator attempted to prompt her to think and/or learn more about this aspect of the culture(s):
Excerpt 5.9
You mention that your professor told you that "Spaniards work to live and Americans live to work". **Do you think there are any cultural roots to these two different belief systems?** In other words, **are there different cultural norms/values/assumptions that might account for this difference? If so, what do you think they might be?**

In her response, the facilitator did not focus on the emotional/judgmental response that Samantha had had (“I think what shocks me more”), but rather asked questions in order to push Samantha’s thinking and also to encourage her to question both her home and host cultures. In her ‘last word’ response, Samantha addressed this topic:

Excerpt 5.10
In regards to my professor stating “Spaniards work to live and Americans live to work” I definitely think there are cultural roots to this statement. I think that people in American try to fit this persona (brand clothes, nice cars) and will be miserable and work constantly to achieve that. Whereas, Spaniards are content with the little things in life, they’re always happy and life just seems to flow here.

Here she attempted to go a little bit deeper, but still really tended toward saying *that* things are the case, but not *why* they are. Even while she agreed that there were cultural roots to the statement made by her professor, in her explanation she stated *that* Americans work to achieve a particular social status and *that* Spaniards are generally content with life, but was not really able to talk about the underlying values or beliefs (e.g., valuing wealth or status over other things) that might be impacting those ways of conceptualizing work and life, as the facilitator had asked her to do.

Another example of this occurred in Week 9 where in her initial post Samantha had discussed the fact that her grandparents had the perception of Spanish people as being lazy. In response to this, the facilitator asked the following question: “Do you know why it is that they may have said/felt that Spanish people were lazy?” Samantha’s ‘last word’ response was as follows:

Excerpt 5.11
I think that the preconception of Spanish people being lazy comes from the fact that many of them do not work, and the "siesta" period during the day. I think people forget how severe the crisis is in Spain. **In regards to the siesta, it's part of their culture.**
Here Samantha was able to offer a couple of ideas as to why people might have this idea about Spanish people: first that they do not work and second because of the siesta. As part of this response she had the opportunity to say much more about how/why the siesta might impact people’s thoughts about the Spanish. She also had the opportunity to share more about why the siesta exists and how it impacts, and is impacted by, the culture. However, all she was able to do was state that it exists and simply noted “it’s part of their culture”, thus again being able to say that this practice is, but not why (e.g., the underlying values related to it).

The type of exchange between Samantha and the facilitator where 1) Samantha would respond emotionally to an aspect of culture; 2) the facilitator would attempt to mediate her to think more deeply about the topic through analytical questions rather than focusing on the emotions; and 3) Samantha would struggle to do so was very common. One reason that this type of mediation might have been difficult for Samantha to orient responsively to is that it was not part of the activity of her ZPD (see Chapter 2). That is, she did not have the kind of abstract conceptualization of culture (e.g., as a set of values, attitudes and beliefs or as discourse) that would allow her to be able to analyze elements of culture, events, and interactions more deeply. In other words, if she believed that the most relevant aspects of culture were those that she could see then it would very likely be difficult for her to take up mediation that required her to look for elements that she had not fully considered. Unfortunately, this meant that Samantha was not always able to use the mediation to help her understand her experiences and reorient to future experiences and interactions. The facilitator did come to realize that this type of mediation was very difficult for Samantha to orient to and, as will be discussed in the following section, eventually shifted her mediation to be more aligned with Samantha’s ZPD and what she was able to understand and do.
In order to accurately understand Samantha’s development of interculturality, it is important to note that, while she never demonstrated a mostly analytical stance in her participation in the course, Samantha did, in fact, become more able to understand and talk about cultural and linguistic events and interactions objectively, as opposed to emotionally, as the course progressed. This may be the case because she eventually began to perform more inquiry (i.e., wondering and asking questions) than she had been able to do early in the course. For example, in Week 10 she reported having talked to one of her professors about the fact that she was receiving catcalls that made her uncomfortable: “when I was talking to my professor about it, he told me to ignore it, keep walking, and they’ll leave you alone” (initial post). Also, in Week 12 she noted that she had struggled with the fact that Spaniards often interrupt each other in conversation, “but once a professor explained to me that these interruptions occur often, I was able to embrace it” (initial post). This shift toward a slightly more analytical stance was demonstrated in Week 7 when Samantha talked about what she had learned from her host sister with regard to variation in the Spanish language:

Excerpt 5.12

It’s so shocking to me that there are so many variations among one language, but then I think about it and English has it too! It’s when you’re learning a language that you recognize all these little things, but in your native language it all just comes naturally! (Initial post)

This excerpt demonstrates that, while Samantha initially had an emotional response (“it’s so shocking to me”) to this topic, she was then able to step back and look at the situation more objectively, comparing it to her own native language and coming to understand that perhaps this was not so shocking after all.

As demonstrated here, while she never completely stopped responding in emotional ways, Samantha was eventually able to shift more toward performing analysis by stepping back and reflecting more objectively on the issues and by asking members of the host culture for their perspectives and insights into the experiences that she was having. This, then, demonstrates that
she was working to develop interculturality, particularly the ability to question her host culture and understand, at least to some extent, the perspectives of the host community.

5.4.5 Making connections across experiences

The final aspect of Samantha’s intercultural experiences that significantly impacted her participation in the course and on which the facilitator’s mediation was focused, was the fact that she often struggled to move beyond the immediacy of her experiences and make connections across experiences; that is, to identify relationships among events, phenomena and experiences in ways that would help her to further understand the situations and interactions in which she found herself. While she had stated in her initial survey that learning about her classmates’ experiences was a goal that she had set for her participation in the course, noting “I plan on learning a lot about other people’s experiences in their study abroad cities” (survey, 2/6/13), it is not surprising that this would be difficult for Samantha, given that it is similar to taking a more analytical position, which, as discussed in the previous section, was something that she sometimes struggled with. As demonstrated through her course participation, Samantha frequently remained entrenched in the immediacy of the here-and-now of her experiences rather than making connections to other things she was learning or to other experiences. She did seem, however, to be able to make more connections as the course progressed, particularly between herself and her classmates, perhaps because she had set this as a goal. She occasionally made connections in other areas as well, such as between her target and native languages (as seen in excerpt 5.12 above) and between her other SA courses and the online course.

The fact that Samantha often remained in the immediacy of her experiences was demonstrated by the fact that the focus of her blog posts and classmate responses was more often on sharing her own personal experiences within the target language and culture than on analyzing
the cultural reasons for the experiences she had or the difficulties that she encountered. Many of
the weekly blog prompts did, of course, require students to discuss the experiences that they were
having given that an attempt was being made to help them connect abstract (i.e., scientific)
concepts in the readings to concrete experiences that they were having (i.e., activating their
everyday concepts). Because of that, this was an expected part of students’ initial posts. Where
this focus on personal experience was particularly noticeable, then, was in Samantha’s responses
to her classmates’ posts. This focus on her own experiences rather than on her classmates’ and
rather than on culture in general occurred throughout her participation in the course, but was most
prevalent at the beginning. In fact, during her first two classmate responses (on 2/11/13 and
2/17/13) she did not ask her classmates a single question about their own experiences, as most
students did in their responses to each other, but rather focused solely on sharing her own
experiences with her classmate. This can be seen in the following excerpt:

Excerpt 5.13
I also have noticed that Spaniards are a lot touchier and more personal when they talk. [...] When I was on the bus for the first time I realized that I really do not have a lot of personal space, there is no personal bubble in the Spanish culture. Furthermore, when my host mom has friends over, they take “make yourself at home” to a whole new level. [...] It’s funny that you mentioned the pace of walking. I’m so used to running around campus, that I’ve actually started to walk really fast here also. People legitimately stare at me, like I’m on fire! [...] Finally, I do notice the calm culture of Spain. It seems like everyone is always running around trying to do something in the U.S. but here, people are happy just to be walking around. I do like it a lot, sometimes it is frustrating because I want to get things done, but the calm culture won’t allow it. For instance, I wanted to mail a postcard the other day and needed stamps. It was siesta so everything was closed. I had to wait to get stamps. (2/17/13)

While Samantha did make reference to the things that Tara talked about in her initial post
(personal space, the pace of walking, the “calm” nature of the Spanish culture, etc.) she then
simply used those as springboards to share the personal experiences that she herself had had in
relation to those topics.

This focus on her own experiences was, in fact, so prevalent that the facilitator, after
trying to focus her mediation on getting Samantha to do more analysis of the host culture,
realized, as mentioned above, that this was something that Samantha was having quite a bit of trouble doing. In order that her mediation would meet Samantha where she was, so that she (the facilitator) could continue to push Samantha in small ways to where she hoped she would be able to go (i.e., becoming more analytical), she shifted her mediation to include much more of Samantha’s own experiences. In other words, indications of Samantha’s engagement and struggles with the mediation informed the kinds of comments and questions offered by the facilitator. In response to the struggles that Samantha seemed to be having, the facilitator shifted her mediation to asking questions specifically relating to Samantha’s concrete experiences in the culture rather than concentrating solely on abstract concepts.

An example of this appeared in Week 9 when Samantha had shared in her initial post that Spanish girls do not like American girls “because they think we are stealing their men from them”. In responding to this, rather than asking Samantha directly to try to figure out the underlying issues, the facilitator instead asked Samantha to use what she had personally experienced as a basis for understanding the situation: “What, specifically, makes you say/feel that the Spanish girls don’t like you? What have they done or said? Has this been the case everywhere you have gone (or most places)?” Here the facilitator asked about what Samantha had directly experienced (i.e., what the Spanish girls had done or said) so that Samantha could think about the situation more concretely. The facilitator had not given up entirely on pushing Samantha’s thinking and making of generalizations, though, as revealed by her final question. By asking the question about whether this had been the case in other places as well the facilitator was attempting to mediate Samantha into making connections to other experiences that she had had in her host culture. This also attempted to mediate Samantha, albeit indirectly, into reflecting on whether her experiences were more individual (i.e., with the girls in Alicante) or whether that could be applied more broadly to other contexts. In this case, then, the facilitator attempted to use what Samantha was able to relate to and understand as a point of entry into further mediation of
deeper thinking about her experiences in the culture and of making connections between her experiences in different contexts. This was done as a way of encouraging and supporting the more analytical way of thinking that the facilitator was trying to help students develop as she worked with them through the process of intercultural development.

As mentioned above, Samantha was eventually able to make a partial shift from focusing on her own experiences to making connections between her own experiences and her classmates’. After the first few weeks of responses, Samantha began to ask questions of her classmates and continued to do so more and more throughout the rest of the course. She never ceased to describe her own experiences, because this was her preferred way of organizing her classmate responses, but she was able to frame those descriptions as part of the questions that she was posing to her classmates. For example, in responding to Thomas’ Week 11 post she tied what he had said in his initial post to her experiences and the questions that she had for him:

Excerpt 5.14
[Thomas'], [Alice’s] remarks about finding out when European children [begin] language learning also stuck out to me, in fact, I just did a comparative paper between language learning in the United States and in Spain and the initial age language learning begins. It was actually really interesting to research. Do you think it’s better to start language learning at a younger age? Do you think the United States starts too early, too late, or good timing? That’s an extremely good point you made in regards to people with simple jobs knowing English as an L2. When I was travelling this past week, I thought to myself multiple times, “wow, a lot of people know English, and a lot of Americans only know English.” Do you think this is a problem in America? (4/14/13)

It is demonstrated in this excerpt that Samantha had been able to shift from focusing solely on herself and her own experiences to attempting to gain a better understanding her classmate’s thinking about their initially articulated ideas. This excerpt also demonstrates that Samantha was, at times, able to make connections between her work in her other courses while abroad and the readings in the online course (“I just did a comparative paper between language learning in the United States and in Spain”). The excerpt also demonstrates that she was making a connection between her home and host cultures about the value placed on language learning. Making these
kinds of connections had the potential to help Samantha, and her classmate as well, reflect on and understand the topic (in this case language teaching and learning in different countries) more deeply so that she could use the insights that she had gained in future contexts.

This shift to being able to make more connections and move away from concentrating solely on herself and her own experiences impacted Samantha’s development of interculturality because it moved her toward questioning others’ cultures and understanding their perspectives, which is a key element of the dynamic and dialogic process of intercultural development. It also had the potential to move her away from her emotional responses to more reflective and analytical ones, thus helping her develop cultural knowledge and the skill of interpreting her host culture and its members.

5.4.5 Summary

To summarize the experiences of Samantha and the mediation provided to her toward the development of interculturality, the data demonstrated that she began the course with a mainly instrumental orientation, focused on completing course assignments and getting a good grade. This orientation meant that she was not always receptive to the mediation provided by the course structure and the facilitator and that she sometimes struggled to use the mediation in a way that would allow for the most intercultural development possible. She did, however, demonstrate a somewhat more responsive orientation as the course progressed, sometimes responding more readily to the available mediation and attempting to use it to better understand and interact within her host culture and language.

With regard to her perceptions of herself as a user of the L2, Samantha was very often preoccupied with what she perceived to be her lack of language skills. This often caused her to view herself negatively as well as viewing language issues as making things harder for her rather
than as learning opportunities. These negative feelings about her language ability potentially impacted the quality of some of her interactions with members of the host culture. They did not, however, prevent her from having some interactions that helped her to improve her abilities and gain insight into things she was experiencing in the host culture. Mediation in this area was directed at acknowledging Samantha’s struggles while still encouraging her to interact with host culture members.

Because of the struggles that she had with language and with understanding her host culture at times, Samantha very commonly had emotional responses to her situations and interactions rather than analytical ones. While emotional responses were to be expected, the facilitator attempted to help her move beyond these because a more analytical stance is necessary for being able to objectively reflect on and understand experiences while abroad. While she was never able to become fully analytical in her reflecting on and understanding of her host culture, Samantha was able to begin to use the mediation provided to shift toward a more analytical stance as the course progressed. This, then, had the potential to positively impact her development of interculturality because she could then act upon the insights that she gained through that inquiry and analysis in future situations. She could also potentially begin to understand that culture involves both visible and invisible aspects and to look for the invisible aspects as a way of gaining continued insights.

Finally, with regard to making connections across experiences, Samantha tended, particularly at the beginning of the course, to focus more on the immediacy of her experiences than on the connections that she could make to things such as knowledge gained in other classes or contexts, her classmates’ experiences and her future teaching experiences. This meant that she was at times not able to take advantage of other ideas and experiences as part of her process of intercultural development. As the course progressed, however, she was able to begin to make connections between her own experiences and those of her classmates. This impacted her
intercultural development because it allowed her to use the skills of interpreting others’ cultures and understanding their perspectives, two very important elements of interculturality that can be applied in multiple intercultural contexts.

The next section will move away from Samantha’s experiences to look at the experiences of Michael with regard to these same mediational foci. This will then be followed by a discussion that synthesizes the two cases and talks more broadly about students’ development and how it was impacted by the mediation.

5.5 “This is such an interesting topic!”: Michael’s experiences of developing interculturality

5.5.1 Background

Michael studied abroad during his eighth semester at the university, which was a full year later than the other students in his cohort. In addition to being a WL ED major- German and Latin options, he was pursuing a double major in anthropology and had taken a year away from WL ED coursework to take courses for that major. He was also an honors student at the university in a program that required him to take extra coursework and complete an honors thesis. His study abroad experience took place in Vienna, Austria, which he had chosen because “the idea of experiencing such a rich history and culture firsthand was too much to resist” (background survey, 2/1/13). This revealed immediately that culture learning was a key aspect of the SA experience for Michael, as will be discussed below. In terms of language background, taking into account high school and college, he had studied both Latin and German for seven years, but had taken three semesters off from language courses in order to work on the courses for his anthropology major. As a result of this break, and as will become particularly salient in the
discussion below, he noted that he felt that his “German grew extremely rusty” (initial post, Week 11).

This experience was not Michael’s first one abroad. In 2008 he spent 3 weeks in Munich, Germany, in 2011 he spent one month in Israel on an archaeological dig and in 2012 he spent two and a half weeks in Rome. While this was not his first time out of the U.S., it was by far the longest amount of time he had spent abroad and was also his first time specifically studying (i.e., taking classes) outside of the United States.

For his time in Vienna, Michael decided to live in an apartment run by his program because he had been told that the homestays provided by the program were not like homestays in other countries (e.g., living with families with multiple members and interacting on a daily basis): “the IES program had told us that homestays in Austria are usually living with an elderly couple or university professor” (response to Thomas, 2/10/13). He lived in the apartment with other international students and they all elected, and signed a contract, to speak only in German with each other so that they could work on their language skills as much as possible. There was also an Austrian resident assistant (RA) in their apartment, with whom they could practice their German regularly.

Michael took classes with other international students through his program as well as one class at the University of Vienna. These courses included German language, music history, text and film, and culture of immigration. In addition, he was involved in an education internship in which he helped teach English classes to Austrian high school students.

5.5.2 Michael’s orientation to learning

Michael demonstrated early on in the course that he was especially responsive to the learning and mediation available in the course (i.e., motivated to engage in processes of
mediation and to make use of that mediation to gain further insights into the target language and culture and to more fully engage with both). According to his background survey, he had several goals for himself during his time abroad that demonstrated this orientation. One of the main ones was to make friends with both other international students and with members of the host culture. Specifically, through his varied experiences abroad his hope was to “make friends with many Viennese people of all ages”. Linguistically, Michael had the goal of attaining a high level of fluency and proficiency in German, which could be achieved through these interactions. Additionally, and in relation to his future career as a teacher, he hoped to “pick up enough knowledge of Austrian cultural history and current practices to teach a German class” (all quotes from background survey, 2/1/13).

These goals demonstrate that, even from the beginning of his time abroad, Michael was orienting responsively toward learning in his SA context; that is, he displayed openness toward learning about and participating in a variety of linguistic and cultural practices. He also demonstrated openness specifically toward engagement with members of the host culture. While he mentioned improving his language skills as a goal, and this was at times at the forefront of his participation in the course, it did not seem to end up being the topic that had the most significance for him. Rather, as demonstrated in his work throughout the course, he was most interested in learning about the culture and interacting with the members within it as well as in making connections to how he might apply his knowledge and skills to his future professional life.

One instance where Michael’s responsive orientation to SA was revealed clearly was in his Week 4 initial post. In this prompt students had been asked to respond to part of that week’s reading (Storti, 2001) that talks about issues caused by making cultural assumptions about other’s actions:

Excerpt 5.15
I know I have made fewer assumptions because I came here with an open mind, or perhaps a cautious one. I knew things would be different, and I tried to prepare myself
to expect that. I have found that most things really aren’t that different at all...After all, I’m in Austria, not Indonesia. And I have been trying to observe the way people do things as much as I can. But there are always those times when I think, “what the heck, guy?! Who does that!?!” Then I realize, “Oh...Austrians do that.” I guess there’s all sorts of things here that make people potentially different.

In this post, Michael reflected on his own assumptions and on his thinking both before his arrival in Austria and after. Important here is the fact that he noted a way in which he was trying to come to understand the host culture (“I have been trying to observe the way people do things as much as I can”) and also that that observation was at times causing him some consternation (“But there are always those times when I think ‘what the heck, guy?!’”). This demonstrates his responsive orientation to learning in SA in that he was open to gaining a greater understanding of the host culture and was working even from the beginning of his experience to do so, even when he didn’t understand everything easily at first. This type of orientation, then, allowed for the possibility that Michael would be able to interact with members of the host culture, develop an understanding of their perspectives, question the culture and use the insights that he gained to help him in future situations, all key elements of developing interculturality.

Shifting to how Michael oriented to learning in the course, it is important to note that his expectations and goals for his participation in it were varied. He wanted the course to keep him focused on why he was there (i.e., to improve in his cultural and linguistic knowledge and practice), “I expect the course will help me stay on target”, and to help him make sure that his experience abroad would be relevant to his future plans: “I also need to make sure that what I get out of it can suit the purposes of language teaching in the future.” In addition, he looked forward to the connection to, and dialogue with, his classmates that the course would afford him: “I will also be able to hear about other students’ experience in their cultures, and be able to use their insights in my own reflections” (all quotes from background survey, 2/1/13). It is clear that Michael understood the value that the course could have for him in both his immediate and future contexts. He also realized that the dialogue created would be beneficial to his own learning and
reflection. Having these understandings made it possible for Michael to be open to participating fully and responsively throughout the course.

From the very beginning of his participation in the course, then, Michael demonstrated a responsive orientation. He was particularly open to participating fully in the dialogues with the facilitator and his classmates and he was also very open to engaging with, and taking up, the mediation available, especially that offered by the facilitator. One example of this occurred in Week 3, where in his initial post Michael had referred to Viennese as ‘normal’ people, but as “slightly grumpier people”. He also stated that he had been “warned about that at orientation”. As part of her feedback, the facilitator focused on that statement:

Excerpt 5.16
I'm really interested in your statement that Viennese people are slightly grumpy and that you had been warned about that at orientation. What is it about them that makes them seem grumpy (especially to an outsider)? Are people in other areas of Austria also stereotyped this way? Is there some aspect of the country's/city's culture that affects their behavior or your perception of their behavior?

In this response, the facilitator questioned this generalization that Michael had made of the Viennese people, using the word “seem” and focusing on the fact that this might simply be a perception held by people who are not Viennese. In his ‘last word’ response it was clear that Michael had understood this mediation, even using the facilitator’s words “seems”, and had realized that this may be his perception rather than the reality of the situation:

Excerpt 5.17
As for the grumpiness, I suppose it really is more of a “seems” thing. They only seem grumpy to Americans. When I’m in the States, and maybe this is just particularly unusual about me, I smile at strangers when we make eye contact. [...] But the Viennese certainly never do such a thing. In fact, at orientation we were warned specifically against smiling at strangers because it would come off as particularly strange.

In addition to responding to the facilitator’s mediation, Michael was also able to reflect on and talk about why it might have been the case that the Viennese seemed grumpy to him as an American (e.g., they do not smile at strangers on the street), thus demonstrating developing understandings of both his own culture and host culture. Later in that same response he noted that
he had had a different experience when asking a “serious-looking” Viennese woman for directions, stating that as soon as he spoke to her, “instantly she smiled and answered the question in an adorable, kind voice […] They’re certainly not all that grumpy” (emphasis in original). This revealed that he was able to use multiple interactions as resources for gaining information on the culture and people and that through this he began to learn that the generalizations that he made were not always accurate. Developing these types of understandings about himself and his host culture is an important element of developing interculturality because it has the potential to help students reflect on and analyze their experiences in a way that allows them to apply these understandings in future contexts, thus deepening their insights into the culture and furthering their intercultural development.

Further evidence of a responsive orientation in Michael’s participation in the course is that he was extremely interested and invested in the topics of the course and in his participation in the course itself, consistently going beyond the minimum that was required to fulfill the course assignments. For example, when asked questions by his classmates or the facilitator about things he had talked about in his posts related to the German language, the Austrian culture or his experiences with those, Michael very often offered extended explanations that included specific linguistic and cultural information (e.g., related to dialects, linguistic and/or cultural history, public policy, politics, etc.), particularly in his ‘last word’ responses. In fact, he even noted in the rationale for one of the ‘last word’ exemplars in his blogfolio that the exemplar had been included because, “it demonstrates a pretty common scenario in my postings: I really like to talk about Austria” (blogfolio, 4/28/13). He often wrote lengthy responses and also frequently said things like “Sorry this paragraph is so long, but it was such an interesting question to think about!” (‘last word’ to Melinda, Week 4), “Sorry if this paragraph gets long…I love talking about this part!” (‘last word’ to Dorothy, Week 4) and “All in all the topic is a terribly interesting one” (initial post, Week 7). It was also very common for him to share facts about Austria in his responses to
his classmates, comparing the experiences they had shared with his own. Finally, he also
sometimes provided links to pictures of food items that he had talked about or YouTube videos
that would demonstrate linguistic elements he was discussing. All of this makes it clear that he
was oriented to learning in the course as a responsive, contributing member who wanted to learn
from others and to share his experiences with others as well. As noted, this orientation related to
his sharing of aspects of both language and culture. Each of these will be looked at in greater
detail in the next two sections.

5.5.3 Michael’s perception of self as a user of the L2

While much of Michael’s participation in the course was centered on his learning about
his host culture, his perception of himself as a user of the L2 was also a salient one in his
experiences abroad and in the facilitator’s mediational focus. Though he did not mention any
discrete language skills that he felt he struggled with or wanted specifically to improve, overall
concerns and discomfort with using the language in communication were certainly salient. As
mentioned earlier, Michael had taken some time away from learning and practicing the German
language in order to complete courses for his archeology major. This left him feeling at a
disadvantage and proved to have a relatively strong impact on his perceptions of his language and
communication ability at times. For example, in Week 4 when discussing a list of possible
emotions (e.g., frustration, anger, impatience, etc.) associated with living in a new culture that
had been presented in a reading (Storti, 2001), Michael associated these feelings with speaking
the language and stated:

Excerpt 5.18
I’ve experienced mixed feelings here in Austria. […] But when it comes time to actually
interact with Austrians, I know exactly what Storti’s list refers to. It's mostly when I go
to buy things that I feel like an idiot, or get frustrated. (Initial post)
Michael also noted multiple times that he felt a bit ‘rusty’ in his language skills, sometimes comparing himself to other students in his program. This was demonstrated in Week 11 when he stated:

**Excerpt 5.19**

I used to be at the top of my German classes, but having taken about three semesters off, my German grew extremely rusty. It was terrifying to realize that I had forgotten so much! One of my roommates here is a terrific German-speaker, however. In fact, the students in my German class are all very good…and I am very near the bottom of the class. It is embarrassing to have gone from one of the best to the worst! […] And of course, I keep telling myself, “I have to be good enough to teach this!!” (Initial post)

Both of these excerpts reveal that Michael struggled with the fact that his German skills were not as proficient as he would have liked and that he sometimes felt embarrassed or frustrated by this. Excerpt 5.19 also reveals that one of the reasons that he felt this way was that he knew he would be going into the classroom to teach German the following year, which seemed to put even more pressure on him to continue to develop his fluency and proficiency.

With regard to Michael’s concern about his language abilities, the facilitator focused on this at times and attempted to encourage him to keep interacting with members of the host culture despite these issues so that he would see the issues as learning opportunities rather than as something that inhibited his interactions and his learning. For example, in her feedback in Week 4 she stated, “I encourage you to keep asking people for help when you need it and trying to make yourself understood.” Also, in her Skype response to Michael on his Week 11 post (see excerpt 5.19) she attempted to push him to define what “good enough to teach this” meant and encouraged him not to push himself to be perfect or to compare himself to a native speaker. Again, she wanted to make sure that language did not become an inhibiting issue for him but rather one that would help facilitate his development of interculturality.

This struggle with language and negative feelings associated with it also appeared in Michael’s interactions with his classmates. Two examples follow:
Excerpt 5.20
And I can totally relate to what you are saying about speaking too! I have studied German since 8th grade, but when it comes time to talk to someone, even in German class, all of a sudden it’s like [I] just don’t have the vocabulary. (Response to Samantha, 2/12/13)

Excerpt 5.21
It’s also really cool that you could figure all that out at the [airport] counter in Spanish. Before I hopped off the plane, I hadn’t taken a German course in a year and a half. I thought I was all that when I could order some Orangensaft (orange juice) on the flight, but as soon as they started making announcements in German I was totally confused. (Response to Thomas 2/10/13)

In both of these excerpts, Michael shared some of the negative feelings that he was having with regard to his ability to understand and communicate in the language.

Despite having these feelings at times, Michael’s main way of talking about language had more to do with his perceptions of the usefulness of it and what he learned about the variation, history and evolution of it along with how he saw the relationship between language and culture. This revealed that, while he sometimes perceived himself as a less-than-capable user of the L2, he was not preoccupied with this issue. It also revealed that he did not perceive language as discrete items to master but that he viewed it more broadly and in relation to communication. This, then, allowed him to view the communication issues that he had as opportunities for learning and growth.

One example of his focus on the usefulness of German, as opposed to the issues, appears in his ‘last word’ to Shania in Week 4. Here he noted that he was already feeling better about his ability to communicate and that going to a country (Slovenia) where he did not speak the language at all had shown him the value of having at least some level of language in which to communicate in Austria.

Excerpt 5.22
And as to the communication difficulties, things have indeed been getting better, even since I’ve last posted. Actually, going to Slovenia helped out a lot. When I was there, I couldn’t communicate with anyone, and my Slovene-speaking friend had to do all the communicating. When I returned to Austria, I was just so thankful that I was in a country whose language I could speak! So I started viewing German as something that makes life easier whereas it used to make life “harder.” (emphasis in original)
This experience allowed Michael to talk about the improvements he was making and to gain a greater appreciation for the language speaking ability that he did have, helping him to focus more on the positives of being an L2 learner and user than the negatives.

Linguistic variation, particularly as related to dialects and accents, was a topic that was of particular interest to Michael throughout his time abroad and his participation in the course. While the blog prompt in Week 7 related specifically to that topic, asking students to talk with a native or expert speaker of the language about their understandings and perceptions of the variation in their language along with any stereotypes that are ascribed to speakers of the different variations, this was a topic that Michael included in many of his posts, classmate responses and ‘last words’ at other times throughout the course as well. For example, in his Week 4 ‘last word’, he shared some information on the topic in answer to a question that she had asked as to whether the German in Austria was different from the German he had learned in school:

**Excerpt 5.23**

*What they teach in schools* is called *Hochdeutsch*, which basically means “standard German.” Luckily, this is indeed a type of German that all Austrians and Germans can speak. The reason for this is that there are many little dialects scattered all over Germany and Austria. If there was no Hochdeutsch for university professors and newscasters to speak, then it would be really hard for people to understand each other! **A lot of the dialects are mutually intelligible**…except for Swiss German, which is pretty crazy. And the dialects vary in how different they are from Hochdeutsch. The Viennese “dialect” is a little more than a funny accent, with some unique vocabulary and certain contractions. However, that unique vocabulary does trickle into the Austrian Hochdeutsch.

This excerpt reveals that Michael was developing a deeper understanding of language as well as the ability to talk about how and why these aspects of language develop and are important. In talking about variation Michael also demonstrated that he was developing an understanding of with whom/in which contexts to use the ‘standard’ versus the ‘nonstandard’ dialect and the impact that that might have on the hearer’s perception of the speaker. This is evident in the following excerpt:
Frau Sernett will show off her Wienerisch every now and again, but as a teacher she uses standard German with us in the classroom. Again, if she spoke Wienerisch with us, we’d struggle greatly to understand her. But if she spoke standard German with friends on the street, they would think she was being stuck up or something. (Initial post, Week 7)

The fact that Michael was able to see language use and linguistic variation in this way demonstrates his intercultural development because it shows awareness that language use and the ways in which language users are perceived are impacted by the context in which the language is spoken.

The topic of variation was also one that Michael often brought up in his classmate responses. He was particularly interested in learning about variations in his classmates’ L2s and host cultures since he had no prior exposure to those. This is demonstrated in his response to Shania’s discussion of linguistic variation in Spain:

Excerpt 5.25
This is super interesting to read, especially for someone who hasn’t ever really studied Spanish (me :P)! I was wondering if there was a dialect that was considered correct above the rest. Would it be safe to say that this Spanish is considered “standard?” Or is it just a dialect held in esteem for the way it sounds? (Response to Shania 3/18/13)

Here he was attempting to find out whether the concept of a ‘standard’ dialect existed in Spain as it does in Austria, thus allowing him to make comparisons and connections between the two languages and cultures that may help to expand his cultural awareness and understanding.

Michael was also interested in how variation in other languages and cultures impacted the people who spoke those variations. In her Week 13 post Dolores had mentioned that some Spaniards were discriminated against because of their language (“During the Franco regime, only Castilian was accepted, and therefore I learned the discrimination that some Spaniards have undergone only from language”), Michael attempted to find out more about this in his classmate response:

Excerpt 5.26
When you say you understand the discrimination that some Spaniards have undergone only from language, do you mean discrimination against people who speak a certain dialect?
Or discrimination that makes it's way into certain phrases? This is such an interesting topic! (Response to Dolores 4/22)

These excerpts demonstrate that language and communication were of interest to Michael not only in his own context but also within that of his classmates, thus revealing an attitude of openness and curiosity toward both language and culture that was a significant part of his process of intercultural development.

While Michael had demonstrated a strong ability to focus on variation in language and how users of those variations might be perceived, this was still a main focal area of the facilitator’s mediation. For example, she often attempted to push him even further in thinking about language, working to develop his understanding that it both impacts and is impacted by the different contexts in which it is spoken. In excerpt 5.27 below, she specifically focused her mediation on helping Michael see the relationship between aspects of culture (in this case history and politics) and the language that is used:

Excerpt 5.27
It is great that you are using your understanding of the history and the politics of Austria to understand the people and the experiences that you are having. **Is it helping you to understand anything about the language as well?** (Week 4)

In his response, Michael noted at first that this was not a topic that he had thought a lot about. He was, however, able to give an example of how ‘political’ language was used in scholarly settings that helped him further reflect on this topic. He also included a connection to similar language use in his L1:

Excerpt 5.28
**I’ll have to think more about your question,** as to whether I’ve noticed Austria’s politics and history affecting it’s German. **The only example I can think of** has to do with immigration. One Austrian political party (the FPÖ, or Freedom Party of Austria) is outspokenly opposed to immigrants in Austria. **In scholarly circles, however** the word *Migranten* (migrants) is being dropped in favor of a phrase that translates to “people with migrant backgrounds,” so as not to make migration someone’s sole defining characteristic. **It reminds me of** how in our SPLED [special education] classes, we’ve been guided to use the term “people with disabilities” instead of “disabled persons.” (‘Last word’, Week 4)
In this exchange the facilitator required Michael to think even more deeply about language than he had before, particularly about the impact of aspects of culture (e.g., political views and doctrines) on language use. The purpose of the mediation was, in part, to demonstrate a way of thinking (e.g., about how understanding culture and understanding language go hand in hand) that Michael could potentially employ in the future, using the insights that he gained through this analysis to reorient his future experiences and interactions.

Michael demonstrated that he had, indeed, developed, at least to some extent, this deeper type of thinking about language and culture in his Week 7 post. When concluding his discussion of variation in dialects in the German language he noted:

Excerpt 5.29
All in all, the topic is a terribly interesting one, and it has a lot to say about the development of a language, but even more about the idea of cultural identity. Speakers of a dialect have a place to belong: the place that sounds like home.

In this statement it is clear that he saw the impact of language and linguistic variation on an individual’s personal and cultural identity. Thus, the relationship between the language that a person speaks and the culture that they identify with was salient in Michael’s thinking. With regard to development of interculturality, this demonstrated his emergent understanding of culture as discourse and of the inextricable link between language and culture.

As should already be clear from this and the other data excerpts presented thus far, Michael demonstrated an ability from the beginning of the course to approach issues and experiences in SA with an analytical positioning. That is not to say that he never had emotional responses to the situations that he encountered and the interactions that he had (some examples can, in fact, be seen in excerpts 5.18 and 5.19 above), but he was able to quickly move beyond those, at least in part with the help of the mediation made available in the course. This movement from emotional to more analytical responses will be the focus of the following section.
5.5.4 Moving from emotional to analytical positioning

One of the most important aspects of Michael’s SA experience, and an area on which the facilitator focused quite extensively, was his development of culture-specific knowledge as well as cultural self-awareness during his time in Austria. That is, as a result of the mediation and due to his orientation to learning in SA, he was very often able to be analytical about the culture in which he was living, stepping back from his own perspective and seeing members of the host culture for themselves rather than comparing them to himself and his own culture. He was also able to analyze himself and his own understandings of culture and ways of doing things, and then acknowledge that there were ways, other than his own, of doing and thinking about things that were just as valuable as the way he would do/think about them. In addition, he demonstrated the ability to go beyond just describing culture to using culture as a way of making sense of his experiences.

As noted above, Michael still at times had emotional responses to his experiences and interactions. This was to be expected, of course, as it is a normal and predictable part of studying abroad. It is the case, however, that his responses, even from the beginning, tended to be more analytical than emotional. He attempted to understand differences that he experienced or difficulties that he had from a more cultural perspective rather than a mostly personal one. He also consistently worked to share not only the things that he learned about the culture but also what he had learned about the why behind those things. In other words, he shared both the visible, Big-C, aspects about the culture as well as the much less visible little-c aspects.

With regard to his conceptualization of culture, then, it was clear that Michael saw culture as comprising both visible and invisible elements. This was apparent from the very beginning of his participation in the course. For example, in his background survey, when asked how he would go about reaching the cultural goals that he had for his time abroad, Michael noted,
“Already I have been to many operas, concerts, a ballet and even a ball. [...] And I can’t count how many types of cakes I’ve eaten at how many cafes and coffee houses” (survey, 2/1/13). These could be considered Big-C aspects because they are events and elements that can be ‘seen’ and experienced. The rest of his response to this question also made it clear that he was aware that there were other important aspects of culture as well: “the history courses I am taking will certainly supplement the cultural events I experience” (ibid.). This demonstrated an understanding on Michael’s part that the events do not stand on their own but rather they have histories behind them that impact their meanings and norms. Another piece of evidence that Michael understood that histories and norms are an important part of culture can be seen in the following excerpt:

Excerpt 5.30

The cause of most of [the cultural issues that I have] is that, **while I have watched enough people doing enough things to know how to do them myself, I don’t know the reasons behind them. I’m not familiar with the norms.** (Initial post, Week 12)

Here it is clear that Michael understood that, while one can mimic what members of the host culture do, without knowing and understanding the norms that underlie those behaviors it is still possible for cultural issues and misunderstandings to occur.

The fact that he understood that differing cultures have differing norms, values and attitudes seemed to make the process of moving from an emotional to analytical positioning relatively easy for Michael because he knew to be ‘looking for’ these elements as part of his experiences and/or as part of his reflection on his experiences. There were, however, also times when his response was more emotional because he realized that he did not know the norms and he felt that not knowing them made things more difficult.

This can particularly be seen in the following two excerpts. The first excerpt (5.31) is related to norms for crossing the street, where he was unsure about what to do when the walk signal was red:
Excerpt 5.31
I’m not familiar with the norms, so I’m always afraid I’m going to mess up. […] One example is crossing the street when the little walking man is still red. Sometimes there are no cars coming at all, and crossing the street would be perfectly safe. But I’ve been with large groups of unrelated Austrians where no one has crossed. Sometimes a person does cross and no one follows… Other times a few people follow. I’ve heard it just something that Austrians don’t do, and I’ve had friends fined 70 euros for doing it… But there must be times when it is acceptable, right? I have no idea, and I feel like an idiot standing there at a small intersection with no cars coming in any direction… waiting for the green man. (Initial post, Week 12)

In this excerpt, it is clear that Michael struggled at times when he was not sure of the norms of a situation, which caused him to experience negative emotions (“I’m afraid I’m going to mess up”, “I feel like an idiot standing there”). Despite this, the excerpt also reveals that knowing that there are norms to be followed had impacted Michael’s participation in the culture; that is, it had encouraged him to observe members of the culture to see what it was that they did in a given situation (in this case, crossing the street when the walk signal was red). Observation was a practice that was very common for Michael while he was abroad and in other posts he revealed that it had been helpful to him. However, as revealed in this excerpt, and above in excerpt 5.30, observation did not always provide all of the insight needed. Be that as it may, the fact that Michael consistently attempted to use observation as a tool to learn about cultural norms and how to follow them provides valuable insight into how he was working through the process of developing interculturality.

In the next excerpt, Michael talked about the fact that the norms for waiting in line differed between Austria and America and that that had caused him some issues:

Excerpt 5.32
One of the hardest things for me is the Austrian concept of not waiting in lines. If you go up to a counter to order a pastry, you have to make sure that when the cashier is ready, if it is your turn, you go for it! Because if you hesitate even a little, then that old woman who, has literally just shown up and slipped blatantly in front of you, is going to get the last piece of Waldviertler Mohntorte. I still haven’t mastered it, and it still bothers me… especially when I am in a super hurry and only have a little time anyways. Americans are all about their lines. “What the heck is wrong with Austrians?” I used to think. But really, it could just as well be, “What is wrong with Americans? Why are we all so into our queuing behavior?” (Initial post, Week 9)
In this excerpt, Michael discussed the somewhat negative feelings that being unsure of the norms caused him to have in this particular situation (“one of the hardest things”, “I haven’t mastered it and it still bothers me”). Knowing that the norms existed and not being able to follow them was difficult for him. However, knowing that the norms existed also seemed to help him to reflect on the experience in a more analytical way at the same time. For example, he noted that he had tried to “master” this situation and was bothered by the fact that he had not been able to. However, he was at the same time able to make a comparison between waiting in line in Austria and waiting in line in America, which potentially helped him to think about the different perspectives involved.

What is most interesting is that he noted that at first he had put the ‘blame’ for his struggles on the Austrian ‘system’, but the more he reflected on it, the more he realized that the American way was not necessarily the only or ‘right’ way of doing things, but rather that either or both ways could have value. In this case he was able to ‘decentre’ himself (Byram, 1997; Kramsch, 2009) and understand that the way he was used to doing things was not the only way, thus furthering his development of interculturality.

As mentioned above, Michael demonstrated throughout his participation in the course that he was able to use culture, and what he had learned about the culture, as a way of making sense of his experiences. This is visible in an exchange that he had with his classmate Melinda around the topic of environmental issues and recycling in Austria. Her questions and comments on this topic can be seen in the following excerpt:

Excerpt 5.33
You mentioned that there are less plastic waterbottles, the people bring their own bags to the grocery store, and Tupperware is hard to find. How does this compare with your experiences in the U.S. and or other countries? I feel it has something to do with their environmentally conscious attitude, so might this forward thinking be reflected in their political dealings/religious beliefs/government system? By that, I mean do you find their government and social norms to be overall progressive […]? (Melinda to Michael, 2/6/13)

In her response, Melinda asked Michael to compare his experiences in Austria with those in his home culture and to discuss whether the kind of view (“forward thinking”) that she felt was being
demonstrated around this issue played out in other areas of the culture as well. In his ‘last word’
Michael demonstrated his ability to use what he had learned about the culture as a way of making
sense of his experiences by providing extensive cultural information as a way of making sense of
the fact that recycling (and the lack of water bottles, plastic bags and Tupperware in his area) was
an important part of daily life in Vienna.

Excerpt 5.34
You brought up a very interesting point about whether the recycling reflects accurately on
social and political norms. [...] The party with the majority of representatives [...] is
the “Social Democratic Party of Austria,” which right from the beginning shows the
country’s [...] affinity for socialism. Teacher wages are paid by the state [...]. Austria[ns
voted in a recent referendum] to keep the current system [of compulsory military
service], because it also allows for the alternative of one year of civil service [which
provides for volunteers in the ambulance corps, nursing homes, etc.] Healthcare is
publicly funded [...]. So all in all, I think the recycling fits well into the current
Austrian political agenda. They’re trying as best as they can to look out for their
citizens. (‘Last word’, Week 4)

Because of his responsive orientation and generally reflective and analytical stance, the
facilitator did not have to work especially hard to mediate Michael in this area. However, there
were still some times when his initial posts focused more on saying that something was the case
rather than providing more in-depth discussion of why this might be the case. In these cases the
facilitator had to work to mediate Michael’s further reflection on, and analysis of, the topics. For
example, in the Week 10 discussion of the differences in perceptions of sexual harassment
between American female students and the Spanish SA program director, Michael had made
statements in his initial post (referred to in the facilitator’s response in excerpt 5.35) that he had
not expanded on to her satisfaction:

Excerpt 5.35
One thing I would like you to talk a bit more about is the following statement: "there may
be some stereotypes about American women involved in the way that they are treated". What, specifically, might be the stereotypes and how do you think that "blending in"
might help alleviate some of the perceived harassment?
Here the facilitator attempted to push Michael to say not only that the stereotypes might exist but also what they might be and how the solution that he had offered of “blending in” might improve the situation for the American girls. In his ‘last word’ he was able to respond to these questions and to provide more information about the stereotypes as well as to talk about how a change in their behavior might impact their situation, thus reflecting slightly more analytically on what he had said and on what might be at the root of the American girls’ issues.

Excerpt 5.36

[With regard to the stereotypes about American girls, things change when you get to a bar or club setting. […] When Austrian guys picture the stereotypical American girl at a bar, they expect her to be loud, drink a little too much, and dress in more suggestive clothing than an Austrian girl might. So when they see that sort of behavior, they assume it is acceptable to respond to it in a more forward, flirtatious/heckling way. So I imagine that if a girl were to try an act more like the Austrian girls do at clubs or bars, she would only attract as much attention as the Austrian girls do.

Another thing that the facilitator did consistently was ask Michael more analytical questions in order to push his thinking even further and so that he could continue to hone his skills in reflecting on and talking about his experiences this way. Another purpose of mediating in this way was so that he would continue to adopt this analytical stance in future contexts and interactions, thus encouraging his process of intercultural development. An example of this can be seen in the mediation around the difficulties that Michael had with the differing concept of ‘lines’ in Austria (see excerpt 5.32 above for Michael’s initial statement). In response to this discussion, the facilitator attempted to push him further to reflect on and talk about why this particular concept of lines might exist in Austria:

Excerpt 5.37

Finally, I want to ask a bit more about your struggle to adjust to the fact that people don't line up in Austria like we do in the US. First of all, why do you think lines are less (or maybe not at all) important there than in the US? Is this the case in all situations (e.g., stores, restaurants, buses, etc.)? (Week 9)

Not only did the facilitator ask Michael to think about the underlying cultural values that might be at play, but she also pushed him to think about whether the line situation was the same in all
Austrian contexts, thus implicitly requiring him to determine whether he was making a
generalization from one context to the broader culture. In his response, Michael was easily able to
talk about whether lining up occurred in other contexts. The reader will note that he struggled,
however, to give a specific answer as to the underlying cultural roots.

Excerpt 5.38
Austrians and lines. There are few cases when Austrians do line up, and this is when
waiting in line for things that have been paid for (namely the line to run in and get standing
room spots at an opera or concert), or places with long lines like the grocery store.
However, in most other places it is a free-for-all: bakeries, post offices, doctor’s offices,
subways… I’m not one hundred percent sure why it is. I mean, if you think about
Austria and its support of Socialist healthcare policies and heavy government involvement
in things like gun control as opposed to the United States where individual and state rights
are strongly supported…you might think that something so organized as queuing culture
would be completely opposite. (‘Last word”, Week 9)

Despite not being able to provide a specific answer to the question of underlying values,
Michael was still able to demonstrate that he could step back and reflect on how general political
policies and views on individual rights might be at play. The fact that the ways in which the
concept of lines plays out as it does in the two cultures seemed counterintuitive to him
demonstrates that he was still in the process of developing an understanding of the host culture,
and even of his own culture, that would help him to talk about the specific beliefs and values at
play in this particular situation. Thus, even Michael, who in many ways stood out as one of the
most reflective and analytical students in the cohort, still benefitted from mediation as he worked
through interpretations of his experiences and continued to negotiate his new cultural
surroundings.

5.5.5 Making connections across experiences

Another way in which Michael attempted to work through his interpretations of his
cultural and linguistic surroundings throughout the course was by making connections among
events and experiences. As already noted, this is related to the previous topic in that making these connections allows students to develop a more reflective and analytical positioning as they go through the process of developing interculturality. Making these connections also has the potential to enrich students’ understandings and help them to make greater sense of their experiences. This was a particularly salient aspect of Michael’s experience, as it was one of the ways in which he most commonly organized his participation in the course, both in his initial posts and in his dialogues with his classmates and the facilitator. Specifically, he very frequently made connections between topics in the online course and in his other study abroad courses, between the online course readings and his experiences and between his experiences and his classmates’ (see excerpt 5.25 above). He also made connections to his teaching internship in Austria and to the German teaching that he would be doing in the future. He also at times made connections between experiences he was currently having and those he might have in the future. This orientation toward the future, as opposed to focusing on the here-and-now, helped Michael to keep a positive and reflective attitude, even when he was having struggles. Being able to make these connections was also important because it helped him to further reflect on and understand his experiences, his interactions, readings he did in the online course, topics in his other courses and his classmates’ experiences, all of which mediated his thinking and his intercultural developmental process.

One of the most common connections that Michael made was between his participation in the online course and the topics of the other courses he was taking or had previously taken. This can be seen in comments such as, “we talked about it in my Culture of Immigration class today” (‘last word’, Week 4) and “I have been talking a lot about [dialects], especially recently. In fact, both my German class and my Austria in Text & Film class are currently in the middle of a unit on dialect!” (initial post, Week 7). Excerpt 5.28 above provides an example of this as well, where Michael made a connection between language use suggested in his previous special
education courses and language used in certain contexts in his host culture. The fact that these connections helped him gain more knowledge and understanding of his host culture is demonstrated in the following excerpt, which occurred in a post in which Michael discussed an interaction he had witnessed on the tram between two school-aged (about 10 or 11 years old) boys:

Excerpt 5.39

I was witnessing one peer teaching another about social gender norms by sanctioning his behavior (with ridicule). We talk about this sort of thing in Sociology and Anthropology all the time! And here it was going on right in front of me…on a tram in Vienna. (Initial post, Week 5)

In this excerpt, Michael demonstrated that he was able to connect an event that he had witnessed in his host culture with a topic, in this case social gender norms that he had studied in previous classes. This, then, allowed him not just to witness the event, but also to understand it on a deeper level and in a way that could potentially be applied in future contexts to other situations he witnessed or found himself in.

In addition to helping Michael understand events in his host culture more deeply, the connections that he made between the topics of the online course and the other courses he was taking while abroad helped him to gain a deeper understanding of the course topics. This was especially evident in his response to the prompt in Week 10. For this assignment, students had been asked to read a brief case study about an incident that had taken place in Spain where an American female student and the Spanish SA program director perceived the practice of catcalling in differing ways (the student perceived it as sexual harassment while the director perceived it as part of what American women sometimes experience in his culture). Michael tied his response directly to a topic he had been discussing in another course, specifically noting how it had helped him to continue to think about, and better understand, the topic.

Excerpt 5.40

Thinking about this question [of differing perspectives of ‘sexual harassment’ between Spain and the U.S.] has helped me to understand one of the topics we have been
discussing in my Culture of Immigration class: that of cultural determinism. The idea is that we cannot pigeonhole people into certain tendencies, or accept certain actions as simply correct just under the suggestion that it’s “in someone’s culture to do it. [... This helps me] understand why, because of cultural differences, these female students experienced what in the States would be considered sexual harassment; and why, also because of these differences, the director of the program did not consider them to be so severe and felt that nothing could be done about them.” (Initial post, Week 10)

It is clear from this excerpt that Michael was able to take what he was learning in one of his classes and apply it to the assignments in the online course, thus giving him practice at seeing events and incidents from an other person’s perspective, an important part of developing interculturality. In addition, while the case study took place in a culture other than the one in which he was studying, it still gave him insights into how a person’s culture may impact their perceptions. These insights could then be applied within the context of his own host culture, again helping him to understand the perspectives of others and using that as a way to interpret the experiences that he had.

Another area in which Michael made connections was between his work in the course and in the teaching internship that he was participating in. This aspect of his experience abroad allowed him to interact directly with members of the host culture and to gain a greater understanding of the educational system in Austria. This had the potential to provide him with even greater insights into the culture. The fact that he made these connections to the internship experience demonstrated that the experience did, in fact, impact his learning. For example in Week 5 he noted, “I’ve been learning a lot about the way Austrian schools work in the teaching internship I’m taking” (initial post) and in Week 13 he shared some of the differences between the Austrian and U.S. systems, like “the fact that all teachers are paid by the State, and that the school system forks into two different paths (one for those who will work a trade and one for those who will continue on to university)” (initial post).
The connections that he made between the topics of the course readings and his internship experience also revealed that he was gaining insight into the perspectives of members of the host culture. This can been seen in the following excerpt:

Excerpt 5.41

A lot of the preconceptions [about Americans] I have heard about have been in the classrooms that I teach in. It came as a surprise to me that the students were so well informed as to American politics. But some of the stereotypes that they had were about relating American political parties to their own. It’s easier to stereotype, because America only has two strong political parties, unlike Austria’s six that have representation in government. (Initial post, Week 9)

Here he connected the question about preconceptions of Americans in his host culture that had been posed in the reading and prompt for that week to the interactions that he had had with the students in his internship. This demonstrated that he was able to answer the question posed with information from actual interactions that he had had rather than just guessing as to the preconceptions that members of his host culture might have of Americans. Again, gaining an understanding of issues and questions from the perspective of members of the host culture is a key aspect of developing interculturality and one that Michael was able to participate in quite often during the course.

The final type of connection that Michael made throughout the course is the connection between his current experiences and future ones. Excerpt 5.42 provides an example of this. In this excerpt he made connections to future experiences in cultural contexts other than his home culture and, briefly, to his future teaching context:

Excerpt 5.42

It trips me up sometimes, because here in Vienna things can be awfully similar to the States. Then something happens, and I first think to myself, “what the heck!?” Then I realize, “Oh wait…maybe that’s different here!” It’s going to take a bit to get used to, but as soon as we start thinking more openly about where we are staying now, I’m sure that sort of thinking will carry over into all the other places we visit too! And maybe even on the level of the classroom: everyone sees things differently. Maybe there is a reason someone has acted a certain way! (Response to Samantha, 2/18/13)
The key aspect of this excerpt is that Michael noted that the attitude of openness (“as soon as we start thinking more openly”) was an important one for helping both he and his classmate to understand their current SA contexts (“where we are now”) and for continuing to use this attitude and the insights gained in future intercultural contexts (“that sort of thinking will carry over into all the other places we visit too”). He also then noted that having this type of openness and understanding would help them in their future classrooms as well because it could help them to remember that “everyone sees things differently”. Here Michael demonstrated an important characteristic of interculturality; that is, an attitude of openness and the ability to act upon the insights that are gained in future contexts. He also provided mediation to his classmate through his response; potentially helping her to realize that this attitude and ability could be applied to her own SA experiences as well.

In terms of facilitator mediation of this area, the fact that Michael made connections quite naturally meant that the facilitator did not really need to do much extra mediation with Michael in this area, though she did at times encourage him to reflect on whether his experiences in one situation were similar to or different from experiences in other situations, as was the case in excerpt 5.37 above (“Is this [the lack of lines] the case in all situations (e.g., stores, restaurants, buses, etc.)”). For Michael, the majority of the mediation in this area came from the structure of the course, the activities and blog prompts themselves. These required him to think about specific topics related to culture and language and to reflect on the experiences he had in light of those topics. They also required him to interact with others around these topics and to verbalize and make clear his thinking and understanding. Because of his responsive orientation to the course, Michael was able to take up these mediating activities and take advantage of the opportunities that he had to make the connections and to share those with the other members of the course. Without access to these mediating activities through his participation in the course, however, it is not clear that Michael would have made these connections in the same way or to the same extent.
He certainly would not have had a ready-made ‘space’ in which to share his ideas and clarify his thinking. Again, even though Michael was one of the stronger students in the course with regard to being able to make connections, he still required and benefitted from the mediation provided. As a result of receiving mediation through the course structure and from the facilitator he was able to work toward the development of interculturality in ways that he may not have had he been left to his own devices during his SA experience.

5.5.6 Summary

To summarize the experiences of Michael and the mediation provided to him toward the development of interculturality, the data demonstrated that he had an extremely responsive orientation to both his SA experience and the course. This was demonstrated in his enthusiasm for the course topics as well as his willingness to engage with his classmates and with the mediation that was provided by the course structure and the course facilitator. Having this kind of orientation often allowed Michael to easily reflect on and analyze himself, his home culture, his host culture and language and the interactions and experiences that he had during SA. It also allowed him to readily take up the mediation provided by the facilitator and to experience a relatively ‘smooth’ process of intercultural development because he was open to seeing and understanding new perspectives and to using those to guide his participation in the culture.

With regard to his perception of himself as a user of the L2, Michael did at times have some doubts about his abilities, but he was not preoccupied with those doubts, instead seeing communication difficulties as opportunities for learning and growth. His main way of talking about language had less to do with his struggles and more to do with his perceptions of the usefulness of language and what he learned about the variation, history and evolution of it as well as how language and culture are related. This awareness of the interconnectedness of language
and culture is an important element of interculturality, thus Michael was able to demonstrate his development through his participation in the course as related to this topic. Mediation in this area centered on encouraging Michael to use language to facilitate interactions with members of the host culture rather than allowing negative perceptions of his own language abilities to inhibit his interactions and his learning. The mediation also focused on helping Michael to gain even greater understandings of the relationship between language and culture and of language use in context.

Because some of his experiences with language were less successful than he would have liked and because he sometimes struggled to understand the norms behind cultural events and interactions, Michael at times had emotional responses to his experiences. He was, however, often able to move from these emotional responses to more analytical ones, at least in part with the help of the mediation provided by the course. The facilitator’s mediation was aimed at helping Michael focus on the underlying causes of the issues that he experienced so that he would be able to gain greater insight into the culture and language in order that he could use those insights in future contexts, which he demonstrated that he was able to do.

Finally, Michael’s ability to make connections across experiences demonstrated that he was more future-oriented rather than focusing on the here-and-now of his immediate experiences. This helped him to move beyond his emotional reactions and it also helped him to use a variety of resources for gaining a greater understanding of the topics of his courses (both online and in his abroad program) and of the host culture and target language in which he was interacting. Making these connections allowed Michael to progress in his development of interculturality because it allowed him to continue to develop a more reflective and analytical stance toward himself and his host culture.
5.6 Discussion and conclusion

The reader is reminded that these two cases were chosen because they represented relatively stark contrasts in how students experienced their SA programs and their participation in the course and in the mediation that was required to help them through the process of developing interculturality. Examining the two ends of the spectrum allows for greater understanding of the process of intercultural development that can be applied to other students in the course, especially those in future iterations. As will be discussed in the concluding chapter, it can also provide insights that are useful to intercultural educators working with students who are participating in SA experiences in general, even those not taking this course or one similar to it. In this section a synthesis of the two cases will be presented with specific focus on what students’ experiences within each of the focal areas may reveal about the process of the development of interculturality that students go through while abroad. Also discussed will be the relationship between the mediational foci and interculturality, particularly focusing on the elements of interculturality addressed in each of the students’ experiences as well as how the focal areas may be related to and impacted by one another.

5.6.1 Synthesis of the cases: Samantha and Michael’s differing experiences

Based on the data and discussion provided in the two cases, it is clear that Samantha and Michael had very different experiences in their host cultures and that they responded to and acted upon the mediation provided in very different ways. One of the main (and most important for this work) ways in which they differed was in their orientations to learning in SA and in the course. As will be discussed in greater detail in the following section, the researcher views this aspect of students’ experiences as overarching the other three presented in the chapter. In other words,
students’ orientations to seemed to greatly impact their experiences, course participation, and the mediation required in the other areas as well. It is important to note that the argument is not that there is a direct correlation between students’ orientations and how they experience things such as language, emotional or analytical positioning and making connections across experiences, but rather that their orientation does seem to make particular experiences in those areas more or less likely. For example, while approaching SA with a responsive orientation does not guarantee that students will be more analytical or able to make connections across experiences, it may make those things more likely given that students with this type of orientation are generally more open to engaging fully with their host cultures and with the mediating activities of the course.

Likewise, approaching SA and the course with a more instrumental orientation does not prevent students from engaging with mediation that pushes them to be more analytical or to make connections, but this kind of orientation may make it more difficult because they may be focused more on ‘getting things done’ in the course than on recognizing the assignments and activities as opportunities for development.

When examining the data, it was revealed that Samantha exhibited this type of instrumental orientation during the majority of her SA experience. This meant that she often struggled to understand and take up the mediation that was provided by the course activities, her classmates and the course facilitator. It also meant that she did not necessarily have the tools necessary to develop a greater understanding of the culture and language in which she was interacting, possibly making her development of interculturality a more challenging process.

Michael, on the other hand, approached his time abroad with a responsive orientation that made him extremely open to receiving various forms of mediation and to responding positively and enthusiastically to them. This meant that he was more open and able to develop a greater understanding of the culture and language within which he was interacting. This also meant that he had greater potential to use what he had learned to understand and participate successfully in
future situations and interactions. While Michael seemed to have this type of orientation throughout his time abroad, Samantha’s orientation at times seemed to shift, which, as previously discussed, is often the case with students in the course. At times, particularly as the course progressed, she became more open to responding to the mediation provided in ways that allowed her to use that mediation to help her learn more about the host culture and the target language. She also seemed to have more of a responsive orientation when it came to interacting with members of the host culture in order to become more familiar with the culture, as she had stated in her background survey that she wanted to do.

Students may enter SA with different orientations because this is something that is likely to be impacted by things such as personality characteristics, prior experiences and personal histories. These may all factor into how students approach and respond to any given situation that they experience, including study abroad. While it is not possible, nor did this study attempt, to draw direct causal links between students’ personalities, experiences and histories and how they orient to SA, the two cases provided some interesting insights that may inform future research in this area (see Chapter 6 for further discussion of this). For example, Michael had had several prior experiences spending time outside of his home country for somewhat extended periods of time while Samantha had not. It could be the case, then, that the prior experiences he had had allowed Michael to enter the present one with a more open and responsive orientation because he had been able to work through some of the struggles that students abroad encounter as part of his prior experiences. For Samantha, however, since the present experience was her first extended one, she was working through these struggles as part of her participation in this course.

Students’ goals and expectations for SA and for the course may also impact their orientations. Students entering SA with discrete and concrete goals may have a less responsive orientation to SA in general because they are focused solely on reaching those goals and they may become frustrated when they perceive that they are not reaching them as quickly or as fully as
they had hoped. This may cause them to be less responsive to mediation that encourages them to work toward other goals if they feel that their initial ones are not being met. Students entering with more global and general goals, however, may have a more responsive orientation because they are focused more on the experience as a whole and less on getting to a certain point (e.g., a particular grade or a certain level of language proficiency). This may allow them to be more open to mediation that is aimed at helping them experience the host culture and target language more deeply because they can see the benefits that doing so has for their learning and growth. When considering the two cases in light of this, Samantha had noted some discrete and concrete goals (e.g., receiving a grade of at least ‘C’ in each of her courses, learning to trill her ‘rr’ when speaking Spanish) and she seemed to become frustrated when she did not feel that she was reaching these goals, particularly the language goals. Thus, she was not always as open to mediation that encouraged her to look beyond these topics to expand her cultural and linguistic learning. On the other hand, Michael had noted more general goals (e.g., making friends with many Viennese people and gaining knowledge of Austrian cultural history and current practices), which allowed him to focus more broadly on his experiences and left him more open to mediation that encouraged him to think in new and different ways.

These goals may have been at play as well in students’ perceptions of themselves as users of the L2. Given that Samantha had very specific and discrete goals for her language learning, and given that she struggled with self-doubt of her language abilities from the very beginning, her experiences with language and communication tended to focus on the problems that negatively impacted her interactions rather than on what she was learning or how those issues might help her to learn and grow more generally during her time abroad. The fact that Michael did not set discrete language goals for himself perhaps made it easier for him to see language issues as opportunities for growth rather than as something that hindered his progress or his interactions. Given that he was not specifically focused on language as merely vocabulary and structure, this
may have also made it easier for him to more easily understand the relationship between language and context and the impact that the two have on each other. Mediation for both students, then, focused on encouraging them to overcome their negative perceptions. Mediation for Samantha remained at this level because she continued to have difficulty doing so, but, because of his responsive orientation and the fact that he was able to move beyond his negative perceptions of his language ability, mediation for Michael was able to move beyond this to helping him see various connections between language and culture.

Students’ orientations and whether they focused on more negative aspects of the communication issues that they encountered as opposed to seeing those issues as opportunities for gaining a greater understanding of the host culture or target language were very much related to their ability to move from and emotional to analytical positioning. Both Michael and Samantha had emotional responses to their experiences, as was to be expected given their unfamiliarity with their host cultures and the immediate necessity of using the target language for daily interactions and tasks. A key difference, however, was in their ability to move beyond those responses to their interactions to look more objectively at their experiences. Samantha responded quite emotionally at times to the difficulties that she had in both the language and the culture, frequently focusing on the problems rather than the potential learning opportunities. This often made it difficult for her to think about why the difficulties that she was having might have been taking place even when mediation attempted to help her do so. Michael also responded emotionally at times to the difficulties that he had in the language and culture. However, even as he was responding in this way he was also often able to begin to think about why he might be having those issues and/or why he might be responding emotionally to them (i.e., understanding the underlying and differing values, attitudes and beliefs, including his own, that may be at play).

Another key difference was in the students’ abilities to take up the mediation that was aimed at helping them move from emotional to more analytical responses. Samantha struggled
very much at first to orient responsively to mediation that asked her to think and learn about underlying cultural values that might impact her experiences. As mentioned above, this could be at least partially due to the fact that she did not have a conceptualization of culture that accounted for the ‘invisible’ aspects that she could neither see nor experience. This potentially made it difficult for her, then, to engage with mediation that required her to use this kind of conceptualization because it was not part of the activity of her ZPD. She was, however, able to make somewhat of a shift toward a more analytical positioning toward the end of her program, particularly using interactions with members of the host culture to mediate her understanding of her experiences within it. The fact that Michael seemed to have a conceptualization of culture that accounted more for the ‘invisible’ aspects of it meant that he was much more able to orient responsively to mediation that required him to use this kind of conceptualization to understand the experiences he was having. This may also have been the reason that he was able to set broad goals from the beginning of his SA experience. There were, of course, times in the course that both students had some level of difficulty fully engaging with this kind of mediation. This demonstrated that each of them was still in the process, albeit at differing points, of being able to make this kind of shift from emotional to analytical positioning completely on their own.

Michael and Samantha’s abilities to make connections across their experiences in SA and in the course also differed greatly. Michael was easily able to make connections between the course readings and assignments and his own experiences, between the topics of the online courses and his other courses, between his own experiences and his classmates’ and between his current experiences and his future ones. Samantha, on the other hand, was mostly only able to make connections between her classmates’ experiences and her own. This was because she was very often focused on the here-and-now immediacy of her experiences while Michael was more focused on seeing how prior experiences might inform his current ones and how his current ones might inform future ones. This difference in focus may be due, at least in part, to the students’
differing orientations. For example, it is possible that Michael’s responsive orientation allowed him to be more open and able to take advantage of (i.e., use to help himself make sense of his experiences in the host culture and target language) the mediating activities of the course (e.g., the readings, the activities, the blog prompts, etc.) while Samantha’s more instrumental orientation made it more difficult for her to see the activities as more than items to be completed.

As should be clear from the discussion within each of the cases, the facilitator’s mediation of the students and their experiences and interactions was systematically focused on each of these areas and on attempting to meet the students where they were. For example, the fact that Samantha often negatively viewed her own language learning and use required the facilitator to provide mediation that worked to encourage her to be less hard on herself and to engage with native speakers despite the fear and frustration that she sometimes felt so that she would be able to learn from their cultural insights and use what she learned in future situations. In addition, because Samantha struggled to go beyond a surface-level understanding of culture and was very focused on her own emotions and experiences, the facilitator shifted from asking her to think solely analytically about the incidents and difficulties that she was having to using her concrete experiences and emotions as initial focal points, then shifting again toward requiring more abstract inquiry and analysis. Thus, the facilitator was able to help Samantha put the emotions that she felt in relation to the language and culture into words so that they could be reflected upon and potentially translated into action (Kramsch, 2006). Because Michael was often able to think and understand in more abstract terms from the beginning, the facilitator was able to focus on pushing the analysis that he was already beginning to do even further, helping him to develop even deeper understandings of his host culture and target language. In other words, Michael’s initial understanding of culture positioned him to accept mediation aimed at developing more sophisticated understandings of his experiences, while Samantha’s required constant connections between her everyday concepts and the scientific concepts of the course.
5.6.2 The relationship between the mediational foci and interculturality

As noted in the previous section, students’ orientations to learning in SA and the course is seen as having an overarching, though not necessarily causal, impact on their development of interculturality during study abroad. That is, students with an instrumental orientation might be less likely to see difficulties as opportunities for growth, to understand language as meaning and as impacting and being impacted by context, to operate from a reflective and analytical stance as opposed to an emotional one, or to make connections between past, present and future experiences. Students with a more responsive orientation, in contrast, may find it somewhat easier to do each of those things. Nonetheless, these orientations are not viewed as determinants of ‘success’ in the course but rather as an important starting point for thinking about and mediating students’ development of interculturality.

The reader is reminded that in the work of Byram (1997, 2000) and Deardorff (2008), students’ attitudes, particularly attitudes of openness, curiosity and discovery, are seen as a fundamental place to start when examining students’ intercultural development. Attitudes are also seen as dynamic and shifting in relation to a variety of factors at any given time. For the purposes of this study, parallels can be drawn between these attitudes and students’ orientations in that when students are enacting attitudes of openness, curiosity and discovery they may be more likely to have a responsive orientation because they will be more open to engaging with, learning more about and analyzing and reflecting on their experiences in their host cultures and target languages. When students are not enacting these attitudes, however, they may have a less responsive orientation and may struggle to take up mediation aimed at helping them develop interculturality. Given that students’ attitudes can and do shift, so do their orientations to learning and to the mediation provided. Orientation, then, is seen as impacting students’ overall intercultural development rather than just one aspect of it. In other words, students’ abilities to
understand different perspectives, to question and gain knowledge about their own and other cultures, to critically reflect on and analyze their experiences and to act upon the insights that they gain as a result of this analysis in future interactions and/or contexts may all be affected by the orientations with which they approach learning in SA and in the course.

With regard to the other focal areas and how they relate to interculturality as it is understood for this project, students’ perceptions of themselves as L2 users, and the impact those perceptions have on their interactions, relate to their development of skills and knowledge that allow them to come to understand perspectives different from their own and to question and gain knowledge about their own and other cultures. By participating in interactions with native speakers and learning more from them about their language and culture, students can develop awareness that communication is more complex than just “saying the right word to the right person in the right manner” (Kramsch, 2006, p. 251). They can also gain greater linguistic and cultural knowledge and insights as well as the ability to better interpret both the language and the culture that they experience in a variety of contexts.

Students’ ability to move from emotional responses to a more analytical stance demonstrates the attitude of curiosity, the development of culture-specific knowledge and the skill of interpreting experiences and interactions within the culture. This also relates to students’ abilities to question and gain knowledge about their own and other cultures and, of course, to their abilities to critically reflect on and analyze their experiences. In other words, students who are able to move from emotional to analytical stances are potentially able to experience greater development of interculturality throughout their experiences because they are able to gain more insights into their home and host cultures. Students who are able to do this may, because of their analytical stance, also be able to make connections between and across experiences and to use the insights that they have gained in one context to reorient their thinking and behaviors in other contexts.
5.6.3 Students’ differing processes of developing interculturality

Returning to the cases of Michael and Samantha with regards to their development of interculturality and the ways in which it was mediated, it is clear in the data that both of them did develop interculturally, though to differing degrees. It is also clear that the process of this development was quite different for each of them. Evidence of Michael’s development can be seen in the fact that he was able to come to understand and accept many perspectives and behaviors that were different from his own. He was also able to question both his host culture and his home culture, thus allowing him to critically reflect on and analyze himself and his experiences and to understand that his own way of doing things was not necessarily the ‘natural’ way (Byram, 1997). His development was also demonstrated in the fact that he was able to use the insights that he had gained through reflection, analysis and mediation to make connections and to inform his future experiences and interactions.

Given his responsive orientation to learning and his openness to engaging with various types of mediation, Michael’s process of development could be said to be one that was somewhat ‘smoother’ than many students might experience, though it was not, of course, without some struggles. Because Michael began his SA experience from a more analytical and reflective position, he was able to engage with the mediation provided by the course structure and activities, his classmates and the course facilitator rather easily. Thus, even when he did experience situations that were confusing or upsetting to him (and which produced emotional responses) and even when he encountered questions about the language and/or culture that he could not easily answer, he was usually able to work through those issues and questions with the help of the mediation and at times even on his own. The fact that he continued to require mediation, however, indicates that there were still things for him to learn and still further areas in which he could develop. That is, while his orientation allowed him to be more independent in his
negotiations with the target language and culture than many of the other students, he was still able to benefit from the support that he received from the facilitator and the other mediating elements of the course. In other words, participation in the course allowed for greater development of interculturality for Michael than would have been the case had he been left to his own devices during his SA experience.

Evidence of Samantha’s development can be seen in the fact that she was able to begin to question and gain a greater understanding of both her home and host culture through reflection on her personal experiences and by participating in dialogic interaction with members of the host culture. She was also able to begin to shift from purely emotional responses to her experiences to a slightly more analytical positioning. In addition, she was able to begin to make connections between her classmates’ experiences and her own, which helped her begin to move from focusing solely on her own experiences in the here-and-now to thinking about how her current experiences might impact her learning and/or her future experiences.

Given her instrumental orientation to learning and the focus on her perceived lack of Spanish language skills throughout the course, Samantha’s process of developing interculturality could be seen as a somewhat ‘bumpy’ one. That is, when looking at her development across the experience from beginning to end, times can be seen where she was not particularly responsive to mediation, then she was, then she struggled again, and so on. In other words, this was certainly not a linear or smooth process for Samantha, but rather one that included fits and starts, ups and downs. As the mediation shifted to better match how Samantha was experiencing SA and the course and as she continued to receive recurring types of mediation throughout the course (e.g., in the prompts and interactions) she became at times better able to respond to it and use it in her development. However, when the facilitator attempted to shift the mediation again to push Samantha’s thinking and development, her ability to engage with it sometimes decreased. This type of developmental process is not at all unexpected, particularly from a Vygotskian theoretical
viewpoint, because development itself is not seen as a linear or smooth process. Nor is it seen as taking place within the student but rather through social interaction. The fact that Samantha’s process of developing interculturality included struggles and various levels of responsiveness to mediation at differing times is not at all negative, but rather serves to make it clear that the type of mediation provided, and the ways in which it is provided (e.g., the responsiveness of it to students’ experiences and needs) is a very important aspect that must be understood when making decisions about how students will be supported and encouraged in their development of interculturality during their time abroad.

Ways in which educators working with students during study abroad may benefit from the insights and understandings gained through examining the students’ experiences and the mediational foci of these cases, as well as the mediation provided by the course structure, will be discussed as part of the concluding chapter.
In this chapter, course week numbers (e.g., Week 7, Week 12) are used when referring to students’ initial posts, ‘last word’ responses and facilitator feedback while specific dates (e.g., 2/11/13) are used when referring to classmate responses. This is done for clarity, as, due to the organization of the course, students did not always respond to classmates who were in the same week of the course as they were (e.g., Samantha may have been posting in Week 10 but responding to a classmate’s Week 4 post).

It is important to note that these terms were ones that Samantha had been exposed to and had discussed in previous courses taught by the facilitator. This meant that she potentially had both of the conceptualizations available to her upon entering the blog course. A discussion of the potential impact of prior instruction on the topic of culture will take place in the concluding chapter.
Chapter 6

Discussion and Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

This chapter will review the key findings of the study, briefly revisiting the research questions in light of the analysis and specifically examining what has been learned through this project about the impact of the mediation provided by the course structure and activities on students’ processes of intercultural development. Also examined will be the impact that this research might have on future iterations of the course itself (e.g., revisions to elements of the course that may allow for even greater understanding and mediation of students’ development of interculturality) and, more broadly, its potential relevance to other intercultural educators working with students while abroad, particularly in the context of formal courses. In addition, the limitations of the study will be discussed, along with possibilities for continued research in this area.

6.2 Insights gained about mediation and the development of interculturality

As was discussed in earlier chapters, and as has come to be understood and acknowledged by other researchers in the field (see Aguilar Stewart, 2010; Byram, 1997; DeKeyser, 2010; Jackson, 2008; Smolcic, 2013), students cannot be left to their own devices while abroad with the assumption that they will develop linguistically and/or culturally on their own just by virtue of being in a new culture. Instead, this process should be mediated through the provision of resources and opportunities for interaction in order to help students question their
own and other cultures and to reflect on and analyze their linguistic and cultural experiences. In this way, we may hope that students will take what they learn and apply it in future settings so that they can interact more appropriately (i.e., according to established norms and values) and effectively (i.e., achieving particular objectives) in each new setting. This mediation may be provided in a variety of ways including, as was the case in the research discussed here, through activities that students are required to complete and through dialogic interactions with both peers and a more knowledgeable course facilitator. Examining the overarching mediation provided by the course structure and activities (Chapter 4) and the mediational foci that emerged during the course facilitator’s dialoging with individual learners (Chapter 5) allows for a better understanding of the processes of learner development of interculturality and how it may be promoted. These discussions are briefly revisited in what follows.

6.2.1 Insights into the mediation provided by the course

As was discussed in Chapter 3, the course was designed specifically with systematic and dialogic mediation of students’ interculturality in mind. From the Vygotskian sociocultural perspective that served as the theoretical underpinning of the course, development is understood not as a natural process internal to learners and driven by internal individual factors but rather as a result of dialogic social interactions with others that allow individuals to appropriate particular cultural tools. Thus, the research questions were aimed at understanding how the various tools of mediation offered by the course allowed the students to come to greater understandings of themselves and, in this case, their host cultures and target languages. The questions were also aimed at discovering what students’ participation in the course revealed about their intercultural development and how their processes of development needed to be mediated by course activities and materials and by the course facilitator. As has been mentioned several times before, the goal
of the course and of the analysis performed here was not that students reach a certain ‘level’ of interculturality in order to be considered ‘successful’ in the course. Rather the purpose was to examine the relation between mediation that was negotiated with individual students in the course and their intercultural experiences.

In terms of the first research question, which explored how the various forms of mediation served to help students co-construct opportunities that mediated their critical reflection on, and reorientation toward, the linguistic and cultural contexts in which they were situated, the data revealed that each element of the course (e.g., the blog prompts, students’ initial responses to the prompts and the classmate, facilitator and ‘last word’ responses), individually and in concert with each other, provided these kinds of opportunities. The blog prompts functioned to require students to critically examine and reflect on themselves and their experiences within the target language and culture. Students’ responses to these prompts then allowed them to verbalize their thinking, make connections between their lived experiences and the more abstract concepts in the readings and activities, and examine topics in new ways as well as communicate ideas and thoughts they might not otherwise have had the chance to discuss.

Students’ dialogic interactions with their classmates offered an additional and related form of mediation. It was here that students engaged in expanding their cultural knowledge through learning more about each other’s experiences, pushing each other’s analytical thinking through the questions that they asked, and learning more about language use in context, both in their own and their classmates’ target language and culture. Like students’ initial responses to the blog, classmate responses also functioned to provide them with new ideas and ways of thinking about topics and with advice/useful information that could be applied in their own contexts.

The course facilitator’s responses worked to systematically push students to think beyond generalizations that they were making and to compel them toward more analytical thinking; that is, explaining not just that something had happened or was a certain way, but also why that might
be the case (i.e., what might be the underlying values or beliefs at work). A related foci of the facilitator’s mediating efforts in this regard entailed helping students move from emotional interpretations of their intercultural experiences to more analytical interpretations. In addition, the facilitator’s responses served to mediate students’ understanding of the target language, uses of the language they encountered, and their perception of themselves as users of the language. Finally, the ‘last word’ responses allowed students to clarify and/or rethink aspects of their initial posts, to share further cultural or linguistic information that they had gained and also to discuss aspects of the culture that they wanted to learn more about along with how they intended to go about achieving that learning. All of these elements of the course worked together, then, to provide students with opportunities to reflect on themselves and their experiences and to reorient their thinking and behaviors in ways that could be applied in subsequent experiences and interactions.

6.2.2 Insights into mediating students’ developing interculturality

While it was found that these mediating opportunities were made available to students by the course structure and activities, the analysis also revealed that students engaged with these opportunities in varying ways and to varying degrees throughout the course. This level of engagement with mediation, then, affected their development of interculturality. Both their engagement with the mediation and their development of interculturality were revealed by the shifting ways in which students understood and talked about themselves and the language and culture in which they were situated during their participation in course assignments and interactions. The evolution of students’ ways of thinking and talking about themselves and their contexts, in relation to the mediation, provided interesting insights in answer to the second research question (How does the students’ thinking about themselves and the language and
culture(s) in which they are participating evolve during the course… and what does this suggest about their intercultural development?) as well as into their processes of developing interculturality. What became evident was that certain aspects of the students’ experiences abroad and in the course were particularly relevant to their development of interculturality. It was revealed that these areas were also the foci of much of the mediation provided by the course facilitator. Specifically, these were students’ orientation to learning in SA and the course, their perceptions of themselves as users of the L2, their ability to move from an emotional to analytical positioning and their ability to make connections across experiences. While all of the students within the course had experiences that varied with regard to these areas, the cases of Michael and Samantha were chosen for closer examination because they represented clear contrasts in their experiences, in the ways in which they talked about those experiences and in the ways in which they engaged with the mediation made available. They also experienced different processes of development and, while both can certainly be said to have developed, the extent to which they had moved toward interculturality differed at the end of the course.

A key finding of the study was that students’ orientations toward learning in SA and the course had a significant affect on their development of interculturality. Students with a more responsive orientation were more easily able, by engaging with the mediation available through the course and through their contexts (e.g., members of the host culture), to develop the attitudes, knowledge and skills necessary to question and learn about their own and other cultures, to understand perspectives different from their own and to critically reflect on and analyze their experiences. While students with a more instrumental orientation may have been able to do these things as well, at least to some extent, it was often more difficult for them to do so because they were not as likely to fully engage with mediation that was aimed at helping them develop these skills, attitudes and knowledge and at helping them see the course activities as opportunities for development rather than as items to be completed for a grade. As previously discussed, students’
orientations can and do shift at times based on factors such as their interest in the course topics, the personal experiences they are having, etc. Of key importance, then, is that the facilitator must work to be aware of the orientations that students are operating from at any given time and to adjust the mediation accordingly. That is to say that where students are coming from (i.e., the orientations with which they are approaching their experiences) must be the starting point of the mediation.

Another finding was that the experiences that students had with language and communication, and the perceptions that they had of themselves as L2 users, also affected their development of interculturality. Some students may enter SA with very specific goals for their language learning and at times become frustrated when they are not able to reach those goals. They may also see language and culture as two separate things, especially at the beginning of SA. Thus, in these cases students’ perceptions of language may be more focused on lexical or structural aspects and less focused on seeing it as meaning-based and as both impacting and being impacted by the context(s) in which it is used. Given that understanding language in this latter way is a significant element of interculturality, students who struggle to have this understanding of language may be at somewhat of a disadvantage in their development. This means that the focus of the mediation in this area should be on helping students go from concentrating on the negative aspects of their issues and struggles with language, which might inhibit their learning and development, to seeing those struggles as opportunities for learning and growth which can then be applied in future interactions and which might facilitate the learning and development. Mediation can also be focused on helping students to learn more about specific relationships between their target language and host culture and how the beliefs and attitudes of the culture may be reflected in the language, giving them greater insights into the perspectives of others and helping them continue through the process of developing interculturality.
As has been discussed in previous chapters, moving from emotional responses to experiences within the host culture to a more analytical stance is one of the most important aspects of developing interculturality. Students who are able to reflect on and analyze themselves and their experiences may be more easily able to develop interculturally because they can look beyond themselves and their struggles to understand the perspectives of others, thus allowing them to realize that their way of doing things is not the only way and certainly not the ‘right’ or ‘natural’ (Byram, 1997) way of doing things. This can then help them to approach future situations with a more open mind and with the ability to interpret the differing cultural values or beliefs that may be causing them to experience the feelings that they have. This does not mean that they will not have emotional reactions, but rather that they will be more easily able to move past those emotions to a deeper understanding of the culture that can be applied in future contexts and that can help them continue to learn about new ways of thinking and being.

Students who struggle to go beyond these emotional reactions may experience greater difficulties in the process of developing interculturality because their focus may remain on themselves and their own perspectives rather than on learning about and understanding the perspectives of others. Mediation in this area, then, must be focused on helping students look for the underlying causes of their emotional reactions. It is also important that the mediation meet the students where they are in order to push them further. While this is, of course, an important aspect of all intercultural mediation, it is particularly salient here because if the facilitator attempts to provide mediation that focuses on analysis but the student is only really able to focus at that time on his or her own emotions, that mediation may be unsuccessful. Mediation must, instead, help the students to first process through their emotions (Kramsch, 2006) and then begin to help them look for and understand the underlying causes. Once this shift is made, students may have a much greater chance of using this practice of reflection and analysis that is necessary for developing interculturality. Similarly, mediation must also focus on helping students make systematic
connections between experiences whenever possible so that they may be able to gain greater insights into their host culture and target language and so that they may learn to use a variety of resources (e.g., other courses, their classmates’ experiences, experiences in multiple contexts) to further their own learning and development. The mediation must also be focused on helping students see how their current experiences might connect to their future ones, perhaps even by explicitly making the connections for them until they become more able to do so on their own.

6.3 Contributions of the study

The findings of this study have the potential to contribute to future iterations of the course itself, and the mediation that takes place therein. At the same time, it is hoped that this research will be of interest to other educators who are working with students as they are in the process of developing interculturality.

Analysis of the data has provided insights into how the course may be further developed in future iterations with even greater mediation toward the development of interculturality. For example, given that the mediational foci discussed above have been found to be important for students’ intercultural development, the course and the facilitator can work to be attuned to these from the outset. That is, revisions could be made to course activities and to the facilitator’s mediation that allow for more in-depth focus on these areas right from the beginning of the course. This could perhaps even be started before the students leave to go abroad so that they can begin to think about the topics ahead of the struggles and questions that they might face. This would also allow the facilitator to begin to learn about things such as students’ orientations to learning and their perceptions of themselves as L2 users so that her mediation can be more attuned to meet the students there they are from the very beginning.
Another revision that could be made is for the facilitator to “teach” the students more about what to do in specific situations rather than just asking questions that try to lead students to particular understanding or behaviors. In other words, there may be times when it is more appropriate for the facilitator to offer specific direction to help students develop a particular aspect of interculturality. This would be especially important for students who struggle to engage with the more general mediation because it could provide them with specific knowledge or skills that may help them in their developmental process. This might be accomplished through the addition of intercultural ‘cases’ that the students are required to think about and provide comments and/or recommendations on. These could then be discussed and mediated by the facilitator in order to move the students’ thinking in the desired direction. This could be done very early in the course or, perhaps, even prior to students actually going abroad in order to better position them to deal with the situations that they will encounter themselves.

Finally, there is always the potential for revision of course topics that may be more relevant to the students in a given cohort. One topic that may be important to address more directly, as revealed by the data in the current study, is the notion of culture and how students understand it. If there is indeed a connection between students’ orientations to learning in SA and their conceptualizations of culture (a topic of inquiry that will be discussed below), then the argument could be made for inclusion of a conceptual treatment of the topic as part of the course. This might, again, be accomplished by the study of particular cases or, perhaps, through additional readings and activities that help students to develop a deeper understanding of culture and the elements of it that impact their daily lives and interactions.

In addition to the impact of the research on the course itself, this study has attempted to fill the gap that exists in SA research due to the lack of a specific focus on the processes of intercultural development that students go through while they are abroad and how those processes might be mediated. This was done by looking specifically at the ways in which the mediation
provided supported students in their development and at how the processes of development were revealed through students’ participation in the course and their engagement with the mediation provided. This is important because looking specifically at the forms of mediation provided by the course, including systematically guided reflection and analysis, and attempting to determine the ways in which that mediation impacted students in their development of interculturality allows for a greater understanding of the ways in which particular students can be supported in particular ways as they are attempting to become participating members of the new culture using their L2. This, then, has the potential to impact the ways in which SA course instructors and program coordinators interact with and assist students in their intercultural interactions and development. While it is, of course, the case that no two students or contexts are the same, the data from this study can help inform intercultural educators of a variety of ways in which they might approach and implement their mediation with different students. It can also help inform them of activities that may be useful, whether carried out in the context of a full course or simply added as part of a program that already exists, for mediating their students’ development of interculturality.

As revealed in the data for this study, some of the activities that may be most helpful in this area are requiring students to dialogue with the educator and with classmates in order to verbalize their thinking about the experiences and issues that they may be having. Also important is requiring students to more deeply analyze their experiences. While SA programs sometimes include a blog or journaling component, it may be the case that students are only asked to write about their experiences, but not go deeper into reflecting on the experiences and analyzing the causes of any issues that they may encounter. It may also be the case that students do not receive feedback on their writing in ways that push them toward interculturality (i.e., understanding the perspectives of others or questioning their own and their host culture) and toward applying what they have learned in future contexts. The feedback and the foci of the mediation provided by the
facilitator in this course, then, can offer suggestions for what other intercultural educators may do to help their own students in the process of developing interculturality.

Another contribution of the current study is related to the benefit of understanding students’ orientations to learning during SA and to the mediating activities of the course. Understanding how students may orient to learning in their SA experiences and to the opportunities for mediation that they encounter while abroad is important because it can help both researchers and practitioners gain a greater understanding of how intercultural development is impacted by these factors. It may also help shape the ways in which they attempt to mediate their students by providing useful insights into the students’ developing knowledge and attitudes that then inform the types and foci of mediation that are made available. More important, it provides a basis for a mediator to think seriously about the forms of mediation that individual students might require, recognizing that a single type of statement, question, or prompt cannot be expected to evoke similar responses from all students. This, it is hoped, will prove relevant to other educators who work with students developing interculturality, particularly during SA. While it cannot offer specific direction for how to work with every student in every context, a limitation that will be described in the following section, it can offer some general ways of thinking about the mediation provided and the ways in which it might impact students’ processes of development.

6.4 Limitations of the study

One limitation of the current study concerns the small number of participants and the specific program of study within which it took place (i.e., a specific population of future language teachers). One may legitimately ask how the experiences of these particular students might be similar to or different from other populations of students (e.g., those not seeking to be language teachers or those studying abroad in a country where they are already highly proficient in the
target language). It could be the case, for example, that students who are not planning to become language teachers would find other aspects of their experiences abroad more salient or that they would require different types and/or foci of mediation than those the students in the current study. For example, those who are already highly proficient in the language of their host culture may not require mediation in that area, but the cultural aspects of communication, rather than the linguistic ones, might be much more salient for those students.

Another limitation of the study, and one that stems from the design of the course, concerns the primary mode of facilitator-student and student-student communication. Because most of the dialogue takes place in writing and in an asynchronous setting, the students can choose which questions from their classmates and the facilitator they want to answer and to what extent. This means that there may be issues or questions that they have not fully addressed in their ‘last word’. As a result, the mediation of that particular topic may not be as thorough as it could have been. For example, there may be times when the facilitator could push students further in their thinking and their development of interculturality but is unable to do so because the students, and even the facilitator herself, have already turned their attention to the next week’s topic. Without the extremely thorough and in-depth discussion that could come from continued dialogue it may be difficult to fully examine for research the students’ process of development and also to know how they would respond if they were provided with continued mediation. One way of mitigating this limitation, as alluded to in Chapter 4, could be to use the videoconferencing aspect of the course more frequently. This would allow the facilitator and the student to engage in more face-to-face interactions that would provide opportunities for more in-depth and mediating discussions.

Finally, while the data offers some insights into whether/how students use what they have learned to orient their future interactions within their SA contexts, it cannot, nor did it attempt to, speak to how the students might use what they have learned outside of this context, whether at
home, in another intercultural context, or even in their future classrooms. To mitigate this, the ‘case’ approach, as discussed in the previous section, might again be used in order to understand how students transfer their understandings to new contexts. For example, at the end of the course students might be provided with intercultural cases that take place in contexts different from their SA contexts (e.g., encountering an international student from Saudi Arabia after returning to their home university) and then asked again to provide comments, insights and/or recommendations. Their responses may allow for an understanding of the ways in which they are thinking about themselves and others in those different contexts, as well as providing insights into how they might apply specific elements of interculturality that they have learned in the course to future situations. This connection between students’ SA experiences and their future experiences, including future teaching, could also be a topic for continued research, as will be discussed in the final section.

6.5 Directions for continued research

There are many different directions for continued research that may be taken based on the insights gathered from the study discussed here. For example, as was discussed in Chapter 5, students’ overall orientations to learning during SA and in the course seemed to be an overarching factor in relation to the other mediational foci. It was also the case that students’ conceptualizations of culture seemed to impact the goals that they set for themselves during SA as well as the main type of orientation with which they approached their experiences. Further research may help determine whether there is any kind of causal link between students’ orientations and the ways in which they perceive themselves as language users or the extent to which they are able to move from emotional to analytical responses or make connections between and across experiences. This could provide facilitators with significant insights that could help
inform and focus their mediation of each individual student in particular ways. Further research could also help to determine whether there is any link between students’ conceptualizations of culture and the ways in which they orient to SA and to the mediating activities that are made available. This could provide insights that could help inform how the concept of culture may be brought into students’ programs, both prior to going abroad and while they are in their host cultures.

Based on analysis of the cases of Samantha and Michael as well as data from the other students in the cohort not featured in this study, it may be the case that students with prior experiences studying abroad may orient more responsively to their experiences and to the mediation provided by the course. Carrying out research specifically looking at students who have been abroad and how they experience the course, orient to the learning and engage with the mediation could help determine whether and to what extent this is, indeed, the case. This could provide facilitators with insights into the ways in which students who have been abroad before and those who have not will require differing types and degrees of mediation toward developing interculturality.

Given that this research is being carried out in a program and course for pre-service teachers, several lines of further research could be directed at this topic. For example, one area that could be examined is how the intercultural development that takes place may orient pre-service teachers’ future work within a classroom context, both in student teaching and in their own classroom after completing their university program. That is, it could examine how they might use the knowledge, skills and attitudes that they have gained as teaching tools for helping their own students begin to develop greater intercultural understanding. This could provide useful insights that might impact how the course facilitator specifically works to mediate the connections that the students make between their experiences abroad and their future teaching.

Perhaps an element could also be built into the course in which students are required to
participate in a service-learning component that takes place in a classroom in their host community, thus placing them in the role of teacher while they are still in their host culture. This could then become a site for examining the relationship between their experiences in that classroom and their intercultural development or for examining the impact of that teaching experience on their future teaching experiences once they return home.

Finally, to take this notion of helping pre-service teachers make connections between their time abroad and their classroom teaching even further, a very interesting future project could be to include as part of their teacher education program, most likely in teaching methods courses, training for teachers in how to help their students begin to develop interculturality for themselves. Research on this could then examine whether/how/to what extent the pre-service teachers are able to use their own processes of developing interculturality to inform the ways in which they help their own students through the process.

Each of these areas for further research could continue to cultivate a rich understanding of students’ development of interculturality during study abroad, how that may be applied in future contexts, and how that development may be affected by specific and systematic mediation that aims to push students’ reflection on, and analysis of, themselves and the culture and language in which they are living, learning and interacting.
References


Appendix A

Full Course Syllabus

LANGUAGE LEARNING THROUGH STUDY ABROAD (WL ED 399A)

The field of second language acquisition now includes a substantial body of research examining the gains students make in language proficiency and cultural understanding during study abroad. This research points to the need for additional forms of support to ensure that all students benefit from their time abroad. It is increasingly clear that some students make considerable gains while others develop comparatively little. Moreover, experience in the field of teacher education indicates that even those students who benefit considerably from their time abroad are not always well positioned to integrate their insights, knowledge, and experiences into classroom teaching.

Goal: The purpose of this course is to facilitate collective discussion of and reflection on experiences during study abroad. Moreover, course activities are designed to prompt students to engage with members of the target culture with the aim of documenting interactional norms and contextual variation of target language use; gaining insights into the target culture through dialogue with native speakers, observation of cultural practices, and examination of cultural artifacts; and reflecting on ways in which these insights may be brought into subsequent classroom practice, field experiences and student teaching. In fact, you will be expected to demonstrate during the WL ED 495C field experience and student teaching that you are integrating the artifacts you collect while abroad as well as your reflections and analyses of the target language and culture.

Requirements:

1. Course Blog: The course blog is available at https://protected.personal.psu.edu/m/x/mxh299/blogs/wl_ed_399a_language_learning_abroad/. This is a protected blog so you will need to log in to the blog each time with your PSU Access account. You are required to submit weekly blog postings that address assigned topics (see schedule below) and meet set criteria (e.g., approximately 1.5 pages, typed, double-spaced). In addition, you must write a brief response to another student’s blog entry each week (see Response Schedule on course blog) and then, in turn, respond to your classmates’ response. This will be a sort of ‘last word’ in which you answer questions posed by your classmates or otherwise continue the discussion raised by the entry and response. The hope, of course, is that this is not actually the last word on the topic, but rather that your thinking and dialogue will continue to develop throughout the course. You are also responsible for responding to Michelle’s feedback on your posts each week. Entries are due no later than Friday at 10pm (local time), responses to other students’ entries are to be posted no later than Monday at 10pm (local time) of that week, and ‘last words’ are due no later than Tuesday at 10pm (local time). Responses to Michelle’s feedback are due Thursday at 10pm (local time). In total, there will be 11 blog entries and associated sets of responses. The entries and responses will be in English since we are not all studying the same language. Your performance will be evaluated each week (out of 10 points) and written responses will also be provided.
If desired, you may choose one week of the semester when, rather than posting a written response on the blog, you instead submit an audio or video file about the topic for that week. This would not be simply a reading of something you have written, but rather it would be used as a way to enhance/clarify your response for that week and should be creative and interesting (perhaps in song or story-telling format). Keep in mind that your audio/video file would also serve as a resource that you can keep and use in your future classroom practice, including during your 495C field experience and student teaching. This is NOT required, but could provide you with a great resource for your future teaching, so it is something to consider.

For some of the weeks, the blog responses will be based on readings. These readings, along with particular questions/topics to focus on are posted on the course blog on the Readings page.

Note: This is a professional rather than personal blog, and therefore the content and tone of your entries and comments to one another must remain professional at all times.

2. Inquiry Activities: Three written reports (approximately 3 pages each, typed, double-spaced) are required that report on the following inquiry activities. These are intended to prompt you to gain awareness of language use and variation in the local environment, engage with native speakers of the language, and experience and investigate aspects of the local culture. Inquiry activities may be completed in any order but all three must be completed by the end of the course (see due dates below). Like the blogs, these activities provide another set of resources that can be shared with your future language students.

A. Linguistic Analysis – For this activity, you will undertake a careful analysis of language use in both formal and informal signs that you encounter in streets, at restaurants, at stations, etc. You will be asked to photograph several examples of language used in signs and also to discuss questions you have regarding the signs with a native speaker/expert users. In your analysis, you should comment on how language is used in the signs (e.g., single words, commands, phrases, idiomatic expressions, unusual vocabulary, etc.) and to compare this with similar signs you are familiar with from the U.S.

B. Interview – This encourages the activity of developing connections with other people and involves an in-depth conversation or series of conversations with a member of the target culture (someone in your host family, a person at the institution where you are studying, or someone you have simply met). The focus of the interview is to elicit a biography of the native speaker/expert user of the language, including details of his/her life and experiences as well as insights into his/her views, values, and beliefs. You should use your notebook computer to make a video and audio recording of the interview to facilitate your analysis. You will be asked to submit a report of the interview that includes commentary on how this individual’s life experiences and perspectives compares with those of many people in the U.S. You should also include excerpts of the video/audio recording of the interview to demonstrate some of the interesting points that emerged. [Keep in mind that this creates an authentic resource that you can take with you when you begin teaching and use to illustrate features of the target language or other noteworthy points.]

Remember, as an interviewer your role is not to agree or disagree with the individual’s views nor to share your own perspectives but rather to try to understand what s/he thinks and why (i.e., what values or beliefs these views suggest).

C. Participatory observation – Here you move from the ‘sidelines’ and actually take part in the culture (to the extent that the immediate context enables you to do so). That is, you are
participating as you are able while also observing behaviors, norms, customs, forms of interaction, and all other phenomenon that strike you as noteworthy. Examples of cultural activities or contexts that you may consider include: a visit to a primary or secondary school, hospital, factory, or government office, etc.; traditions associated with a cultural holiday or festival; host family/friend birthday or wedding, etc. What is crucial here is your reflection on the experience, contrasting it with how these activities or contexts would likely play out in the U.S.

3. Videoconferencing: You will be asked to videoconference three times during the semester. **Twice** you will be asked to meet with Michelle through Skype to discuss your experiences. These meetings will be scheduled on an individual basis at a time that is convenient for both you and Michelle. You will also be asked to meet once through Skype with a classmate who is attending a program in a different country. In this session you will do a general comparison of your experiences and you will also be asked to discuss one of the Inquiry Activity assignments that you have submitted. In addition, you will be asked to submit a brief write-up of what you learned as a result of your discussion (further details will be provided). You may also be asked to Skype in to a class that is being taught by a WL ED student who is currently student teaching. More details will be provided as the semester progresses.

4. Blogfolio: As a culminating synthesis of your learning and your experiences abroad, you will be asked to create a “blogfolio,” a portfolio collection that draws upon your blog entries, responses to and exchanges with other students, and inquiry activities. The purpose is to have an archive of your development through this journey as well as your reflection at the end of the experience and as you look toward returning to the U.S. and furthering your preparation as a world language educator. This assignment is a compilation of the work that you have done throughout the semester, not the production of new material, though it will include a rationale for and discussion of your choice of materials and discussion of your progress/change as a result of your participation in the course. The blogfolio is to be submitted via Taskstream.

**Note:** During study abroad and in all course activities and discussions, we will maintain an ethnographic orientation to the target language and culture. This involves following an inquiry or investigative rather than judgmental approach to interactions in the target culture. A rule-of-thumb employed by cultural anthropologists that would be good to keep in mind is to ask yourself the question: *What is this culture like?* rather than: *Do I like this culture?* It goes without saying that being in a different cultural system you will encounter beliefs, behaviors, practices, and interactional patterns that you are not accustomed to. While you do not need to embrace them and abandon your own cultural identity, it is also important that you do not reject them out of hand as ‘weird’ or ‘bad.’ This involves resisting any impulse to define your experiences through stereotypes (positive or negative), and instead trying to understand the culture and people in your new environment. Remember, this is your opportunity to experience the target culture firsthand, and as a World Languages Educator you will eventually function as an ambassador or intermediary between the target culture and the culture of the students you will teach.

**Distribution of Final Grade:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Weight</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Course Blog/Videoconferences</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blogfolio</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inquiry Activities (3)</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Course Calendar*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SA Week</th>
<th>Blog Topic</th>
<th>Readings</th>
<th>Assignments Due+</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Week 1-2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### Part I: Developing a beginning awareness of your new culture

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week 3</th>
<th>Arrival: What was expected, unexpected, challenging, etc.</th>
<th>Storti (2001), Chapters 1 &amp; 5</th>
<th>Background survey and blog entry</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Week 4</td>
<td>Dealing with country/culture shock</td>
<td></td>
<td>Reading Response blog entry</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Part II: Language as negotiated activity

| Week 5  | Observation and analysis of language use (interaction patterns) |                                                                           | Carefully observe an everyday communicative event (more details on blog prompt) |
|---------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|                                                                          |                                                                                  |
| Week 6  | Cross-cultural (mis)communication                               | Tannen (1984) “The pragmatics of cross-cultural communication”            | Reading response blog entry                                                      |
| Week 7  | Linguistic variation (including attitudes and stereotypes)      |                                                                           | Talk with a native speaker/expert user of the language about linguistic variation and his/her attitudes toward it (more details on blog prompt) |
| Week 8  | No blog topic this week, but you WILL still respond to classmates in different weeks, as applicable; use the time to work on your first inquiry |                                                                           | Inquiry Activity I due by midnight Sunday                                         |

### Part III: Perceiving through language and culture

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week 9</th>
<th>Cultural and personal perceptions</th>
<th>Novinger (2001) Chapter 3</th>
<th>Reading response blog entry</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Week 10</td>
<td>Gender and culture</td>
<td>[Brief case study to consider]</td>
<td>Response to case study</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Part IV: Self as language learner and user

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week 11</th>
<th>Social identity and language use</th>
<th>Kinginger (2004) “Alice doesn’t live here anymore”</th>
<th>Reading response blog entry</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Week 12</td>
<td>The multilingual social actor</td>
<td>Excerpt from Kramsch (2009)</td>
<td>Reading response blog entry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 13</td>
<td>Impact of study abroad on future classroom practice</td>
<td></td>
<td>Blog entry</td>
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### Part V: Course conclusion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week 14</th>
<th>Intercultural competence in World Languages Education</th>
<th>Byram (2009) “Intercultural competence in foreign languages”</th>
<th>Reading response blog entry Inquiry Activity III due by midnight Sunday</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Week 15</td>
<td>Blogfolio</td>
<td></td>
<td>Blogfolio submitted via Taskstream</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note that start and end dates vary depending upon individual program schedules. Therefore, Week 1 for some students will not be Week 1 for all.*

+Additional information will be provided for each topic/assignment on the course blog.

**Important Dates for all PSU students:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date Range</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jan 7th – Jan 16th</td>
<td>Drop/Add Period</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan 17th – Apr 5th</td>
<td>Late Drop Period</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apr 26th</td>
<td>Withdrawal Deadline</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

More information can be obtained from the Registrar's Office. (863-8500 / 865-6357 or online at [Registrar@psu.edu](mailto:Registrar@psu.edu)).

**DISABILITY STATEMENT:** Penn State welcomes students with disabilities into the University's educational programs. If you have a disability-related need for reasonable academic adjustments, contact the Office for Disability Services (ODS) at 814-863-1807 (V/TTY). For further information regarding ODS, please visit the Office for Disability Services website at [http://equity.psu.edu/ods/](http://equity.psu.edu/ods/). In order to receive consideration for course accommodations, you must contact ODS and provide documentation (see the documentation guidelines at [http://equity.psu.edu/ods/guidelines/documentation-guidelines](http://equity.psu.edu/ods/guidelines/documentation-guidelines)). If the documentation supports the need for academic adjustments, ODS will provide a letter identifying appropriate academic adjustments. Please share this letter and discuss the adjustments with your instructor as early in the course as possible. You must contact ODS and request academic adjustment letters at the beginning of each semester.

**Penn State Policy on Academic Integrity:**

In accordance with section 49-20 of the University's policy on academic integrity, cheating, plagiarizing, submitting another person’s work, and tampering with another person’s work are all forms of academic dishonesty. More information can be found by accessing the following website: [http://www.psu.edu/polreg/studguid.html#R64](http://www.psu.edu/polreg/studguid.html#R64). Violation of this code will result in immediate failure of the course and students may be referred to Judicial Affairs for further disciplinary action.
Appendix B

Initial Background Survey

Q1: Please provide your name, age, gender, U.S. hometown and current study abroad location

Q2: How many years have you studied a language (or languages), in what context(s) have you studied and why did you choose to study language- both in general and for your specific language(s)?

Q3: What is your motivation for becoming a language teacher? Please be as specific as possible.

Q4: Other than the fact that it is a requirement of the program, why have you decided to participate in a study abroad program this semester? Again, please be as specific as possible.

Q5: Do you have previous study abroad experience? If so, where did you study, when and for how long? What type of housing did you live in?

Q6: Which type of living arrangement are you currently in (dorm, apartment, host family, etc.)? Why did you choose this type of arrangement?

Q7: What are the expectations and goals (social, academic, linguistic, cultural, etc.) that you have for yourself during your time abroad? How will you attempt to reach those goals? Please be as specific as possible.

Q8: What are your expectations/goals for your participation in this course? What do you hope to get out of it and why?
Appendix C

List of Blog Prompts

WEEK 3
As part of your response this week, **please fill out the following background information survey**: [http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/D37DKN5](http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/D37DKN5). (Depending on how much you write, and I would like you to be as specific as possible, it will probably take you around 15 - 20 minutes to complete.)

Your first blog post will be related to your arrival in your respective country/city. Please discuss the following (**NOTE**: please write in prose/paragraph format rather than simply reposting the questions with your answers):

*Any travel/arrival issues that you had and how you handled them
*Whether your experiences so far match your expectations (along with how or how not); this can be related to what the country/city is like, what the people are like, what your host family is like (if applicable), what the school is like, etc.
*Your biggest challenge in your first couple of weeks and how you are attempting to work through it

Your entry (along with your classmate response and 'final word') should be in the form of a comment to this blog entry.

**NOTE**: Please see the "Start Dates" entry for your specific due date for this first blog post. Let me know asap if you have any questions or issues.

WEEK 4
(REMEMBER that the articles/chapters can be found under Readings at the top of the page.)

In relating these two chapters (1 & 5) to your own experiences that you have had so far, I would like you to respond to the following questions:

*Which of the aspects of a new country mentioned by Storti (climate, loss of routines, etc.) do you think have been the most difficult for you to adjust to so far and why? Which, if any, have you not found particularly problematic and why do you think that might be the case?
*In chapter 1, Storti notes: "Some other consequences of adjusting to so much that is new and different are frustration, anger, irritability, and impatience. And from time to time you may also feel threatened, vulnerable, anxious, incompetent, and foolish. Your self-esteem and self-confidence, in short, take quite a beating" (p. 19). How do you see this relating to your own experiences so far? Have you experienced any or all of these emotions? When and why? What have you done, if anything, to try to make the situation better for yourself?
*What do you think about Storti's assertion that the cause of cultural incidents is "the assumption that other people are like us" (p.75)? Do you agree or disagree? Why? Have you found yourself guilty of making this assumption in your experience abroad? If so, what issues has this caused for you?
*What are your thoughts on the suggestions that Storti makes throughout chapter 5 for ways to help prevent cultural incidents? Are there any that you think might be helpful in your own situations (that you have either tried already or intend to try)? If so, which ones and why?

**WEEK 5**

This activity harkens back to the communication ethnography assignment that you completed in WL ED 300 and is meant to help you heighten your awareness of the everyday uses of language that characterize and help to create our worlds. In addition, as learners/users of an L2, orienting to language use in this way can bring into focus features of the target language that must be understood in relation to particular situations and activities (i.e., contexts). For example, which features of language are most salient in “telling” you what type of interaction you are observing/participating in?

For this posting, carefully observe a communicative event that takes place in your L2, one that is familiar to your "new" everyday life but in which you are NOT a participant (it's too difficult to both participate in the interaction and also observe it). Examples might include a conversation in a café, an interaction on a train or in a classroom, etc. For your blog posting, you should describe:
- the setting (physical setting, circumstances, background information)
- the participants (who is present, the roles they perform [parent, teacher, waiter, etc.])
- the responsibilities they have (seeking particular information, giving information, maintaining the discussion, etc.)
- the patterns of interaction (specific acts—questions, statements, introductions, leave taking, etc.) and how these appear to be organized (i.e., turn-taking)

Then, and most importantly, discuss your observations of the language itself, including metaphors, euphemisms, clichés, repeated formulaic "chunks", specialized vocabulary, expressions and grammatical construction, as well as non-verbals, such as body language, gestures, volume, etc.

Finally, consider how this everyday communicative event may have unfolded or been negotiated in your home culture. What features of this communicative event seem similar to what you would expect to find at home (both socially and linguistically)? What differences do you think there would be? What might account for these similarities and differences?

**WEEK 6**

This week's reading (Tannen, 1984) brings into focus some of the many aspects of communication that can cause issues, especially when communicating with someone in/from another culture.

In your post this week, please do the following:
1) Describe, in detail (who, what, when, where), a communication difficulty that you have had during your experience abroad and then discuss the following:
   a) What did you think was the cause of the problem at the time that the difficulty occurred?
   b) Which of Tannen's levels of communication difficulties might actually have been at the root of the issue that you had?
   c) Now that you are aware of these potential difficulties how might you approach future instances of cross-cultural communication?

2) Discuss any changes (in style, language used, non-verbals, etc.) that you have found yourself
making in your communications with people in your host country. Specifically, please answer the following questions: What changes have you made? Why? What have been the results of such changes? How did/do you feel about making such changes?

**WEEK 7**
Thinking back to our readings and discussions in WL ED 300, we considered how English varies widely within the U.S. We noted how even in our class - and most of us are from the same geographic region of the country - there were differences with regard to word meanings and expressions (think Pittsburgh vs. Philadelphia), the acceptability of certain grammatical constructions (some of us found certain constructions to be just plain wrong and in need of correction while others found them to be acceptable in conversation but not formal writing; others had difficulty identifying the "errors"), and, of course, we saw how widely pronunciation can vary. Our readings in that course also drew attention to the judgments that are made about people on the basis of the ways in which they speak. For example, we discussed language variation across generations and the attitude of older speakers toward some of the ways younger speakers use the language. We also talked about pronunciation differences by region across the U. S. and the stereotypes we hold about people from the South, from New England, and so on. We also considered the attitudes many have toward certain varieties of English, such as African American vernacular, as well as how individuals react to "code switching" as in the case of "Spanglish".

With this as background, I am asking you now to do a similar investigation into variation in your L2. This assignment involves speaking with a native or expert speaker of your L2 in order to get their thoughts on variation in that language, including attitudes about different varieties of the language or the different ways in which people use the language. You may also try to find out about stereotypes that are held regarding speakers who use the language in one way or another. Remember, your responsibility is not to agree or disagree or to attempt to change the individual's mind. Rather, you should try to determine what s/he thinks as well as insights s/he can offer regarding attitudes that are held in the society more generally about these issues.

Your posting for this week should give a little bit of background info on the person that you chose to talk to about this topic (how you know them, where they are from, in what areas of your host country they have lived, etc.) and then share what you learned about linguistic variation as a result of your discussion with them. Finally, discuss any similarities/differences that you see between attitudes toward linguistic variation in your current location and those that exist in the U.S.

**WEEK 9**
"Perception is the internal process by which we select, evaluate, and organize the stimuli of the outside world. From the time we are born, we learn our perceptions and the resulting behaviors from our cultural experiences" (Novinger, 2001, pp. 26 - 7).

Understanding that we all have preconceptions is important for understanding how culture shapes perception. Culture creates preconceptions in each of us, training us from birth in the behavior patterns that we are expected to conform to and which we in turn expect from others. When we carry these preconceptions/expectations into cross-cultural encounters, this can sometimes cause problems for our successful interaction/participation in the new culture.

For this week's posting I would like you to discuss the following:
*What is something that stood out to you in the chapter (perhaps something that you particularly agreed or disagreed with)? Please explain and share your thoughts/impressions.

*Which of the ways that culture shapes perception (i.e., preconceptions, collectivism v. individualism, face, gender roles, etc.) have impacted you or have you experienced in your time abroad so far? Please give specific examples as to what you have noticed and/or how you have been impacted.

*What are some preconceptions (positive or negative) that you had before you arrived in the country in which you are studying? Where do you think those preconceptions came from, specifically (i.e., where do you think you 'learned' them)? Which turned out to be accurate? Inaccurate?

*What are some of the preconceptions that people in your new culture have held about you (either you personally or 'you' as in American)? How have these preconceptions manifested themselves (i.e., what have people done/said)?

*Which of the personal perception filters (pp. 41 - 44) have you struggled with most so far in your time abroad? Please describe a specific incident where this was an issue for you (either when your own or someone else's personal perception filter(s) caused a problem). If it was your own personal perception filter that caused the issue, what might you do to avoid similar incidents in the future?

**WEEK 10**

Here is the document that contains the brief case study for your consideration this week: Gender and Culture13.docx. Once you have read the document, please answer the following questions based both on your reading of the cases and on your own experiences:

*Why might American female students have more difficulty in these situations than local or other international students?

*What do you think are the CULTURAL sources of the conflict between the American and the Spanish perspectives in this case? Do you think it is really true that the American students 'did not do anything' to cause this situation? Why or why not?

*How can we interpret/understand the host institution director's (perceived) relative indifference to the plight of these young women? What are the cultural perceptions that might be at play here (particularly those related to gender roles and/or the norms of relationships in the culture)?

*Have you had any experiences with issues of gender in your host country that have had an impact on your perceptions of the host culture or that have had an effect on your willingness/ability to participate fully in the situation or in the culture/society in general? Please explain.

*FEMALE students: What has been your experience (positive or negative) with the behavior of men toward you in your host country? Have you had any experiences similar to those mentioned in the case study? If so, how did they make you feel and how did you handle them? What differences have you noticed between your experience with men in your host country and in the US? What might be the cause of these differences (cite specific cultural values, norms, etc.)?

*MALE students: What have you noticed about the ways that males in your host country treat/interact with females? How does that compare to the way that males in the US treat/have been socialized to treat women? What might be the cause (cite specific cultural values, norms, etc.) of any differences that you have noticed? Have you encountered any situations in which you felt that a woman was being mistreated? If so, how did it make you feel and what did you do, if anything?
WEEK 11

**REMEMBER that you can find this by clicking on Readings at the top of the page**

This week's reading presents the topic of identity in relation to the study of foreign languages and participation in study abroad. It also offers insight into the experiences of one individual, Alice, and how her experiences (re)shaped her identity. [For our purposes we will define identity generally as a (fluid) sense of self related to who you are (physically, emotionally, etc.), what you do, where you live, who you are with, etc.]

Please address the following questions in your response:

*What stood out to you most in this chapter and why? (Most interesting/surprising/ new/different, etc.)

*In terms of your background, motivation (for language study and studying abroad), experiences and expectations, how are you both similar to and different from Alice? Please provide as much explanation as possible.

*What group(s) have you become part of while studying abroad? How/why? How has your membership in these groups affected your language proficiency?

*What has your experience abroad taught you about language learning and what has it taught you about yourself?

*Do you think that your identity (or any aspect thereof) has changed at all during the time that you have been abroad? If so, how has it changed and what do you think has brought about that change?

WEEK 12

Please read the attached case study and related discussion (this is from one of my textbooks so you will notice my markings on it) and then respond to the following questions/prompts:

*What do you think of the culture shock incident that John encountered? Which of the discussed theories seems to offer the best explanation to you and why?

*What does it mean to say that "John was using Australian pragmatics in a French setting”? What types of consequences did this have for him? What might be some concrete ways that he could overcome this issue?

*What does it mean to you to "act" French/Spanish/Ecuadorean/Chilean/Austrian/German (whichever one applies in your case, of course)? Are there particular ways of doing/saying things? Do these appear to be the same in all of the areas of the country that you have visited and with all of the people that you have interacted with? If not, how has this affected your understanding of assimilation into your host culture?

*Have you experienced a situation similar to John's in your time abroad (where you couldn't, or struggled to, do something because of the differences in norms/expectations of the situation)? If so, write a brief description of what occurred (who, what, when, where, etc.). Then, discuss what is different in U.S. culture than in your host culture that might be causing the difficulty that you are having/had (i.e., what role does your culture/language play in your understanding of the situation and your ability to act appropriately?).
**WEEK 13**

For this blog entry I would like you to reflect on your experiences abroad so far and to think about how they might impact your future work as a World Languages educator. Please respond to the following questions:

*What insights, if any, did you gain into the educational system of your host country? What are some similarities and differences that you have noticed between the system in the US and the system in your host country? How did any differences impact your learning?*

*What, if anything, did you learn about teaching from the teachers that you had in your courses while abroad? Are there any methods or activities that they used that you plan to try in your own classroom? If so, what are they and why do you want to try them?*

*How have your ideas about language and culture (and their relationship to each other) changed over your time abroad? Please give specific examples.*

*How do you think you might use your new linguistic and cultural understandings as teaching tools? What are some specific things that you want to share with your students? Why do you want to share those things? How will you make sure that you still remember them by the time you are ready to present them in the classroom? (You will be asked to do this as part of your work in WLED 412 next semester, so you want to be sure that you can remember as much as possible.)*

*What types of artifacts do you plan to bring home with you and how/why do you think you will use them in your classroom? Will they help give your students a better understanding of big-C Culture (the visible) or of little-c culture (the invisible) or both?*

*If you feel there are others ways in which your time abroad will impact your teaching that these questions did not address, please feel free to share those as well.*

**WEEK 14**


Wow! Can you believe that your time abroad is beginning to wind down? A bittersweet thought, I'm sure. For your final blog entry for the course I will ask you to think specifically about the construct of intercultural competence (ICC), which we talked about last Fall and which you have been working on developing throughout your time abroad. In this reading you will look at the importance and usefulness of ICC within the field of language teaching and learning.

**NOTES:** 1) Remember that we saw Byram and his *savoirs* briefly when we talked about the topic of culture in 411 in the Fall. We saw four there and the model that he presents in this reading is his suggestion for/discussion of a new fifth one. 2) This chapter is meant to be an overview of the model with just basic info provided about the components. Many more details are discussed in other of Byram's writings if you want to learn more about how he specifically defines each component.

Please respond to the following questions:

*What does the term *intercultural speaker* mean to you (based on the reading and your own ideas/experiences)? Is this something that you yourself aspire to be or that you would want your future students to aspire to be? Why or why not?*

*Byram notes that his model of ICC is based on the explicit assumption that language teaching needs to focus on one or more countries where the language is spoken (p. 322). Do you agree with this? What are the pros and cons of approaching language teaching in this way?*
*In the model on p. 323, which of the components of ICC do you see as most important and why? Do you think that this model could be something helpful to you as a teacher? Why or why not?

*On p. 330, Byram states "The exclusive focus [on one identity] is a didactic [teaching] necessity, a need for simplification, particularly in the early stages of learning, a simplification common to all didactics." What is Byram saying here? What is your response/reaction to the quote? Do you agree that it is necessary and/or ok to simplify the concept of culture for teaching purposes? Why or why not?

*How do you think your teaching of culture/intercultural competence may differ (in terms of how you conceive of culture and what/how to teach, etc.) now that you have had the experience of studying abroad?

And, finally, given that this is your last blog for the course, a couple of questions specifically about our blog course:

*What do you think was most valuable about the course? Which topics were most relevant to you and why?

*Are there things the course encouraged you to think about/reflect on that you might not otherwise have done?

*What would you like to see changed about the course?

Thank you all for such great work and for putting so much thought into your postings and responses. I loved reading everything that each of you wrote and seeing how you were experiencing and working through so many different things. I know that the course required extra time and effort, but hopefully you feel that you can take away something that will be useful to you in the future.

See you in the Fall!
Appendix D

Blogfolio Guidelines

Language Learning Abroad Blogfolio
Spring 2013

Note: To be submitted through Taskstream at the end of your study abroad experience (precise due date dependent upon the dates of your abroad program—see blog entry for list of due dates).

Purpose: Your blogfolio is intended to function like a portfolio in that you are to accumulate evidence that displays the ways in which you have developed over the course of your time abroad. In particular, the focus should be on your developing knowledge and abilities relevant to the target language and culture. It should display both evidence of your development and reflections on that development as well as implications of your new knowledge and insights for your eventual classroom practice.

Expectations: Your blogfolio must include the following components, each submitted as CLEARLY LABELED (with your name and the content) [Word document] attachments on Taskstream:

1. Participatory Observation Report: Attach your Participatory Observation inquiry activity

2. Interview Report: Attach your Interview inquiry activity

3. Linguistic Analysis Report: Attach your Linguistic Analysis inquiry activity (with all photos included in the document itself)

4. Exemplar Blog Entries: (You should compile these all into one document to attach. Please clearly label the topic and date of each exemplar within the document.) At least four specific entries (full or partial) on the course blog displaying instances where you addressed the following topics (you may provide as many instances as you feel you need to in order to demonstrate that you addressed each of these areas):
   a. reports of interactions you had with native speakers, understandings or misunderstandings that occurred, and how meaning was negotiated
   b. insights that you gained into the target culture, through interactions, through literary/cultural texts or other media, or through any other aspect of your experience abroad. You should be sure to include exemplars in which you discussed comparisons or contrasts between the target culture and your native culture.
   c. comments concerning the target language itself, including for instance, varieties of the target language that you encountered as well as your reflections on how the target language is used in specific contexts
   d. reflections on connections between insights you have gained into the target language/culture and your future classroom practice (i.e., how you will try to bring what you are learning into your classroom)
e. **IN ADDITION**, please include a written rationale for why you included each exemplar and a reflection on what you believe these exemplars reveal about the development of your thinking/learning throughout the course.

5. **Exemplar Blog Response Postings:** (These should be compiled into one document *with each exemplar clearly labeled.*) Instances of **three** specific exemplars that display your responses to or comments on postings made by others in the course. These should be ones that are representative of the quality of your responses/comments throughout the course. (You might select ones where you pointed out an interesting observation, drew a connection to your own experience, or did some sort of comparison or contrast between their experience and yours.) **IN ADDITION,** please include a written rationale for why you included the exemplars and a brief reflection what you believe they reveal about the types of responses that you provided to your classmates over the course of the semester.

6. **Exemplar ‘Last Word’ Postings:** (Again, these should be compiled into one document *with each exemplar clearly labeled.*) Instances of **three** specific exemplars that display your ‘last word’ replies to responses posted by others to your blog entries. These should be ones that are representative of the quality and/or type of ‘last words’ that you submitted throughout the course. **IN ADDITION,** as with the other elements, please include a written rationale for your inclusion of the particular exemplars and a brief reflection on the learning/thinking that is demonstrated by each.

**Evaluation:** Your blogfolio will be evaluated according to evidence that it includes relevant to each of the following domains:

- Analysis of Interactions with Native Speakers 20%
- Engagement with the Target Culture 25%
- Interpretation of Language Use in Context 25%
- Comparison of Perspectives with Target Culture 15%
- Reflection on Implications for Teaching 15%

*Evidence should be ongoing through weekly entries and inquiry activities and should reflect your development over the duration of the study abroad experience.*

**Ethnographic Orientation:** It is important to follow an inquiry or investigative rather than judgmental approach to your interactions in the target culture. A rule-of-thumb employed by cultural anthropologists that would be good to keep in mind is to ask yourself the question, *What is this culture like?* rather than *Do I like this culture?* It goes without saying that being in a different cultural system you will encounter beliefs, behaviors, practices, and interactional patterns that you are not accustomed to. While you do not need to embrace them and abandon your own cultural identity, it is also important that you do not reject them out of hand as ‘weird’ or ‘bad.’ This involves resisting any impulse to define your experiences through stereotypes (positive or negative), but instead trying to understand the culture and people in your new environment. Remember, this is your opportunity to experience the target culture firsthand, and as a World Languages Educator you will eventually function as an ambassador or intermediary between the target culture and the culture of the students you will teach.
VITA

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