"FINDING YOURSELF IN A FOREIGN COUNTRY":
THE SUBJECTIVE LEARNING EXPERIENCES OF STUDENTS
IN AN EMBEDDED SHORT-TERM STUDY ABROAD PROGRAM

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the subjective learning experiences of students on an embedded short-term study abroad program. Using an innovative ethnographically and phenomenologically inspired assessment strategy called *photo-cued interviewing* (PCI), this study uses conversations prompted by students’ photographs of their experiences to make their learning more observable and describable: to uncover understandings about the processes of learning—the situations in which students learn—and the products of learning—the specific learning outcomes—in embedded short-term international educational programming. By using a sociocultural lens and a case study approach of 15 university students participating in one embedded study abroad program that included a 10-day international component in Sweden, this study provides new understandings about curriculum and program design decisions and asserts that short-term programs, though often criticized, can successfully result in significant student learning outcomes, both intended and incidental. This dissertation also has implications for education more broadly as it interrogates what constitutes both learning and teaching, and how broader conceptions of both may impact understandings of student learning.
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You wanted to be a circus ringmaster.
Being a professor is basically the same.
You did it, kid.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

“I found half of my learning was not in the school setting and it was just these interactions, and especially in places where they didn’t really want us being. But it was so so so important, because I’d say most of what we talked about when we were having fun was the shit from that day. Our outside stuff or nightlife—a lot of learning happened for me there. And really a lot of it was because I was interacting with my classmates. It wouldn’t have been the same if I was alone.”—Angela, 28

Overview

This dissertation examines the subjective learning experiences of university students on an embedded short-term study abroad program using an innovative ethnographically and phenomenologically inspired assessment strategy called photo-cued interviewing (PCI). Examining the subjectivity of student experiences, which is a philosophical concept that acknowledges an individual’s perspectives, desires, and beliefs as influential factors in their agency and broader constructions of reality and truth (Solomon, 2005), is important for understanding the various ways in which students experience situations and how their perspectives on phenomena may differ from one another. Using the PCI method and a case study approach, I elicited conversations around 15 university students’ photographs—which chronicled their most significant and meaningful experiences from participating in one embedded short-term program with a 10-day international component in Sweden—to make their learning more observable and describable. These conversations uncovered understandings about the students’ subjective experiences, and by extension, the types of learning that took place during the program. Specifically, this study uses sociocultural perspectives (e.g., Vygotsky, 1978; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Bakhtin, 1981) to highlight the processes of learning—the situations in which
students learned—and the *products* of learning—the specific learning outcomes—of this particular embedded short-term program. This study provides new understandings about curriculum and program design decisions as well as new insights into student voice and representation, and asserts that short-term programs, though often criticized, can successfully result in significant student learning outcomes, academic and social-emotional, intended and incidental.

**Problem Statement**

More college students are venturing abroad for academic credit today than ever before in our nation’s history. During the 2014-2015 Academic Year, education abroad programming saw a 2.9% increase in U.S. student participation over the previous year, with 313,415 U.S. students studying abroad—an impressive amount that has more than tripled over the past twenty years (Institute of International Education [IIE], 2016). However, the average length of time that students are spending abroad has dwindled in recent decades. While study abroad participation historically constituted a full semester to an entire year (or even an entire degree program) overseas, currently, 63.1% of students participate in short-term programs lasting from only a few days to up to eight weeks, with 14.5% of students remaining abroad for two weeks or fewer (IIE, 2016).

This downward trend in the length of study abroad program participation has caused considerable concern and controversy in the field. Critics argue that such brief experiences simply cannot produce significant student learning outcomes in the same ways that lengthier programs can. Common criticisms of short-term programs include: students engage in minimal interaction with the local community; students remain in homogenous groups and only speak
English; short-term programs provide limited time for deep investigation and reflection on the experience, which often leads to reinforced stereotypes of host cultures; and short-term programs are less academically rigorous (see e.g., Eyler, 1999; Marklein, 2004; Tucker, Gullekson, & McCambridge, 2012).

As evidenced in the participation statistics presented above, this trend in shorter participation is simultaneously occurring with a dramatic boost in participation more generally. However, as more students engage in study abroad programming, the field undergoes a form of democratization in which programs become fueled by consumerism rather than a focus on the facilitation of student learning. This democratization leads to a “dumbing down” of program curriculum (Lewin, 2006, p. xiv), consequently painting programs as vacations instead of academic experiences. Ultimately, this trend has contributed to the widespread belief that short-term study abroad programs lead to minimal gains in intercultural competency, personal development, cross-cultural understanding, and learning more broadly defined. The result is academy- and field-wide distrust of short-term study abroad programs. In summary, short-term study abroad programs have garnered a poor reputation in regards to the student learning that they facilitate, or perhaps fail to facilitate.

**Purpose and Significance of the Study**

The majority of studies aimed at highlighting learning in study abroad focus on programs that last an entire semester or academic year, despite growing student participation in short-term programs (Martinsen, 2010). Research that elucidates more complete, more complex understandings of the processes and products of student learning in short-term study abroad is necessary. I have developed an ethnographically and phenomenologically-inspired data
collection tool—photo-cued interviewing (PCI)—that derives from photovoice (Wang & Burris, 1999) and video-cued multivocal ethnography (Tobin, Wu, & Davidson, 1989; Tobin, 2014) methodologies. By demonstrating the use of PCI through a case study evaluation (Farmer & Napieralski, 1997) of an embedded short-term study abroad course, I confront the perception of limited learning in short-term study abroad programs. This study demonstrates that student learning is occurring on these programs in a variety of ways, and cultivates new insights into the processes through which such meaningful learning occurs.

More work needs to be done regarding the assessment of learning outcomes of study abroad programs, and developing tools that can accurately and adequately assess student learning and evaluate the processes that lead to these outcomes can aid in this effort. This study provides the education abroad field, and the field of education more generally, with a new tool for understanding the subjective experiences of students. Developing understandings about students’ subjective experiences can inform the ways in which we think about learning and how we carry out assessment efforts. With this new perspective on learning and assessment, educators and practitioner-scholars can perhaps combat the argument that students are not learning much on these types of programs by showing that students may simply be learning things that they may not have been looking for, and in ways they may not have considered before.

Second, the findings of this study (i.e., understanding how and what students learn), contribute to future curricular and program design efforts. Assessment ideally results in meaningful feedback that can be used for future programmatic improvement (Farmer & Napieralski, 1997). By capturing how students are learning and what they are learning in these situations, program designers can then use that knowledge to (re)construct programs in ways that
could potentially facilitate those learning outcomes more purposefully in the future, making them easier to assess (Lankard, 1995).

Third, this study demonstrates the use of photo-cued interviewing as a viable strategy for understanding student learning as a result of international educational experiences more subjectively. Though not an initial goal of this research, the findings of this study indicate that more structured reflection strategies—in this case, in-country presentations, daily blog posts, and post-program video presentations—can be problematic for uncovering truths about student learning as students often do not feel able to provide authentic representations of their experiences in these types of instructor-monitored spaces. This is a significant contribution to the literature of study abroad outcomes assessment as many existing qualitative studies rely upon these types of data collection strategies to understand what students are or are not learning. I will discuss this further in Chapter 2.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, this study seeks to bridge a gap between the fields of educational anthropology and higher education. By developing a tool that stems from and complements each discipline, I attempt to show that these two approaches to understanding the world do not have to be and should not be kept separate. My ontological and epistemological approaches in this study—examining what counts as learning and how that learning can be observed and investigated—seek to demonstrate that anthropological ways of understanding the world and more traditional outcomes assessment strategies can be combined in ways that elucidate understandings of students’ subjective ways of knowing (anthropology) and that those personal perspectives can be assessed in ways that produce conclusive insights into what students learn on embedded short-term study abroad programs (outcomes assessment).
Context

The upward trend in student participation on short-term programs does not seem to be slowing, and international education practitioners are working diligently to enhance rigor and respect within the field. A current movement in the field, and one that I was heavily involved in with my work at Penn State, is the attempt to recruit more faculty to develop and lead short-term programs abroad—or, what is referred to as either embedded programming or faculty-led programming. While the phrase faculty-led programming can refer to any type of international program led by a faculty member, Penn State defines an embedded program as a “course taken at a Penn State campus that includes an international, credit-bearing travel component” (Global Penn State, 2013, emphasis added). In an embedded program, students take part of the course on campus and part of it in another country, with the international experience complementing and enhancing the residential coursework. Students can learn material in the residential class sessions, apply and experience it abroad, and return home with time to reflect as a group, though some programs, like the one in this study, forgo the final reflection phase. The assumption behind this approach is that faculty members possess the curricular training and expertise to intentionally design courses—crafting student learning outcomes, structuring residential and international activities to facilitate learning, and conducting assessment—in ways that can lead to strong learning gains, no matter how brief the international component.

As a volunteer Embedded Programs Specialist in the Penn State Office of Global Programs, part of my role was to work closely with the Assistant Director for Embedded Programs and Special Initiatives to engage and mentor faculty as they begin developing embedded programs. We worked to ensure that faculty were following Penn State risk management guidelines and that the Forum on Education Abroad’s Code of Ethics (The Forum
on Education Abroad, 2011) and Standards of Good Practice (The Forum on Education Abroad, 2015) were met. More specifically, we aimed to promote the importance of fostering student learning through intentional programmatic design (i.e., triangulating learning outcomes with relevant course content and purposeful in-country experiences), though admittedly, our influence was limited by how willing faculty were to work with us. Participation in our workshops was strictly voluntary, though some departments and colleges are beginning to make it a requirement for their faculty members who are or plan to lead embedded programs.

Through this work, I partnered with a pair of professors from the College of Liberal Arts who frequently consulted our office as they designed an embedded course to Sweden. These two individuals admittedly lacked knowledge of best practices in the study abroad field and learning outcomes assessment (although they had both led programs previously), which is why they were eager to have me be part of the experience. As a group, we remained committed to the idea that meaningful learning can occur on short-term programs, particularly learning for which we do not plan.

As previously discussed, programs with such brief international experiences—like these shorter embedded programs—have a poor reputation due to the perception of a lack of learning that occurs on them. However, this study demonstrates that these criticisms are not legitimate; rather, they emphasize a gap in the ways we currently understand the experiences of students who study abroad. Students are learning a great deal, but we simply are not attending to all the ways in which their learning is occurring. We need to be looking in the right places for it, and we should be searching with appropriate tools.
Research Questions

This dissertation study seeks to identify gaps and common spaces within the discourses surrounding student learning in embedded short-term study abroad programming by utilizing ethnographically and phenomenologically inspired assessment strategies. Photo-cued interviewing, or PCI, can help elucidate more complete understandings of learning on study abroad programs, both formal and incidental, academic and otherwise. By capturing students’ experiences abroad using a combination of PCI and other ethnographic methods, this study responds to the following research questions:

1. What are the subjective learning experiences of students on this embedded program?
   a. How are students learning? (processes)
   b. What are students learning? (products)

Conceptual Framework

This case study employs a grounded theory analytical approach. However, the study is heavily informed by the underpinnings of sociocultural theory (e.g., Vygotsky, 1978; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Bakhtin, 1981), incidental learning theory (e.g., Marsick & Watkins, 1990; 2001; Mealman, 1993), research on representation and student voice (e.g., Crapanzano, 1999; Christensen, 2004; Bower, 2003; Casey & Hemenway, 2001), findings from my pilot study, and my own experiences and lessons learned in study abroad administration and program design.

Summary of Methodology

This study employs a sociocultural approach to knowledge creation and uses a combination of interpretive methods. First, I conducted 10 days of participant-observation with
15 university student informants during their embedded short-term program to Sweden. One month after returning, I conducted PCI interviews and focus groups with the students. A combination of photovoice (Wang & Burris, 1999) and video-cued multi-vocal ethnography (Tobin et al., 1989), PCI uses conversations around student photos to elicit understandings about their subjective experiences abroad—particularly, what they learned and how they learned it. Using a grounded theory approach, I inductively analyzed my fieldnotes and interview data to construct new understandings about the situations in which students learned, the types of learning outcomes facilitated during this embedded short-term program, and the importance of student voice and representation in assessing student learning.

**Study Limitations**

The most obvious limitation to this study—the subjective nature of the data collection and analytic methods—is also its greatest strength. While this study relies on self-reports and reflective accounts of student learning, researcher observation, and researcher interpretation (resulting in highly subjective findings and discussion), it can also uncover processes and products of learning in ways that more objective measures and frameworks (e.g., scaled inventories) fail to notice.

Second, this study is limited by its single case study approach. However, what this study lacks in generalizability it makes up for in its transferability to other short-term programming and education more generally. While the findings of this study, which uncover what these particular students learned, are not intended to be generalized to other embedded short-term study abroad programs, the insights they provide into the situations in which students learn, how students choose to (re)present their learning, and their perceptions of the authenticity of their
reflective assignments can provide useful and transferable lessons on assessment and student voice, social-emotional learning in international contexts, and program design.

Finally, this study focuses solely on the program’s impacts on student learning, ignoring the effects that this program undoubtedly will have on the host region and the individuals with whom the students come in contact, and although examining this falls beyond the scope of this study it remains an important aspect of international education. Impact, transformation, affect, influence—they are all not a one-way street. Just as introducing a new species of fish into a pond affects both the new fish and the pond’s entire ecosystem, so too is the relationship between the study abroad student and the host community. Future research should examine the outcomes—processes and products—of short-term programming on local host communities, regions, and nations for a more equitable approach to program design, implementation, and evaluation.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW & CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter provides a review of the literature surrounding study abroad outcomes assessment and representation as well as the conceptual framework that serves as a loose guide for this study. The literature review simultaneously focuses on three topics of scholarly concern relevant to this dissertation. It begins by addressing outcomes assessment efforts in study abroad to date, highlighting popular scales and traditionally praised student learning outcomes. Second, the literature review addresses issues of methodology in assessment, covering traditional assessment methods and highlighting critical gaps in assessment approaches. Third, it focuses on the authenticity of assessment and the varied representations of reality of student experiences. The conceptual framework section includes discussions of sociocultural perspectives on learning and development, as well as incidental learning and its implications for assessment in education.

Literature Review

Learning Outcomes of Study Abroad

Like contemporary study abroad itself, outcomes assessment in the discipline is a relatively new endeavor. As students have moved beyond the more informal “grand tour” (de Wit, 2002) approach to participation in international education and have become more engaged in university or third-party sponsored programs, measuring learning has increasingly become an important aspect of the field. Heightened accountability has resulted in constituents and stakeholders—administrators, practitioners, faculty, and even parents and students—demanding evidence that the time, money, and resources that they have invested have resulted in significant and real learning gains (Wellman, 2001; Zernike, 2002). To date, most assessment projects in study abroad have employed a quantitative approach and have focused mainly on programs
lasting for an entire semester or academic year (Martinsen, 2010), and the body of literature on student learning in study abroad continues to grow with this trend. A brief review of existing literature on student learning in study abroad and popular approaches to assessing learning in study abroad follows in the next sections.

**Academic and Professional Benefits of Study Abroad**

Study abroad is a High Impact Practice (Kuh et al., 2010), or an educational experience that makes a “significant difference to student persistence, learning outcomes, and student success” (Lee & Green, 2016, p. 61). Studying abroad is positively correlated with many indicators of intellectual growth (Ingraham & Peterson, 2004), such as higher GPAs and higher capacities for critical thinking, as well as other positive academic outcomes like greater persistence and deeper levels of student engagement (NSSE, 2007; Kuh, 2008; Kuh et al., 2010). Participation in study abroad programming also leads to greater commitment to philanthropy and civic engagement, social entrepreneurship, and positive future education and occupation experiences (Paige et al., 2009). Professionally, studies have shown that participation in study abroad programming leads to the attainment of job-related skills (Preston, 2012), and that employers place significant value on applicants who participated in study abroad programming, particularly for longer periods of time in non-English speaking countries, and those who studied material relevant to the job for which they are applying (Trooboff, Vande Berg, & Rayman, 2008).
Large-Scale Quantitative Assessment: The Gold Standard

One of the largest and most well-known studies in education abroad learning outcomes assessment is The GLOSSARI Project. GLOSSARI—Georgia Learning Outcomes of Students Studying Abroad Research Initiative—is considered the gold standard in study abroad outcomes assessment research and looked at various impact metrics of study abroad participation for students in the University System of Georgia (Sutton & Rubin, 2004). It was comprised of six quantitative phases, including: comparing study abroad participants and non-participants on self-reported learning, course exams, and other academic measures; comparison of pre- and post-departure self-reported learning; correlation of learning outcomes with program features (i.e., duration, location, etc.); and a longitudinal cohort of participants and non-participants to examine effects post-graduation (Sutton & Rubin, 2004, p. 70). GLOSSARI was the first of its kind, and resulted in many valuable findings for the field. For example, students who had studied abroad showed a greater knowledge of global interdependence and cultural relativism (Sutton & Rubin, 2004), though researchers did not define these constructs. GLOSSARI’s multi-faceted, albeit entirely quantitative approach helped highlight the meaningful impacts that researchers hypothesized were caused by study abroad participation. Hence, their approach was deductive.

Another renowned study, The Georgetown Consortia Project, examined the effects of immersion programs on study abroad participants (N= 1,159, control N= 138). Undertaking a pre- and post-test comparison design using the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) and the Simulated Oral Proficiency Interview (SOPI), this study utilized a framework inspired by Engle & Engle’s (2003) framework of immersion and intervention to test the hypothesis that immersion leads to significant gains in student learning in regards to language and intercultural competence. However, using these quantitative measures the researchers found little support that
immersion, particularly housing students with host families and enrolling them in host university courses, resulted in significant gains in student learning (Vande Berg, Quinn, & Menyhart, 2012)—a finding that contradicted what study abroad had posited for decades (Engle & Engle, 2003).

Lilli and John Engle, two seminal figures in study abroad, coordinate intervention-style programs for the American University Center in Provence, France (AUCP). Offering immersive short-term and long-duration stays, AUCP, an institution of higher learning recognized by the French Ministry of Education, remains a beacon of success in fostering learning and development through study abroad (2012). Using the IDI as their measurement tool, Engle and Engle found that certain elements of their intervention programs—increased direct, authentic contact with the host culture and skillful mentoring—led to significant gains in cross-cultural competency (Engle, 2009; Engle & Engle 2009; 2012). Again, these findings aligned with predetermined learning outcomes as identified on the IDI and did not account for unintended outcomes that may have resulted from such experiences.

The Intercultural Development Inventory, or IDI, (used in two of the previously mentioned studies) is the most used scale to assess learning and development in study abroad. Used in education institutions and other organizations and industries, the IDI is a rigorously designed and validated 50-item questionnaire that assesses an individual’s intercultural competence, or “the capability to shift cultural perspective and appropriately adapt behavior to cultural difference and commonalities” (Ogden, 2011, p. 2). Hammer (2012) proposes the use of qualitative data in conjunction with the IDI. Called developmental interviewing (Hammer, 2012), this open-ended line of questioning seeks to understand in what ways students engaged with cultural differences overseas and what differences “made a difference” (p. 127). However,
Hammer (2012) argues that developmental interviewing is mainly of value when triangulated with the IDI results and should not be considered as a stand-alone method of assessment.

The Global Citizenship Scale, or GCS, is a three-dimensional assessment scale that includes validated constructs of social responsibility, global competence, and global civic engagement, each with three valid and reliable sub-constructs (Morais & Ogden, 2010). The GCS serves as a model for developing programs that intend to result in greater global citizenship, contending that each dimension is necessary to achieve these larger outcomes. Morais and Ogden’s (2010) scale, although bounded by specified outcomes, seeks to uncover new understandings of the societal benefits and academic development that study abroad can offer.

There are several existing scales that seek to assess non-cognitive skills or social-emotional learning in international experiences (Ogden, 2011). For example, the Beliefs, Events, and Values Inventory, or BEVI, is a questionnaire that combines four measures into one instrument, specifically focusing on what students believe and value about themselves, others, and the world writ large. Such scales, many of which are validated and revered by study abroad professionals, are not well known and are not often used by the scholarly community who typically conducts such assessments.

As part of an independent consulting contract, I am currently co-constructing a tailored (Palomba & Banta, 1999) scale for assessing non-cognitive learning outcomes for short-term high school travel abroad experiences. In alignment with the consulting partner’s stated learning outcomes, a colleague and I have matched those outcomes with existing constructs and have validated the survey using both exploratory factor analysis and principle components analysis (Murphy, Johnson, & Levitan, 2016). The survey was piloted during Summer 2016, and although significant adjustments must be made to our scaled variables, it shows significant promise in
demonstrating student learning along a number of non-cognitive and social-emotional constructs. However, this scale and the many others like it admittedly are bounded by the outcomes intended by the organizations implementing them and thus fail to capture learning that is not planned or intentional.

**Learning Outcome #1: Second Language Acquisition**

A majority of studies looking to examine learning in study abroad programming focus on one major learning outcome: the acquisition of a foreign language. Learning a foreign language has long been the most desired learning outcome of traditional study abroad programming (de Wit, 2002). In fact, the United States government has taken a great interest in using international educational experiences as a means to furthering its political and diplomatic agendas. For example, Title IV of the Higher Education Act provides funding for the establishment of international education programs, such as university foreign language centers and overseas research centers, to develop a greater understanding of “critical cultures and languages” (Johnson, 2016; United States Department of Education (USDOE, 2011). They have also developed Foreign Language and Area Studies Fellowships, which are granted to students—like myself—who have an interest in and show promise in developing fluency in languages such as Mandarin Chinese, Urdu, Japanese, Russian, Portuguese, and other “critical languages” (USDOE, 2016). The U.S. State Department’s “100,000 Strong” initiatives seek to dramatically increase the number of Americans studying abroad, primarily in semester or year-long programs, in China and throughout the Americas (and vice versa) by 2020 (USDOE, 2015; Johnson, 2016). These regions in particular have been targeted because of their close economic ties with the U.S.,
and foreign language training is seen as crucial to maintaining strong political ties in these regions.

As usual, increased government interest has yielded an increase in assessment efforts, and as typically seen in large-scale assessment, a majority of the studies conducted are quantitative in nature. Much like the studies conducted by Engle and Engle (2003; 2009; 2012), these studies generally rely on quantitative measures to assess student growth in their ability to speak, read, write, and comprehend the language of the host country or region. Second language acquisition, or SLA (Freed, 1995), within study abroad contexts provides students with unique opportunities to observe language use from a variety of different perspectives. In assessment efforts, these different perspectives and contexts become variables—length of stay, degree of immersion, accommodations (hotel versus homestay), student motivation, etc. (see e.g., Dornyei, 1990; Brecht, Davidson, & Ginsburg, 1995; DuFon & Churchill, 2006; Freed, 1998; Kinginger, 2013; Tanaka & Ellis, 2003).

Some studies, however, have made use of qualitative approaches to understanding second language acquisition in study abroad. For example, in a pre-post quasi-experimental study of language acquisition and related affective outcomes, Allen and Herron (2003) used interviews and program evaluations to uncover that while linguistic capabilities improved and language anxieties decreased for students who traveled abroad, their motivation to speak the foreign language did not increase post-program and was not significantly different than their non-traveling peers.

However, as short-term programming does not allow for prolonged exposure to a foreign language, students cannot be expected to learn much more than greetings, commonplace sayings, and perhaps how to place a meal order. Therefore, as short-term programming becomes more the
norm in study abroad participation (IIE, 2016), then foreign language acquisition will likely no longer be the preferred learning outcome that students will walk away with. Instead, students will be expected to learn—and programs will be designed to promote—more short-term, or proximal learning outcomes. This dissertation serves to highlight some potential ones.

**Non-SLA Outcomes of Study Abroad**

Though research on second language acquisition proliferates the literature on student learning in study abroad, the learning outcomes of studying abroad reach far beyond the acquisition of a foreign language. For example, studying abroad often leads to a greater understanding of other cultures and how one should adjust their behavior when encountering them (see e.g., Koskinen & Tossavainen, 2004; Ingraham & Peterson, 2004; Heinzmann et al., 2015). This learning outcome, intercultural competence (Deardorff, 2006; Williams, 2009) or intercultural awareness, is one of the most highly desired social-emotional outcomes of study abroad programming. However, growth in areas such as intercultural competence is highly dependent upon a number of key factors, such as design and duration of program, age of participants, and the contact situation with locals (see e.g., Anderson & Lawton, 2011; Donnelly-Smith, 2009). For example, a number of studies find that longer programs are associated with greater gains in intercultural competence (Dwyer, 2004; Engle & Engle, 2004; Kehl & Morris, 2008; Medina-López-Portillo, 2004), though shorter programs can still be effective in facilitating cross-cultural development (Anderson et al., 2006; Dwyer, 2004; Chieffo & Griffith, 2004; Donnelly-Smith, 2009) (cited from Heinzmann et al., 2015). Other possible social-emotional outcomes of study abroad include: increased self-confidence (Juhasz & Walker, 1987; Nash, 1976) and maturity (DeGraaf et al., 2013); the development of a more outgoing, friendly, and
uninhibited personality (Hadis, 2005); and better coping and problem-solving skills, which contribute to better mental health (Bathke & Kim, 2016).

**Participation Patterns and Varied Student Learning Outcomes**

While the above literature suggests that studying abroad can lead to significant learning gains, it is important to note that not all types of students participate at the same rates or learn in the same ways. Students of different races, ethnicities, ages, genders, and majors participate in study abroad programming at drastically different rates. For example, during the 2014-15 academic year, 73% of students who studied abroad were white, and while the percentage of minority students participating in study abroad programming (27%) has increased over the past decade (from 17%) (IIE, 2016), these numbers are not proportional to the enrollment figures for post-secondary education more generally (58% white and 42% minority) (USDOE NCES, 2016). Minority populations, such as first-generation students and students of color, face unique barriers to participation in study abroad programming, such as financial and family constraints, the lack of relevant programming, and the absence of cultural capital (see e.g., Simon & Ainsworth, 2012; Dessoff, 2006; Salisbury et al., 2009).

This disproportional participation rate suggests that the broader literature on learning in study abroad is likely skewed by a racially homogenous subject base. Researchers have thus conducted more targeted research attempting to understand the impacts of studying abroad on various minority populations. For example, black students who study abroad in Africa may develop a better understanding of their racial identity and a greater sense of their long-term goals (see e.g., Lee & Green, 2016; Brux & Fry, 2010; Penn & Tanner, 2009; Tolliver, 2000). Student-athletes who travel abroad on foreign tours with accompanying academic experiences show
promising gains in intercultural competence, knowledge of the host culture, and skills particular to their sport (Johnson et al., forthcoming).

**Missing Methods, Missing Data**

Common threads amongst many (though not all) of the aforementioned studies include: quantitative measures, large-scale data gathering and analysis, and a focus on intended outcomes. More open qualitative research methods, however, must be given a seat at the table if researchers hope to gain a wider understanding of student learning in study abroad. While quantitative research aims to operationalize set variables, qualitative researchers concern themselves with investigating the complexity of topics in their respective contexts. Qualitative researchers examine phenomena from the vantage point of their informants, which gives way to new understandings about the meaning that informants assign to their subjective experiences (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Qualitative inquiry, such as ethnography and ethnographically inspired methodology, is much better situated to uncover processes of learning and discovery of the insider (i.e., the student, the subjective) perspective (Farmer & Napieralski, 1997; Fetterman, 1988). Concerns over threats to validity, including researcher and informant subjectivity (Farmer & Napieralski, 1997), can be mitigated by collaborating with researchers who have an expertise in specific qualitative methods (or by becoming an expert yourself), rather than with the specific type of program being evaluated or assessed (Gardner, 1977). Additionally, educators with unique insights into learning processes (i.e., the program leaders themselves) can also serve as researchers, provided they practice reflexivity and attempt to understand and mitigate the ways in which they may influence the assessment process. Ultimately, approaches to evaluation and assessment should move beyond the inputs to outcomes relationship and examine the complex
processes of learning, because some outcomes may have nothing to do with the inputs included in traditional assessment and may therefore be dismissed or missed altogether (Astin, 1982).

Some researchers have begun to take inductive qualitative approaches in assessing study abroad programs (e.g., Wilkinson, 1998; Williams, 2009; Kinginger et al., 2016). However, most of these studies have been facilitated by external researchers, not the teachers or leaders of the programs personally. One approach I see missing is developing a qualitative assessment tool that teachers or program leaders can easily use to assess learning more holistically themselves, eliminating the need for outside researchers. Aside from methods such as double-entry journaling (see e.g., Bringle & Hatcher, 1999), qualitative assessment strategies are unfortunately often thought to be out of reach to teachers and leaders at the programmatic level due to the time and effort needed to implement them. We must develop tools that teachers feel comfortable with using and that maximize the productive use of their time and space. Creating tools that can be easily used by the teachers themselves can yield increased data on student learning as more and more teachers become equipped with new methods for unearthing students’ subjective learning experiences. However, qualitative research is a broad field, and I believe that some methods are particularly accessible to teachers and program leaders, in terms of time, cost, and know-how.

**Issues of Representation in Student Reflection**

While the previous section presents the need for qualitative approaches to understanding student learning in study abroad, this section cautions educators on how information gleaned from such approaches should be presented. For example, this study presents student dialogue around their experiences abroad as representations of their subjective realities, as opposed to
simply reality. The nuances between the two approaches and some implications are discussed below.

**Reality versus Representations of Reality**

There may be a distinct difference between reality and representations of realities, and we must be vigilant and critical of such differences (Crapanzano, 1999). The former connotes a positivistic, objective, total truth of what is, while the latter recognizes that realities are constructed, contextual, and subjective. What is true for one person in one time and space may not be true for another (or it may not be true at all). The nuance between reality and representations of realities often becomes lost, goes unacknowledged, or is ignored altogether, and without acknowledgement of the representational aspect of realities, it is not possible to make responsible recommendations based on research findings. For example, when educators—who have vested interests in the outcomes of their teaching—are the ones attempting to understand the experiences of their students, they need to understand their positionality, the positionality of their students, and how this interaction creates a picture that is one part of a much larger student experience landscape in which other student learning may be present.

School demands to evaluate and assess teacher effectiveness and student learning have led to the creation of the role of teacher researcher, in which teachers carry out a form of research (often action research) that examines their own practices, classrooms, and the learning that results (Kemmis, 1988; Cox-Peterson, 2001). Under this new role of teacher researcher, educators are tasked with examining the truths expressed by their students (Kincheloe, 2003). However, in most studies of student learning in study abroad that use various forms of student reflections as data, the findings are presented as reality as opposed to representations of realities.
Rather than accepting students’ reflections as positivistic realities, educators might instead benefit from phenomenologically, hermeneutically, and reflexively examining the subjectivities of those responses, as well as their own suspensions of disbelief that have accompanied their historical acceptance of student reflections as reality (Crapanzano, 1999; Kincheloe, 2003). We must ask: What processes have helped produce these representations of reality? How have I influenced this representation? Are there other possible representations that are not being shared? How can these other representations of reality be better accessed? And, what gets lost when we present data as reality as opposed to a representation of reality?

**Power and Representation in Educational Ethnography**

One influence over the representations of realities presented by student informants is power. Issues of power and representation are not new in educational ethnography (e.g., Katz, 1992), or in classrooms (Bianchi, 1997; Scott et al., 2006; Shepardson & Britsch, 2006). Most commonly studied in research with children (Christensen, 2004), researchers’ positions of power and influence—whether brought on by age differences, relationships, etc.—often change the behaviors of their informants. Critical theorists (Levinson, 2011; Apple, 1995) argue that power relations between the researcher and the researched inhibit informants from sharing their most authentic selves, instead prompting informants to act in ways—or offer representations of reality—that will please the researcher.

In classroom settings, perceived teacher power and students’ desire to please the teacher often prohibits teachers from accessing certain representations of realities (Bower, 2003). When students know that a teacher is going to read what they write, it influences the content of their writing (Smith, 2000). In addition, teachers may choose to reshape, edit, or ignore student
responses if they represent realities that go against “acceptable” or “desired” points of view, leading to the redefining of dialogue surrounding student learning (Lemke, 1990; Reinsvold & Cochran, 2012). For students, this power imbalance leads to less intrinsic motivation to complete tasks—particularly writing tasks—in a way that accurately and authentically represents the self. Completing a task then becomes a “balancing act” (Cleary, 1996) in which students ultimately produce something between what they really want to say and what they think the teacher wants to hear from them. Students often view the structures and guidelines provided by teachers and the freedom to express themselves as “binary oppositions” (Casey & Hemenway, 2001, p. 74). Students generally want to be given some structure to follow for their assignments, but tasks that are too structured often inhibit students from freely expressing their thoughts, leading to unimaginative and largely formulaic products (Casey & Hemenway, 2001). What results then is often student self-censorship, which can lessen the impact of the cognitive contribution they are able to make regarding their own learning (Roberts & Nason, 2011).

This is particularly problematic when considering reflective tasks, such as in this study. Reflective thinking involves four phases: the experience itself, the description of the experience, the analysis of the experience, and taking intelligent action (Dewey, 1933; Rodgers, 2006). However, when the description phase becomes distorted—in this case, heavily influenced by the psychological presence of the teacher (Spaulding, 1995)—the analysis and action phases become compromised. In other words, if students do not feel free or motivated to offer accurate representations of what and how they learned, then the analysis and conclusions the teacher is able to draw become misguided and inaccurate. Students also lose motivation to reflect when the designated format and rhetoric for a reflective task—which is dependent upon the audience, often their teacher—is uncomfortable for them (Cleary, 1996), and their sense of pride,
ownership, and engagement with the topic diminishes as the reflection becomes less representative of themselves and their thoughts (Casey & Hemenway, 2001).

Weberian (1978) notions of power, or the prevailing social order and its influence, are increasingly prevalent in education as educators-turned-researchers attempt to understand the experiences of their students. What often results from such educator-driven inquiries is fabricated, filtered “truth” that reflects just as much and perhaps more about the influence of the perceived power held by the researcher than the behaviors and thoughts of the researched. Teacher researchers must be cognizant of how their power may be influencing their students and the work they produce, and reflexively examine this power dynamic as they assess and learn from student work. We must understand how students perceive and define their situation before we can make sense of their reflections on it (Delamont, 1976).

**Conceptual Framework**

**Sociocultural Perspectives**

Sociocultural theory describes how cultural and historical context creates cognitive development. The sociocultural theory of learning, in its simplest form, posits that all learning originates through interaction. Vygotsky (1978) observed that cognition is a social process, and that human cognitive ability is developed through social interaction. Vygotskyan sociocultural theory highlights three important facets of the relationship between social interaction and individual learning and development (Wertsch, 1991). First is that learning occurs in two stages. Humans first interact with others on a social level, which Vygotsky calls *interpsychological*, and then internalize the interaction on a more individual or personal level, which he calls *intrapsychological*. Thus, learning is a dynamic, transformative process and has two stages: the
process of interaction and the product of the interaction. This perspective illustrates that learners acquire knowledge through activity and reflection, but also acknowledges that learners are not empty vessels at the time of interaction and bring their own knowledge(s) to the activity (Tudge & Scrimsher, 2003). The lessons individuals learn from their social interactions may be imitated, but the intertwining of the social and individual fields can lead to the lessons becoming internalized in more personalized ways (Lantolf & Pavlenko, 1985).

Second, Vygotsky highlights the use of semiotics—tools and signs—in human action and interaction. We use tools and signs to both facilitate the co-construction of knowledge with others and to further our own independent problem solving in the future. Often called “appropriation” (Leontiev, 1981; Bakhtin, 1981), we find, conceptualize, and use cultural tools that already exist to aid in knowledge creation—we learn to use the wheel without reinventing it. Finally, Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory of learning argues that change must be examined in situ and in process in order to understand the true nature of the change (Wertsch, 1991). Examining behavioral change from a historical perspective as it is occurring—and not only the end point—is the basis for understanding it. Human beings are both embodied and situated within a culture (Zlatev, 1997). While embodiment yields the subjectivity of our feelings, actions, and experiences, being culturally situated means that our lives are also fundamentally intersubjective as we act and interact with others (Witte & Harden, 2015). It is, therefore, important to investigate learning as a process that acknowledges multiple forces acting and interacting at once and not only the end result.

Vygotsky differentiates between learning and development. Unlike Piaget (1926) who argues that development precedes learning, Vygotsky posits that learning leads development. He also proposed that development cannot exist without learning:
Learning awakens a variety of internal developmental processes that are able to operate only when the child is interacting with people in his environment and with his peers…. learning is not development; however, properly organized learning results in mental development and sets in motion a variety of developmental processes that would be impossible apart from learning. Thus, learning is a necessary and universal aspect of the process of developing culturally organized, specifically human, psychological functions. (p. 90)

Therefore, from Vygotsky’s perspective, development occurs once children learn general concepts, which can then be acted with in different situations.

As Vygotsky continued to explore the relationship between context, learning, and development, others also sought to understand the tenets of and limitations to socio-cultural theory. One important move was the distinction between Vygotsky’s focus on didactic dialogue and what came to be known as guided participation (Rogoff, 1990; Lave & Wenger, 1991). This approach sees development as an apprenticeship in which “guided participation in social activity with companions who support and stretch children's understanding of and skill in using the tools of the culture” (Rogoff, 1990, p. viii). This perspective argues that face-to-face interactions are not the only guiding influences on learning and development. Individuals are influenced by verbal language as well as more tacit and non-verbal forms of communication with peers, teachers, and others in their social and cultural settings. Rogoff’s, Lave and Wenger’s, and others’ work on apprenticeship and guided participation enhanced sociocultural theory’s influence in research on in- and out-of-classroom learning.

Building upon the idea of learning through apprenticeship and formal training, Lave and Wenger (1991) further expanded the contexts in which learning could occur to include many
different types of activities. As people interact with others who are more skilled than they are—such as a patient with a doctor—they engage in what is called legitimate peripheral participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991). The most important aspect of this type of learning situation is that some form of learning is nearly inevitable; the imbalance of skills between the patient and the doctor almost guarantees that, through engagement with the doctor, the patient will learn something from the doctor, even if not what was expected. This is called situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991). This approach—acknowledging that learning does occur in some way—combats views that a potential learning situation (e.g., a classroom lesson, a study abroad program) is unsuccessful due to an individual’s failure to learn (Toohey, 1999). Rather, individuals who are not exhibiting desired learning outcomes may have instead learned something else or are simply maintaining their legitimate peripheral participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991) because they are not empowered or able to participation via the avenues that have been presented to them (Zuengler & Miller, 2006).

The situated learning interaction between the patient and the doctor, which presumably takes place in a hospital or doctor’s office, describes what Lave and Wenger (1991) call a community of practice. They define a community of practice as a group that shares a common interest and who by sharing their experiences desires to learn with and from one another. Lave and Wenger particularly sought to understand how novices or newcomers become members of established groups, particularly in skills and craft-based activities—tailors, shipmen, midwives, butchers, etc. (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). For Lave and Wenger (1991), learning and identity are necessarily intertwined; moving toward greater participation in a community of practice signals both learning and the development of an identity in relation to the activity at
hand (Day, 2002). This transformation of identity, they continue, is rooted in discussion (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

It is important to highlight that Lave and Wenger focus on more structured situated learning contexts and managerial methods of interaction, such as a novice participating in an activity that is guided by an expert, or how an expert trains a novice. Brown and Duguid (1991; 2000), however, used the same principles of communities of practice research and applied them to more informal and unstructured learning contexts. For example, in their research on Xerox copier repairmen, the researchers learned that repairmen often shared their tips, tricks, and experiences with one another on lunch breaks. Xerox executives took notice in these valuable exchanges and created an initiative that enabled these previously hidden perspectives to be shared with the corporation worldwide, ultimately saving the company millions of dollars (Brown & Duguid, 2000).

We can glean important lessons about human interaction and individual agency from the work of Brown and Duguid. Although organizations can provide manuals on how to perform tasks, much of what individuals learn about the job is through interaction and conversation with other individuals (Davenport & Prusak, 2000). To apply this same concept to the classroom and other educational settings, educators would do well to acknowledge and capitalize on the influence that unstructured interaction with others has on knowledge-seeking behavior, and thus learning and development. In this dissertation, I view the embedded study abroad program as a community of practice in which the students are apprentices seeking to learn from experts. The experts—the course professors, the Swedes they encounter during the program, and their fellow peers—and the knowledge they hold and impart create an interactive situation in which student learning is inevitable, whether intended or not.
Another seminal figure in sociocultural theory, Mikhail Bakhtin (1981), contends that “language, for the individual consciousness, lies on the border between the self and the other” (p. 293). Day (2002) argues that, from Bakhtin’s perspective, “the individual consciousness is intersubjective and is realized in dialogue with others” (p. 16). The concept of dialogism, Bakhtin argues, is a key part of the learning and meaning-making processes: language (which is his primary focus) is mutually formed as speakers and hearers co-construct utterances and their meanings in relation to past, present, and future contexts. Via a process called appropriation, individuals hear utterances from the multiplicity of voices available, and appropriate them in ways that fit their own needs and convey their own intended meanings (Toohey, 2000). Appropriation in the Bakhtinian sense is not simply a tool, but rather an individual’s ability or capacity to effectively steal the discourses of others and to adopt them for one’s own purposes. Bakhtin also argues that all language is political, stating that the ways in which individuals adopt and appropriate language (and by extension, behavior) reflects the power relationship between them and the original speaker—an idea that hearkens back to the previous section on representation. Ultimately, Bakhtin posits that individuals cannot directly know themselves, and must author a self in relation to their multivocal surroundings.

It is not uncommon to meld different sociocultural perspectives into one framework, particularly in ethnographic studies that seek to understand processes of learning (e.g., Toohey, 2000; Day, 2002). There has been considerable debate as to whether the perspectives of Vygotsky, Lave and Wenger, and Bakhtin are compatible or incompatible with one another. For example, Matusov (2011) posits that continuity between Vygotsky and Bakhtin is problematic. A key discrepancy, he highlights, falls within the difference between Vygotsky’s Hegelian monologic approach and Bakhtin’s dialogic discourse approach (Matusov, 2011). Nevertheless, I find
that these differences lie beyond the purpose of this study and that it is still productive to use these various perspectives together in complementary ways. For example, there are useful congruencies between Lave and Wenger’s situated learning and Bakhtinian dialogic perspective. Both argue that learning results from situations (interactions, language exchanges) that are rooted in specific sociohistorical contexts—they are dependent upon space and time. Further, both Bakhtin and Lave and Wenger acknowledge the conflictual power relations inherent in participating in various discourses of learning.

Lave and Wenger’s (1991) concept of apprenticeship also compares nicely with Bakhtin’s notion of appropriation. As previously detailed, Lave and Wenger’s (1991) apprenticeship model of learning involves a novice learning from a more experienced person in a given situation—even if we do not see it, we can assume the learning is there, even if not in the ways we expect. Alternatively, Bakhtin (1981) uses the metaphor of appropriation. Individuals hear the "utterances" of others and appropriate them in ways that are useful to them, personally. To more explicitly draw the connection between Bakhtin and Lave and Wenger, the person who first uttered is the person with experience—they say or do something that seems foreign to the novice (e.g., the student). The student then takes that new information, tries it out, and finds a way to use it that will benefit them. The way they use it may not be how it was intended for them to use it, but that does not mean they did not learn anything.

**Incidental Learning**

Studies of the impact of innovative technologies (such as computers) on students' primary learning—learning obtained from planned course curriculum—from the 1920s to 1980s showed no significant results (Russell, 1997, as cited in McFerrin, 1999). However, as educators and
researchers came to better understand the nature of learning in the classroom, they began to acknowledge that students often learned in ways not explicitly connected to the curriculum, an assertion that is backed by sociocultural perspectives (e.g., Lave & Wenger, 1991; Bakhtin, 1981). Therefore, new realizations on the impact of technologies, such as how a majority of learning outcomes related to technology use were not the result of planned curricular content, gave way to new understandings about how learning can occur incidentally, whether we plan for it or not.

While this study is not only aimed at understanding incidental learning in study abroad experiences, identifying and understanding incidental learning in study abroad programs will both help combat criticisms of limited learning in international education programs and offer new understandings about the learning outcomes we can perhaps more intentionally facilitate and assess in the future. Marsick and Watkins (1990) define incidental learning as “a byproduct of some other activity” (p. 12) that stands in contrast to formal or structured learning and informal learning. While the differences between formal or structured learning (i.e., specific activities linked with specific outcomes) and incidental learning may be obvious, the contrast between informal and incidental learning is subtler. Informal learning refers to learning that is “intentional but not highly structured”—such as networking, mentoring, or self-directed learning—but still has specific, targeted learning outcomes (Marsick & Watkins, 2001, p. 25).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Structured?</th>
<th>Intentional Learning Outcomes?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Formal Learning</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informal Learning</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incidental Learning</td>
<td>✓ or ✗</td>
<td>✗</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 1: Comparing Learning Paradigms*
In contrast, incidental learning can result from either formal or informal learning situations and is characterized by outcomes that were likely not intended or planned for (Marsick & Watkins, 1990). With incidental learning, students make discoveries about themselves and the world via their experiences and interactions with others. Because the learning moment can be unstructured and unguided, these discoveries are often made unconsciously by the students and are revealed through purposeful reflection. Related to Bandura’s (1986) social learning theory and Kolb’s (1984) experiential learning theory, incidental learning is also linked to “integration with daily routines,” “inductive process[es] of reflection and action,” and is “linked to the learning of others” (Marsick & Watkins, 1990, p. 5).

Because incidental learning results from "unanticipated outcomes" (Ragsdale, 1997), it often goes unexamined. The learning is not expected and is therefore often difficult to assess (Lankard, 1995). The lack of student differentiation between intended and incidental learning outcomes further complicates assessment efforts and the ability to link specific outcomes to specific learning situations (Mealman, 1993). It should also be noted that not all incidental learning is positive or desired (McFerrin, 1999), and thus can result in mis-educative experiences.
and the development of inaccurate conclusions. However, incidental learning that occurs in the classroom is often viewed as more meaningful and significant to the learner than the intended outcomes set by the educator (Jones, 1982).
CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This dissertation ultimately seeks to uncover students’ subjective learning experiences to elucidate more complete understandings of how and what students are learning during a particular embedded short-term study abroad program. This chapter details my general research design: participants, data collection techniques, analytical approaches, and validity considerations.

Human Participants and Ethics Precautions

Site Selection

As explained previously, my primary responsibility as the Embedded Programs Specialist for Penn State Global Programs was to identify and support faculty members across the university who were interested in designing and/or leading embedded programs. I contacted several faculty members at Penn State’s University Park campus with whom I had worked over the past year and a half and who I knew were leading programs over the Maymester and Summer I sessions, which generally fit the timeline for my study. I also vetted these courses and professors with other Global Programs staff in hopes of identifying an embedded program that showed distinct promise for facilitating meaningful student learning outcomes. This narrowed my options to three programs. The first program focused on language, literature, and culture, and involved two weeks of travel throughout Brazil and Columbia in May. The second program included two weeks of travel to Germany in June and July to study issues in environmental science. The third program focused on issues of human resources and employment with 10 days of travel to Sweden in May.
After speaking with faculty leaders of the three separate embedded programs, I selected the third—a program jointly led by faculty members in two different colleges on the Penn State University Park campus. I chose this course as the focus for my study for a number of practical reasons. First, the dates for the course’s travel component aligned with my own summer travel schedule—the Germany program conflicted with my summer work in Peru. Second, the travel itinerary listed three different cities as host locations, but with a fairly non-hectic and non-expensive travel schedule, unlike the first program which traveled back and forth between Brazil and Columbia. Finally, the faculty members for the program had been in frequent contact with the Office of Global Programs throughout the creation of the course, which signaled to me their commitment to effective course design and student learning.

This embedded program was a split-level undergraduate and graduate course with a particular focus on how large Swedish organizations handle human resource and labor issues. The course began during the Spring semester with students attending four “pre-trip” meetings on the University Park campus. During those class sessions, students completed reading assignments and engaged in discussions about employment relations and human resource management both at home and in the Swedish social welfare context. This was also a time for orienting the students for their international experience: setting expectations, calming concerns, and reviewing safety and risk management information. I was only able to attend the last of the four sessions, which was held two weeks prior to their departure for Sweden.

The international component of the embedded course ran from May 18th to May 28th, for a total of 10 days in Sweden. During that time, students traveled to three Swedish cities—Jönköping, Stockholm, and Gothenburg—where they attended seminars at local universities, met with human resource professionals at Volvo, IKEA, Husqvarna, and the Swedish
Jordbruksverket (Board of Agriculture), and participated in other cultural activities such as a visit to the famed Vasa Museum in Stockholm. The program was fairly structured (in comparison with the many other programs I have seen through my work in Penn State Global Programs), though students were given a great amount of free time for personal exploration. For an abridged version of the course syllabus and a detailed itinerary of the international component of the embedded course, see Appendices A and B, respectively.

**Informant Recruitment and Selection**

Although the two faculty members had agreed to allow me to use their program as the basis for my study, we all agreed that 100% buy-in from the student participants was important. Student informants were recruited during their last pre-trip class session. I presented a brief description of myself, my educational and professional background, and my research, and handed each participant a personalized informed consent form. As this class session was held on a Friday evening, students were given the weekend to consider their participation and were asked to provide a response by the following Tuesday. Ultimately, all students agreed to participate, with over half of them returning the signed consent form during the class period. The outstanding forms were collected sporadically over the following week.

There were 15 university students enrolled in the course. As mentioned previously, the course joined students from two different colleges, and the enrollment for the course was nearly evenly split between them. Two of the students were graduate students. They were all full-time students of Penn State, though one of the students took all of their courses through Penn State’s World Campus online degree program. 11 students were female, four were male. They were between the ages of 19 and 30, and they were predominantly white, with the exceptions of Marie
(half Korean) and Marcy (Chinese-American). For a detailed list of co-researcher characteristics, see Table 1. Students were offered a $50 (cash) incentive to participate, payable upon completion of their interviews. The two professors—one from HPA and the other from LER, and both female—agreed to participate in the study but are not included as co-researchers in this dissertation. Although all 15 students agreed to participate, only 11 of them ultimately agreed to participate in the PCI interviews and focus groups. Of these 11, 10 of the students actually participated.

Table 1
Informant Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Informant*</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Class (2016-17)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Angela</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Senior (Online)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brandon</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Senior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bryan</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Junior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dana</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Graduating Senior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Danielle</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Graduate Student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emily</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Senior/Graduate Student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jessa</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Senior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kari</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Senior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kate</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Graduate Student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marcy</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Senior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marie</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Junior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noah</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Junior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patricia</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Junior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachel</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Senior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tony</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Graduating Senior</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTE.—*All informants were assigned a pseudonym.
Methods

I employ the following interpretive methods to understand the subjective learning experiences of my informants.

Participant-Observation and the Researcher Journal

Participant-observation is a cornerstone of any ethnographic research project (e.g., Spradley, 1980), though there has been much debate about the role of the researcher in ethnography. Along the participant-observer continuum (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007), there are a number of positions in which the ethnographer may situate him or herself. For example, Gold (1958) argues that ethnographers can be detached and not participate in any activities, and simply be a fly on the wall. This detached approach to ethnographic data collection is called the complete observer (Gold, 1958), and entails the researcher either remaining obscured from their research subjects or positioned in plain sight in public settings—either way, the subjects are unaware that they are being observed. The complete observer’s methods are therefore unobtrusive, but also may inhibit them from fully understanding informant activities (Merriam, 1998).

On the other end of the spectrum, the ethnographer may “go native” (Malinowski, 1922), with their actions indiscernible from those of their informants (Gold, 1985). The complete participant (Gold, 1958) fully immerses themselves in the research setting to the extent that they act and behave just like the people they are studying. Their researcher role is often obscured from their informants, which precludes the researcher from disrupting normal behavior, but also presents several ethical concerns as this approach entails the deception of informants, which may result in a loss of trust (Gold, 1958).
My role in this study fell somewhere in the middle, as Adler and Adler (1994) argue it should. I utilized Gold’s (1958) observer as participant stance; my informants were aware of my researcher role and allowed me to participate in various group activities—even though I was not a member of the group—so that I could generate more complete understandings of their experiences. This “peripheral membership role” (Adler & Adler, 1994, p. 380) enabled me to develop close relationships with my informants, which led to me developing an insider identity while also maintaining enough distance between my informants and myself to exclude me from full group membership. I functioned as an insider-outsider in an attempt to bring both emic and etic perspectives of student experiences (Spradley, 1980).

It is important for ethnographic researchers to manage their impressions and to maintain some distance between themselves and their informants; ethnographers must establish rapport with informants, which enables them to blend in and better enables the informants to act naturally, but must also be able to step back in order to more objectively analyze the data they have collected (Bernard, 1994). This is not to say that ethnographic fieldwork is objective. Participant-observation is a very subjective approach to understanding culture. Participant-observers must therefore practice high degrees of reflexivity, managing their own understandings of the culture they observe, examining the ways in which their identities and biases may affect the data they gather and their interpretations of it, and keeping an open, nonjudgmental attitude about what they observe (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; DeWalt & DeWalt, 1998; 2002).

Participant-observation also enables researchers to observe events that informants may be unwilling to share or discuss during interviews (Marshall & Rossman, 1995), and increases the validity of ethnographic studies when analyzed in conjunction with other types of data collection (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2002). In order to gain a more complete understanding of what occurred
during this program, I functioned as a participant-observer throughout the majority of the embedded program. I attended one four-hour-long residential class prior to the 10-day international component, which included getting to know the 15 student participants and two faculty leaders, getting a sense of group dynamics that had formed over the three previous residential class sessions that I was unable to attend, and developing an understanding of the class culture. Though all students were responsible for organizing their own travel to and from Sweden—meaning that the group did not travel to or from Sweden together—I traveled with the class throughout the 10 days in Sweden. I participated in the same activities as the students, acting more like “one of them” than a researcher.

I recorded extensive fieldnotes (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011) in my researcher journal as I followed the group of students from the beginning of the course to its conclusion, creating a “regular, systematic” (p. 1) record of what I observed, interpreted, and learned. I attempted to craft “thick descriptions[s]” (Geertz, 1973) of program activities and student behaviors. I made use of sketches, diagrams, photos, and brief voice recordings that I found useful for chronicling my observations along the way. My researcher journal also functioned as a space to record memos following informal in-country interviews, group and one-on-one conversations, and other reactions or thoughts I had throughout the data collection process.

Photo-Cued Interviewing (PCI)

In addition to participant-observation, I also utilized my own novel qualitative data collection technique, photo-cued interviewing, or PCI, to gain understandings about students’ subjective experiences. I believe it is important that the modes of gathering data should be enjoyable for the informants of the research study (see more in Gibson et al., 2013). Today’s
university students are increasingly consumers of social media and digital communities (Levine & Dean, 2012), expressing themselves through photo and video via sites and apps such as Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter, and YouTube to name a few. What some refer to as “electronic crack” (Levine & Dean, 2012, p. 69), social media (and what students decide to share on it) provides today’s generation with a new, more visible outlet for sharing their experiences with others. Look at many college student Facebook or Instagram accounts, my own included, and you will see an onslaught of images—friends, vacations, food—that each represent something meaningful about the moment the photos were taken. Sometimes users provide captions that explain the significance of the photo, while other images are left to be interpreted by viewers. This dissertation capitalizes on today’s generation’s tendency to use photography as a means of expression, meaning making, and communication—assessing learning in a non-invasive way that is rich with context, rigorous in methodology, but also that speaks the language of my informants and is fun to participate in.

The University of Michigan’s Elsa Wang and Mary Ann Burris (Wang & Burris, 1999) also saw the use in using a medium familiar to their informants to understand their perspectives and subjective experiences. Focusing mainly on community identity (Wang & Burris, 1999) and issues of women’s health (Wang, 2009), Wang and Burris wanted to develop a methodology that could enable them to garner community interest and support in conducting participatory needs assessments. The resulting approach, photovoice, also known as participatory photography, is a highly flexible methodology that has three main goals:

1) to enable people to record and reflect their community’s strengths and weaknesses,

2) to promote critical dialogue and knowledge about important community issues through large and small group discussion of photographs, and
3) to reach policymakers. (Wang & Burris, 1999, p. 370)

Essentially, informants are given cameras and are asked to visually document the various strengths and needs of their communities. Then, they are asked to caption each photograph—explain what it depicts, why they took it, what it means to them, and other information pertinent to the photographs. Researchers then use these informant-provided interpretations to gain understandings about how the informants view and experience their communities.

The photovoice methodology provides a useful framework for researchers who seek to uncover personal understandings and insider ways of knowing. Particularly, Wang and Burris argue that photovoice enables the researcher to “perceive the world from the viewpoint of the people who lead lives that are different from those traditionally in control of the means for imaging the world” (1999, p. 372). It also enables assessment to move beyond the necessity of words or traditional scaled or multiple-choice questions, allowing imagery—imagery that is important to the informants—to guide the process. Further, photovoice allows researchers to access spaces that may not be available to them personally, such as, in the case of my study, free-time and personal exploration activities. Finally, this method has the potential to incite change by inviting informants to “become advocates” (Wang & Burris, 1999).

I found photovoice to be a particularly useful method for studying the subjective learning experiences of students studying abroad. First, the goals of photovoice partly align with my goals for this research:

1) to enable students to document and reflect on significant and meaningful learning moments of their study abroad experience,
2) to promote dialogue around concepts (processes and products) of learning that may be occurring on study abroad programs, but that may have been overlooked or ignored to date, and,

3) to reach educators and practitioners in hopes of informing outcomes assessment and curricular design efforts.

The students’ photographs enable experiences to move from the abstract to the concrete, and such visual documentation helps to promote greater dialogue around their subjective experiences (see e.g., Edwards et al., 2007). This method affords the possibility of having students identify their learning more subjectively (i.e., not in relation to pre-determined learning outcomes), enabling a more open view of the personal, professional, or academic benefits that embedded short-term study abroad programming can offer. I sought to not only identify how and what students may be learning on study abroad programs, but also to develop and demonstrate a method that can be implemented by educators and/or practitioners—to bridge the gap between educational anthropology and assessment in higher education, and to make research doable in the classroom by both the students and the teachers.

Much like Wang and Burris influenced approaches to community needs assessments, Tobin and colleagues’ *Preschool in Three Cultures: Japan, China and the United States* (1989) revolutionized the way ethnography was understood and undertaken, especially in the comparative education scholarly community. Rather than stepping into various cultural settings (in this case, preschool classrooms in Japan, China, and the United States) and simply observing behaviors and interviewing individuals, Tobin and colleagues instead used video cameras to capture a “typical day” in one preschool in each of the three cultures. The videos they shot were not seen as evidence or data; instead, the researchers used the videos as interview and focus
group cues. They selected interesting clips (with help from teachers in the schools) that seemed to represent something meaningful or intriguing about a particular culture’s approach to child-rearing and socialization practices. The research team would then show those clips to teachers, administrators, and parents both within that culture and to those in the other two cultures, to better understand how individuals in each culture viewed their own practices in relation to others’ practices. This method, called *video-cued multivocal ethnography* (Tobin et al., 1989), allows for reflection upon and explanation of experiences *in situ*, and for comparison and contrast between cultures *through the eyes of the informants*.

The “Tobin method” as it is affectionately called is useful for this study as I sought to create a dialogue around visual representations of learning culture and meaning making in study abroad. Specifically, I wanted students to select images that they feel best represent their experiences in Sweden and then to describe them to me during individual interviews. Students were also given opportunities to reflect upon the photos of their classmates, highlighting how their experiences may have been similar or different, and providing another layer of multivocality (Bakhtin, 1981; Tobin et al, 1989). Ultimately, the Tobin method as partially applied in this study allowed students to guide their own descriptions of their experiences, and therefore shape the ways in which educators can observe and understand the learning that occurred for them.

Wang and Burris’s photovoice and Tobin’s video-cued multivocal ethnography methods serve as examples of how understanding the ways in which informants understand their world should not be a quantitative or bounded endeavor. In other words, these two methods produce insights into the subjective experiences of study informants without binding them to pre-conceived notions of what they may know or have learned, and allow informants to freely
express their perspectives relating to their experiences. They each acknowledge the subjectivity of truths, and the various truths presented by each informant do not necessarily negate or counter one another. Rather, the truths their informants provide about their respective worlds, in many ways, help the researchers to fill in gaps that may be left from only examining one truth (Jackson, 2004). In combining these two methods into what I call photo-cued interviewing (PCI), I sought to understand what and how students learn, through their eyes and voices, and not in relation to what their teachers or study abroad practitioners think they will learn, and without assumptions of how learning may be designed to occur. I also acknowledged that situations can be experienced in multiple ways, and that each interpretation is valid and valuable for understanding student learning holistically.

PCI is most deeply rooted in ethnographic perspectives. By using student photos to prompt conversation, researchers are able to glimpse into the culture of student learning (Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989). This approach allows researchers to understand how students make meaning of their experiences while abroad and affords new insights into how and what students learn during study abroad programs. It also allows researchers to access and understand situations that they may not have noticed or had access to during participant-observation, thus painting a broader picture of the program itself.

The PCI method partly stems from phenomenological perspectives as well. Van Manen (1990) posits that all experiences are pre-reflective, meaning that in order for learning to result from an activity one must consciously reflect on the experience to understand it and its impacts. PCI provides students with a space for this reflection by bringing them back to the experience itself. The students’ photos move their experiences from the abstract to the concrete, grounding their conversations in situ and enabling them to reflect upon their experiences in context. PCI
gives voice to reflection and allows for learning to become known to the students themselves and makes it more observable to the researcher.

As can be expected from college students studying abroad, the students took numerous pictures to document their experiences in Sweden—pictures of buildings, friends, food, locals, etc. Before departure, I advised them to be thinking about moments or experiences that resonate with them, on a personal, professional, or academic level (Ogden, 2006). Three to four weeks after we returned from Sweden, I asked them to submit three photos they took that “represented something meaningful or significant” about their time in Sweden. While I did not specify what I meant by “meaningful or significant,” I later learned that students interpreted this to mean something fun, something insightful, something confusing, something intriguing, something moving, etc. My decision not to provide too much guidance on the types of photos students might submit stemmed from my interest in their subjective experiences; doing so may have hindered their personal expression and influenced the types of photos they saw fit to share with me (Gibson et al., 2013). My goal was to elicit images that represented moments that were personally meaningful and significant for them, and not images that represented moments they thought I would want to hear about. Keeping the instructions vague and open to personal interpretation enabled students to select and submit photos representing their personally meaningful experiences—the significance of which emerged from within them—and thus prompted conversations that uncovered what they personally learned during their time abroad. However, providing them with a focus—something meaningful or significant—helped to create a mediated dialogue about the meaning through which they interpreted their experiences.

The result was 32 photos that revealed the “subjective, idiosyncratic, and culture-bound” (Tobin et al., 1989, p. 7) experiences of the 10 students who elected to participate in the PCI
portion of the study. The students’ photos, which included images of their favorite Swedish meals, the Stockholm skyline, various modes of transportation, and the students hanging out together at an amusement park to name a few, were visual ethnographies (Tobin et al., 1989) that each served as cues, or prompts, during interviews and focus groups. The photos opened up dialogue surrounding student experiences and allowed for greater discussion and interpretation that was visually grounded in the experience itself and highlighted the complexities of authenticity and student voice. The conversations that resulted from the PCI individual interviews and focus groups were dialogic and multivocal, presenting multiple discourses surrounding their experiences that often complemented and contradicted one another.

**Individual Interviews**

11 of the 15 students (with the exceptions of Bryan, Jessa, Noah, and Patricia) agreed to participate in the individual interviews, though only nine students actually completed their interviews (Angela did not show up for her interview and Marie did not respond to my scheduling requests). Five interviews were conducted in-person over coffee, lunch, or dinner in State College, Pennsylvania, with the remaining four conducted via Skype or Google Hangout. Interviews were audio recorded with participant consent using two voice recorders. Although originally planned for only 45 minutes each, individual interviews ranged from 64 to 132 minutes.

Using a semi-structured interview protocol (Spradley, 1979; Corbin & Strauss, 2015) I asked students to reflect upon their experiences, using their photos as prompts, to understand what they found meaningful, the situations in which they learned, and what they learned (processes and products). Each individual interview began with a brief reintroduction to the
purpose of the study and an overview of the informed consent form that students signed prior to traveling to Sweden. I then asked students to select which of their three photos they wished to talk about first; some students had a preference while others asked me to choose, in which case I simply selected the first photo that appeared in the student’s file on my computer. With each of us looking at the selected photo, I asked the students to describe it: “Tell me about this picture.” Students most often described when and where the photo was taken, what was in the photo, and why they selected this particular photo to share with me, though I sometimes needed to prompt students on the latter.

With the conversation now grounded in a particular experience or moment, my line of questioning depended heavily upon the information students provided and varied greatly for each student. For example, Dana’s first photo—a seafood meal she ate in Stockholm (Dana, Photo #1, shown below)—related to the unexpected aspects of the program that caused her to push her own boundaries. After she described how trying the seafood was “stepping out of [her] comfort zone,” I asked, “Were there other parts of the program that required you to step out of your comfort zone?”

Dana, Photo #1: Seafood Meal in Modern Restaurant in Stockholm
When Danielle used her photo of a slew of bicycles parked in Gothenburg as a metaphor for Swedish values of living a healthy lifestyle and being environmentally conscious (Danielle, Photo #2, shown below), I asked, “How have you thought about those values in relation to your own life?” While these lines of questioning yielded important insights about Dana’s and Danielle’s subjective experiences abroad, I could not have necessarily anticipated them in advance—just as with most of the conversations elicited by the students’ photos.

Danielle, Photo #2: Bikes on Gothenburg Archipelago Islands

At many points, the conversations deviated from the moments depicted in the photos and drifted to other experiences students found meaningful and/or significant. For example, Tony’s conversation about his photo of Lake Vättern in Jönköping (Tony, Photo #1, shown below), which for him represented the jarring experience of being “immersed” into a new culture surrounded by new people, developed into an intriguing dialogue about his journey to Sweden. Tony segued from discussing how some students traveled together (and therefore got to know each other beforehand) to talking about how he had to navigate the Swedish transportation
system on his own. While continuing to question Tony’s experience in this case proved very fruitful, the most difficult decisions I had to make were on-the-spot judgment calls on which deviations to pursue and which ones to leave alone.

The primary rationale for conducting individual interviews is that it provides a space for each student to describe their own subjective experiences from their time abroad. This in-depth examination of individual perspectives, as I suspected, gave students the opportunity to purposefully reflect on their experiences, which many students admitted they had not yet done, and yielded interesting insights into the lessons each student came away with. Another rationale for conducting individual interviews is to demonstrate that teachers, acting as teacher-researchers (Kemmis, 1988; Kincheloe, 2003; Cox-Peterson, 2001) can sit down with students to discuss the meaning of the students’ photographs in order to better understand how they experienced the program. Through capturing students' subjective experiences, teachers can then gather new
information about the kinds of learning (and possibly development) cultivated during the program and which kinds of activities or situations sparked those learning moments.

**Focus Groups**

In keeping with Tobin et al.’s (1989) multivocal method and Bakhtinian (1981) notions of multivocality and dialogism, students were also given opportunities to reflect upon each other’s photographs as a group, which layered the discourses surrounding students’ subjective experiences. In small groups, students participated in focus groups using each other’s photos as cues. The first focus group had four student participants—Kari, Marcy, Danielle, and Angela. All four students participated via Skype. The second focus group had three participants—Kate, Rachel, and Brandon. Kate and Rachel met with me in-person while Brandon Skyped from a distance as he was working in another city at the time. Originally planned for one hour each, the focus groups lasted 84 and 91 minutes, respectively. As with the interviews, each focus group was audio-recorded with participant consent using two voice recorders.

Following a semi-structured protocol (see Appendix D) and with myself as a moderator, students collectively reflected on their own photos as well as photos taken by their peers. Prior to the focus group date, I asked each student participant to email me one photo they would like to discuss with their peers that represented something meaningful and/or significant about their experience in the program. Students were encouraged to use one of the photos from their individual interviews, though this was not required. Only one student, Kari, choose a different photo (Kari, Photo #1). Like the individual interviews, each focus group began with a brief overview of the study and information provided in the informed consent forms. I then described the format for the focus group. One at a time, each student would describe their selected photo to
their peers, being sure to highlight what the picture was of and why they chose it to share. I described my role as a moderator; I would interject as little as possible and wanted the students to have a conversation about each other’s photos and the shared or differing perspectives they held regarding the particular moments or experiences depicted in the photos.

I asked for volunteers to be the first to share in each focus group, and for each subsequent sharer afterward. The first student shared their respective photo with the group, giving a brief explanation of when and where the photo was taken and what it represented to them. Then, students were encouraged to converse with each other about those interpretations and whether or not they agreed. Most students excitedly offered their own interpretations of their classmates’ photos, though I had to politely prompt conversation in some instances. For example, I would ask, “Danielle, what do you think about Angela’s photo?” or, “Brandon, do you agree with Rachel’s perspective on this particular moment?”

This collective approach elucidated understandings similar to the interviews, but also encouraged students to interact with others’ reflections to co-construct new understandings and meanings together. For example, Brandon’s photo of Gothenburg (Brandon, Photo #1) prompted a contested discussion about what it means to raise a family in Sweden versus in the United States:

*Brandon:* It just seemed really easy to raise a family there. There were so many different programs that supported you having a family that made it a lot easier. Whereas in the United States it's harder to have kids. Many people wish they could have more but they can’t because of money or work or something like that.

*Rachel:* Coming from Lancaster County and Amish/Mennonite background—they have huge families. Pretty much all of them. There's no problem having them. There's lots of
Brandon: I think it's because you and I are from two completely different contexts. Brandon, hailing from Philadelphia, and Rachel, who was raised in the farmlands of New Holland, both had different perspectives on the influences of the economy and governmental support on raising children in the two countries. While simplistic, this exchange illustrates how experiences are highly subjective and contingent upon the backgrounds and prior experiences of each student, and highlights the power in giving students spaces in which they can exchange perspectives, such as the PCI focus groups. Deloach et al. (2008) came to similar conclusions about the role of group discussion during study abroad programs; facilitated group discussion can cultivate new understandings about cultural phenomena and that the group setting makes providing students feedback and assessing student learning less time consuming for faculty members.

The primary rationale for using focus groups as a data collection strategy is that it provides a space for layered discourses to emerge and for a telling and retelling of the same events from different perspectives (see e.g., Tobin et al., 1989). Not only does it enable researchers to gain access to individual students’ perceptions of particular meaningful moments, but it also gives way for multiple interpretations of those moments, and therefore paints a broader picture of how students experienced the program. Another rationale for using focus groups is to highlight that PCI can also be student-driven, which relieves the researcher (or course instructor, if they are collecting the data) of having to individually interview each student on their own, thus saving time, and allows students to be both co-constructors of knowledge and peer evaluators.
Data Analysis

Because this study uses data collection tool that is open, flexible, and that offers emic explanations of students’ subjective experiences, a grounded theory approach serves as an appropriate analytic methodology. Evensen and Pratt (2012) contend that grounded theory “conforms to an epistemology which assumes that persons act on the basis of individual and personal meanings that are constructed (defined and redefined) through social interaction, and that these ways of being and knowing can be made subject to inquiry” (p. 3). Grounded theory is also particularly useful for understanding processes (Corbin & Strauss, 2015), and the inductive nature of grounded theory can help reveal how students understand what they have learned and how that learning may have occurred. Complemented with—though not rigidly guided by—a conceptual framework centered on study abroad learning outcomes, sociocultural perspectives, and incidental learning theory, grounded theory analytical approaches helped me to construct an understanding of the processes and products of student learning that may be missed in other types of analytic strategies.

In order to protect the identity of my informants and in accordance with IRB human subject ethics regulations, I assigned each student a pseudonym, keeping a coded roster of participants in a password-protected file space (PSU Box). I transcribed each interview verbatim and uploaded the transcripts into NVivo qualitative analytic software. While transcribing each interview, I recorded interviewer comments throughout the transcription text to record my initial reactions to what was said, or what was not said (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Once transcription was complete, I read each interview and focus group closely several times before I began coding to develop a close intimacy with the data (Charmaz, 2011).
The analytic strategy detailed here arose from lessons learned during my pilot study. Because this study focuses on both processes (how) and products (what) of student learning, I devised a preliminary two-pronged coding approach in order to capture both at once in order to understand the situations in which students learned and what they learned more specifically. Using an open, emergent coding scheme (Corbin & Strauss, 2015), I conducted a first round of line-by-line conceptual, impressionistic coding in NVivo for both processes and products of student learning (Corbin & Strauss, 2015) to help me ground future coding iterations closely in the data. During this initial phase, I noticed the need for a third prong that focused on the role of reflection in student learning. I employed several analytic strategies, such as making theoretical comparisons, examining expressed emotions, and looking for negative cases (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). In doing so, I sought to assign labels to each concept in order to make them more succinct and tangible to work with moving forward in the coding process. Some of these were in vivo codes (Charmaz, 2011).

Because I find that NVivo for Mac software does not allow users to easily rearrange leveled nodes, I conducted the final rounds of coding by hand. After exporting all of my codes from NVivo to Microsoft Excel, I printed the list of codes and cut each code into a strip and spread them around the room, splitting the codes into three categories according to my preliminary coding scheme—process (situation), product (outcome), and reflection. Next, I conducted one round of more focused coding (Charmaz, 2011) in order to identify the most significant and frequently mentioned concepts and to narrow the number of conceptual codes I had generated from the first round of coding. Then, I organized these more focused codes into categories that represented connections among the conceptual codes. This resulted in approximately 30 different piles: 19 for products of learning, three for process (or situations, as I
later re-labeled them), and 7 for reflection (which represented codes on the PCI method and the reflective assignments from the course). I wrote detailed memos for some of the more abstract codes along the way to help me parse out definitions and descriptors for each code and how they were different from one another.

Finally, I engaged in theoretical coding (Charmaz, 2011), where I organized the categories from the previous step into higher-order concepts (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). In this phase, I also often found that I had to work backwards; the categories I had created in the previous round of coding often became themes which needed to be further broken down internally. For example, my three process categories served as overarching themes, with each category breaking down into more specific types of situations. Ultimately, I developed three overarching thematic categories: situations that incited learning, learning outcomes, and reflections on learning and assessment in study abroad. I present each of these broad themes as a chapter in this dissertation, with each chapter further broken down into general concepts, focused categories, and specific examples. See Figure 3 for an example of this organizational scheme.

![Figure 3: Example of Coding Scheme](image)

Learning Outcomes
- Chapter 5 Theme

Social-Emotional Learning
- 1 of 2 categories of learning outcomes

Intercultural Competence
- 1 of 8 categories of SEL outcomes

Abandoning Ethnocentricity
- 1 of 3 categories of IC
Ultimately, my goal with this study is not to develop a theory of incidental learning in short-term study abroad. Instead, my study is informed by sociocultural theory, situated learning, incidental learning, and other highly applicable theories related to my context. Rather than reinventing the wheel, I have adopted Lave and Wenger’s (1991) apprenticeship model of learning and Bakhtin’s (1981) concept of appropriation, and have chosen to use these theoretical tools as loose guides in my search for answers about student learning in these international contexts. However, because I do not hypothesize how or what students are learning, I believe the grounded theory analytical approach is well-suited to unearth understandings about student learning in this context.

**Validity**

As a scholar and practitioner trying to find a space for anthropological qualitative research in the quantitatively driven field of study abroad outcomes assessment, I must meticulously address the perceived threats to validity that qualitative research generally garners. Maxwell (2013) offers several examples of validity tests for researchers to consider when evaluating the rigor and credibility of their qualitative studies, and I employed several of these approaches to validity testing during my research.

First, while eliminating researcher effect is not possible in qualitative research, I was able to control for it through practicing rigorous reflexivity. Reflexivity is a process of reflection and action that enables the researcher to understand how they may be influencing what an informant says and how this may influence the interpretations you can draw from any given data (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). By constantly memoing in my research journal, I attempted to better understand my biases and to mitigate how my identities—as a study abroad practitioner, as
a teacher, as a believer in the benefits of study abroad, and as a white female in my mid-twenties—may be impacting my research. For example, I considered the ways in which my young age enabled me to enter, observe, and participate in situations from which older individuals (such as the two course professors) may have been excluded and how this entrée impacted my relationship with my informants and the information I was able to collect.

Revealing and attempting to control for my various social and demographic identities, however, is merely mechanical and othering, and is only a first step in practicing rigorous reflexivity (Ruby, 1995). Ethnographic researchers must also make themselves vulnerable. The vulnerable ethnographer not only acknowledges their identities, but also problematizes them in ways that help them to better understand their positionality and the ways in which those identities are influencing the ways in which they gather and see data, and therefore create knowledge (Behar, 1996). Vulnerable ethnographers must then place distance not only between themselves and their informants, but also between themselves and their own assumptions or beliefs (Jackson, 2004). It is this distance that enables ethnographers to distinguish between truths and subjective truths, and to further resolve their own subjectivities in relation to their ethnographic work. In keeping with critical reflexivity (Ruby, 1995) and vulnerability (Behar, 1996), I was careful to problematize my various identities in hopes of mitigating the influence my own assumptions and biases about study abroad and student learning may have had on my data collection and analysis.

Another way I attempted to rule out threats to validity was by conducting member checks (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Member checking involves sharing your interpretations of the data you collect with your informants to ensure that what you have interpreted accurately captures their intended meanings. Following the interviews and focus groups, I returned to some of my
informants via either email or Skype, shared my general interpretations, and asked them to verify
or modify what I had written.

Lincoln and Guba (1994) contend that prolonged engagement helps researchers establish
trustworthiness of the qualitative data they gather. Many ethnographers spend years living within
the communities they study in order to establish trustworthiness, but as this program only lasted
ten days, my engagement with my informants was not as prolonged as with other ethnographic
studies. However, my engagement with my informants lasted throughout the entirety of the
program, meaning that I completed an entire cycle of the culture. This length of engagement
enabled me to gain greater access to and trust with my informants and allowed me to develop
deeper understandings about the ways in which they experienced the program.

I also diligently searched for and highlighted discrepant or negative cases that did not
support my interpretations. By doing so, I both acknowledged “the pressures to ignore data that
do not fit [my] conclusions” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 127) and found evidence that either supported
my conclusions or gave way for modifications of them. This process helped to ensure that my
interpretations and conclusions were valid and that they could not be disconfirmed elsewhere in
my data. I include some observed negative cases in my data chapters.

Finally, data triangulation served as a way for me to reduce the risk of chance
associations I may make have taken within any one given data set, and afforded me the
opportunity to better assess the generality of my interpretations (Maxwell, 2013). By
triangulating interviews, focus groups, observation fieldnotes, and researcher memos, I was able
to better understand how various aspects of the phenomena I was researching may complement
or contradict one another (Fielding & Fielding, 1986). This generated a greater depth of
understanding and ultimately helped me to paint a larger picture that grasped multiple aspects of truth and reality.
CHAPTER 4: SITUATIONS FOR LEARNING

As sociocultural theory contends, cognition and cognitive development is highly contextual in relation to both history and culture. In summary (please refer back to Chapter 2 for a fuller account of sociocultural theory and its application to this study), Vygotskian sociocultural theory argues that cognition is a social process, and that cognitive development occurs through interactions and reflections upon those interactions (1978). Lave and Wenger (1991) use an apprenticeship model of learning to argue that learning is situated in contexts where an inexperienced individual (i.e., the novice) learns from an individual with higher levels of experience (i.e., the expert). Finally, Bakhtin (1981) uses the concept of *dialogism* to explain how language (and learning) is co-constructed with others, and that individuals appropriate meanings in ways that are useful to them. Though they each have their differences, Vygotsky, Lave and Wenger, and Bakhtin all posit in various ways that the learning outcomes of certain situations become internalized and enacted in highly personalized ways, meaning that what individuals learn during these interactions sometimes may not be what was intended for them to learn.

Using a loose framework informed by the apprenticeship model of learning and situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991), as well as dialogism and appropriation (Bakhtin, 1981), this chapter highlights the different types of situations in which student learning occurred during this embedded short-term program. I view this embedded study abroad program as a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) inhabited by the students, the course professors, and the Swedish people the students interacted with along the way. Following multiple, iterative rounds of coding, I concluded from the students’ accounts of their subjective experiences that learning primarily occurred for them in three broad types of interactions: professors-as-experts, Swedes-
as-experts, and classmates-as-experts (see Figure 4). In keeping with an apprenticeship model of learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991), the students were novices in each of these types of interactions (though as the third category hints, they sometimes acted as experts as well).

![Figure 4: Three Categories of Interactions](image)

I define each of these interactions in the respective sections below and describe the types of situations that took place in each interaction. While connections between learning outcomes and situations will be briefly noted in this chapter, what students learned from these situations specifically will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5. My participant-observations and PCI interviews and focus groups revealed that students learned similar outcomes from many different types of situations; therefore, reporting situations and outcomes together here would become highly redundant and will be reserved for future publications.

Each of the three types of situations, where different parties served as experts, also each contain the various ways in which learning occurred in relation to the course design: situations inside the formal program, situations inside the non-formal program, and situations outside of the program (see Figure 5). The formal program category refers to situations that were part of the formal program planned and initiated by the course professors. These situations were included on the course syllabus and program itinerary (see Appendix A and Appendix B) and were often very
highly structured by the professors and other course collaborators—company employees, host-university professors, etc. The non-formal program category refers to situations that were part of the non-formal program planned and initiated by the course professors. These situations were often listed on the itinerary, but were not necessarily structured or guided in the same way as more formal activities. The outside-of-program category refers to any situation that occurred outside of the program as planned and initiated by the course professors. These situations were not necessarily written into the course syllabus and largely occurred as happenstance encounters and within student-created social spaces. Learning in these situations, therefore, was highly incidental. These situations generally arose from designated "free time," meaning that I was not able to be present for all of them and relied upon student accounts for some activity descriptions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Formal Program</th>
<th>Non-Formal Program</th>
<th>Outside-of-Program</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• included in syllabus/itinerary</td>
<td>• included in syllabus/itinerary</td>
<td>• not included in syllabus/itinerary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• learning highly structured by course professors</td>
<td>• learning not highly structured by course professors</td>
<td>• learning not at all structured by course professors</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 5: Types of Situations in Relation to Course Design*

Though these secondary categories I created were highly informed by Marsick and Watkins' (1990; 2001) different learning paradigms, they focus on the situations themselves as opposed to the outcomes the situations produced. My decision to code for situations as opposed to using Marsick and Watkins' (1990; 2001) framework for learning paradigms rose from two factors. First, because there were only three *intended* learning outcomes of the course listed on
the syllabus were, a vast majority of the outcomes I observed in-country and elucidated from interviews and focus groups would have fallen into either the informal or incidental learning categories. Based on these preliminary analyses, my own experiences abroad, and underpinnings of sociocultural perspectives (i.e., Lave & Wenger, 1991), I operated under the assumption that all students learn *something* incidentally from the situations they participate in while abroad. As one primary goal is to highlight what students learn, delineating between formal, informal, and incidental learning outcomes seemed ancillary to my objectives and not particularly useful for addressing my research questions. Second, understanding the situations in which learning outcomes are facilitated can help inform future study abroad program design efforts. If we have an understanding of which types of situations are likely to facilitate student learning, then programs can be more intentionally designed to include spaces for such situations to arise, and therefore present greater opportunities for learning. Such intentional program design decisions would make incidental learning more formal, and make assessment more possible (Lankard, 1995).

Finally, this section only highlights the types of situations that a) I observed student learning occurring in-country, b) the situations mentioned by students during our post-program discussions, and c) the types of situations in which professors, Swedes, and classmates acted as experts. It is likely that student learning occurred in other situations during the program that are not reported in this dissertation, and that the sociocultural framework I have applied here may have limited the data on which I am able to report. I will discuss this limitation in greater detail in Chapter 7.
Course Professors-as-Experts

The first broad type of interaction students experienced involved the two course professors serving as experts in various contexts. Though perhaps the most expected type of interaction experienced by students in formalized educations settings such as this embedded program, the course professors-as-experts interactions were the least prevalent of the three types of situations detailed in this dissertation. Interactions that feature the professors-as-experts occurred in two different kinds situations: lessons provided during pre-departure class sessions (though interactions occurred here in multiple ways) and while purchasing tickets for public transportation.

Pre-Departure Class Sessions

This embedded course consisted of four residential class sessions coupled with the 10-day international component. The four pre-departure class sessions were held on four consecutive Fridays throughout the month of April from 4:00 to 8:00PM, with the final session held two weeks prior to departing for Sweden. A crucial component to embedded programming, these pre-departure sessions were meant to give students a foundational understanding of course content and the aspects of the host-culture that students may come in contact with in-country. During these classes, the two course professors—by nature of their role as the course faculty—acted as the experts on Sweden and Swedish culture, though one professor had only briefly visited Sweden once (fieldnotes, 4/29/16).

As part of these classes, the professors assigned articles, gave presentations, facilitated discussions, and crafted assignments related to human resource management and health care policy in Sweden, and Swedish culture more generally. For example, during the class session...
that I was able to attend (the final of the four), one of the professors led a lesson on basic conversational Swedish, teaching the students how to count to ten and useful phrases such as “Talar du engelska?” (Do you speak English?). My conversations with many of the students, like Kate and Tony, revealed that they used many of the phrases they learned in this class session when interacting with some of the Swedish people they encountered.

Though no students submitted photos that were intended to represent the pre-departure class sessions as meaningful or significant parts of the program, some students mentioned that they found the class sessions to be "pointless" at times. In particular, several students noted that the session devoted to cultural expectations and pre-departure orientation focused largely on what to pack. While I, too, took note of the heavy focus on packing, I also took note of how the students seemed to enjoy trying to speak Swedish for the first time after the professor’s quick lesson (fieldnotes, 4/29/16). This suggests to me that some students did not walk away learning what the professors-as-experts intended for them to learn. However, some students did show evidence that these in-class professors-as-experts interactions yielded positive learning outcomes. For example, for students like Marcy, learning about the "Swedish Model" (i.e., Sweden's flat organizational structure) and Swedish cultural concepts such as jantelagen and lagom (which relate to collectivism and will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5) during these class sessions made recognizing and understanding them when in Sweden much easier.

The situations that arose during these pre-departure class sessions are perfect examples of formal program situations. The presentations and activities were very structured and designed with specific learning outcomes in mind. Marcy, for example, walked away with a deeper awareness and understanding of Swedish cultural concepts, and Kate and Tony gained capacities for conversational Swedish. At the same time, some students focused more on the professors’
suggestions for what to pack as opposed to other important cultural information provided in the presentation. The fact that students sometimes did not learn what the professors expected them to learn in this highly structured situation underscores the complexity of situated learning; even highly structured, intentional activities can lead to unintended, incidental learning outcomes.

**Purchasing Group Tickets for Public Transportation**

From purchasing tickets to navigating the various systems to actually riding buses and trains, student interviews and focus groups as well as my fieldnotes were littered extensively with references to student experiences with Swedish public transportation. While students learned many lessons from their personal use of Sweden's public transportation (these situations are detailed in the two subsequent sections), this sub-section highlights one particular situation where the professors acted as experts, but instead of learning what to do, the students walked away from the situation having learned what *not* to do.

The professors organized a number of bus and train trips in which the entire group traveled together, such as buses to and from university lectures and company visits as well as trains between the three cities. One particularly salient situation involved students and professors purchasing bus tickets at the terminal station. Several students highlighted their frustration with the process, partially stemming from the *perceived* ineptitude of the professors (who were trying to act as experts, showing the students how to purchase tickets from the ticket vendors in the station) and partially from the lack of self-awareness exhibited by their fellow classmates during the situation. For example, prior to visiting Husqvarna, the students and professors walked to the local bus station in Jönköping to purchase a pre-loaded transportation card so that they could enter and exit buses quickly, despite being such a large group—appropriately following the risk
management related suggestion of Penn State Global Programs. As each student stepped up to the counter with the professors to purchase their bus pass, the rest of the group stood outside of the tiny ticket office, at times blocking the doors and failing to move out of the way of other customers. As noted by both Kate and Tony, these students were a "nuisance" to others.

Watching this behavior, Kate and Tony simultaneously realized their own self-awareness and the lack of it in some of their peers. Additionally, as the students attempted to board the bus back from the company visit, they learned that the professors had miscalculated the fares and that their cards did not have adequate credit to pay for their return trip (fieldnotes, 5/20/16). Interestingly, not a single student discussed whether or not they learned how to properly purchase a ticket or anything particularly related to Swedish public transportation in this situation (as was likely intended), but many seemed to learn valuable lessons about how their behavior (e.g., rudely standing in the doorway of a busy bus terminal) can negatively impact the lives of others.

I should note however that the “lesson” learned in this situation—where the professors were supposedly serving as experts on how to purchase tickets but instead indirectly facilitated a situation in which students learned how not to act—may also have included a Swedes-as-experts dynamic, highlighting an important nuance in defining an expert in a given learning situation. Experts may overlap in a situation, meaning that students can learn lessons—though markedly different lessons, as in this case—from multiple experts in one situation. For example, in order for the students to observe that their behavior was negatively impacting those around them, they likely contrasted their behavior with the behavior of others. In this case, Kate and Tony’s observations of the behavior of the Swedish people in the bus terminal—seemingly annoyed at their classmates’ rudeness—constituted a slightly different situation in which the Swedes served as inadvertent experts. In other words, the Swedes were not necessarily intending to share or
impart knowledge, but their presence in the situation and their contrasting role as the cultural
other made them experts, in the eyes of some students, on how they should behave in this
culture. A more expanded discussion of inadvertent experts and more examples are presented in
the following sections.

**Swedes-as-Experts**

The vast majority of meaningful or significant situations experienced by the students
during this embedded program featured Swedish people as knowledge experts. Whether
intentionally or unintentionally (e.g., inadvertent experts), the Swedes that the students interacted
with taught the students valuable lessons about cultural beliefs, personal behaviors, and other
important concepts.

**Host University Lectures**

Students attended a number of lectures, which were all part of the formal program, at two
host universities in Sweden—Jönköping University and Gothenburg University. On Day 2 of the
program, students attended an afternoon presentation given by the faculty of Jönköping
University. This presentation compared U.S. and Swedish human resource practices (such as
employee recruitment and employment reviews) and detailed the Swedish work day and Swedish
approaches to work-life balance as they relate to employee psychosocial health. They also
discussed the Swedish “flat model” (i.e., a non-hierarchical approach to organizational structure)
and how it embodies Swedish collectivist ideals. Although my fieldnotes suggest that many
students “seemed antsy” and slightly disinterested in the presentation material—particularly as
that morning’s company visit yielded similar information and because they were eager for their
The second lecture, which students attended over lunch on Day 3 at Jönköping University, detailed theories surrounding organizational change. About half way through his presentation (which included several videos in Swedish with English sub-titles), the professor asked which students had read about the organizational theories he was referencing; not a single student raised their hand, suggesting that much of what he was discussing was going over their heads. While Brandon mentioned this professor’s presentation specifically, I noted in my fieldnotes (5/20/16) that several students (namely Bryan and Noah) were nodding off and were even called out by the professors for not paying attention (fieldnotes, 5/20/16).

This situation—only yielding a mention from one student (Brandon)—highlights another important concept in sociocultural theory. Vygotsky (1978) discusses how students are only able to learn certain concepts if they have been provided with the proper scaffolding, or assistance that matches the needs of the learner, which allows them to achieve a particular learning goal (Wood & Middleton, 1975). In this situation, the students were not within their zone of proximal development, or

…the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86).

The students did not have the proper foundation from which to build upon, making the information being given to them quite useless for them at the present time. Even though they were being assisted by a “more knowledgeable other” (i.e., the Swedish professor) (Vygotsky,
1978), they did not have the proper scaffolding to help them understand and process this new information. This may help explain why only one student mentioned this as a significant or meaningful situation.

On the morning of Day 6, students attended one final presentation at Jönköping University, given by a member of their law faculty. The students all seemed very engaged and excitedly asked questions regarding Sweden's anti-discrimination policies (fieldnotes, 5/23/16). In particular, Marcy, in a conversation stemming from her candid photo of elderly Swedish couples swing dancing (Marcy, Photo #1) noted the significance of this presentation as the only opportunity in which they were able to ask questions that were not necessarily pertinent to the course content, such as LGBT rights and the separation of church and state in Swedish legal practices. Patricia was particularly engaged during the presentation, though I was unable to gather her personal perspective on the learning moment as she did not agree to participate in the interviews or focus groups.

Several students, such as Rachel, Marcy, and Emily specifically mentioned the two lectures given by professors of Gothenburg University on the morning of Day 10. The first lecture, which focused on Gothenburg's nautical history, was of particular interest to Danielle. As she discussed her photo of a large anchor on display outside of their Gothenburg hotel (Danielle, Photo #3, shown below), she explained how she found the history of the city that she learned (partly) during this presentation to be fascinating, though this was not mentioned by any other students.
The second Gothenburg University lecture, which included a presentation on Swedish healthcare practices and alternative Swedish organizational structures, was highly regarded by several students, particularly HPA majors who felt that the rest of the program did not focus enough on healthcare-related topics. Marcy felt that this lecture gave her the least-biased and most reliable information about Swedish organizational practices:

The only thing that actually resonated with me—like wow I feel like I’m being productive—was when we went to Gothenburg University and there was a guy who actually knows his shit. Not just people who are working—HR representatives aren’t going to say anything bad. It was really interesting to talk to the guy who said, "This is what I studied. These are actual statistics. I know what I’m talking about." He’s a university professor and I got a lot more out of that last lecture than I basically did the whole trip.
The professor, who presented selected findings from a study he had conducted with nursing programs across Sweden, used statistics and theory to support his assertions about Swedish organizational frameworks and policies, and the impacts—both positive and negative—they have on employees and patients (fieldnotes, 6/3/16). For Marcy, this approach seemed much more reliable than learning similar information from the HR representatives who "pimped out their companies" (i.e., only spoke positively about them) during their various company visits.

**Company Visits**

Throughout the program, students visited four different Swedish companies and attended presentations given by HR professionals and other employees of the various organizations. Although students were unable to take photos in many of these spaces, several students mentioned situations they encountered during these highly structured visits—which were all part of the formal program—that produced significant and meaningful learning moments for them, both intended and unintended.

**Jordbruksverket**

On the morning of Day 2, the students visited the Swedish Board of Agriculture (Jordbruksverket) headquarters in Jönköping. Two HR representatives gave students a walking tour of the facilities. During the tour, among other things, the representatives highlighted the company’s innovative open activity-based work spaces. Each employee was given their own laptop or iPad and Beats-style headphones that they would carry around with them to different work spaces according to their present needs. The students were very interested in how employees used the different spaces, such as common areas, quiet rooms, and meditation.
galleries, and were eager to ask questions relating to employee satisfaction and productivity (fieldnotes, 5/19/16).

After the tour, we returned to the main conference room where we enjoyed fika—the traditional Swedish coffee and pastry break, which become a large topic of conversation throughout the program and during the interviews and focus groups—and the HR professionals gave presentations that focused on Sweden's liberal employment policies more generally: universal healthcare coverage, extended parental leave, generous amount of vacation days, etc. (fieldnotes, 5/19/16). This was the first physical introduction to Swedish employment practices for the students. It was the first time they were able to see the things they learned during their pre-departure orientation class sessions in action. The students actively engaged in discussion with the HR professionals about healthcare policies, the impacts of the company’s employment practices on employee well-being, and the efficiency of the organization’s unique structures (fieldnotes, 5/19/16)

**Husqvarna Manufacturing Facility**

The group's second company visit was to the Husqvarna manufacturing facility just outside of Jönköping on Day 3. As explained by our enthusiastic tour guide (a Husqvarna employee), the company, known most famously for their chainsaws, also manufactures leaf blowers, robotic GPS-enabled lawn mowers, and other garden and forestry related products. Starting with a brief lecture in their museum on the history of Husqvarna, the students were given opportunities to ask questions about the organization’s history and about their extensive line of products.
The students were then given a guided tour of the chainsaw manufacturing facility. Here, the tour guide responded to several student questions, explaining the flow of the factory, the chain of command for when factory workers have questions or problems, and even demonstrating the importance of ergonomics (a priority for many Swedes) in the design of each individual work station (fieldnotes, 5/20/16). Several students, like Danielle and Brandon, found the factory tour to be incredibly informative, particularly because they plan to one day be HR representatives and had no previous exposure to the factory environment. Marie, however, expressed her disinterest in the tour and its applicability to her life. Turning to me during the tour, she loudly said, “Why am I here again? This is not relevant to my future. It's pointless.” Unsure of the most appropriate reaction as a researcher in my position (Is it acceptable for me to use this as a teachable moment?), I erred on the side of being the "outside researcher" and settled on nervous laughter and let her continue complaining. While Danielle, Brandon, and others saw the connection between the knowledge gained during the factory tour and their future work as HR professionals, Marie seemingly failed to do so. This may either point to Marie’s comparative immaturity—she was the youngest student in the program—or her lack of appropriate scaffolding (Wood & Middleton, 1975) due to her limited exposure to related coursework.

Next, the students attended a presentation by Husqvarna HR representatives that focused, again, on Sweden's general employment practices and how they employ the Swedish flat organizational structure at their facilities. I do not recall any students mentioning this particular situation resulting in significant or meaningful learning moments, but the fact that it focused on much of the same information as previous presentations suggests that students may have learned similar things during this situation if they had not already been exposed to it in other situations. This highlights the importance of thoughtful program design; in order to maximize student
learning, educators should consider structuring programs in ways that are not repetitive in the kinds of learning they produce or reinforce. Rather than presenting students with the same information from multiple sources (which seemed to be the perspective of several students regarding what they were told in these company visits), educators may want to consider crafting itineraries that introduce students to new kinds of information.

**IKEA Distribution Facility**

The group visited IKEA's Torsvik-based distribution facility—a 45-minute bus ride from Jönköping—on the morning of Day 8. This visit consisted of a three-hour presentation on IKEA's HR policies, which essentially mirrored the more general Swedish practices the students had already learned about from other presentations. However, IKEA was the first company to discuss the application of the Swedish company's policies in their many international markets. Several students, such as Marcy and Patricia, asked very poignant questions specific to how IKEA’s Swedish employment practices differ from their practices in places like Brazil and China who have much more lax employee rights (fieldnotes, 5/25/16). Interestingly, no students mentioned this situation during our discussions of their most meaningful learning moments. Several students did, however, note their surprise and disappointment with visiting an IKEA distribution facility as opposed to an IKEA store.

**Volvo Headquarters and Museum**

On Day 9, the group visited the Volvo headquarters and car museum in Gothenburg. Unfortunately, I was unable to attend this visit as I contracted the flu and was in bed sick. The students, specifically Danielle, Angela, and Bryan, thoughtfully texted me updates throughout
the day so that I could be kept in the loop. Danielle, again reflecting on her photo of the anchor
and how it represents Gothenburg’s history (Danielle, Photo #3), kindly filled me in at length
about what the Volvo visit entailed. The students spent the first two hours attending a
presentation given by Volvo's HR representatives. The presentation, like the others, focused on
their organizational structure and employment practices. Brandon and Danielle both noted that
Volvo's structure was unlike the other companies they visited, having a more pronounced
hierarchy like U.S. companies: "I could have been attending a presentation in Midtown
Manhattan" (Brandon). The second part of the visit, mentioned only by Danielle, included a
guided tour of the Volvo car museum. Apart from the vintage cars she saw, Danielle did not
discuss anything else about the tour or the various situations that may have occurred during it.

Commentary on Company Visits

As is evidenced above and as I highlighted in the Husqvarna sub-section, many of the
company visits focused on similar topics. Reiterating Marcy's skepticism of the information
presented during company visits, she also noted that some of the visits resulted in re-learning the
same information:

IKEA, the Board of Ag., and Husqvarna were identical. They were like [in a robot voice],
"These are our corporate policies. We do things for our employees. We hope our
employees are happy".

Marcy seems to suggest that visiting each of these companies was not necessary and that
students could have learned the same information by only visiting one of them. Additionally,
Marcy believed that their pre-planned speeches were very robotic and impersonal, making the
interactions/situation very impersonal for her.
Walking Tour of Jönköping

Originally planned as a bike tour (and thus part of the formal program), the students joined a Jönköping faculty member on a walking tour of the city on the evening of Day 2. Following an afternoon of presentations, students left the university on foot and walked toward Jönköping's Lake Vättern. The faculty member guiding us provided historical commentary and fun facts as we passed various sites. After walking along the water for approximately one quarter of a mile—passing a slew of upper-scale shops and a match factory-turned brew pub—the faculty guide took a sharp turn upward, leading the group on an uphill march. What was supposed to be a casual walk turned into a more rigorous "hike" on foot\(^2\). Several students mentioned this experience in their interviews, an event that became infamously known as “the hike in business casual.” We hiked past what looked like a grain mill (Emily, Photo #2) and the remnants of a burned church and watchtower (complete with commentary provided by the professor). As Dana noted, much of what they learned during the hike—such as the history of the town—was prompted by the professor who guided them. We stopped several times so the students could take photos of the beautiful views. I snapped this quick picture without them noticing:

\[\text{---}\]

\(^2\) This was not a hike in the traditional sense, and would therefore not violate the university’s risk management policies. The students merely used the term “hike” to contrast it with what they expected—a leisurely bike ride.
As noted most enthusiastically by Emily, several students found that the incidental learning that took place during this situation was more meaningful to them than the historical facts provided by the professor. This once again highlights Lave and Wenger’s (1991) notion that students may learn things beyond what the “expert” may have intended them to learn. While the course professors may have designed this situation to facilitate learning related to the history of Jönköping, the students also learned valuable lessons about self-efficacy and perseverance. For example, as will be more greatly detailed in Chapter 5, Emily felt an internal drive to continue hiking even after walking in her dress shoes became unbearable. However, once she reached the top of the hill (Photo #2, see below) she saw the fruits of her labor and learned the value in continuing to pursue your goals even when giving up seems like the easier thing to do.
Vasa Museum

Having read Joseph Maxwell's *Qualitative Research Design: An Interactive Approach* (2013), I was incredibly excited to visit the Vasa Museum with the students. The *Vasa*, a Swedish warship that sank to the depths of Stockholm’s inner harbors on its maiden journey due to its top-heavy construction, served as Maxwell's metaphor for the importance of study design in qualitative research. The *Vasa*, excavated from the harbor in the 1960s, now rests within the center of the multi-story museum fully restored to its original state. While at the museum, students took part in a 30-minute informational tour given by a Swedish museum employee in which they were told the story of the warship's construction, its fateful maiden voyage, and its journey from the depths of the Stockholm harbor to its place in the museum gallery (fieldnotes, 5/23/16).

The visit to the Vasa Museum was, again, part of the formal program facilitated by the course professors. I was enthralled by the tour, admittedly paying less attention to the students at
times than the presenter. However, I did take notice of the mixed responses that students exhibited, ranging from deep interest to severe boredom. Interestingly, only Emily explicitly mentioned the Vasa Museum tour as a situation where learning occurred for her, though even she did not submit a photo from the museum. I find it hard to believe that students did not learn anything in this situation (given the two hours spent at the museum), and instead assume that what they learned in this situation simply was not meaningful enough to many of them to bring up in our discussions, or perhaps was not as meaningful as other moments.

Emily also explained that, even though they were given the same presentation by the same Swedish employee, many of her classmates walked away with sparse and sometimes incorrect information:

"So the ship sank in 20 days?" No, 20 minutes. We are all listening to the same dude tell us how this happened, we’re all listening to the same presentation, and different people were interested in different things and so some people would pick up on, "Oh, that’s made out of gold," and another person would be like, "Wait, it sunk in 20 days?"

Despite listening to the same presentation given by the same tour guide, several students processed the information they heard very differently, resulting in drastically different ideas about the history of the Vasa warship. This situation brings to light the fact that, as Lave and Wenger (1991) posit, novices can participate in situations at various levels. Some individuals, like myself, the course professors, and students like Emily, were fully engaged during the museum visit, listening intently and asking questions. Others maintained limited peripheral participation (with an emphasis on the limited) in which they engaged to a much lesser extent, which resulted in a mis-educative experience (Dewey, 1933). Ultimately, the students left the
museum and went their separate ways without the benefits of a reflective discussion in which some of these misconceptions could have been clarified and corrected.

**Conversations over Dinner with Jönköping University Faculty and Students**

To commemorate the group's final evening in Jönköping, the faculty organized a group dinner, sponsored and hosted by Jönköping University. Held in a quaint semi-enclosed room called the *Orangerie*, students enjoyed shrimp salad sandwiches, smoked salmon, a Caesar salad, and an assortment of desserts while enjoying a gorgeous view of the inner shores of Lake Vättern. In addition to ourselves, the dinner was attended by each of the Swedish faculty who had given presentations throughout the week, five or six Jönköping University staff members, and four or so Swedish students. While intended to give students the opportunity to interact with the Swedish faculty, staff, and students, the large majority of the U.S. students sat together at the one large table in the center of the room and did not interact with the others (fieldnotes, 5/26/16). The only students who I witnessed interacting with the Swedish professors and students—Kate and Tony—were also the only two students who mentioned the dinner as a meaningful learning situation during their interviews, though neither of them submitted photos directly relating to the event.

For example, Kate joined a group of faculty members at a small table and struck up conversation with the law professor who had given a presentation earlier in the week. From this conversation Kate explained that she learned that the professor was divorced, but that he and his ex-wife would plan weekend get-togethers in which they could both spend time with their children, including children from their previous and current marriages. As I will discuss again in Chapter 5, Kate contrasted this family structure with the more complicated divorces she has
witnessed in the United States, gleaning that (whether actually generalizable or not) Swedish divorced parents put a greater emphasis on remaining friendly for the sake of their children. To Kate, this was a much better approach to family dynamics and reinforced Sweden’s more general collectivist ideals. While I suspect that the faculty member was only making polite conversation, his life story served as a lesson for Kate on Swedish cultural values, highlighting how individuals often appropriate information to fit their needs (Bakhtin, 1981).

These dinner conversations are examples of non-formal program situations. While the dinner was planned and facilitated by the course professors, it was not highly structured, which allowed for the conversations between the students and Swedes (and the topics they focused on) to arise more organically. It is likely that the professors planned the dinner to provide students with a space to talk with Swedes and to learn more about their culture (which happened with Kate), though they could not necessarily control what was to be learned specifically. Again, this underscores the complexity of situated learning and how students often walk away from situations with unintended learning outcomes.

**Gothenburg Canal Boat Tour**

During their pre-program stay in Gothenburg, Kate, Danielle, Angela, and Jessa enjoyed a boat tour along the cities many canals and larger waterways. Describing one of her photos, which featured the four women on the boat (Kate, Photo #1, see below), Kate briefly described the experience as "touristy." The boat company logo had a "frog with a slicker thing." As Danielle explained, the Swedish tour guide informed them of Gothenburg's nautical history and how much of the city used to be a shipyard. Danielle learned from him that many of the buildings still in use today, including many surrounding their hotel in the later days of the
program, were once used for shipyard storage. Though the city seemed to have lost some of the nautical "identity" that the boat tour guide spoke of, Danielle observed that much of it still remains, as evidenced by her photo of a large anchor (Danielle, Photo #3).

![Photo of a large anchor](image)

*Kate, Photo #1: Students on Ferry to visit Gothenburg Archipelagoes*

The Gothenburg canal boat tour is an example of an outside-of-program situation. The tour was not included in the program itinerary; this group of four students elected to participate in the tour on their own, meaning that the activity and subsequent learning were completely unstructured. The learning that occurred during this outside of program situation was, therefore, completely incidental to the program itself, highlighting that students in this program learned through situations beyond those provided by (or even observed by) course professors.

**Lunch at a Lebanese Restaurant with JU Students**

In Jönköping, a small group of students joined Jönköping University students Sven and Elsa³ for lunch at a Lebanese restaurant that Sven had recommended. Reflecting on her photo of another tasty meal she enjoyed in Sweden (Dana, Photo #1), Dana explained that Sven and Elsa

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³ These are pseudonyms.
talked at length during lunch about the various university clubs at Jönköping University, describing how each organization dresses up in matching overalls and does activities together. She also noted that she and the other American students asked Sven and Elsa about the unusually early store closing hours in Jönköping. For Dana, who grew up outside of Philadelphia, the fact that Swedish stores closed in the early evening was odd: “…we were confused about why nobody was ever out or it was dead after a certain time period.” This sentiment was shared by Sven and Elsa, who both grew up in Stockholm:

…and they thought the same thing but they both were from bigger cities. [Elsa] said even for her going to Jönköping was definitely a different transition to see how laid back and quiet it was compared to the big cities.

This outside-of-program situation included a brief exchange in which Dana’s assumption that all stores in Sweden closed early was corrected when Elsa pointed out that stores in Stockholm (just as in Philadelphia) were open much later. The American students also acted as experts in this situation, teaching the Swedish students—who would both soon be studying abroad at Penn State—about clubs and student organizations at Penn State.

**Tony and the Swedish Student**

Tony often found himself in situations outside of the program where he was able to talk one-on-one with Swedish people. Whether on the train between cities or sitting down for a meal, Tony discussed everything from language to politics with the Swedes he met. During his Lebanese lunch with Sven and Elsa, Tony struck up a conversation with another Swedish student who had also stopped in for a meal:
I kind of forget what our conversation was but I said "Gothenburg" and she was like, "Yeah, that's how you Americans say it." And she taught me how to say it. It just added to my arsenal of Swedish.

Though Tony could not recall specifics about the exchange, he was touched that he was able to so informally learn more Swedish from this student—a goal of his throughout the trip, and a skill he practiced whenever he could.

**Asking Swedes for Directions**

One important and interesting curricular decision made by the professors was to have each student take the responsibility of finding their own way to Sweden. As opposed to typical group flights organized by study abroad course professors, each student booked their own transportation and traveled either independently or in groups of two. Of all of the situations students experienced during their program, traveling to and from Sweden was mentioned the most during focus groups and interviews.

Most students traveled directly to Sweden and back to the United States. Dana and Brandon, traveling together from Philadelphia, flew into Gothenburg and were tasked with buying a ticket to Jönköping. Navigating the "overwhelming" language barrier, they approached the ticket booth at the bus station and struggled through basic Swedish that they had learned online to purchase a ticket. In a conversation stemming from his photo of a tram in Gothenburg (Brandon, Photo #2), Brandon explained, "This was the first time where I really felt like a minority." Not knowing which kind of ticket they had purchased, and not seeing their ticket time posted on the departures board, they resorted to frantically asking, at random, Swedish people where they needed to board. The Swedes kindly informed them that they had purchased a train
ticket and offered them directions on where to catch the train. Dana and Brandon boarded their car, and waited for passengers with the same destination listed on their tickets to disembark (which also presents Swedes as inadvertent experts in this situation). Ultimately, Brandon reflected on his nerve-wracking experience quite positively and used it as a metaphor for the entire program: "[It’s about] getting lost and finding yourself in a foreign country."

Traveling by himself, Tony flew into Stockholm and had 45 minutes to catch his train to Jönköping from the large central station. After paying an exorbitant amount for a taxi (nearly $95), he arrived at the station and exchanged money at the nearest Western Union booth—which cost him another large chunk of money due to the unexpectedly high exchange rate: "I just gave him $40. I didn't know what he said, but I only got 75% of the Swedish currency." After asking someone to point him toward the correct platform, Tony boarded the train and proceeded to have a two-hour-long conversation with a Swedish-Iranian immigrant about Swedish culture and workplace matters.

**Swedes-as-Inadvertent Experts**

In several situations, the perceived Swedish experts that students learned from were unwitting participants in the learning moment. Just as Kate and Tony observed the Swedes’ reactions to their classmates’ rude behavior in the train station (see first section in this chapter), the students often learned valuable lessons from Swedish people even though the Swedish people they observed did not know they were teaching anything. In these types of interactions, the Swedes were *inadvertent experts*—they were wholly unaware that the students were viewing them as experts on Swedish culture and lifestyle. Nevertheless, the Swedes served as inadvertent experts in several learning-related situations.
**Gothenburg Amusement Park**

Following their visit to Volvo on Day 9, students were given an afternoon of "free time." About half of the students, at the suggestion of Kate, decided to visit a large amusement park in the city. On the bus ride there, they learned from an older couple that the park was the highest rated amusement park in Northern Europe, which got the crew excited. Upon arriving at the park, Emily noted that the game prizes were smaller and the park in general was "less flashy" than comparable parks in the U.S.—a facet she very much appreciated. As I will describe more in Chapter 5, Brandon noticed that riders would leave their electronic devices out in the open at the ride stations, seemingly trusting others not to steal them. While neither of these outside-of-program situations were intentionally facilitated or even known to the Swedes whose behavior and actions the students were observing, the students nevertheless gathered important insights about Swedish culture, such as minimalism and trust.

**Jönköping Swing Dance Event**

Once students arrived at the top of the hill at the conclusion of the infamous “hike in business casual” on Day 2, they found a large public park where they were delightedly met by the Dean of Jönköping's School of Education, who was grilling Swedish sausages over a fire pit for them to have for dinner. During this time, students chatted amongst themselves and with the Dean and professor who had given the tour. After a few minutes, the students began commenting on the large number of elderly couples who were walking by. They discovered that the couples were attending a swing dance event in a large shelter house in the park near where we were eating (fieldnotes, 5/19/16). A small group of students and myself walked over to the event.
where we stood outside the gates (they were charging admission) and watched the couples energetically dance song after song.

Marcy, Photo #1: Swing Dancing Club in Jönköping

Many of the students never did find out exactly what was happening at this event, but several of them mentioned it as a situation that provided insights into Swedish culture more generally, despite it being a moment of pure happenstance and unbeknownst to the Swedes themselves. In this situation, the elderly couples acted as inadvertent experts on Sweden, and the students used their observations of the couples to develop understandings (whether true or not) about Swedish cultural values and lifestyle. For example, this situation was so salient for her that she selected it as one of her three photos (Marcy, Photo #1, shown above). Marcy contrasted their seemingly well-balanced and active lifestyles to that of her American and Chinese friends who work all day, saying that the Swedes seem to place more value on spending time with family. Whether Marcy’s interpretation is correct or incorrect, her observation of the Swedish
swing dancers-as-inadvertent experts helped her to form an understanding about Swedish culture more broadly.

**Going out on the Town**

As can be expected with nearly any group of college-aged students, the students spent a number of nights in Sweden out on the town. Perhaps more surprising is that the situations that arose in these largely hidden social spaces—bars, dance clubs—resulted in significant learning gains for the students. A number of students mentioned one particular Stockholm club, which had been converted from an old opera house, as a site for meaningful learning. Whether by conversing with locals or by observing the ways in which Swedes danced with one another, students noted that their observations taught them valuable lessons about Swedish culture. For example, Dana noted that the Swedes tended to dance further away from one another than Americans did, which signaled to her a more modest approach to interactions. Other students, citing more low-key pubs and bars as learning spaces, noted that they were useful spaces for observing locals and garnering new understandings about their own behavior in comparison.

**Classmates-as-Experts**

In a handful of instances, the students’ classmates served as experts on different topics. Depending on the situation at hand, students often turned to particular classmates who were exhibiting knowledgeable or leader-like behavior. In some situations, students’ relative expertise shifted back and forth as students exchanged perspectives and mutually informed their classmates on varying ways of thinking and seeing the world. The two types of situations that saw the students acting as experts were the student presentations and situations in which students guided each other throughout Sweden.
Student Presentations

At the end of their stay in Jönköping—on Day 6—students divided into small groups of two or three and gave presentations on what they had learned regarding Swedish company practices and Swedish culture more generally. The presentations, rigidly framed by a rubric devised by the professors, were each approximately 15 to 30 minutes long and were delivered in front of their peers, the two course professors, and a small group of Swedish professors from the host university. Students covered topics such as the Swedish Model, parental leave, fashion, food, and transportation (fieldnotes, 5/24/16).

I include the student presentations here as an example of classmates-as-experts because several students noted that the presentations gave them opportunities to learn from one another. Danielle talked at length about how listening to the presentations given by her peers helped her see what she had learned through a new perspective:

I was looking at everything from an HR perspective. I kinda had blinders on to anything else. I was able to learn from [the healthcare policy students in my class]. They saw things from a healthcare perspective and less from an HR perspective. I remember sitting through the presentations and going, "Huh, yeah I definitely did not think of that," or we talked about the same thing but we looked at it in a different way. They looked at things that I didn't know about and wouldn't have thought to touch upon.

As Danielle points out, her human resource management focus inhibited her from seeing things she learned from a healthcare perspective. Her healthcare policy classmates then became the experts in this situation, teaching Danielle to view the lessons they learned in Sweden from a healthcare policy perspective. The dual focus of the course—enrolling students from two different colleges—allowed Danielle and her classmates to learn from one another as they...
explored lessons learned about Sweden and Swedish culture from their different perspectives. Danielle's observation also suggests that perhaps the presentations would have been a less fruitful learning situation had all of the students been from the same major.

It should be noted that several students expressed to me in-country and in the interviews their discomfort with sharing some of their opinions on Swedish culture in front of their professors and the various Swedes in the room. I will discuss the implications of this hesitancy more in Chapter 6.

Students Guiding Other Students

Students were sometimes left to navigate Sweden’s various public transportation systems on their own. For example, when Patricia suffered an allergic reaction minutes before our departure to Stockholm, Kate took control of the situation and guided the group to the train station and onto the train from Jönköping to Gothenburg so the professors could remain with Patricia at a local hospital (fieldnotes, 5/26/16). Other times, such as the bus ride to IKEA, students such as Emily and Brandon took charge. In these instances, and interestingly, regardless of whether they were in charge or not, a number of students developed forms of grit and independence as they observed the calm behavior of their classmates who had taken charge and learned to adapt in stressful situations and persevere.

Chapter Conclusion

While the replication of some of the aforementioned learning situations may not be entirely possible, or even desirable, understanding the kinds of interactions that lead to significant learning outcomes can help educators and study abroad professionals design program
curricula that facilitates learning more intentionally. Allowing students to travel independently, providing them with opportunities to converse with locals, planning guided visits to local companies; these programmatic design decisions all facilitated situations that, according to these findings, can cultivate meaningful student learning.

This chapter also details how student learning occurred in formal, non-formal, and unplanned situations. While students often discussed situations that were highly structured by the course professors (e.g., pre-departure class sessions, Vasa Museum), they also mentioned situations that were less structured (e.g., dinner at JU) or even entirely outside of the planned program (e.g., amusement park, canal boat tour). Additionally, even when situations were highly structured, students learned in often unintended ways. The added layers between the types of situations experienced by the students and what they learned from the situations emphasize the complexities of situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991) and exemplify the notion of appropriation (Bakhtin, 1981). Whether or not situations are planned and regardless of what the intended learning outcomes are, if there are any, students possess the ability to appropriate the information they are given in ways that are meaningful and significant to them.

In many ways, it is hard to directly connect learning outcomes to specific situations. During this program students were presented with foundational understandings during class sessions, were lectured about them during company and university visits, and then experienced them firsthand in their free time. So, disentangling the effects of one situation from another is difficult—and not necessary. The goal of this dissertation is to understand the subjective learning experiences of students—what they learn and how they learn it. These findings demonstrate that students often learn the same lessons in multiple situations. Knowing that some learning situations result in the same learning outcomes can also aid in future program design decisions.
Perhaps only one university lecture or one company visit is necessary, allowing time for other types of interactions (and subsequent situations) that could generate different learning outcomes, or for more purposeful group reflection guided by the professors.
CHAPTER 5: LEARNING OUTCOMES

This chapter uncovers the various learning outcomes that resulted from the situations that arose during this embedded study abroad program, both intended and unintended. As indicated on the syllabus, this course had three intended student learning outcomes:

1. Demonstrate knowledge of human resource management applied in a range of organizations in a social welfare context (Sweden and other Scandinavian countries).
2. Compare and contrast the institutional and cultural contexts of the USA and Sweden.
3. Demonstrate intercultural competencies that can be applied throughout a later career.

This chapter provides evidence of student learning in relation to these three objectives as well as numerous incidental learning outcomes (Marsick & Watkins, 1990; 2001) that occurred. As a result of my grounded theory analytical approach, I have separated the emergent learning outcomes into two large categories: social-emotional outcomes and academic outcomes. Each of these categories are defined and broken down into more meaningful themes in the following sections.

Social-Emotional Learning Outcomes

It is unwise, and certainly not backed by research, to consider social-emotional learning outcomes as inferior to or entirely separated from academic learning outcomes. In fact, social and emotional learning (SEL) is critical to academic learning. Social-emotional learning cultivates skills, attitudes, and behaviors that better enable students to effectively and ethically deal with daily tasks and challenges (CASEL, 2016). Social-emotional learning interventions, when compared to non-SEL focused curricula, often result in better student academic
performance (Durlak et al., 2011). Social-emotional learning fosters relationship-building skills—between peers, teachers, and parents—which result in more positive academic behaviors (e.g., Blum & Libbey, 2004; Hamre & Pianta, 2006; Hawkins, Smith, & Catalano, 2004; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Social-emotional learning also promotes self-awareness, which prompts students to persist despite challenges (Durlak et al., 2011). Aside from bolstering academic learning, social-emotional learning interventions can also lead to lower substance abuse and fewer psychological and behavioral problems into adulthood (Dodge et al., 2014).

The students in this study exhibited a broad array of social-emotional learning outcomes. From attitudes to behaviors, intentions, and actions, my participant-observation and our conversations around their photos from Sweden elucidated promising understandings about the ways in which their international experience changed their views on the world, of others, and of themselves. The following sections detail the eight social-emotional outcome themes demonstrated by the students: intercultural competence, self-awareness, openness to new ideas and experiences, grit and independence, empowerment, global interconnectedness, humility, and wonderment. Each section then contains various examples provided by the students that pertain to the social-emotional learning outcomes. Refer back to Figure 3 for an example of this organizing structure.

**Intercultural Competence**

An explicit goal of this program, the development of intercultural competence, is a goal of many study abroad experiences. Deardorff (2006) defines intercultural competence as “the ability to develop targeted knowledge, skills, and attitudes that lead to visible behaviour and communication that are both effective and appropriate in intercultural interactions” (p. 247).
Intercultural competence has three distinct yet interrelated dimensions: cognitive, affective, and behavioral (Williams, 2009; see Figure 6). The cognitive dimension focuses on knowledge gained (e.g., regarding cultural values), the affective dimension involves one’s emotional response to the culture (e.g., ability to adapt to new situations), and the behavioral dimension focuses on enactment of skills, such as the ability to problem solve or communicate with people.

![Figure 6: Three Dimensions of Intercultural Competence (Williams, 2009)](image)

The development of intercultural competence is an interactional process whereby students actively interact with people and products of the host country. Intercultural competence is motivated by curiosity, and sometimes necessity; it is driven by the desire to learn about people and cultures different from one’s own, and the desire to develop skills to live in a global world (Killick, 2015). Intercultural competence is a life-long process and cannot be achieved in a short period of time; it requires purposeful reflection (McKinnon, n.d.). An individual who exhibits intercultural competence is flexible and able to adapt to new cultures and environments. They adopt non-ethnocentric attitudes and are empathetic toward “others.” These characteristics then become embodied in interculturally competent behaviors and styles of communication (McKinnon, n.d.).
Because intercultural competence is such a highly desired learning outcome, many study abroad programs (such as this one) are often specifically designed to facilitate it (e.g., Engle & Engle, 2004; 2012). Research shows that the development of intercultural competence may depend on a number of factors, one of which is the length of contact with the culture (i.e., duration of the international experience; Sutton & Rubin, 2004; Engle, 2009). Program type and design also greatly influences student gains in intercultural competence (Sutton & Rubin, 2004). Yet another factor may be the differing motivation of students who choose to take advantage of study abroad opportunities and their willingness and expectation to learn through them.

In this section, I highlight evidence that suggests these students developed varying degrees of intercultural competence as a result of situations that arose during this embedded program. I detail how these students exhibited a somewhat counter-ethnocentric attitude, the ways in which they adjusted their behaviors and actions to match their host culture, and some negative cases in which interculturally competent behavior was not particularly evident.

**Abandoning Ethnocentricity**

Along the cognitive dimension of intercultural competence (Williams, 2009), many students demonstrated knowledge gains in regards to the ways they acted and the ways in which their actions were perceived by those from other cultures. While in Sweden, many students noticed that their behavior was markedly different than the behavior exhibited by most Swedes. This markedly different behavior—which a number of students deemed inherently “American”—was often seen as inappropriate, worrisome, and embarrassing.

These students’ realizations represent a discernible shift from ethnocentrism to a desire to assimilate to Swedish cultural standards, or to simply not be the “ugly American.” Ethnocentrism
is defined as an individual’s “tendency to view their culture or in-group as superior to other groups, and to judge those groups to their standards” (Levine & Campbell, 1972). Ethnocentric individuals are often ignorant of diversity, and their inabilitys to expand their world views often creates conflict when they come in contact with people from different cultures. These students, however, recognized the limits of ethnocentric attitudes and discussed this realization in many ways.

For example, some students became frustrated when their classmates would just assume that Swedes would conform to their culture, American culture. Kate, reflecting on a photo of her friends (Kate, Photo #3) discussed this realization in terms of the group’s limited language abilities:

Not that I’m not the ugly American or anything, but when people travel it’s really irritating when they’re like, “Ugh, they don’t speak English.” Well of course, if someone would come to Penn State and try to speak another language to you you’d be like??? So I think I’m just overly sensitive to people not necessarily appearing to try to not be the stereotypical American, like, “I’m just going to order in English.”

Kate’s frustration stems from her classmates’ behavior clashing with her own value system. She believes that when you enter another culture, you should not assume that the people of that culture can or will be able to speak your language, which is a break from ethnocentric or “ugly American” beliefs that promote English-speaking superiority.

A number of students expressed a similar desire to blend in. Kate, reflecting on a peaceful moment sitting alone on a bench in Gothenburg (Photo #2, shown below), desired to be unobtrusive in her stay in Sweden, and to seem as little like an American as possible:
And so being able to just sit there not in anyone’s way, not having to worry about being an American, standing in the middle of a doorway or something and not talking. [laughs] In English! And just having a relaxing moment and just enjoying it.

Similarly, Emily, discussing her photo of the Copenhagen bus station and her confusion regarding the Danish language (Photo #1) said, “You don’t want to look like the Americans walking down the street.” Emily and Kate shared the desire to blend in with the Swedes and not be in the way, particularly focusing on not wanting to appear American.

The top priority for some students, like Tony, was to not look like a tourist. He said, “I just tried to blend in. I feel like to get the experiences, being an obvious tourist is one thing, and another is just to blend in and see what’s going on. I just don’t like being a sore thumb.” Tony also perceived that people in Sweden were constantly watching his group because of their touristy American behavior:

I was just there hanging out, and watching everyone else look at them like, “Oh, they’re Americans.” You could just tell. Obviously they knew. Me personally, I like to keep a
low profile and keep everything good. I can get loud when I want, but for the most part I tried to keep a low profile and do my thing. But some people were just so damn loud. This loud behavior, for Tony, was a telling characteristic that signaled to others that he was part of a group of Americans, and he was very conscious of the fact that the Swedish people had noticed this too. His desire to “keep a low profile” demonstrates a turn from typical American behavior to a behavior more acceptable in Swedish culture. However, Tony’s frequent selfies (see e.g., Photo #2 & Photo #3) somewhat negate his desire to not stick out as a tourist.

At the most extreme end of abandoning ethnocentric perspectives, some students experienced a form of cultural cringe (Phillips, 1950), or an internalized inferiority complex that causes people in a country to dismiss their own culture as inferior to the cultures of other countries. Coined in relation to Australian Aboriginal culture, it frequently refers to a colonized mindset and is most often used in post-colonial theoretical writings about the influence of the colonizer on the colonized. In this case, while not colonized in the traditional sense, students felt that American behaviors were somehow inferior to Swedish behaviors, which led to a cringing at the ways in which they and their classmates would sometimes act.

Some students, like Kate, expressed an outright embarrassment for being an American at times. She explained that she sometimes felt the need to apologize:

So the first interaction with people in Sweden was kind of nerve racking. I don’t know any of the language. I’m this American and I feel bad about it I guess. It was like having a big target on your face. Like, “I know, I’m sorry everyone.”

Tony echoed Kate’s concerns, stating that his fellow American students “lacked social awareness”:
I would try to disassociate from a group of 17 people walking around like a bunch of chickens with their heads cut off. Like when we were buying our bus passes in Jönköping, we’d buy it and then we’d come outside and then everybody was just standing in front of the door. How do you not realize that you’re just standing in front of the door when all of these other people are coming in at weird angles to come in? And they still wouldn’t move! I feel like some people in our group just lacked social awareness. I don’t like being a nuisance for anyone.

The group’s socially unaware behavior became so embarrassing for Tony that he tried to disassociate himself from them. Tony and others showed very strong affective responses to this seemingly American behavior, and as demonstrated in the next section, took steps to exhibit more culturally appropriate behaviors and actions. This may stem, in part, from what Danielle astutely noted: "The whole ‘everyone hates Americans’ kind of thing, it gets ingrained in your head that the world pretty much hates you." Perceiving that others do not like Americans, or believing that American behaviors were cultural targets, may have contributed to the students' cultural cringe and related adaptive behaviors.

**Adjusting Behavior and Actions**

It is not logical (nor backed by theory) to expect behavioral change over a 10-day experience (McKinnon, n.d.). Cognitions and attitudes change before individuals can change their behavior. In this study, however, many students showed development along the behavioral dimension of intercultural competence (Williams, 2009). Through their comments that they overcame language barriers and were able to communicate in new ways, as well as the ways in
which they were able to blend into various Swedish cultural norms, these students exhibited behaviors typical of interculturally competent individuals.

For Emily, the ability to adapt to Swedish culture began with noticing subtle differences, and employing cultural awareness:

The things you learn, especially if you’ve never been to that country, you just pick up on so many subtle differences. Like the fact that you have to pay for a bathroom. To us, that’s earth shattering. But to them, it’s just normal. And that, I don’t even know what it’s called. I guess it’s cultural awareness.

For Emily, who was again discussing her photo of the Copenhagen bus station (Photo #1), that cultural awareness went beyond the recognition of simple differences and moved on to her acceptance of those differences and her desire to adapt to them. She went on to add that the shift was more difficult for some of her peers:

I remember Kari was freaking out because they didn’t have a microwave, and I was like you just have to learn how to adjust to something completely different than you’re used to. For me, that’s the best part. You just go, you go because everything is just so different. That’s why I went anyway. It’s a fun adjustment. It’s more about how do you fit into their culture, not how does their culture fit into yours. Honestly, that’s why I always like to go places. But with somebody who is not used to that, they’re not used to not having a microwave. It’s different, and they expect it to be America, but it’s not America. She got used to it, she did great.

Emily's frustration here stemmed from her travel buddy Kari's inability to adapt to the Scandinavian cultural context as quickly as she had. Kari, like most other students, was able to adapt eventually.
Kate said the change for her was mostly mental:

[I made] normal comparisons, just like this is how I have to do it here. This is just the system here and trying to mentally adjust. But as far as the different culture and the language I was really excited to experience it and be in the moment and not worry about how things were different but notice the differences that I could fit in or operate the system or do whatever it is that I was trying to do. (Kate, Photo #2)

Not only was Kate excited to experience the host culture, but she was adamant about finding ways to incorporate what she observed about Swedish cultural norms into her own daily routine.

For Kate, and many others, the behavioral changes that were most evident in our conversations revolved around communication. As highlighted above, Kate made valiant efforts to be culturally sensitive in her conversations with Swedes:

As far as I got was downloading a Swedish language app but I never actually got a couple phrases that I was able to say. So we walk up to the counter and I was like you know I don’t know the language. So we hobbled through it. I don’t want to just walk up and start speaking English—everyone was saying that they’re probably going to speak English, but to me that’s a horrible assumption to make. That was always a mental battle in my head every time I interacted with a Swedish person. And by the end I was like, “Talar du engelska?”

I observed this behavior from Kate on several occasions. To me, her hesitancy at the beginning of conversations and her instinct to start off with the basic Swedish that she knew was well received by the Swedes she spoke to, from coffee shop baristas to university professors to company employees (fieldnotes, 5/27/16). Much like Kate, Tony's attempt to "use as much
Swedish as [he] could" was viewed favorably by the Swedish people with whom I saw him interacting.

Many students, recognizing their limited knowledge of the Swedish language despite the lesson provided by the professors during one pre-departure class session, employed various strategies to make cross cultural communication simpler. One communication strategy employed by students was the use of gestures. Kari, reflecting on her photo of the group eating “French hotdogs” at the Jönköping bus station (Photo #1, see below), recounted a particularly funny story about ordering food from a cart in Stockholm:

Dana and I were like, “Let’s go to that hot dog stand near the hotel.” It was this man who spoke no English. It took me a while because he didn’t speak a lick of English and I had to explain to him [with gestures] what I wanted and what I wanted on it, so it was kind of hilarious.
Reenacting her gestures to me via Skype, Kari used a combination of gestures that she intended to mean eat, hotdog, bun, and sauce to communicate her order to the cart owner. I did not think to ask her whether her order was correct.

Rachel recalled her experience trying to communicate with a non-English speaking bus driver on her way to meet up with the group in Sweden:

The second bus driver didn’t really speak English and my bag was on the other side of the bus, but it still was no big deal. I just motioned, gestured like, “Please go get it! Or should I crawl through?”

Mimicking a bear crawl, Rachel recounted the gestures she used to communicate her needs to the bus driver, which she described as successful.

Marcy, lost in Stockholm and needing to find her way to Jönköping to meet her classmates, used a very practical strategy: Google Translate. She said:

I was waiting for the bus and my bus didn’t show up so I had a conversation with a Swedish lady. She was really friendly and she wanted to talk to me in English and she really only spoke at me in Swedish even though I told her I didn’t speak Swedish. I even put it in my translator: “I don’t speak Swedish.” I showed it to her and she was like, “Oh yeah,” and then continued to speak to me in Swedish.

Rather than ignoring the woman speaking Swedish to her, Marcy attempted to communicate with her. Ultimately Marcy found the exchange more humorous than helpful, yet her willingness to try to communicate across the language barrier—much like Kari and Rachel's pantomiming and gestures—signals an attempt at exhibiting interculturally competent behavior. For the majority of students, navigating the communication barrier was not a serious issue—and partly because the vast majority of Swedes with whom they interacted spoke English. However, these cases
demonstrate that even when in situations where they could not use their mother tongue, students were able to adapt to the situations and find and employ strategies that enabled them to communicate cross culturally.

Apart from communication, students found other ways to exhibit behavior that was appropriate for the Swedish context. As mentioned above, some students were very cognizant of how loud Americans typically speak in relation to other cultures. Several students combatted this perception and adapted to the culture by simply lowering their volume. For example, Emily experienced this in several European countries she visited around the Sweden program:

In Denmark everyone talks very quietly and I just noticed it and I felt very awkward talking very loudly. So I just stopped talking. And Kari would get so mad. She would be like, “You are mumbling. Stop mumbling.” And she would start screaming at me, and I was like, “Stop it” (mimics being embarrassed). And she didn’t mean to, that’s just how you talk in America. And so when we got to Sweden, she actually said, “You’ve really got this whole quiet thing down.” And then when we got to England (post-Sweden) we were both quiet. We knew that that was how you were supposed to be. (Emily, Photo #1)

Emily, who had traveled extensively prior to the Sweden program, had a very quick affective response to Denmark’s quiet culture and adapted her behavior accordingly. Kari, who was traveling internationally for the first time, seemingly found it difficult at first to understand why Emily had changed her behavior and continued to be loud. After prolonged exposure to the quietness of Denmark, Sweden, and England, Kari eventually adapted her behavior in the same manner.
Some students were very concerned with looking the part. Tony expressed that, even when packing his bags for Sweden, he was very conscious of what he wanted to bring and the message his clothes might send:

I packed very plain clothes. Just to blend in. My aunt was like, “Please don’t pack your American flag socks.” Why would I? I’m not trying to draw all this attention to myself. Dana took a similar approach, using her personal style and clothing choices to fit into Swedish culture more seamlessly:

I think I wore the same four things the entire trip. I don’t want to say I conformed to them, but throughout the trip seeing how simple they were, I think the rest of the trip I just wore jeans, a t-shirt and a jacket.

Something so salient in millennial culture—style—made many students feel more in-tune with Swedish culture. Whether it was leaving their typical American clothes (e.g., Tony’s flag socks) behind or finding new ways to use the clothes they already own (e.g., Dana’s t-shirts, jeans, and jacket), these students used style as a way to adapt to what they observed in Sweden.

For Kari and Dana—two tall, thin blondes with blue eyes—fitting into Sweden aesthetically was not difficult. I observed that the two were frequently mistaken for being Swedish, and Dana discussed a time when a couple stopped her to ask for directions in Stockholm: "We’re like, ‘We’re just as lost as you!’” The two reflected that they physically "fit in," though Dana interestingly said that physically matching Swedish culture did not necessarily make her feel more comfortable:

I did feel like I fit in with them just by being tall and blonde. I look like I’m part of them but at the same time I had no idea what I was doing at any time. I remember in one of the stores I was checking out and the girl working started speaking to me in Swedish and I
said, “Oh, I’m sorry, do you speak English?” and she’s like, “Oh, I had no idea you were American.” I did feel like I didn’t stick out as much. Just mainly maybe I looked like I fit in but realistically I was always a little bit lost or unsure.

Emily astutely noted how Sweden, not being very different from her own cultural context in the U.S., provided for a particularly easy transition:

*Emily:* The last trip I went on (Sri Lanka) we got weird diseases and we all got really sick. We didn’t have electricity, people were literally dying and being deported, and you’re just so amazed that people live that differently than you. So this trip was like a breath of fresh air. I don’t feel completely thrown out. It’s something that I kind of recognize and I’m familiar with. But I’m not THAT familiar with it, so I can kind of figure it out though.

*Kayla:* You had enough cultural awareness that you knew there were differences and how to adapt, but at the same time it wasn’t too much of a shift for you.

*Emily:* It was a shift I was comfortable with. Which is probably why I got around the Underground as well as I did, because I was like okay the DC metro, I know that. And you can kind of compare them.

Emily’s observation of the similarities between Sweden and the U.S. may help explain why the students demonstrated such growth along the behavioral dimension of intercultural competence. Because the host culture was fairly familiar—they had electricity, no one contracted “weird diseases”—adapting to Swedish cultural norms and behaviors was not a large shift from what they were already accustomed to. This harkens back to Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development (1978), emphasizing the fact that the students’ previous experiences were
scaffolded enough in ways that lowered the distance between what they knew and what they were experiencing.

**Negative Cases: Being Ineffective at Intercultural Competence**

While many students showed significant gains along the three dimensions of intercultural competence, not all students successfully exhibited interculturally competent attitudes and behaviors abroad. Whether experiencing difficulty in adapting to Swedish customs or failing to adapt at all, nearly every student exhibited some shortcomings in the ways in which they were able to express intercultural competence.

A number of students expressed frustration and difficulty when confronted with new cultural situations. For example, during a lecture on hiring practices given by a professor at Jönköping University, Angela asked a question about the differences between a curriculum vita and a resume. Her question was met with confusion by the professor, who then asked her several times to repeat or reword the question (fieldnotes, 5/23/16). It was very obvious to me, and I believe to several others in the room, that the professor's confusion stemmed from a simple translation issue, though Angela responded to the situation with frustration and ultimately gave up. She commented on this frustration during her focus group:

> I ended up getting so frustrated with the language barrier. Even just our different terminology. It was really starting to piss me off. And for so many things to go unanswered... I just don't want to make my assumptions. I want somebody to say yes or no.

Instead of trying to find a way to communicate her question more clearly or to understand why the professor did not understand her question, Angela's strategy was to stop communication
altogether. Angela did go on to say, "I realized I am the worst person for sitting here being agitated," though the behavior she exhibited in the moment did not demonstrate this self-awareness.

On a lighter note, several students expressed frustration with Swedish bathrooms—particularly, paying to use them. When asked which aspects of Swedish culture were the most difficult for her to adapt to, Kari responded, "The lack of water and [paying for] the bathrooms." Danielle and Angela echoed this notion, stating:

_Danielle_: Kayla, Do you remember when we went to the mall and had to pay for the bathrooms so I gave you my second to last 10 krona coin and then I went to put a five krona coin in and the guy was like no because it only takes the 10 kronas? What the hell, you're still going to get 10 kronas from me! Does it really matter whether you get 10 one kronas or two fives?

_Angela_: That cost 10 kronas? That's like a dollar! To use the bathroom. That is crazy.

Left out of this conversation is the fact that Danielle, in her frustration, ended up not using the bathroom at all, opting instead to wait until we found a restaurant for lunch. Much like Angela and her lost-in-translation exchange with the professor, Danielle's strategy for dealing with this cultural difference was to succumb to her frustration and avoid the situation entirely.

Some students discussed the group's inability to adapt to the cultural norms of Sweden. In a contradiction with her own claims to be quiet, Emily noted that the group as a whole (using an inclusive "we") failed to blend in at times: "And I could just tell everywhere we went, especially in Stockholm, people would just watch us. I knew it was because we were loud, we were obnoxious." Danielle continued this notion of sticking out:
I'm sure that our mannerisms had something to do with saying who we are. We were not as polite or considerate of other people as some other cultures are. Whether it's ordering at a restaurant, or little things like that that you don't think about that could make you stand out as an American.

With a more humorous story, Marcy recounted an instance when, while out dancing at clubs, some students felt like they were blending in but were actually doing the opposite:

When we went to Hotel Burns [my classmate] was trying to get with some girl and they continuously rejected him. They don't want doofy Americans. All the other guys gave off a very model-esque, I'm cool vibe, and [my classmate's] like booty bumping into this girl.

While these three stories all demonstrate that the students sometimes fell short of adapting to Swedish cultural norms, they all come back to another common theme—being an American in a foreign place. I am not arguing that being an obvious American is something to avoid. In fact, I believe that students should learn to celebrate their own identities. However, these students are using their American identity to contrast their actions and behaviors with what they observed to be acceptable and desired in Swedish culture, which is an admirable learning outcome. With some targeted reflection, this apparent felt shame for being an American could be turned into a much more positive experience for the students.

It should also be remembered that, as stated at the beginning of this section, intercultural competence cannot be completely acquired in a short period of time and is a life-long process (McKinnon, n.d.; Deardorff, 2006). These students will all continuously move back and forth on a spectrum of intercultural competence for some time, though these shifts—along all three dimensions—are very promising for furthering understandings about cultural awareness and fostering the ability to adapt during short-term programming.
Self-Awareness

Self-awareness is closely related to the cognitive dimension of intercultural competence (Williams, 2009). However, many instances of demonstrated self-awareness in this study were not specifically related to cultural adaptation, thus justifying it as a separate theme to be reported in this dissertation. Self-awareness, or self-perception, most commonly refers to: the understanding of yourself including strengths, weaknesses, desires, emotions, and beliefs; the ways in which you are perceived by others; and, the ways in which you respond to others, emotionally and behaviorally (see e.g., Bern, 1972; Wicklund, 1975; Baumeister, 2010; Abbaté, Boca, & Gendolla, 2016). Self-aware individuals demonstrate improved introspection (Baumeister, 2010) and bolstered self-regulation (Deci & Ryan, 2010). Not only do they notice more about themselves, but self-aware individuals are more capable of making evaluative comparisons against standards such as ideals, norms, goals, or expectations (Baumeister, 2010).

Behavior at Home vs. Behavior in a Foreign Place

A number of students expressed self-awareness through abstract discussions of how they think and act when they are abroad. Most notably, Emily described several instances—not related to cultural adaptation—when she noticed that she acted in a way that was atypical of herself. She grappled with this realization early in her interview:

You think, "I'm somewhere different so I have to do different things?" It's completely stupid; just because you're in a different place you don't need to change who you are. I mean, you do, but you don't change your actions. Maybe your thoughts?

Emily questions herself, contemplating aloud the ways in which people change in new environments. Above, she settles on the idea that they change their thoughts, though she goes on
to describe situations in which she was aware of how much she changed her actions as well, and questions why that change occurs:

If you wouldn't do that at home, why would you do that here? What is the difference? To go out and have fun until 4:00 in the morning, that's just not something [I] do. And it's this crazy thing that we believe has to happen. I don't know if it's Americans or everyone, but you see it in movies and you go crazy. *The Lizzie McGuire Movie*, we kind of talked about it there, but that's what that movie is. She goes crazy and does all these things she would never do and it's all because she's in this foreign city. But we say I'm different, this is Lizzie, and it's not. You're the same person, you're just in a different place. I think it's just growing up. You realize that your location doesn't change you.

The film Emily refers to above, *The Lizzie McGuire Movie*, chronicles the story of a teenage girl on a high school trip to Rome. While in Rome, she is mistaken for an Italian pop star and proceeds to travel like a celebrity and perform in front of thousands of people. Much like Lizzie, who acted in ways she normally would not have at home, Emily found herself in situations where her behavior abroad did not match her typical behavior in the States. Danielle also discusses how her behavior abroad differed from her normal routine:

When I was in Gothenburg [before the program started], we did a lot of walking around and just getting to see what there is. It's funny because normally I'm so scheduled with everything. I have to have a schedule, but I felt like when I was there, maybe to an extent have a schedule, but at the same time I don't want to overschedule myself and not get to just walk around and see what there is.
Regardless of the reasons for why Emily and others changed their behavior in Sweden—peer pressure, movies about high school girls-turned-pop stars—their recognition of the phenomenon demonstrates self-awareness.

**New Desire for Self-Improvement**

Some students exhibited a newfound desire for self-improvement as a result of the embedded short-term program. Kate, for example, reflected on herself in this way during our interview saying, "The main thing that I want to make sure that I keep reinforcing is just to be, from my perspective, a better person. And not just self-centric." One student, who had an unfortunate drunken incident in Sweden, used the instance as an opportunity for positive self-reflection on the aforementioned changing of their actions and a move toward self-regulation (Deci & Ryan, 2010):

You have to have some regrets. And I don't know if it's just a part of growing up that you realize this was something I really shouldn't have done, or if it's just being aware of how you personally perceive yourself. The next morning I woke up and was like that should never have happened. That's not what I want to do and it made me so upset because I have always heard that Americans when they go to foreign places they do these terrible things, because all of a sudden you're on a different continent and the rules don't apply anymore. But I just did that. And it was just this horrifying realization. I can never get there again.

While a hard lesson to learn, this student turned a bad situation into a positive learning experience. The self-awareness of their past actions, their emotions, and their goals influenced their decision to improve their self-regulation and to control their alcohol consumption.
Other Examples of Self-Awareness

On a lighter note, other students demonstrated self-awareness (and to an extent, self-regulation) through much more mundane and typical circumstances. For example, Dana realized the need to downsize her packing in the future: "Going there I brought a huge suitcase full of clothes, yet I had two buy a new carry-on too [for the flight home]. I learned my lesson about over packing." One interesting self-awareness theme revolved around politics. In comparing themselves with Swedes they encountered during their program, many students became aware of their own shortcomings in their knowledge of politics and world news. Danielle acknowledged that Swedes knew much more about U.S. politics than she knew about Swedish politics:

Hell, even the rest of the world is talking about Donald Trump. They know what's going on with our politics, but I don't know anything about anyone else's politics. So we are really narrow minded if we really don't know anything about the world's politics but they seem to know all about ours. So that was eye opening too.

Here, Danielle implies that her experience of learning how informed the Swedes are about world politics has prompted her to become more knowledgeable as well. Other students acknowledged this knowledge imbalance as well, and even seemed surprised by how much the Swedish people knew about American politics. Rachel, for example, said:

They knew a lot about what was going on in the U.S. Like in convenience stores people would ask you about gun control or the election and I know that some people said that they went to McDonalds after going out and people would always engage them in those types of topics. People not only knew English but were also aware of what was going on in the United States.
The late-night McDonald's trip Rachel references above is explained by Dana below. A small group of students stopped for late-night dinner at McDonalds in Stockholm where they engaged in political conversations with people from Sweden, Egypt, and Germany. Dana explains that such questions about American politics, and particularly about then Presidential Candidate Donald Trump, were quite common during the trip:

They wanted to know about Donald Trump and that kind of stuff. The typical things. It was always funny. I know that's the common question there.

Danielle, Rachel, and Dana all recognized that the Swedish people they encountered had a greater knowledge of U.S. politics than they had of Swedish politics, and through that comparison become more self-aware (particularly Danielle) of their own knowledge gaps.

**Negative Cases: Lack of Self-Awareness**

Several instances, observed by myself and the students, demonstrated a glaring lack of self-awareness in some students. Kate and I both observed how her fellow classmates were often acting as if they were unaware of their surroundings. Regarding a situation in which Kari was nearly pickpocketed while walking in the middle of the group, Kate and I had the following exchange in her interview:

*Kate:* I'm surprised that it took that long, especially with how obvious of a large group we were and people just weren't being observant of their surroundings.

*Kayla:* You know how many bags I just quietly zipped up and nobody noticed I touched them?

Kate continued her discussion of being unaware, relating it to her previous comments on group movement and her recollection of the Jönköping bus station incident:
[Tony] would just roll his eyes and be like, "Let's start herding people." It would be so obnoxious. They would walk through, 15 of us, with our luggage, and just stand there. Huge group, blocking the complete doorway. People would stare at them but they would have no awareness. From the outside looking in it seems like they're not really aware of being in people's way. I was trying to be.

Not only did Kate and Tony recognize the obliviousness of their classmates, but they felt compelled to correct their behavior. Emily also noted this apparent lack of self-awareness in others. Like Kate and Tony, this became a point of frustration for Emily as, in comparison with her peers, she seemed to be much more self-aware than they were:

I would be like, “I have to get a picture of that.” The significance of it and history of it, and people would be like, “Who cares, it's a rock.” You realize how unaware people can be. And I think that's what gives some travelers a bad reputation. When you don't know anything. When I was in England [after Sweden], [this person] didn't know who Winston Churchill was. It would be like people coming to the U.S. and not knowing what the White House is.

For Emily, this lack of self-awareness in others (e.g., an American not recognizing a bust of Winston Churchill in London) was a point of slight embarrassment for her as she reflected on how it leads to people who travel, like her, earning a poor reputation.

These instances, while general and quite contextual, are worth noting as counterevidence to student self-awareness as they illustrate—just as with intercultural competence—the spectrum of learning and development. A student who is incredibly self-aware in one moment may lack awareness in the next, but that does not mean that it was not a learned behavior.
Openness to New Ideas and Experiences

Having an open mind to new ideas and experiences is a highly valuable trait in today's ever-changing world. As globalization influences all aspects of our lives, it is important that today's college graduates are capable of and willing to embrace new concepts and ways of thinking. My findings illustrate that these short-term study abroad program participants left Sweden with a much more open mind than they had before they traveled.

Open-mindedness, in essence, refers to the willingness to try new things or to consider new ideas (see e.g., Hare, 1993; Adler, 2004; Riggs, 2010). Individuals who are open-minded are more willing to accept ideas that run contrary to their own beliefs, can more readily embrace change, are passionately curious, non-judgmental, and are capable of turning perceived problems into opportunities (Hare, 1993). The students in this study demonstrated open-mindedness in four distinct yet interrelated ways: a willingness to consider new perspectives, stepping out of their comfort zones, a newfound desire to see more of the world, and a heightened curiosity for the unknown.

Considering New Perspectives

For a number of students, their brief stint in Sweden resulted in a new, profound understandings of the inherent value in considering new and different perspectives. Brandon's most salient lesson from his Sweden experience involved a roller coaster, a box full of iPhones, and trust issues. As explained in Chapter 4, Brandon and a number of other students elected to visit an amusement park during their downtime in Gothenburg. While boarding a roller coaster, Brandon looked at the loading area and saw an open box full of iPhones and other expense-looking smart devices, and although Brandon did not have a photo of this moment to reflect
upon, he stated that it is the one photo he wishes he would have taken. After some confused observation, he saw that no one attempted to take what was not theirs. After jokingly saying, "I thought, do I just take three of them?" Brandon related it all back to his core lesson for the trip: "The Swedish are a trusting people." Overheard in a bar from a university employee, Brandon discussed this new personal mantra and how seeing it in action taught him a broader lesson about the importance of understanding other ways of thinking:

[I learned] that there is a different way of thinking in the world. I knew that. Everyone knows that. But it's hard to understand it until you see it. People do have this entirely different mentality. Not being individualistic, which the United States is. Not stealing people's iPhones. It was just crazy for me to see that. And it's just so different from the way we think. It's not always [our] way everywhere.

As Brandon puts it, knowing that not everyone thinks in the same way is common, but his experience seeing those different values embodied in Swedish culture struck a chord with him. Brandon's eyes were opened to a new way of thinking—simply, there is great power in trusting others. While I don't imagine that Brandon will be leaving his iPhone unattended in the U.S. anytime soon, his repeated mentions of "the Swedish are a trusting people" while in Sweden, during our interview, and during his focus group suggests that the salience of this lesson will not soon wear off.

Kate and Tony echoed Brandon's understanding of the value of new perspectives. Tony recognized that even though people do things differently, they all seem to get the job done. He noted, "It was cool to see how different people do different things and it gave me insight into how there's not one way to do things. A lot of people do things differently and it works out."
Kate walked away from her experience slightly humbled, recognizing that her way of thinking and doing things may not always be the best way:

Something that was more meaningful and this is just self-reflection as far as some of the upbringing for kids, not thinking that you're this great person, but you're a part of society. You don't know it all. And so for me taking charge, I think not trying to smother people, in life and at work, not assuming that I think that I know what's best. So it's just a different outlook in life. What can I learn from you?

Kate expressed that, moving forward, she hopes to be a better leader, one who recognizes that she does not hold the answers to everything and that it is important to value the perspectives of others, which is an important lesson for a future human resources manager. Both Kate and Tony, like Brandon, exhibited the understanding that their way of viewing the world is not the only way. Instead, they came to understand that others can have valid views as well, and that there can be more than one correct approach to any given situation, suggesting a greater openness to new ideas.

Emily highlights how it is sometimes easy to get stuck in your ways, but that traveling with an open mind can lead to important lessons about culture and life:

When you stay in one place your whole life you get used to how everybody in that one place thinks. You forget about all of the things that happen outside of your little bubble. When you go somewhere else it's like nobody else is the same as you. They're a little bit different. So how do you take it, and what are the lessons you learn from them? How do they deal with scenarios that maybe you've never seen before? And to me it's just interesting to see how they deal with daily life. What do they do, and can you do that, and how can you bring that into your life if it's something you like.
Emily’s metaphor of a bubble illustrates the closed-off nature of some ways of thinking. However, Emily's willingness to remove herself from her bubble (whether that is her hometown or her home university) and put herself into new contexts and keep an open mind about the new ways in which people act and think has taught her to embrace differences, and perhaps even incorporate new ways of thinking and doing things in her own life.

Marcy’s change of perspective was very personal. Marcy explained to me that before leaving for Sweden, she overheard that another classmate was planning to bring drugs on the trip. Being a more straight-edge individual, Marcy was troubled by this and noted how her negative perception of this classmate changed throughout the trip and that this taught her a larger lesson of open-mindedness and acceptance:

As soon as I met [this classmate] I was freaked out by [them], but [they] didn't bring cocaine [like I had overheard]. Instead [they’re] ambitious and smart. I was continuously surprised by [them] because [they] asked all these super insightful questions, and I think that taught me not to take things at face value—in my head I had written [them] off as this person who just throws [their] life away to partying, but that doesn't mean that [they don’t] care about other things.

Through getting to know her classmate—rather than blindly accepting what others had told her—Marcy came to learn that there was much more to this person than their party reputation. Although she later still acknowledged her classmate's tendency to drink and party, Marcy was more accepting of her classmate as a whole. Marcy’s new understanding of her classmate's many identities helped Marcy glean the more broadly applicable lesson of not taking things at face value.

4 There is absolutely no evidence that this or any other illicit events occurred.
For Emily, her perception change was subtler and somewhat difficult for her to put into words. During our conversation, she reflected on a photo of New York City at night taken from the plane window (Emily, Photo #3, shown above), explaining how her perception of small things changed as she came back home from Sweden:

I think it's about perception. I don't know how to phrase it either, that's the hard part. It's not even stuff you see, it's not big stuff. It's little stuff. It's like portion sizes. When we were over there, it could be like this much (cups hands). Or the types of foods they eat versus the types of foods we eat. But when you come home, restaurants [here] are bigger and much more centered around family. You have lots of tables and everybody is very social. They do in Europe too, but it's all outside. Things like that. Little stuff. And none of it's bad. I guess it's just how you look at it.

Emily, while not necessarily reflecting a new openness, demonstrated a more open perception of how she viewed cultural differences between the U.S. and Sweden. By saying that "none of it's
Bad, she frames her understanding as an acceptance of different ideas of cultural phenomenon—even those as simple as portion sizes or restaurant layouts.

**Stepping out of Your Comfort Zone**

One of the scariest and most nerve-wracking experiences for many people is taking a leap into the unknown—entering the dark room in the haunted house, jumping from the airplane with only your parachute, marriage. Leaving one's comfort zone, a space where "uncertainty, scarcity and vulnerability are minimized" (Brown, 2010, as cited in Tugend, 2011), can be a psychologically jarring experience. However, if embraced with an open mind and an eagerness to experience something new, stepping out of one's comfort zone can lead to an ability to manage higher levels of stress and sometimes an increase in skill acquisition (Tugend, 2011).

Many students, like Kate, were excited by the prospect of experiencing a new culture and language. For students like Marcy, registering for the program in Sweden was a leap of its own. Marcy, who divulged to me that she suffers from severe social anxiety, has a difficult time putting herself out there. However, by going to Sweden, she was able to confront that barrier to social interaction:

A lot of it's you just have to force yourself. Part of my therapy is that I have to put myself out there, so that's why I did this trip. I wanted to force myself to talk to new people. Marcy's strength in being able to step outside of her comfort zone, traveling to a foreign country, and interacting with different people led to a greater confidence in herself. Marcy added that she admired another student, Kari, for her fearlessness in jumping into Jönköping's chilly Lake Vättern (Photo #4, shown below). Marcy related Kari's actions to her own desire to push her own boundaries:
As cheesy as this is, it was about pushing yourself to do more. [Kari] was really fearless about it. She even dove in and I was just piddle paddling in the shallow area. And they were like, "I have an extra swimsuit," and I was like, "Ha, no."

Despite Marcy's unwillingness to join Kari and some of her other classmates in the lake (it was, after all, only around 50 degrees outside), the metaphorical significance that she placed on Kari's actions—pushing yourself to do more—suggests that Marcy also desires to embody that same fearlessness in the future.

Dana shared this notion of leaving her comfort zone, and added that the new experiences she had in Sweden have made her more open to experiencing new things in the future:

Sweden in general made me step out of my comfort zone. Even just getting there by myself and trying new things and just not really being sure. I think in the future it will definitely make me more apt to do things I originally wouldn't have done.

For Kari and Dana, their most salient new experiences revolved around food. While Kari was intrigued by common "pumpkin seeds," Dana was more interested in branching out into new culinary worlds:
Before this I never ate peppers or things like that and I ate them every day on those sandwiches they gave us. The other night my mom made peppers for dinner and I was excited.

Looking at her photo of one particularly seafood-heavy meal (Dana, Photo #1, shown below), Dana reflected on how much that meal and the Sweden context meant to her in terms of broadening her horizons:

I don't really go out of my comfort zone with food a lot. This picture especially, I don't really try seafood or anything, so when everyone was getting [the fish] I was like, "Oh, why not?" It was something so simple and I probably could have eaten those here and stepped out of my comfort zone, but I felt like I SHOULD do it while I'm there. If I was here I would have never ordered a fish meal, ever. That meal to me was really stepping out of my comfort zone.
Being in a new, different context inspired Dana to try new, different foods. Dana recalled her mother's surprise at her willingness to try new foods: "My mom was shocked that I tried [the fish eggs].” Though Dana admitted "I probably wouldn't get it again," she "ate all of it." In terms of being more open in the future, Dana said:

> Going forward I will be more adventurous, even something as simple as food. Don't get the same meal every time you go to a restaurant. I usually don't even have to open the menu, but maybe next time I'll look around a little bit.

Dana ultimately expressed a newfound willingness to branch out from her usual routine and try new things. She learned a lesson that not everything new is bad, and that trying new things can be a very positive and eye-opening experience.

Some students learned valuable lessons about the benefits of being willing to have new experiences. Emily learned such a lesson the hard way. On the students' first full day together in Sweden, professors from Jönköping University generously offered to give the students a tour of the city, ending on top of a large hill where the Dean was grilling sausages for dinner. Unfortunately, the students had dressed very professionally for their meetings that day and had no time to return to the hotel to change into more active apparel. The resulting experience came to be known as "the hike in business casual." At first, Emily discussed her disbelief that some people were not up for the adventure:

> I did NOT want to do it. A group of people didn't go and I remember thinking you're only going to be here once. This is your only chance to do it. Don't say no. (Emily, Photo #2, shown below)
For Emily, things like this—"This hike. With that lady. In business casual."—are a unique opportunity, and opportunities such as this should not be passed up. She continued, reflecting on the feeling she gets when she does something out of the ordinary for her:

You get to another country and you think I want to be active and I want to be able to do all of the things that they do, or they want us to do and see, because—that picture doesn't show it very well, it's just a barn—but you get to top and you see amazing things and you think, "If I stayed at the bottom I would have never seen this." And those are the things you remember.

Because she stuck it out (despite losing a toenail from walking in her work flats), Emily not only experienced a breath-taking view of the city, but also a reaffirmed sense of her own capabilities. She realized that she can do things that the locals do. She can, quite literally, climb mountains.

Other students learned valuable lessons from their unwillingness to step out of their comfort zones. Kate learned, upon reflection, that it is better to ask questions than to stumble your way through things blindly:
[I learned] don't be afraid to ask questions. When we didn't purchase the bus pass [on our way to the archipelagoes] I was like this isn't right, and I kinda felt a little bit bad. I definitely think we should have asked instead of just getting on the bus. And when I went up to the counter and was chatting with the lady they were really nice and definitely willing to help. So I think being a little more forward with asking questions was a lesson learned.

While in Sweden, Kate hesitated to ask Swedes for information, opting to stubbornly try to figure things out on her own. Kate eventually realized that a willingness to ask questions would have saved her time and energy, and spared her a bit of guilt.

**Wanderlust**

Wanderlust, or a strong impulse to explore the world, is a fairly prevalent learning outcome of travel experiences, particularly for individuals who have not traveled much before (see e.g., Fuller, 2015; Liang, Caton, & Hill, 2014; Lee, 2010; Shields, 2011; DiFante, 2016). Triggered and further exacerbated by travel (Shields, 2011), wanderlust is a pull factor (Liang, Caton, & Hill, 2014) for many students to continue their exploration of the new and unknown—a mixture of stepping out of their comfort zones, curiosity, and daring.

Unsurprisingly, many of the students returned from Sweden with a strong desire to travel more. For Kari and Tony, their wanderlust focused on seeing more of Sweden itself. Tony reflecting on his photo of himself posing on one of Gothenburg’s archipelagoes (Photo #2, shown below), commented on his newly discovered "taste" for Sweden, but how it left him wanting to experience more:
I definitely want to go back. I would probably take that cruise ship from Gothenburg down to Copenhagen, go through the northern archipelago, or the southern archipelago. I got a taste, but I want more. I want to go to the north of Sweden because there's moose and a lot of woods. And I think it would be really different from southern Sweden. I want to see what's north of Stockholm. Maybe see the northern lights.

In Sweden, I overheard Tony several times saying that he wanted to move to Sweden, so his comment about wanting to see more of the country is not surprising. However, it is interesting to me that, if he ever were to go back, he would not do the same things again. Instead, Tony wants to have new experiences—go on an archipelago cruise, explore Sweden's northern forests. His "taste" of Sweden did not just leave him wanting more, but led to a hunger for expanding his palette. Kari's experience also left her wanting to see more of Sweden, though instead of visiting again, like Tony, she plans to live there someday:
I am going to do my darnest to live over in Sweden and I'm 100% serious with that. I'd like to go back as soon as possible because I think I want to experience it for a longer period of time. I know there were definitely some things that were frustrating, or at least difficult to adapt to, and I'm just wondering how that would affect me long term. For a year or two I think?

Kari's desire to spend a great deal more time in Sweden reflects both her desire to see more but also to test her limits. She admits that her experience was not the easiest at times, but her eagerness to go back and put herself in those situations again is inspiring.

The travel bug bit many students, and during our interviews and focus groups, a very common theme was a new (or renewed) desire to travel the world. During one of the focus groups, Angela, Danielle, Marcy, and Kari reflected on Danielle’s photo of Gothenburg’s southern archipelagoes (Danielle, Photo #1, shown below). For Danielle and Angela, Sweden's natural beauty (as depicted in this photo) and architecture were the catalysts for future travel plans:

_Danielle, Photo #1: View of Gothenburg Archipelago Islands_
Danielle: What else is there out there to see in the world? I want to travel to all these different places and see what I'm missing out on.

Angela: I get it. I totally felt like that 50% of the time at least on the trip. It gives you the travel bug. To be in Sweden, which is so incredibly different—the transportation, the scenery, the people, the buildings, everything—I thought, “This is amazing and I need to go to every other single place that I can.” Because I need to see it.

Experiencing Sweden for the first time and seeing what wonders it had to offer left Danielle and Angela wondering what other treasures the world has to offer. Both said they intend to travel more.

Interestingly, many student comments focused specifically on seeing more of Europe. For Danielle said, "I wish I could see more of Europe and the world now that I know there's things out there that I've never seen before." Tony shared this sentiment; Sweden gave him a "taste for Europe," and he said, "I definitely want to go back there and do a lot more traveling."

Specifically, he also plans to see Spain and Italy: "I want to go to all these different places, but now it's like I REALLY want to make that happen. Instead of just oh it would be nice". Tony explained that he always wanted to travel, but after his experience in Sweden, he was left with an even stronger urge and ability to follow through on his goals:

Now that I've got the taste for travel it's definitely going to be way more occurrent [sic].

I've got my passport for ten more years so I might as well put it to use. I feel like a trip [to Europe] every two years would be pretty cool.

Now that Tony and others have traveled abroad once, they plan to travel even more. However, not all students felt a desire to travel internationally after returning from Sweden. In particular,
Emily, again reflecting on her photo of New York City from her plane window (Emily, Photo #3) found herself feeling the urge to see more of her own country:

After this trip, I need to see America. I'm going to go hike around the west. I've never had that desire. This trip made me feel like I know all of these things about the random places that I've been, but I'm not sure that I know all of these things about my own country. I don't think that was anything that anyone expected me to learn at all.

Rather than jetting off to another foreign country (she has now been to over a dozen), Emily returned with a renewed sense of wanderlust for America. She wants to see Utah and Arizona. She wants to go to Disney World. While Emily shared that she does not plan to stop her world travels (she says that coming to Peru with me is next on her list), her desire to see more of her own country has never been stronger.

Importantly, wanderlust often moves beyond the frequent desire to travel and onto a greater desire to become a global citizen. As people travel more and more, some develop the skills and aspirations to integrate with locals and find home in foreign places (Kaur, 2016). With increased global citizenship comes increases in things such as a greater capacity for critical analysis (Lewin, 2010), pro-environmental behavior (Wynveen, Kyle, & Tarrant, 2011), and capabilities and a passion for improving the lives of others (Lewin, 2010).

**Heightened Curiosities**

Curious individuals are not quick to judge ideas against what they know, but rather are active inquirers into that which they do not. They have an innate ability to want to know more. Curiosity can be motivated by many factors. Most recently, curiosity has been defined as a "form of cognitively induced deprivation that arises from the perception of a gap in knowledge or
understanding" (Loewenstein, 2016, p. 75). Therefore, curiosity plays an essential role in learning and development as individuals discover their own shortcomings and seek answers to that which is unknown to them.

Interestingly, many of the students’ curiosities centered on subjects that were not necessarily pertinent to the course content. Marcy explained, "There's a lot of things that I feel like we couldn't have asked because it was off topic." Such off-topic, unmet curiosities included Marcy's interest in Swedish LGBT laws and refugee programs, Dana's curiosity about when Swedes have time to run errands, and Emily's fascination with the Swedish band Abba.

Some students felt that their curiosities arose because the program did not meet all of their expectations. Tony wanted a greater focus on Swedish healthcare systems, while Emily and many others (as mentioned before) wished they had learned more about Swedish politics:

I still don't actually know. We went to the palace after the Vasa Museum, and I still don't know if that actually is their king. Is it?

Many of these students, like Marcy, have resorted to satisfying these curiosities on their own via personal inquiry, mostly online. She commented, "I'm learning more about Sweden now just because I'm interested in it now because I went there and I wish I had been able to see it. I'm interested and researching outside now." For these students, their heightened curiosity has led to more obvious knowledge-seeking behaviors. They are actively seeking answers to their unanswered questions.

**Grit and Independence**

Grit and independence are two highly interrelated yet very distinct social-emotional learning outcomes. Grit is a non-cognitive psychological trait that combines individual passion
and motivation to achieve goals (Duckworth, 2016). Individuals with grit exhibit the ability to overcome challenges and are motivated to accomplish their goals. Although grit is typically focused on more long-term goals (Duckworth et al., 2007), I use the construct here to highlight the ways in which students persevered to reach their goals, many of which were contextual to the program and not necessarily extendable more long-term. Independence, on the other hand, is more simply the ability to think or act without relying on others. The examples students offered that demonstrated grit, however, often expressed independence as well; thus, the two are reported here in tandem.

For the majority of students, grit manifested itself as they successfully navigated the country. While some students, like Kate and Dana, noted that the language barrier made navigating difficult at first, most students were able to overcome their linguistic obstacles and find their way. While Kari and Dana were able to navigate Stockholm despite their inability to read her Swedish maps or bus schedules, Emily and Tony recalled their harrowing journeys traveling to Sweden. For Tony, who was traveling internationally for first the time, the experience, though ultimately successful, was quite jarring:

So this is my first time flying alone. Got to Stockholm and I couldn't read a lot of things. It was bad. I was really clueless. I looked at my ticket, I looked at the huge board, and I couldn't find my train. I found where my platform was going to be and asked people, "Is this my train?" I made it.

The intonation in “I made it” suggests a bit of surprise at his successful travels, though Tony later went on to say that he was able to overcome his navigational barriers. Emily, who traveled to Denmark with Kari for two days prior to arriving in Sweden, similarly explained:
We get off the plane and everything is in Danish. And we had no idea where to go. All we had was a picture of a map, but it was all in Danish. But we figured it out and by the end of the trip we had safely navigated all of the trains. We knew how to use all of them in Denmark and the joke was that when we got to Sweden we would be the ones who knew how to go around Europe. (Emily, Photo #1, shown below)

![Train Station in Copenhagen, Denmark](image)

Emily, Photo #1: Train Station in Copenhagen, Denmark

Interestingly, Emily often took the lead when the group would travel together on public transportation. She was often the first in line to buy tickets, led the group on walks to various stations, and took initiative in asking for directions (fieldnotes, various dates). It seems that her prior experience overcoming transportation challenges led to an empowering comfort in her ability to navigate and lead others.

Dana commented that it was really her own discomfort, as opposed to the linguistic and navigational barriers faced by others, that she needed to overcome:

The communication—which turned out to be fine because they were all really good at English—I did always feel a little uncomfortable when they would speak to me right
away in Swedish, I never knew what to say. I was just like, “Um, English?” I wasn't sure about it, but it turned out to be completely fine.

At first, Dana was intimidated by the unknown that first encounters in a foreign country can present. Not knowing how to respond when someone would speak to her in Swedish, Dana did the only thing she could think of and asked them if they spoke English. While this made her uncomfortable in the beginning, Dana learned to overcome her discomfort and to openly acknowledge her lack of Swedish conversational capabilities and embrace the fact that she was still able to get what she needed.

Some students, like Marcy, expressed how the program prompted their burgeoning independence: "I think we learned how to be self-sufficient for the first time." Related, students who were traveling for the first time found that simple tasks proved to be barriers to overcome. Tony felt pride in being able to find the group without the use of a cell phone after being separated in the amusement park. Dana learned to budget her money:

We didn't have a lot of money. We had to learn how to, okay, how much money are we going to spend, how are we going to get from place to place, what are we going to be spending the money on. We stayed in an Airbnb in Denmark and it was like, “Ok, we are here for three nights, two days and we had to buy our own food.” And I did it!

Though simple, these examples illustrate that the ability to overcome small, everyday obstacles can serve as catalysts for greater lessons in independence, which is the ability to act on one's own, and grit, which is the desire and ability to persevere when confronted with a challenge.
Empowerment

Empowerment is a complex and embattled concept, and the term itself presents problems in defining it in research contexts. Empowerment is a very personal psychological concept and sociological phenomenon, and the way it is defined and enacted is highly contextual to cultures, circumstances, and individuals. In this study, I am relying upon two different yet related definitions of empowerment: 1) "the capacity of individuals, groups and/or communities to take control of their circumstances, exercise power and achieve their own goals" (Adams, 2008, p. 6); and, 2) "a process: the mechanism by which people, organizations, and communities gain mastery over their lives" (Rappaport, 1984, p. 1). Empowered individuals take greater responsibility for their lives and others', value their passions, and recognize their needs and goals. The examples below, while somewhat related to grit, independence, and overcoming obstacles more generally, represent the cultivation of a profound feeling of empowerment—which was a term coded *in vivo*—due to students’ subjective experiences.

Feeling like a "Badass"

"Did anyone else leave there feeling like a badass?" Angela posed this somewhat rhetorical question during our focus group. Many students, like Angela, returned home from Sweden feeling more capable of taking on the world than before. Marcy, describing her journey to Sweden alone, expressed, "I have more confidence in myself." Emily explained that she was "impressed" with how well she "efficiently" navigated the large London Underground during her travels back to the U.S. Angela, referencing Danielle’s photo of the Gothenburg archipelagoes (Danielle, Photo #2), continued her discussion of personal empowerment with her peers during a focus group:
Angela: … Knowing you can catch trains and busses and shit? And buy your tickets in a different language?!

Kari: Definitely. That was half of my bucket list.

Angela: You just fucking figured that out. And if you're from a rural area like me—I've never ridden a public bus, been on a train, a subway, absolutely none of that shit. Over there—ferries? Hell yeah. Busses? You got it. Metro? Sign me up. It was empowering. I can do New York because I did it in Stockholm in a different language. I sure as hell can get through Chicago. The mystery of the big bad Europe, that's gone! I've got that baby.

In another conversation, Angela continued to describe the extent to which she took pride in her successful navigation of Sweden, despite the hiccups she encountered along the way:

Messing up and figuring how to get on the right bus or this or that, that's showing all of our parents, and even me at 28, like look at us, we're over here doing this! If I can handle Stockholm and Gothenburg and fly myself over there, I can surely figure out life in the U.S. when I get home. Aren't you proud mom and dad?

Angela, Emily, Kari, and Marcy's newly acquired navigational skills gave them an empowering confidence in themselves and their capabilities. Even Angela, at 28, felt a deep sense of personal pride in herself and what she had accomplished. These students returned from their study abroad program feeling more capable of accomplishing their goals and with a deeper belief in themselves.

**Feeling Free**

Travel can be an emotionally polarizing phenomenon. On one end I often find myself frazzled with navigating, communicating, and adapting to new cultural norms. Conversely, there
are times when I feel at ease and more in tune with myself—more in the moment. A handful of female students seemed to share the latter feeling of being free. One student, reflecting on their unfortunate drunken incident in Jönköping, used their experience as a profound personal learning moment: "You learn how to experience yourself and grow. You piss yourself in the street, you learn from it."

For Kate, this lesson of internal empowerment was less hard fought. Reflecting on a picture of her relaxing along the water in Gothenburg (Photo #4), Kate explained that her main takeaway from the program was a renewed passion to "enjoy the moment":

It's kind of not specific to this picture, but what I was doing the whole trip—being in the moment, enjoying what you're doing and not worrying about what happened yesterday or worrying about what's going to happen the next day.

While Kate was actively engaging her personal empowerment in Sweden, she claimed that her experience also "re cemented [her] outlook on life":

I don't think it was necessarily new, but I think it reinforced how I want to live my life and be in the moment and enjoy things. And everyone enjoys different things, and for me it's yes I'll have another coffee. Yes, I'll buy that pastry. Yes I'm going to go to an amusement park. I was there to learn new things, to have fun, and to enjoy new things. And I think that's what I did and I didn't hold back on that. (Kate, Photo #5, shown below)
These students’ empowerment arose from new, freeing experiences and the important personal lessons they were able to glean from them.

Some cases of newfound freedom were much more personal. In the case of Rachel, Sweden's freeing affect had much to do with her home life in the U.S. Rachel, whose family members can sometimes be overbearing, explained to me that for the first time in a long time she was able to "be [her]self:"

I guess I have a lot of family stress sometimes. And I think being on another continent and studying, I felt like I could focus more on my studies and be myself. I just felt safer and more like I could do whatever.

In fact, going to and returning home from Sweden helped her realize the depth of her own psychological suffering:

It was something I never realized—that was apparently an issue for me. I came home and was like, “Oh my gosh.” I think the reason I had so much fun there and felt like I could be myself had nothing to do with necessarily being in a fun new country. I think a lot of it had to do with not having to worry about my [family].
The stress caused by her unique family dynamic, Rachel explained, was never more apparent to her than when juxtaposed against the freeing feeling of Sweden (Rachel, Photo #1, shown below). I expressed my gratitude to these students, and particularly Rachel, for sharing such personal stories with me and reassured them that such deeply personal learning is valuable not only to my research, but to their overall personal development and well-being.

Global Interconnectedness: A Belief in a Shared Humanity

Derived from Kohlberg's sixth stage of moral reasoning development—the universal ethical-principle orientation (1971, as cited in Brockett, 1986)—the belief in a common or shared humanity among individuals is one of the most highly coveted learning outcome goals for study abroad programs, particularly service-learning programs. Sometimes referred to as global interconnectedness (Merryfield, 2014), the belief in a shared humanity is related to both ethnorelativism (Bennett, 2004) and cultural awareness and results in the recognition of how one's actions can have a global impact, that what unites us is stronger than what divides us,
greater compassion for and understanding of the value in others, and relationships fostered across borders—national, cultural, or self-imposed. A few of these outcomes are detailed in the examples below.

**It's a Small World**

"It's a small world after all." I have never been to Disneyland, but Dana's subtle reference brings to mind the iconic theme park ride. It's a Small World features hundreds of animatronic dolls clad in traditional clothing from various countries all singing the infamous theme song promoting global peace and unity. While Dana was simply referencing her surprise at encountering fellow Nittany Lions abroad, other students expressed this sentiment in more profound terms.

One focus group developed a theme of recognizing commonalities among ourselves and the people we encounter. As Angela put it, "We're all just humans":

Going to Stockholm that night when we all went out dancing, it was just American music everywhere and these people were all singing the same words and they were dancing crazy. It's like, wow music and dancing. That is global. Humans like to do that. Some cultures maybe more or less so than others, but it's those little things like that are actually huge.

Dancing at a club in Stockholm and seeing how the phenomenon of dancing and singing was essentially the same for both Americans and Swedes helped Angela realize how alike people from different cultures can be. Her perspective became more "global". Continuing their conversation, Danielle echoed this discovery:
Danielle: You focus so much on differences between you and other people in the world that you lose track of what you actually have in common as human beings.

Angela: Even if you can't speak the same language but you both hear a great song that you like, it's a great way to communicate. You don't have to speak the same language; you don't have to know each other [like we didn't]—it's just shared experiences with people. We're all in this together.

Danielle and Angela both advocate for a greater focus on the characteristics and values shared by people from different cultures, as opposed to the differences between them. Through a recognition of interconnectedness—"shared experiences"—their world became much smaller and the possibilities for togetherness and global community became more apparent to them than before.

For many students, like Rachel, the study abroad program helped them put into perspective the size of the world. Just days prior to leaving for Sweden, many of the students and I noticed a Snapchat Story—a compilation of brief videos from different Snapchat users often highlighting specific places or events around the world—featuring Gothenburg. Rachel made it a point to visit a few of the places she saw in the Snapchat Story:

I saw this donut shop and I saw the lipstick tower and I wanted to see both of them and I did. And that was a really cool experience for me. I think one of the things that [the professors] talked about was what are the things that we learned about the world and did it feel smaller when we were traveling? And it kind of did because I had just seen that on Snapchat a couple weeks ago and then there I am at the donut shop and seeing the lipstick tower. (Rachel, Photo #2, shown below)
Rachel was excited that she was able to experience something that, before traveling, seemed so far away. She had only experienced Gothenburg through social media—through the eyes of other people. After going to Sweden and experiencing them for herself, she was able to realize just how small the world actually is. As Emily similarly noted, "it's cool to be a part of it."

![Rachel, Photo #2: Rachel Enjoying a Donut in Gothenburg](image)

Other students discussed the shared commonalities between Sweden and the United States in more general terms. For some students, like Emily, Sweden seemed much more like home than they anticipated: "It seemed more normal." Rachel noted that the similarities were there, yet often hidden by smaller differences: "Fika (traditional Swedish snack break) is great but it's a lot like coffee and donuts or coffee breaks here. It's a lot of the same just rearranged a little differently."

As I discuss later in this chapter, many students noted the seemingly unique aspects of Sweden's culture, often contrasting it with what life in America is like to them. Tony noted this
tendency of his classmates to focus on cultural differences as opposed to acknowledging the many similarities that he perceived:

I think a lot of people focused on the extreme ends of things. Like they generalized Sweden to be this one thing and America to be very different. But I feel like in that middle 50% it's very similar. For example, I know Netflix offers one year of some combined parental leave. I think there was a gross generalization of a lot of things. Although this does not necessarily present a negative case against global interconnectedness, it does underscore the students' overwhelming tendencies to notice differences without also acknowledging similarities. Contrasting the known with the new is a common strategy for learning; however, unlike many of his peers, Tony moved beyond contrasting and began to notice the ways in which the two cultures shared characteristics.

**Compassion for Others**

Compassion implies a connection with others that often generates an emotional response (Jimenez, 2009). Generally understood in relation to the suffering of others, I instead use compassion in this study as a framework for understanding the plight of others as well as recognizing and acknowledging their innate value as fellow humans.

As previously mentioned, Kari was nearly the victim of pickpocketing while walking with the group in Gothenburg. In the moment, the group's reaction was one of confusion and malice toward the woman attempting to reach into Kari's backpack (fieldnotes, 5/27/16). As Kari recounted her experience while looking her photo of a Gothenburg street (Photo #4, shown below), however, her feelings were much more sympathetic:
I felt sad that she had to do that. That's desperation. Obviously she shouldn't have done it, but I felt really bad to a point because that's just sad.

Unlike many of her classmates, Kari did not feel anger toward the woman. Instead, Kari seemed to believe that this woman's personal circumstances had driven her to take such "sad" actions, which prompted a compassionate emotional response and an understanding of why this woman did what she did. Kari was not quick to judge this woman, and recognized that she was more than just a pickpocket.

Emily also demonstrated such an awareness and noted her attempts to be non-judgmental:

You learn very quickly that you can never judge. Especially when you're somewhere where you really don't know anything. You can never judge the way people do things or the way they think. Because they may think completely differently. And that's okay.

Like Kari, Emily feels the need to take a step back and try to understand cultural differences and social phenomenon. The way people act and the way that they think, to Emily, should be looked
at with an open mind. Judgment without understanding the context is not helpful, and does not lead to compassionate behavior.

Other students, in response to their experiences abroad, expressed their intentions to be more compassionate for others in the future. Kate, who already works full-time, discussed her intentions to be more compassionate in the workplace:

What we heard from the different companies—trusting employees and coaching managers to do that—has been on my mind. When a manager calls and complains about someone [I can now say] "before I immediately jump on board with what you're saying, let's talk through some things you could do to give some good will to the relationship."

Not only is Kate demonstrating the application of lessons learned in Sweden to her job, but she is expressing her intent to be more trusting of and to give value to the ideas of her co-workers.

While Kate is concerned with fostering working relationships in the office, one of Brandon's larger lessons centered on care:

One of the big ones for me is worrying about the well-being of others. I know I'm very individualistic. I'm concerned about my well-being, my future career. You should take care of yourself and worry about yourself. Whereas there—the collectivist society—it was actually really nice to see how it played out—that mentality that you should worry about other people. Don't just put yourself first all the time.

Brandon both recognizes his own individualistic tendencies and the strengths to Sweden's collectivism. He seems to suggest that it is better to care for others and to be concerned with their well-being as well as your own. While Brandon does not explicitly say that he intends to change his behavior, the saliency of this lesson for him suggests that he may.
For many students, the meaningful relationships that they fostered during their program—and the lessons learned from those interactions—were not amongst the Swedish students, professors, or company employees they met. Rather, students cultivated relationships with one another. Looking at a photo of his new friends (Tony, Photo #3, shown below), Tony reflected fondly on getting to know his classmates, saying, "I think this picture shows the relationship that we all fostered together. Going from being near complete strangers to going to an amusement park together."

Angela, reflecting on her photo of one of her classmates in their Stockholm hotel room (Angela, Photo #1, shown below), said that she and this classmate "shared lives." Emily also reflected on the close bonding experience that resulted from the program:

We were on a trip with a bunch of people who I probably would never have talked to if I hadn't been on a trip with them. And that's always what's so much fun about these trips is
you meet people from all these different backgrounds and it's cool to see how everyone meshes together. When we got to know each other we got to find things to bond over.

![Angela, Photo 1: Classmate Peering out Window in Stockholm Hotel](image)

The nature of the program forced Angela, Emily, and others to interact with people who were complete strangers. By the end of the program, they had crafted friendships. While it can be said that this type of phenomenon happens all the time in education, the fact that these students continue to highlight it as a learning experience, even in college, suggests this unique context's salience for them.

Marcy explicitly noted the uniqueness of study abroad program participation for fostering relationships:

That's how a lot of my other friends are who studied abroad. One of my friends went to London for a year. She was rooming with this girl, and she text me in the beginning saying, "I hate this girl." But now she's rooming with her [here]. I was happy that I had the same experience.
Marcy (and her friend) credits study abroad for helping her to craft new friendships with individuals she did not know before. As Marcy continued to note, and as the example of her friend in London similarly illustrates, many of the people she now considers friends (after only 10 days) started off as much less than that. From her self-proclaimed apprehension of the classmate who was supposedly bring drugs, to her initial, negative comparison of another classmate’s materialistic tendencies to her own "FOB" (fresh off the boat) friends, over time Marcy came to understand that these individuals were more than their first impressions seemed to suggest, and it was through participating in the study abroad program together that helped her realize that.

**Humility**

Humility is a psychological construct that refers to an individual's groundedness, or the extent to which they are humble. Recognizing humility as a positive learning outcome has been criticized by some, as they define humility as a low regard for oneself and one's self-worth. However, and as it is applied here, humility can also be seen as a powerful capacity for self-assessment (Tangney, 2000). Often contrasted with narcissism, humble individuals recognize their own limitations and the strengths of others, understand their position in the world, and often exhibit deep feelings of appreciation (Tangney, 2000).

Several students expressed humility as they reflected on how their experiences had impacted them personally. Tony, referring to his former “frat boy” tendency to believe the world revolved around him, said, "I'm way more insignificant than I thought I was. This is what a Chinese person feels like when they come to America." Though Tony's humility does include an
element of low self-regard, he also implicitly acknowledges that this humbling experience—being the foreigner—was a positive thing for him developmentally.

During the class lectures that students attended prior to leaving for Sweden, as well as several company visits in-country, the students learned about two Swedish cultural practices: *jantelagen* and *lagom*. The concepts of *jantelagen*—which translates to "the law of humility and restraint"—and *lagom*—which means "just the right amount,"—struck a chord with several students, prompting frequent mentions in their in-country reflection presentations, post-program video presentations, and our interviews and focus groups. For Marcy, these concepts taught her a valuable, humbling lesson:

> We learned in class about *jantelagen* and *lagom*. I think it's really remarkable to think that no person is better than another. It doesn't matter how far you get in life. You're not better than another person just because you were afforded more opportunities. They could've done the same thing or whatever. I really like that idea.

Learning about *jantelagen* and *lagom*, which could be considered a more academically-focused learning outcome, resulted in Marcy's social-emotional learning as well. Not only did she come away with knowledge of the deeply-ingrained Swedish cultural practices, but also a deeper understanding of positionality, status, and how we should view ourselves and our self-worth in relation to others.

For some students, like Emily, their humility manifested itself in the form of a new appreciation for their own country. Emily spent several minutes discussing the reasons she likes to travel. When compared to other countries in the world (like Sweden), Emily sees America as a place where obesity runs rampant and college and healthcare are expensive:
I think a lot of the reason why people go on study abroad, whether it's for short-term or long-term it's like I need anywhere but here. So you pick the place and it's wonderful. It's this perfect place and you're going to live there. [laughs] But, when you come home it's always my favorite part because you see everything differently.

For students like Emily, study abroad is an escape from their imperfect home. Study abroad allows them to visit new, "wonderful" places, but upon returning home, Emily was able to look upon America with a fresh perspective. She continued:

I remember the first time I went to Europe I was like why does everybody want to live in America? It's so ugly. And then I come home and I get it. Nowhere else do you see stuff like here. This is what I thought Europe was like and I realized it's exactly what America looks like. You realize that you completely idolize this foreign place and if you really just walked out to your back yard—I always think I'm so lucky. But that's the best part about coming home. Everything that once was just "meh" is suddenly so much better. (Emily, Photo #3)

Emily idolized the places she has visited, but after returning home she realizes that America is just as beautiful. In fact, in many ways, it is better to Emily. After traveling abroad, Emily comes to better appreciate the beauty that her own country possesses.

**Wonderment**

Contrasted with the fear and respect that awe implies, wonderment focuses on the experiencer's pure joy, fascination, inspiration, and surprise. Wonderment occurs when individuals step outside of their comfort zones. Interculturally, it happens through immersing oneself in the culture and physical space of another place and experiencing new things (Engberg
& Jourian, 2015). Wonderment is triggered by "provocative moments" (Pizzolato, 2005, p. 629) which are the catalysts that force students to reconstruct their relationship with their environment (Engberg & Jourian, 2015). Experiencing wonderment often creates a drive for achievement and passion.

While the least prevalent of the social-emotional outcomes evident in student interviews and focus groups, a handful of students expressed wonderment in relation to the many different sites they saw in Sweden. Though not part of the program itinerary, a number of students used their first day in Sweden to visit the archipelagoes of Gothenburg. For many students—like Kate, who grew up in Atlanta—Sweden's natural beauty was both surprising and awe-inspiring. Reflecting on a picture of the southernmost island during our interview Danielle commented:

It was so gorgeous and something that I totally didn't expect to see. To me, this was such a pleasant surprise and I thought it was absolutely beautiful. I've never seen anything like this before in person so to be able to see something like this was breathtakingly beautiful.

(Danielle, Photo #1)

Danielle's experience of visiting the Gothenburg archipelagoes clashed with her expectations of Sweden. This new discovery, seeing the beauty of the islands, provoked a sense of wonderment for her. Danielle continued discussing her wonderment in a focus group:

We were just on the ferry and it was one of those moments—do you ever see something and it just takes your breath away and you don't have anything to say, so you just look around at it? Just absorbing it all and trying to look at every little detail and remember it. This was Danielle's defining moment for the entire program, she admitted. She wanted to try and remember every bit of the breathtakingly beautiful scenery that she observed. Danielle went on
to say that this moment has inspired her to spend more time in nature—something she does not do very often.

While Danielle was blown away by the natural scenery of Gothenburg, Dana's wonderment arose from a happenstance stroll around Stockholm's Old Town. After splitting from the rest of the group, Dana and Kari found themselves in the city's most touristy district where the streets were lined with clothing stores, souvenir shops, and cafes. Trying to make their way back to the hotel, the two snaked through narrow cobblestone streets searching for a bridge to cross Stockholm's many waterways. After finally locating one, Dana found herself in one of the most beautiful scenes she had ever witnessed. Dana recalled her experience of standing on the bridge and looking out over Stockholm's waterways and buildings:

I remember finding it so amazing. I had no idea that's what I was walking out to. It was so different. That's why I like that picture. I remember that moment of being like—wow. I'll always remember walking through those buildings and then walking out to that. It was really peaceful and calming. It was a moment that definitely was one of my biggest ones there. It was really strange but I really enjoyed that part of it. (Dana, Photo #2, shown below)
Dana, encountering a scene that took her by surprise, enjoyed the strangeness of it all. A seemingly mundane task—walking through a crowded city—came to mean so much more to her. Although Dana, unlike Danielle, did not state that this experience prompted her to change her lifestyle, Dana was permanently impacted by this moment of awe and the sense of peace that it brought to her.

**Academic Outcomes**

This section highlights the specific course-related content that students learned during their embedded program. Unsurprisingly, the students returned from their program with a deeper understanding of Swedish practices in human resource management, Swedish culture, Swedish values, and what this means for themselves and their future careers as HR and healthcare professionals. Although not as much of a contribution to the literature as social-emotional learning, it is important to highlight the depth and breadth of content-related learning that students demonstrated in order to confront the perception that short-term programs fail to facilitate meaningful and significant learning.

**Swedish Employment Practices**

The many company visits that students attended, coupled with pre-departure lectures and reading assignments led to a greater understanding of how Swedish companies value their employees and the ways in which those values are enacted in employment practices and organizational structures. Sweden's generous parental leave policies were the most featured discussion topics, highlighted repeatedly by students such as Dana, Brandon, Marcy, and Tony. Student interviews were also heavily peppered with mentions of *jantelagen, lagom* (which both
heavily influenced conversations about Swedish cultural values, detailed in a subsequent section), and Sweden's flat, non-hierarchical organizational structure. The majority of students viewed these concepts as positive aspects of Swedish organizational culture, though Rachel also recognized its limitations:

While the flat system seems really good, I still think there would be division—these are the office people and these are the factory workers. I still think you would feel better talking to someone who is a manager. Their titles still differentiate themselves. I think you would feel more intimidated.

Rachel speculates that, despite Sweden's attempt to make the work place more evenly balanced, lower-level employees would still feel "intimidated" by their superiors—even if that hierarchy does not technically exist. Rachel thought more critically than most of her peers.

Though Rachel was skeptical of the Swedish flat organizational structure, other students discussed the practices they read about and saw in very positive terms. For much of his interview, Brandon fixated on Sweden's person-centered, collectivist society and how that influenced Sweden's approach to employee-employer relations. He frequently starkly contrasted this with what he observed about similar relational approaches in the United States, connoting that he believed Sweden's approach to be much better for the employees. In one example, Brandon discussed Sweden's approach to employment review:

Since they care about your happiness and your health from birth, they care about you as an employee. It seemed like a two-way relationship. They talked about your goals for the next year—which that's usually a thing that employers do—but more so like your happiness, what you want to do at work, where you want to be at work. Whereas in the
U.S., it's about salary. It seems like they care more about you as a person all throughout life.

Brandon seems to prefer Sweden's goal-oriented approach to employment reviews as opposed to the more financially-driven approach of the United States. He observed that Sweden's approach represented a more "person-centered" philosophy, which focused on the personal aspirations of the employee. Brandon also extrapolates Sweden's collectivist, caring employment practices to life more broadly, bookending his comment by saying that these practices seem evident "from birth" and "throughout life." While Swedish collectivism in the workplace was explicitly covered during the course, the broader application of it was not, meaning that Brandon made the connection on his own.

Relating to Brandon's observation of the relationship between work and life in Sweden, several students noted how Swedes handled the critical concept of work-life balance. For Marcy, this realization did not arise from course lectures or company visits, but rather her observation of a group of older couples swing dancing together at the end of the hike in business casual. Below, she compares her perceptions of how Swedes spend their time with the United States' approach:

It all looks so idyllic and not real. One of my friends gets to work at 7am and doesn't get off til midnight. That's just how our industry is. But these people were like, "I'm going home at 6. I'm seeing my children." It bums me out being back home and knowing that people don't have to live like this. In Sweden, 50% is your family, social life, life outside of work, and 50% is work. They have a very clear understanding of that and I think the U.S. is really skewed. Which I think is why the U.S. has a lot more mental illness.

(Marcy, Photo #1)
Marcy demonstrated both an understanding of Sweden's work-life balance, but also evaluated it against how people approach work-life balance in the United States. Concluding that the balance is much more even in Sweden, Marcy postulated that not only is America's approach worse, but also that it could be a contributing factor in negative psychological behaviors—a critical and important observation considering Marcy's own battles with anxiety disorders.

**Swedish Culture, Generally**

As Kari reflected on a photo of her and her friends in line for a ride at the Gothenburg amusement park (Kari, Photo #3, shown below) she noted, "I didn't expect to feel the culture like I did." Kari's reaction to the physical and emotional affect that Sweden's culture had on her implies her own surprise, but also the gravitas she perceived of Swedish culture more generally.

*Kari, Photo #3: Group of Students at Gothenburg Amusement Park*

For Kari and many of her classmates, lessons on the culture of Sweden popped up in many different ways during the program. While others may not have "felt" the culture like Kari did, the
interviews and focus groups illustrated the ways in which students came to develop understandings about various Swedish cultural phenomenon. This sub-section highlights student learning centered on Swedish culture broadly speaking.

From simple learning moments centered on Sweden's national candy holiday lördagsgodis (Marcy), to how house colors in Jönköping historically represented the socioeconomic status of the family (Dana, Photo #3, shown below), to more profound observations about the Swedish separation of church and state and its impact on gender equality laws (Emily), the students exhibited a wealth of new knowledge surroundings various Swedish cultural practices.

![Dana, Photo #3: View of Lake Vättern from Hill in Jönköping](image)

One in particular, which Dana learned through her conservations with Jönköping University students Elsa and Sven, focused on university extracurricular activities:
They have clubs on campus and every Wednesday they all get these sets of overalls and the overall color shows what college you're in. You put all these patches on them and the whole school goes out together and does all these different activities. You wear different outfits depending on what major you are.

Dana qualified the custom as "strange," but also said that it was "interesting" to learn about their club culture, particularly when she had been told previously that European universities do not have extracurricular organizations like universities in the United States do.

Another common cultural observation surrounded student perceptions of Swedish public transportation. For example, as Brandon learned during his one-on-one city tour with a student from Gothenburg University, most Swedes do not own cars because of the convenience and efficiency of their public transportation systems. Reflecting on his photo of the tram system in Gothenburg (Photo #2, shown below), Brandon said:

Only rich people have cars. She's like, "That's why they're all high end—BMW's and Mercedes. Why would you buy a car? Take the bus. Take the tram like a normal person."

I was so amazed at their public transportation. Really easy to hop on, hop off, and I just had to take a picture of these little dedicated railways so I could show my mom.

Brandon came to realize (and show his mother) that Sweden's transportation infrastructure was so efficient that it precluded the need to own a personal vehicle. He ruminated about the ease of getting around Sweden, both within cities and between them, suggesting that he wishes it were as easy in the U.S.
Students’ perceptions of diversity differed between one another throughout the program and the interviews and focus groups. While many students focused on diversity during our conversations, at times their conclusions about immigration and the visibility of Swedish diversity differed slightly. Rachel, recalling walking through the streets of Stockholm, felt that diversity was much more apparent in Sweden than it is in the U.S., particularly in terms of differentiating between Swedes and immigrants. She noted that it was "very clear who was immigrating," stating that these people did not look particularly Swedish to her. This implies that Swedish people writ large had a distinct look to them. Danielle captures this sentiment below:

I have to laugh because [the professors] were like, "Not all Swedes have blonde hair and blue eyes. Sweden is so diverse. All the companies take their diversity very seriously." I was surprised that Sweden was not as diverse as they were saying it would be, as far as race and ethnicity is concerned. I felt like it was very Caucasian and light hair, light colored eyes. It was like, "How are you defining diversity because I don't think we are on the same page with that."
Rachel acknowledges the presence of diverse individuals, but qualifies them as "immigrants" and does not consider them to be Swedish. Danielle's comment may explain Rachel's perception; Danielle perceived Sweden to be very homogenous, right down to the blonde hair, blue eyes stereotype. It is interesting, however, that Danielle questions the professors' definition of diversity, particularly when she (and Rachel) also only seem to be focusing on racial and ethnic characteristics of identity.

**Swedish Cultural Values**

A bit more specific than general observations about Swedish culture, this section details examples of student learning focused on particular Swedish cultural values. The section is divided into the following three categories: living a healthy lifestyle, the Swedish collectivist society, and respecting history.

**Living a Healthy Lifestyle**

Citing both the Swedish diet and their tendency to live an active lifestyle, many students reflected on how healthy the Swedes seemed to be. Aside from Kari's observation that their diet "consisted mostly of hot dog material," most students felt that the Swedish diet reflected their overall healthy lifestyles. Although not very eloquently, Tony discussed the obvious differences between American and Swedish health, relating it back to eating habits:

I saw a lot less fat people—less obesity. I feel like the general diet in Sweden was better. Here we use high fructose corn syrup whereas there they use real sugar. I think their eating habits are probably just different.
Comically adding that the smaller bathroom stalls make it so that "you can't be fat" in Sweden, Tony acknowledges that the differences in American and Swedish diets—particularly their ingredients and eating habits—contributed to their overall healthy, or unhealthy, appearances. On a similar note, Dana highlighted the smaller portion sizes of Swedish meals as an indicator of healthy living in Sweden:

[Meals were] a lot smaller and simpler—the portion size too. No one ever asked for a box to go to put their meal in, so that was different. At the restaurants, they actually ate everything compared to here where you go home with half a meal. (Dana, Photo #1)

Emily, who also noted the smaller portion sizes of Swedish meals, said that, “It was never extra.” Dana and Emily, used to larger portioned meals in the United States, were both struck by the appropriateness of the amount of food they were served while in Sweden and used it as a metaphor for the healthy lifestyles of Swedes.

Kari, despite her aforementioned hot dog material comment, felt that the meals she ate abroad were of much higher quality and "fresher" than what she gets in the United States. Reflecting on the high number of food photos she took, Kari said:

It was less about quantity and stuff that you might see in America—put as much on the plate as you can. It was more about the presentation and the taste. I had a really good meal at the aquarium in Copenhagen. Even at an aquarium in the U.S., you'd get a hamburger and it would be subpar. I got this pickled herring and they put it on this smorgasbord and it was so good! I felt like I was in a restaurant. (Kari, Photo #2, shown below)
Though Kari did later acknowledge that the "nice hotels" they were staying in may have misrepresented the common Swedish diet, she still felt that, even in places like a public aquarium, the food she was served was much fresher and tasted better than its American equivalent.

Regarding living an active lifestyle, several students commented on the Swedes' tendencies to take better care of themselves, generally. For Emily, one of the more salient aspects of the company visits was their obvious focus on "well-being";

They do have such a large emphasis on that and I think part of it was being active and being healthy and doing all the things that you're supposed to do.

Like Emily, Danielle also saw having an active lifestyle as a critical component of keeping healthy—something the Swedes often did, but not so much Americans:

They're just overall healthier too. We're like, "I would just rather drive than ride a bike," because we're lazy. They take more initiative and ride their bike everywhere. (Danielle, Photo #2, shown below)
Echoed by both Tony and Brandon, Danielle perceived that the Swedes take more initiative in leading a healthy lifestyle by riding their bikes more often than driving. Additionally, their observations of the differences in the lifestyles led by Americans and Swedes suggested a slight preference for the Swedish approach. Continuing this thought, Danielle reflected on the disparities between American and Swedish health:

I think [riding your bike] is a really good adjustment to someone's lifestyle that could make a difference. It's not the same as going to the gym and getting on the bike for half an hour. It's an everyday thing that [the Swedes] do. It probably helps with their stress levels, and it's cheaper. I wish people in America would do that more because it's better for you health wise.

Citing benefits such a lowering stress levels and saving money, Danielle exhibited a desire for Americans to adopt the (seemingly superior) Swedish active lifestyle. From her observations of Swedes riding bikes, coupled with her perception that they were less stressed, something as
simple as riding a bike, to Danielle, can vastly improve American health—physically and mentally. Astutely acknowledging that such a lifestyle might be simpler to lead in Sweden—their roads are much more bike friendly than road in the U.S.—Danielle admitted that she plans to ride her bike much more in the future, when possible.

The Swedish Collectivist Society

Sweden being a collectivist—as opposed to an individualist—society proliferated pre-departure lectures, course readings, and company visits. As such, the Swedish collectivist society theme was common in our interviews and focus groups. For Brandon, it created a "calming atmosphere" in both the workplace and society broadly speaking. Emily quipped that the Swedes were "not prideful," as compared to more prideful or patriotic Americans. For Marcy, coming from a "cut throat" yet still collective culture like China, Sweden's more caring approach to collectivism resonated deeply:

They want to be the best person they can, but they don't want to kick down other people to get there. That constant pressure to be the best all the time is really unhealthy. And I think Sweden has a much more feminine society: “Let me take care of you. Are you feeling stressed? Go home.” They are worried about you. I think that have more of an internal drive to be better, rather than someone yelling at them to be better, to do better.

Contrasted with both China and America, Marcy perceived that Sweden's more caring society made a person's drive to be better more internal than external. As opposed to society pressuring you to be the best, Sweden's collectivist nature gives individuals the support they need to improve themselves, which, in Marcy’s opinion, is a much healthier approach.
Connecting her perception of Sweden's "non-gluttonous" diet with broader society, Kari noted that Swedish culture appeared to be more equal:

Even when they're talking to each other or when they were engaging with us, the primary goal in the conversation was just to speak to each other. There wasn't any bragging. And you can't always pick up on those things because they're so hard to analyze, but it seemed like they weren't out to prove something. I always feel like [Americans] are out to prove something. We're so competitive.

Acknowledging the subtlety of the phenomenon she observed, Kari felt that Swedish culture, unlike American culture, was much less competitive. When people engaged with one another, the goal was mutual exchange as opposed to bragging about oneself. While Kari picked up on this subtlety in conversation with Swedes, Emily learned a similar lesson while visiting the Gothenburg amusement park. Reflecting on her experience waiting in line for a ride (see e.g., Kari, Photo #3), Emily noted the plainness of the park itself and what it represented to her:

It doesn't look like a traditional Six Flags with all these obnoxious colors and big stuffed animals—this artificial over the top, flashing light, Vegas kinda thing. It was just the right amount. It didn't seem over the top. I want to raise my kids in a European environment because it's almost too over stimulating in America. And then you have these insane expectations to get bigger and better and America is trying to fulfill that and that's what's driving each other insane. I'm getting really deep here. But that's why people are always trying to prove themselves in conversations because they just need to be bigger and better. This all goes back to an amusement park. [laughs] But make things simpler. You don't need to have all these lights and things.
Relating it back to the Swedish concept of *lagom*, Emily preferred the much less flashy approach to entertainment (and beyond) of Sweden. Extending this notion of simplicity beyond the gates of the amusement park, Emily seems to believe that minimalism fosters a less competitive society. Like Kari, Emily said that conversations in Sweden centered less on proving oneself. Emily's preference for such a non-competitive society is so strong that she suggested raising her children in such a culture.

Finally, students often connected Swedish collectivist ideals and their atmosphere of caring to their more family-centered approach to life. For Tony, this meant closer families and greater priorities for spending time together:

> It was cool seeing a strong focus on family. The dads get off work, everything closes earlier, so there's more family time. Walking around in the park you would always see strollers and both parents out together. We walked past the birthday party in the park and then another and then another.

Seeing so many families out and about, even on work days and during typical American work hours, signaled to Tony that Sweden's collectivist business practices (e.g., stores closing early) often allowed for a greater focus on families. Speaking about his photo of Gothenburg (Photo #1, shown below) Brandon also perceived Sweden to be very "family-centered," crediting larger Swedish business and cultural practices for this positive cultural aspect:

> It seems really easy to raise a family there, because of their programs. Like the great maternity leave, the paternity leave, and all the care up to being 8 years old. All the time off, it really gives them time to spend with their children. And you always saw families out in the street during business hours, just hanging out and walking through the streets.
Like Tony, Brandon's observance of families spending time together during work hours represented a greater focus on being together. Though Brandon admitted that he was not a parent, he contrasted his perception of Sweden's family-centeredness with America: "In America it seems like a chore to spend time with your kid." Explaining that America's more stressful work-life balance inhibited family time, Brandon felt that Sweden's progressive social programs—like parental leave and child medical care practices—made it easier to raise and spend time with a family.

**Respecting History**

A final example of Swedish collectivist ideals arose in the apparent respect for history that many Swedes exhibited. Most students contrasted this perceived respect with what they observe in America. For example, Stockholm's cobblestone streets and old buildings represented a cultural value—take care of what you have—that Kate does not see in America. Reflecting on his own picture of a cobblestone street in Stockholm's Old Town (Brandon, Photo #3, shown below), Brandon echoed this perspective:
It represented their values. How they are more collective. Look at this street—it's crazy to me that they still have those and that they respect older buildings, whereas in the United States we're like, "That's old, tear it down." I can think of two cobblestone streets in Philadelphia and they're tourist attractions. We ripped those up so fast because people don't like it, but to them I think it's more of a preservation thing: "Why would we tear it up? That's history." They value keeping the old things, whereas in America we want new things. That photo represents that to me.

Brandon, Photo #3: Street in Stockholm’s Old Town

While Brandon sees America's tendency to replace older infrastructure—like streets and buildings—as an issue of selfish desire and practicality, Sweden's tendency to maintain such places represents a larger commit to historical preservation. Building on Brandon's discussion during the focus group, Kate added:

When you go to Philly and see Independence Hall, yeah they left up some of the buildings, but for the most part it had all been knocked down and either reconstructed to look old or they didn't even try. There are pockets in Charleston where there are still
cobblestones but for the most part they try to do away with that because modern cars can't get through. To fuel consumerism. They try to, it seems, when things get old or obsolete, they do knock it down and reconstruct.

As opposed to Swedish collectivist/socialist ideals, America's more individualistic/consumerist ideals are a driving factor for demolishing and replacing obsolete infrastructure in Kate’s opinion. Unlike what she observed in Stockholm's Old Town, Kate perceives America to be much less concerned with preserving history and much more concerned with "fueling consumerism."

Interestingly, Emily shared the perception of Swedish respect for history. As she traveled across Scandinavia—which in many ways had preserved its history, as evidenced by the old buildings—she became enamored by becoming part of the history of the places she visited:

I wanted to go in and I remember [my classmate] being like, "Why? We have churches in the United States." And she's right, but you can learn so many different things. Like, this church used to be this and it was turned into this. You start to appreciate it more. Now that I'm older, I really get why this is so incredible—that you can still go and see these places and be a part of it. You start to learn why it's so important to somebody else, instead of just that really pretty picture of that cool building that people take pictures of.

Because of the preservation of Sweden's history, Emily was able to not only learn about the history of the places she visited, but she also developed an appreciation of their historical purposes and cultural significance. Rather than just taking pictures and moving on—as so many of us often do—Emily learned, and felt, the benefits of being part of something so historically important to the local culture.
Swedish Demeanor

A final aspect of Swedish culture perceived by the students centered on their new attitudes about the demeanor of Swedish people. Contrary to more positive expectations set by the professors during pre-departure lectures, Danielle did not find the Swedish people to be particularly "friendly" or "helpful:"

After a couple of days and finally getting used to the cultural demeanor, if you will, I definitely didn't see it that way. Not that they were rude, but I felt that they were so indifferent toward us. And I don't know if it's because that's how they actually are with everybody, even other Swedes, or if it was because we were clearly Americans—but they were.

Danielle expected the demeanor of the Swedes to match the professors’ depictions, though her actual experience differed drastically. Questioning the impact of her own nationality on their behavior towards the group, Danielle concluded that, generally, the Swedes' demeanor did not live up to the expectations set by the professors prior to the program. As Marcy quipped, "There are assholes in every country."

This perceived indifference could be explained by an observation noted by Emily. Regarding her interactions with Swedish professors and company employees in particular, she highlighted their tendency to be less outwardly emotive than Americans:

When they talk to you, it's like, "This is what I know." We use exclamation marks and we smile and we giggle when we are explaining things, and they are just like, "This is how it is." They are just very straightforward. Not in a bad way—they just tell you the facts. Emily notes that, while Americans tend to use emotion as a rhetorical device, the Swedes are much less expressive in their styles of communication. Though only speculation, the Swedes'
A straightforward way of communicating could have been perceived as indifference by Danielle, when it is simply a cultural difference—a difference that Emily learned to recognize.

Aside from Danielle and Marcy, students generally expressed their perceptions of Swedish demeanor in more positive terms. From "more approachable" (Emily) to "more chill" and "laid back" (Dana) to "socially reserved" (Marcy) to "better behaved" kids (Kate), the majority of students had only positive things to say about how they perceived the Swedish people to be. Several students reflected on the trusting nature of the Swedish people. For Tony, seeing bikes lining the street unchained represented an apparent "good faith principle" throughout the country. A positive encounter with a Swedish transportation control agent prompted Kari’s positive perception of Swedish trust:

I was on the bus and this guy was coming around checking our passes and I was freaking out and started to look through my purse frantically. He was like, "It's fine, I believe you." I don't think that would have happened on the subway here. They just seemed like a more trusting culture.

Kari, whose more negative experiences riding subways in the U.S. caused her to panic when the Swedish control agent began asking for her ticker, was surprised when we took her word it that she had purchased a ticket and did not demand proof or give her a fine for failing to produce one. Hearkening back to his program mantra—"the Swedish are a trusting people"—Brandon spoke at length about the enormous amount of trust demonstrated within Swedish cultural practices and the demeanor they exhibited:

We would be asking questions and they didn't understand why we were asking it. The answer would be "the Swedish are a trusting people" most of the time. We would ask questions like, "Why didn't they check my bus pass?" and they were like, "Why would
they have to check your bus pass? Why would you get on without paying?" Which is so crazy. How do you do that? How do you leave your iPhone on the side of a roller coaster and no one takes them? But yeah, it's just something I don't have the answer to.

Brandon was "baffled" by the amount of trust the Swedes held in others and how that aspect of their culture permeated throughout their everyday life. From visiting amusement parks to riding public transportation, the Swedish trusting nature was quite apparent for Brandon, which left him astonished in comparison to his own worldview, evidenced in the types of questions he asked in-country.

Though general, highly subjective, and sometimes conflicting personal perceptions, what the students took away regarding how the Swedes acted constitutes a significant learning outcome of the program. Understanding student perceptions of cultural phenomenon is an important aspect of the constructive learning (and teaching) experience. Whether objectively true or not, these perceptions were subjectively true for the students, and recognizing these perceptions allows for teachable moments and opportunities to correct potentially mis-educative experiences.

**Applying Lessons Learned**

Aside from specific learning outcomes related to social-emotional skills or course content that were interwoven throughout the previous sections of this chapter, many students demonstrated the higher order thinking skill of application (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001), which represents a fulfillment of the final tenet of Marsick & Watkins’ (1990; 2001) incidental learning framework. Students demonstrated this integration of new information into their existing knowledge base either by discussing its direct application to their own lives or thinking
more abstractly about the ways in which the things they learned could (or could not) apply in their own personal or professional contexts. Not excluding the themes already mentioned, students learned many cultural lessons that they believed would benefit their own lives and American society more generally.

As previously detailed, one of Emily's favorite aspects of studying abroad is learning lessons that you can bring home with you: "It's interesting to see how they deal with daily life. What do they do, and can you do that and how can you bring that into your life." For Marcy and Rachel, Swedish bathrooms were a salient topic. Referencing the recent U.S. debates surrounding single-sex bathrooms and transgender bathroom rights, the two young women were struck by the way Sweden tackled the issue—by constructing each stall in the restroom as its own separate tiny bathroom, complete with toilet, urinal, and sink. Rachel commented:

Those bathrooms—that would be amazing and people could stop fighting about female and male bathrooms because everyone gets their own little room.

Marcy also thought that Sweden's single-sex, single-stall bathroom construction could be a solution: "Seeing that it could possibly work, it's like these really small things that you remember." However, after having a discussion with an American co-worker, she seemed less hopeful:

It's interesting to apply their ideas to what we have. There was this guy at my work who was arguing about the gendered bathroom thing and that it wouldn't function any other way, but I said how in Sweden I peed next to some guy taking a shit and it was fine. It just baffles me that it can't be like that. Why?

Despite seeing the benefits to the Swedish approach and her own desire to apply it in the U.S. context, the reaction of her co-worker and the larger political context of our country made Marcy
seem doubtful that such an approach would be accepted in American society. As an aside she also noted, "And I think [we] should pay for bathrooms. I think it works so much better."

Similar to Marcy's skepticism of the applicability of lessons learned to the U.S. context, other students felt that the Swedish approach may not, or even would not work here. Dana explained that her desire to apply Swedish concepts in American culture was mitigated by the sheer size differences in the two countries:

Reflecting on what they do there and what works for them and taking it maybe—it's so hard to—once I tell everyone about all the great things they have there, I think back and am like, "Well, their population is only 9.8 million. Could something like that actually work here?" I don't know.

Dana acknowledges that some Swedish approaches are "great" and implies her desire to integrate those aspects of Swedish culture into the American context, but she also becomes skeptical of its applicability because the countries are so different in size. Tony shares Dana's concern:

Their social welfare programs are pretty cool there, but then again it's also such a small country that operates with even smaller municipalities and regions. To have it work on a grand scale here would be much different. Still probably possible, but harder.

Tony, like many students, recognized the benefits afforded by Sweden's progressive social welfare programs—such as parental leave and medical care—but attributed the ease of its nationwide implementation to the small size of the country. With the U.S. being so much larger than Sweden, it may or may not be able to implement similar programs as easily. Marcy, referencing similar programs, seem even more skeptical than the rest of her classmates:
A lot of the others just don't understand that it won't apply here. It won't work. Our population is so much bigger. In the U.S., they want no government—"Everyone's terrible, unions for everyone!" But it's not going to work!

The largeness of the American populace, in Marcy's opinion made applying some Swedish principles and practices impossible in the United States, regardless of their desires to make them work.

Brandon provided a particularly interesting case study of skepticism in his ability to apply lessons learned in Sweden to the American organizational context. As previously mentioned, Brandon spent the weeks immediately following the program interning at a large university hospital in Philadelphia. He explained that he was very optimistic in the beginning, even going so far as to discuss with his co-workers the possibility of implementing Swedish practices into his workplace. He explained:

When I first started my internship, I really wanted to apply these things. I tried to talk about how unions are so big there, because I've been taught in school that unions are bad, but seeing that maybe they aren't so bad...

Brandon was eager to share what he learned, but realized quickly that not everyone was as receptive to the ideas as he was. He continued:

...but even presenting that idea one time to my boss, she was like, "Oh no no no." I got shot down immediately. Not that I thought it was going to change the American dynamic by me making one comment to my middle level manager. But she was like, "No, that wouldn't work here," and I was like, "Ok cool. Glad we thought that out."
Brandon further explained that he disagreed with a lot of the company politics and organizational practices of his employer and that he wondered why, despite his perceived sense of misery in the office over simple matters, nothing was being changed. He began to question the status quo:

I was asking a lot of questions. I keep asking them about their company culture. And I'm just thinking about it from this Swedish trip like, "Why does it have to be like that? Is it the way you're being treated? Is it the organization that is affecting you? To trickle this down to your customer? Your patient?" And perhaps if you get treated better by your manager, or if someone cared for you better, then maybe you wouldn't have this experience.

Brandon ruminated on the reasons for the employee unhappiness that he had perceived and used his newly acquired perspectives from Sweden to develop understandings of possible causes and solutions. Having seen such approaches work well in Sweden, Brandon understands that there is a different (and seemingly much better) way to operate an organization, though he stresses that culture is very difficult to change:

It really can be different. I keep bringing it up with these [organization] executives—they all seem to think that they're not happy with their company culture, but they're like, "It's incredibly hard to change culture." And it doesn't seem like they're being proactive about changing. But [in Sweden], it seems like they would be. If they weren't happy with something, they would work together to make sure it was fixed.

"The [organization] way," as Brandon and his co-workers refer to it, is an ingrained part of their culture, and one that Brandon's co-workers see as difficult to change. In contrast to Sweden's ability to adapt company culture to employee needs, his organization seems very set in its ways, despite the unhappiness of its workforce.
Brandon highlighted one final inhibiting factor to making Swedish practices work in the American workplace:

We're worrying about basic human needs still here—making sure we have healthcare, making sure someone has food on the table at night. Whereas there, they have the time. Those things are met by the government subsidies. So they're past that. They can worry about stress at work and work-life balance. Whereas we'd love to worry about those issues—they're still issues here, but we have bigger fish to fry, like making sure you can get your cancer treatment, making sure you have groceries, welfare, food stamps, Medicare, Medicaid. We're still working on the basics.

Unlike Sweden, where the government provides subsidies for medical care and extended time off for workers with families, the United States does not have the luxury of providing such services. Ultimately, Brandon concluded that because the U.S. was "still working on the basics," Swedish concepts of collectivism and caring for employees simply would not work in the United States—at least for the time being.

It can safely be assumed that one intention for the course was for students to learn about the Swedish model (and other aspects of Swedish human resource management) so that those concepts could be thought about critically and applied in students' own internships and future workplaces. However, many students walked away from the program feeling as if the things they learned were not applicable in their own contexts. In order to mitigate such misunderstandings of applicability, educators would do well to consider ways in which information is presented to students, with careful attention on making explicit how it can apply directly to their specific contexts. One way this may be done is through reflective conversations with students.
Student-Perceived Limitations to Learning

While I will talk more about the limitations to student learning that occurred during this program in the next chapter, it is important to highlight the ways in which students perceived their experience, the astute observations they made about the perspectives they were shown, and how this may have impacted the lessons they were able to learn. Whether an intentional aspect of the program design or not, some students perceived that the perspectives they were shown throughout their time in Sweden were very "skewed."

For Marcy, the niceness of the Swedish company employees that others perceived—and proceeded to generalize to the entire Swedish population—was facilitated by the specific study abroad program context, and would not be uncommon under similar circumstances elsewhere:

They said that Sweden was hospitable, but really all we met with was with designated people—of course they are going to be really nice. Of course they're going to feed us. They feel responsible for us because we are going to their company. And others were like, "Oh wow, they are all so nice," but no, this would happen if you went to a U.S. company too. It's not remarkable.

Marcy argues that the behavior exhibited by the Swedish company employees was simply because they were a group of students on a pre-planned visit to a company as part of a school program. The behavior of the Swedes was appropriate for that specific context, and not necessarily indicative of the larger Swedish context—so much so that it is not even worth mentioning as a distinctly Swedish characteristic in Marcy’s opinion. The general nature of being in a study abroad program led to this specific, sometimes very salient learning outcome (i.e., learning about Swedish demeanor), but what students perceived about Swedish demeanor in those instances was perhaps skewed by the circumstances they were in. Unlike Marcy, however,
perhaps many students did not think critically about it, which further necessitates the need for opportunities to address experiences that may or may not be mis-educative.

Rachel noted that, by only visiting Gothenburg, Jönköping, and Stockholm—all southern cities—they did not get to experience the entirety of Sweden:

I know a large part of their population is in the south, but a lot of Sweden is forest, so I think if we had seen something that was—that's also very Sweden because it's a large part of their culture.

Not only did Rachel perceive the cities they visited as not entirely representative of Sweden, but the companies as well. She noted that the professors most likely choose those specific famous Swedish companies—such as IKEA, Husqvarna, and Volvo—for a reason:

When we went to Sweden we were seeing their upper tier companies so of course we would be like, "These are great ideas that we would like to take back with us." I feel like if Swedish kids came here and went to Google they would be like, “Oh my gosh, this is great. We need to take this back to Sweden.” And [the professors] are not going to pick a company that's following the Swedish system but not doing well. They're not going to highlight its flaws.

Whether for purposes of recruiting students to register for the program or wanting to highlight companies that were famous and performing well (both reasons that were speculated by Rachel and Brandon during their focus group), Rachel felt that only being exposed to those particular, well-known companies did not give students an accurate representation of Swedish organizational practices. Much like Google, which is both well-known and highly regarded for its progressive employment policies, IKEA, Husqvarna, and Volvo were all, as Rachel speculated, likely very different from the majority of Swedish companies, which yielded a very
skewed view of Swedish employment practices more generally. Rachel also noted that, because the companies likely knew they were chosen by the professors to highlight the benefits of Sweden's uniquely flat organizational structure, even the presentations given by the company employees did not provide students with the whole picture:

They had their stuff planned that we were going to go through and that was it I think.

They would have never said or done anything to make IKEA not look good or to make Sweden not look good in front of us.

The presenters at each company, as Rachel presumed, were aware of the objectives of the course and that students were there to learn lessons about the Swedish model, so they adjusted their presentation material accordingly. Rachel also hints that, as employees of these organizations, they may have been limited in the kind of information they were willing to divulge. As Marcy noted, "They may have downsides as well." Thus, the students were only exposed to the more positive aspects of the Swedish approach.

Marcy and Rachel's observations about the program's skewed presentation of Swedish culture and employment practices are astute, and common in program design. However, the implications are alarming. If we are only exposing students to exemplars in foreign countries, can we expect them to gain a realistic understanding of cultural practices and how to apply those concepts in the U.S.? By focusing on benefits and ignoring flaws, what important lessons—about course content, cultural values, etc.—are students then missing? As a broader aspect of curricular design, there may be something to gain by showing the benefits as well as the drawbacks to any approach or idea.
Chapter Conclusion

This dissertation stemmed from criticisms of limited learning and misconceptions about study abroad being more like vacations than educational programs. Interestingly, despite demonstrating clear learning outcomes, some students reiterated these criticisms and misconceptions during our conversations. To many of them the course was a "joke":

I assumed I was going to have to do a good amount of work. Then I was like, "Oh my god, this is going to be a joke. We're not going to do anything." And then it turned into even more of one while we were over there.

This student continued, saying that the program was more of a "guided fieldtrip to Europe" than an educational program and that they only enrolled in the class so they could travel abroad:

People were expecting a vacation to Sweden and having the burden of doing some coursework. Which to me, I didn't go because I wanted to do homework. I went because I wanted to go to Sweden. When someone is like, "How was your vacation?" I'm like, "Well, technically I wasn't on vacation. I was taking a class." And you can't see it [because the video chat function isn't working] but I'm putting quotes around class.

This student's commentary, while honest and quite common, helps perpetuate misunderstandings of study abroad that only focus on the travel aspect; students fly overseas, go sightseeing, and do not learn very much at all.

Commenting on an overall lack of profundity and the deeper impact of their previous international travels, students also expressed disappointment with the course and felt that they did not learn much at all during their experience. Marcy expected her learning to be more

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As many of the students remain in close contact with the course instructors, I have protected the students’ identity in cases such as this where they comment directly on their perceived quality of the course or the course instructors. This anonymity occurs to a greater extent in the following chapter.
"profound" than it appeared to be. Kate, while finding the experience "super meaningful" does not believe that it facilitated much learning beyond what she already knew:

I will remember it for the rest of my life, but it wasn't earth shattering. It wasn't the first time I had traveled so I had gone through a lot of more impactful lessons learned like when I was in Spain. So some of those life lessons had been learned previously, so this was mainly about enjoying the trip and getting the most out of it.

Kate astutely noted that, being the oldest student on the trip, her age had afforded her many more experiences than many of her classmates had been able to have: "Where I am in my life is a lot different than where a lot of the other people were in." For this reason, she feels that participating in the program, while memorable and enjoyable, was not "earth-shattering." In other words, Kate did not believe that she learned much.

However, the findings of this study demonstrate otherwise and highlight clear evidence of significant academic and social-emotional learning gains for Kate, Marcy, and each of their classmates who participated in the PCI interviews and focus groups. Whether studying abroad was more about learning or vacationing, the students learned. Whether students believed that they learned anything or not, the evidence that arose from our conversations around their photos says they did. Students gained competencies in eight different social-emotional dimensions and learned valuable lessons about Swedish employment structures, cultural practices, and values.
CHAPTER 6: STUDENT VOICE AND AUTHENTICITY IN REFLECTION

Although not a primary focus of this dissertation initially, my conversations with students highlighted issues of authenticity and representation in reflection assignments and elucidated new understandings regarding student voice. In general, the students often felt unable to freely express their thoughts or detail their daily activities within the reflective spaces created by the course professors. Though given many opportunities as part of the program to reflect on their time in Sweden—daily blogs, mid-program presentations, and post-program video presentations—they saw these spaces as being monitored, edited, and scrutinized by their professors and others who held positions of power over them (e.g., university administrators, Swedish professors, their parents) who also had access to what they wrote or said. Consequently, the representations of reality that students provided in these spaces, as the findings of this study indicate, were not entirely authentic, resulting in misunderstandings of their subjective experiences.

This chapter discusses the perceived influences of the power of interested parties—in this case, the professors leading the study abroad program, home university administrators, and host university faculty—over the representations of realities students were willing to share with them. I begin the chapter by describing the various reflective assignments completed by the students throughout the program, then discuss students' perceptions of the authenticity of their reflections. Next, I give a brief discussion on why student reflections were not authentic, including the differing perceived purposes for the assignments, and the influence of the professors, and provide a summary of student commentary on the topics left out of their reflective writings.
It is certainly not my aim in this dissertation to criticize the professors of this course. Although some of the data presented in this chapter may highlight some oversights and mistakes made by the professors, the professors exhibited a great deal of thoughtfulness, criticality, and professionalism throughout the program. They were and are not bad professors; they simply did what so many of us educators do and operated with some incorrect assumptions and encountered unforeseen circumstances. I present this chapter not to underscore what they did wrong, but instead to highlight the importance of student voice in understanding student experiences and to help educators identify avenues for improvement in facilitating meaningful and engaging student reflection. Also, as many students remain in contact with the course professors, I have protected the students’ identities where appropriate, such as comments on course quality and the professors’ actions. Any omissions of quote attributions are intentional. Finally, the students’ perceptions of the course and the course professors do not represent my own views and should not be taken as such.

Reflective Assignments

Students were assigned three reflective tasks as part of the course, each worth 30% of their overall course grade. The first task—the blog—spanned the entirety of the 10-day in-country component of the program. Each evening and in partnership with their roommate, students were tasked with writing a brief reflection of their daily activities. Below is a description of the task provided in the course syllabus (see Appendix A for complete syllabus):

Blogs are meant to enhance learning and allow students to voice their opinion on a topic. These are typically one-page responses to a question posed to the class or a reflection on learnings or experiences. They are more experiential, but should be taken seriously. Blogs should be completed online daily while in country.
Students generally completed their blog posts before dinner or before going to sleep each night. After drafting the post, they would then email it to the course professors who would post it to the course website, to which students' parents and select Penn State administrators were given a link.

As detailed in Chapter 4, students also created presentations that highlighted lessons they learned while in Sweden and delivered them to a group of Swedish faculty members at Jönköping University. The in-country presentations, done in groups of two or three, highlighted lessons learned regarding Swedish culture, Swedish employment practices, and lingering curiosities that were yet to be satisfied during the program. See the syllabus description of this assignment below:

*Later during the visit, you will be asked to give a second 6-8 minute PowerPoint presentation to the host university faculty and students. You will work on this presentation while in-country and will work in a group with one or two other students. The presentation should be a reflection of your time in Sweden, what you learned about HRM, comparison to the USA, and your personal experiences. The grade allocated will be for the pair/team as a whole.*

The professors set aside the afternoon of Day 6 for students to work together and prepare for their presentations which were to be given the next day. Most students, as previously mentioned, presented for much longer than the suggested six to eight minutes, instead speaking for upwards of 15 or 20. With the exception of Angela, Bryan, and Patricia, whose presentation was not recorded at the request of Patricia, each presentation was audio and video recorded with the intention of showing the recordings to Penn State faculty and administrators (fieldnotes, 5/24/16).

Finally, students were required to submit a video presentation summarizing their experience and the lessons they learned while abroad. Due no later than two weeks upon their return from Sweden, students were expected to video record themselves talking over PowerPoint
slides about the objectives of the course, their expectations in comparison with their experiences, and other topics about the course. Below is the syllabus description of this assignment:

Students will submit a final video summary of their experiences via ANGEL by two weeks after the trip to Sweden ends. The summary should be 7-10 minutes in length and should reflect on topics such as comparison of initial expectations to actual experiences, main concepts learned and evidence of that learning, thoughts and feelings on own cultural identity, thoughts and feelings on Sweden cultural identity, comparison of the two HRM systems, thoughts on HRM policies, and plans to incorporate this experience into future endeavors. Summaries should include audio and video using VoiceThread or YouTube. In addition, for this embedded study abroad program, students should also submit in the drop box slides based on the format of their oral video.

**Representation in Student Reflections**

In my interview with one student—the first I conducted in this study—they offhandedly described their blog posts as "fake": "They were fake. They were very fake blogs. It wasn't an accurate story of what happened." Unprompted by me or my line of questioning, this student's exclamation, which turned into a several minute conversation, begged attention. It did not necessarily take me by surprise—it was a topic of conversation throughout the trip (fieldnotes, 5/27/16)—but it did inspire me to add a question about course reflections to my protocol for future interviews.

One by one, each student shared with me that, on some level, the reflective tasks they completed did not provide an accurate representation of their subjective experiences abroad. Speaking mainly about the blogs, students generally shared the sentiment that their posts were "censored," "guarded,” and "bullshit.” The strategic editing employed by students led to the creation of blog posts that did not accurately reflect their subjective experiences or what they had learned: "It sort of didn't capture—it seemed like we had to suppress a lot of stuff and [they were] kind of fake." Danielle expressed her frustration regarding the self-censorship she felt compelled to do:
I really couldn't be totally genuine and honest about my experiences through the blogs. I had to like shelter all the viewers from what was really going on.

For various reasons, students like Danielle felt the need to censor their work, which resulted in incomplete and inaccurate depictions of the experiences they had in Sweden. Some of these reasons are detailed in the following section.

**Varied Reasons for Student Inauthenticity**

**Differing Purposes of Blogs**

One possible reason for inauthentic representations of student learning may have resulted from misunderstandings about the purposes of the reflective tasks. Despite the instructions for each assignment included on the course syllabus, students expressed differing views and general confusion on the intended purpose(s) of the reflections, particularly the daily blogs. Common purposes perceived by students included showcasing course content learning, calming parents, making the program look good, and general uncertainty of what they were supposed to share.

**To Showcase Course Content Learning**

Some students expressed the understanding that the reflections, particularly the blogs, were supposed to focus only on learning related to the course content (and thus, not social-emotional learning or learning that resulted from non-course-related experiences). For students like Brandon, the only topics they covered in the blogs were ones that came from the syllabus:

Anything that wasn't on the syllabus I didn't talk about because it seemed like I wasn't supposed to. On the schedule, or academically. They really wanted us to highlight the academic things that we did. Less so what our entire experience was.
Rachel reiterated and supported Brandon's position in their focus group: "I think they were supposed to be more about our school [stuff]." For Danielle, her perception of the blog, being limited only to course content, made them quite cumbersome and repetitive:

I also felt like we needed to keep it very to the course content that we covered. So it almost became stressful, like ugh I need to relate it back to jantelagen and I need to talk to Hofstede's dimensions of culture and things like that, which are, don't get me wrong they're useful, but it's repetitive. I'm saying the same thing over and over again and so is everybody else.

Like and Brandon and Rachel, Danielle also felt compelled to stick to the course content when writing her daily blogs, but more specifically felt the need to relate it to specific learned concepts. For Danielle, the pressure to connect her day to day experiences with course-related content ultimately made the task "stressful." With each student writing about their learning in relation to the course content, the resulting blogs all sounded very similar to one another.

One student, echoing the sentiments of Brandon, Rachel, and Danielle, also explained that the content of the blogs reflected "what [the professors] wanted to hear." Similarly, another student shared that they perceived the blogs to be for showcasing that they had learned what they were supposed to learn:

There are things that you're expected to learn so that's what you write down. That's what is expected of you. The blogs were what was expected of you. So it was everything you did that you were supposed to do that day that made our program or our university look good. And that's what the blogs were.

Each of these students demonstrated a sort of socialization to assessment; they focused on more formal learning because that is what they have been socialized to do. Through the blogs, students
felt the need to demonstrate the learning and development that the professors expected—learning that related to the course content (i.e., Swedish human resource practices). Anything beyond the scope of the course's learning outcomes, for these students, was deemed irrelevant and beyond the scope of the assignment.

To Make the Program Look Good

Just as one student suggested in their comment above, some of their classmates also believed that the reflective assignments were created with the intention of legitimizing the program—making the program look good in the eyes of others. As I learned during my work in Global Programs, this course was in its first year. In order to be approved for future iterations, the course would need positive reviews from the faculty's own department, among other interested parties. For many students, this meant that the content of their blogs, which could easily be viewed using the blog link provided to administrators by the professors, needed to make the program look good: "We weren't allowed to put anything bad." Also noting that some things went left unsaid, one student commented on this perceived purpose and how what they wrote could influence the course being offered again in the future:

I thought about it because everything we're censoring was so this trip could happen again.

Basically they were making sure we looked like angels so that they had a program to run.

That's how everything works—you fix everything up to make it look like you want it to look.

This student and others "censored" their blogs so that their experiences would not be perceived negatively by the university administrators who would make decisions about the course in the future.
While it is unclear whether or not these students’ perceptions arose from comments made by professors, some students said that one of the professors explicitly told them to write their blogs in a way that would not reflect poorly on the program. Referencing non-course related experiences, three students discussed how this influenced what they wrote about in their reflections:

Student 1: We weren't allowed to put that in the blog because it was not appropriate.

Student 2: It could have been read the wrong way. [The professor] said the blogs were to make the program look good for funding in the future.

Student 3: I asked about that too when we did our final project and she said that too: "Make sure it looks good because that's what we will use these for."

Student 2: Most of our presentations and anything graded was with the mindset of this happening again.

In his individual interview with me, Brandon—a very active and involved student on campus—echoed this conversation, sharing that he did not want the program or the professors to be perceived negatively because of his words or actions:

Penn State officials could read along our journey—what we were doing and other things like that so it made the program look good and potentially make it cheaper and more affordable for students and more accessible. Which is why it had to be so PC.

Brandon, a very active student on campus with the best of intentions, did not feel capable of sharing experiences that were not officially part of the program, lest they be perceived as politically incorrect, therefore resulting in the course either not being offered again or becoming more expensive for students in the future.
To Calm Parents

I am not a parent, though as I embark on my own international travels, I understand the concerns of my mother about having a child traveling overseas. During my work with Global Programs, it was not uncommon to receive multiple phone calls and emails each day from parents wishing for an update on their child who was studying abroad. With most of these students being younger than I am and traveling internationally for the first time, I can imagine that their parents' concerns were very similar. To some students, another primary purpose for the blogs was to calm their parents and the parents of their classmates. One student expressed their frustrations with this:

I hated the blogs to be honest. They sent the hyperlink to the blog to my parents in an email—OK, so basically they're sending them to our parents so that our parents can know, "Oh great, they had fun today! They learned! They're alive! They're safe! I don't need to call [the professors] now. So I really feel like that was one of the main purposes of having the blogs, was just to kind of shut the parents up.

It is uncertain to me how the professors obtained the emails of the students' parents, but this student seemed quite shocked and annoyed that their parents were given access to their daily reflections, which they felt were for their parents’ benefit as opposed to their own.

While the above student appeared surprised, Rachel seemed unfazed that her family had access to the course website that featured her blog posts. As she explained during her interview, it seemed very normal to her:

All my sisters when they studied abroad they also had to do it. I think they benefit the parents more than the school, more than the students. They want to know what's going on.
Still admitting that the blogs were more for students' parents than the students themselves, the fact that Rachel's sisters had also completed daily blog posts as part of their study abroad experiences normalized it for her. Because other students wrote blogs for their parents to see, it made sense that she should too.

**Uncertainty**

A number of students remained unclear about the purposes of their reflective assignments. One student explained that their uncertainty arose from the "different standards" that the two professors seemed to have for their respective students (i.e., the students from their college). Danielle speculated that the blogs may have been assigned so that the professors would have something to assess them on, or to be used as notes for their final post-program video presentations:

I don't know if [the professors] had us do it as a way to do more work to put towards our grade? To earn as many credits as the class was worth? Or if they had the right intentions with them: "We want them to be able to reflect back on them for when they do their final presentations."

Danielle’s uncertainty caused her to take caution with the type of information she provided in the blog about her daily experiences. Regardless of the actual purposes of the blogs, the various reasons perceived by students drastically influenced the type of information that students were willing to share.
The Influence of the Course Professors

In a serendipitous moment outside of a restaurant in State College, one of the course professors walked up and joined one of the focus group sessions I was facilitating. Kate, Brandon, and Rachel's animated discussion of their course expectations, their thoughts on Swedish culture, and the censorship of their reflections was derailed by the sudden appearance of their professor, who stayed for several minutes and chatted about the students’ summer work and internships. Even after walking away, the professor’s presence lingered as the students struggled to regain traction on the topics they had been so animated about just moments before (interview notes, 6/26/16).

Whether direct evidence of professor influence or simply a useful metaphor, the students drastically changed their behavior in the presence of their course professor. The influence of professors on student reflections became a familiar theme in many conversations thereafter. Both indirectly and directly, the course professors had profound (largely adverse) impacts on the authenticity of student reflections. As mentioned previously, some students were explicitly told by the professors that one purpose of the blogs was to make the program look good, and that perceived pressure caused the students, like the one below, to leave things out:

They're giving you an assignment and then give you a word limit and THEN are like, "Oh, don't mention this." Like, you want to me to write about what I did today—how am I not supposed to mention that? And then you don't want to lie about it, you don't want to twist it, so you just leave it out.

Because the professors were limiting the word count and content of the blogs, this student was forced to leave some things—seemingly important, meaningful things—out of their reflections.
Some students were afraid that the content of their reflections would negatively impact their grade for the course:

I had to really sugar coat everything and put some fluff into it and make it an A presentation. So there were some things—it was a struggle sometimes to put it together because there were other things that I wanted to say but I knew it probably wouldn't go over well with my grade.

Not wanting to receive a poor grade, this student significantly altered the content of their reflections in ways that would better please the professors. Another student echoed this notion:

I was like, "Sweden is like this," and even when I was saying it I was like this is wrong. But, and this is going to sound bad, but it's what they wanted to hear. I just said what they wanted to hear basically because I'm trying to get a good grade.

As they wrote their blogs each evening, this student lamented the fact that the experience depicted in their writing reflected more of their desire to earn a high grade for the course rather than the actual learning moments that they were experiencing.

Emily, while also concerned about receiving a good grade for the course, spoke about the influence of the course professors in much different terms. While she too changed the content of her blogs, her reasoning focused more on showing respect for the professors than the perceived coercion for students to write about certain things. She talked at length about how her desire to show respect for her professors, and the professors of the host institution, influenced the kinds of things she was willing to talk about in these reflective spaces:

In the presentations, I'm standing up in front of a bunch of adults, especially adults who feel like they've given me an experience that I can really take something back to my country and apply to my life and my future career. [The professor] wanted them recorded,
so for [them], that was [their] take home from the trip and everything [they] had worked for. They want to see how much they helped you and influenced you. It's a respect thing for me. Because you don't want to embarrass the people who brought you. You don't want to embarrass Penn State.

Emily perceived that the professors deserved to be given presentations that highlighted the influence that they personally had on the students' learning and development. For that reason, Emily chose not to include learning outcomes or learning moments that had not been directly facilitated by the instructors—moments that, to her, may have been seen as embarrassing or inconsequential.

More directly, the professors sometimes took a very hands-on role in students' blogs. As mentioned previously, students would submit their blog posts to the professors each night of the program. The professors would then read the blogs before posting them online, a process that seems typical of these types of reflective assignments. However, several students shared that professors actively changed parts of student reflections: "They edited them. If there was something bad, they would take it out". One student expressed to me their extreme frustration at the censorship of their blogs at the hands of their professors:

[The professors] took that part of my blog post out. I was really bitter about that actually.

I was like are you serious? I thought that was actually like a remarkable point.

This student's bitterness expressed above was shared by many of their peers. For example, one student felt that the "redact[ing]" of their blogs was unfair:

I personally felt like that wasn't fair. The blogs were supposed to be about what we did—what we've taken from this, and what we did that day. So when they're redacting things
that they don't want other people to know, it's like, well isn't this my part of the trip?

What I'm supposed to use to reflect on? To remember everything?

This student's comment implies that many of their experiences went untold in their reflections. Thus, their blog posts, heavily influenced by the professors' redacting, was essentially rendered useless as a reflective tool because, to the student, it did not accurately or completely depict their experiences.

When I first approached the professors about conducting my study on student learning outcomes with the students in their course, they were very concerned that my presence would negatively impact the students and influence their behavior. They iterated that this was “[the students’] experience,” and that they should be able to “get what they want out of it.” In order to be able to conduct the study and travel to Sweden with the class, the professors insisted that I obtain consent from all of the students, which I did. What the professors did not seem to recognize was that their presence—as with most professor-student interactions—also strongly influenced the behavior of their students.

The Missing Pieces

As a result of the perceived ambiguous purposes of the reflective assignments and the restrictive influences of the program professors, student reflections did not accurately depict the entirety of what students learned while abroad. As the literature suggests (e.g., Jones, 1982) many of the students felt that the learning that occurred relating to the course content material—the learning they were allowed to/supposed to include in the blog—was not necessarily as meaningful as other learning moments they experienced during their program. For one student, their content-related learning did not appear significant at all: "When they were like, ‘What did
you learn? What did you walk away with?’ it was difficult for me to come up with things that weren't bullshit.” Instead, this student wanted to write about more personal learning moments—instances where they were able to confront their own limitations and anxieties, like striking up conversations with random Swedish people on the street:

I thought they would be really excited because I was just trying to talk to her. I was interacting with an actual Swedish person.

A moment that meant a great deal to this student and fostered multiple social-emotional learning outcomes was ultimately not captured in the course reflections they wrote for the professors.

Like the student above, Angela also felt that her very personal, meaningful learning moments were left out of her blog posts because they were, either implicitly or explicitly, deemed inappropriate by the professors. Her experiences of traveling to Sweden independently, navigating public transportation, and overcoming all of those obstacles were very empowering, but because they did not relate to the course content she kept those stories out, as did Dana:

We wanted to put maybe what went wrong, which I know they said not to and it makes sense, but the first day with Brandon and I, if I had to write my own blog I probably would have talked about buying a train ticket when I thought I had a bus ticket and taking this train three hours.

Dana and Brandon's experience of navigating from Gothenburg to Jönköping was meaningful and significant for Dana, yet because it was more of a "lesson learned the hard way," she did not feel comfortable writing about it.

Not only did the reflective assignments fail to capture many student learning outcomes, but student comments suggest that they also failed to capture the situations in which those learning outcomes were facilitated. One salient example is nightlife: bars, clubs, and other
general "unapproved spaces." For Emily, these types of "personal stories don't belong in the blogs," regardless of the fruitful information that they might provide about the learning and development that occurred during the program. Recalling a night on the town, one student spent a significant portion of their interview talking with me about the self-regulation that the experience cultivated for them. As described in Chapter 5, this rather unfortunate experience helped this student realize their own limits and that they never wanted to experience something like that again. Both Tony and Kari also explained that their experiences meeting people in bars and the cultural lessons gleaned from those situations—such as how Swedes behave in social settings—went untold in their blogs.

One topic of learning that I noticed was missing from students' in-country presentations was their perceptions of Swedish demeanor. Several students had made comments throughout the program about the demeanor of the Swedes: rude (Danielle), not prideful (Dana), quiet (Emily, Kari, and Tony). However, despite the rubric including lessons learned regarding Swedish culture and behavior, not a single student mentioned this observation in their presentations. When I asked Noah, Marcy, Brandon, and Emily about this on the way back to the hotel that evening, they all agreed that they did not feel comfortable talking about their perceptions of Swedes with Swedes in the room (fieldnotes, 5/26/16). If the course professors wanted the students to share their perspectives on Swedish culture and behavior, then perhaps not inviting Swedish professors to attend the presentation session may have provided a more comforting space for students to share their thoughts.

Much like the reflective assignments themselves, this section does not capture all of the learning moments that students elected or were forced not to share in their blogs and presentations. However, students have demonstrated that, while the blogs in particular did
showcase what they learned about Swedish organizational structure and employment practices, they did not paint the larger picture of their learning experiences abroad. What remained missing—various social-emotional learning outcomes, incidental learning situations—tells a much different tale of their program—one that more authentically and completely captures their subjective experiences, what they learned, and how they learned it.

Discussion

"How is someone going to know how my experience truly was unless you get my honest opinion and point of view on it?" As evidenced throughout this chapter, students generally expressed that the three reflective assignments they completed throughout the program (particularly the blogs) were not authentic representations of their experiences. As this student astutely points out above, the resulting edited and censored reflections led to inaccurate and incomplete understandings about what and how students were learning in this study abroad program.

Even as students discussed their photos and the meaningful and significant learning moments they represented, many of them admitted that, even a month removed from the program, they had not reflected much on their experience: "I don't know that I've thought about it much, is that bad?" I reassured Rachel that many of her classmates had said the same thing. Many students, like Danielle, had arrived back home from Sweden just in time to travel for summer internships only days later: "Honestly, since I came back I haven't had a ton of time to really think about it. A day and a half after I got back I had to start my internship." Most existing studies on student learning in study abroad are generally conducted in the days and weeks following a student's return home. The findings for this study, however, reveal that many of the
students had not adequately reflected on their experiences one month after returning. This suggests that the information able to be gleaned from quick turnaround studies may not uncover the most accurate or full descriptions of student learning. The same may be true of my approach here, which supports my desire to conduct further research with these students and highlights the diachronicity of subjective experiences—that the ways in which we think about, conceptualize, and embody our learning experiences can change over time.

Although some students expressed that they had not done much reflecting on their experiences since returning home, others explained that they have been using their photos as a reflective tool. When asked about the ways in which she had been reflecting on her experience, Dana explained that she simply shows her photos to others:

Mostly just showing my pictures to people. That's how I explain everything. I just did this last week. I showed a bunch of my aunts and uncles. I just went through them on my computer and was telling them about each of the things we did. Just what each picture was, where it was. Pictures are a good guidance because I can show people what I meant by it. But a lot of the time too I caught myself saying the pictures don't really do it justice. I have great pictures, but it just doesn't really show. And that's why I talk about it all.

For Dana, her pictures have served as an excellent tool for her reflection. By showing and explaining her pictures to others, she is able to not only personally reflect on her own experiences, but also to teach others about them. Rachel shared this approach:

I would tell people about my trip but I would mostly go through my pictures and say this was this day. We explored, we went to the museum, we learned this. And then I got to think about it again too.
Rachel, who explained that over the past three weeks she had used this strategy with each of her six sisters, used her pictures to recount what happened during her trip and to reflect on what those experiences meant to her. While Dana and Rachel were discussing their own, independent use of photos as a reflection tool, their strategy underscores the usefulness of the PCI method as an approach to reflecting upon learning experiences. If students naturally use photos to reflect, then incorporating it as an assessment strategy could prove a useful—and enjoyable (Gibson et al., 2013)—endeavor.

The openness of the PCI method, while allowing for conversations surrounding more subjective learning experiences of students, still may not capture the most authentic representations of student experiences abroad. As I consider myself a constructivist researcher, it is not my aim here to suggest that the representations of reality that students shared with me were the *truth*—although the students and I do see them as more accurate, authentic, and complete representations of reality than what was shared with the course professors. From a constructivist perspective, *true* representations of reality cannot be totally accessible, and to some constructivist researchers they may not even exist.

To illustrate this limitation of fully understanding student learning, I will return to Marcy. When Marcy’s interview began, she blurted, “I think I sent you the wrong photo.” It was a lovely panorama of Gothenburg, showing the canals, buildings, and parks of the Swedish city from the vantage point of a hilltop. The photo Marcy intended to send, she explained, was the same photo, but with a wider view that included her classmate Rachel “scarfing down a candy bar” in the corner. Marcy explained that she edited the photo because, “Sometimes you need to cut out the derpy shit.” (Marcy, Photo #2 & Photo #3, shown below)
Marcy clarified that when people go abroad they “curate what [they] think is beautiful;” the aspects and experiences they talk about and reflect upon are the good things, often the edited things, and these reflections often do not depict an authentic “reality.” Rachel eating the candy bar, Marcy explained, was a perfect metaphor for her trip—ridiculous, messy, “derpy”, yet also “humanizing”—but that metaphor was not one that she, or the professors (as she perceived), wanted as a representation of her experience. Instead, the “curated” panorama was chosen because it was more beautiful, even if a less authentic representation of her trip as a whole.

Marcy sharing this with me made me realize that even the photos taken by the students and shared with me—which I thought would prompt and provide more accurate and authentic evidence of student learning—are themselves representations of reality. While I did not specifically ask for original, unedited photos, I was struck when several students submitted
photos that were heavily altered, filtered, and edited for various reasons. Angela, one of the oldest students at 28, sent me her three images, but then later emailed “fixed” ones, comically noting how the improved lighting made her look better. Brandon altered his photo of a quaint street lined with shops and old cars in Stockholm’s Old City using Instagram’s vintage filter, adding that it made it seem more like he was stepping back in time: “That’s the one I posted [online].”

The students’ comments and edited photos speak to larger themes of acceptance and legitimacy. Even though Marcy, Angela, and Brandon shared that they altered their photos, others may not have shared this, and that certainly impacts the student learning outcomes that I am able to report here as a researcher. However, acknowledging that there are representations of reality that I may not have been able to access is an important step in learning outcomes assessment efforts and attempts at understanding student experiences abroad. Researchers should constantly cast a critical eye over the data they gather, and acknowledge that the representations of reality they were presented with may not be the most accurate, authentic, or complete representations available.
CHAPTER 7: DISCUSSION & CONCLUSIONS

Conclusions

This dissertation study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the subjective learning experiences of students on this embedded program?
   c. What are students learning? (*products*)
   d. How are students learning? (*processes*)

Using a case study approach following 15 students on a single embedded study abroad program, my study provided answers to these questions, as detailed in the paragraphs below.

Student learning stretched far beyond the confines of the three instructor-identified learning objectives stated on the syllabus. In addition to learning about Swedish human resource practices and demonstrating intercultural competencies, students exhibited significant learning of both social-emotional and academically-focused skills and behaviors. In terms of social-emotional growth, the students demonstrated growth in eight areas: intercultural competence, self-awareness, openness to new ideas and experiences, grit and independence, empowerment, global interconnectedness, humility, and wonderment. Students learned to adapt their attitudes and behaviors to the cultural norms they observed around them, overcame linguistic barriers, developed a sense of community and compassion among themselves, their peers, and the others they encountered during their travels, and cultivated deeply empowering attitudes about their own capabilities—among many other significant and meaningful outcomes. Finding evidence of social-emotional growth is not new in study abroad outcomes assessment research (see e.g., Allen & Herron, 2003; Kauffmann & Kuh, 1984; Jackson, 2007; Goodman, 2016; Coryell et. al., 2016), though observing such pronounced learning and development from short-term
programming, and more specifically a faculty-led embedded program, and this study's use of inductive analyses is a significant contribution to the literature.

Relating to more academically-focused learning outcomes, students exhibited growth in four distinct areas: Swedish employment and human resource practices, general Swedish culture, Swedish cultural values, and the demeanor of the Swedish people. Students garnered valuable understandings of Swedish organizational structures and how they impact work-life balance and general well-being, and how Swedish organizational culture reflects the larger cultural values of the country. They learned about (and saw in action) Sweden’s collectivist ideals, such as *jantelagen* and *lagom*, as well their healthy, active lifestyles.

This study’s inductive analytical approach and unique qualitative data collection strategies allowed for the uncovering of many different types of learning outcomes—not only the ones pre-identified by the course professors. Had this study focused only on assessing student learning in relation to the three stated learning outcomes, it would have found evidence of student growth in those areas, yet missed important insights into the depth and breadth of student learning that occurred in addition to those outcomes. Like most research on study abroad learning outcomes (e.g., Sutton & Rubin, 2004; Engle & Engle 2009; 2012), using a deductive approach (i.e., looking for evidence of specific learning outcomes) would have failed to highlight the majority of positive skills and behaviors cultivated during this program.

This study also provided insight into the types of situations in which learning occurs during short-term study abroad programs, and perhaps study abroad programming and education more generally. Following Lave & Wenger’s (1991) apprenticeship model of learning, students demonstrated learning that occurred in three broad categories of interactions: professors-as-experts, Swedes-as-experts, and classmates-as-experts. Each of the three types of interactions
and the situations they entailed cultivated learning that stretched far beyond the course-defined learning outcomes, both social-emotionally and academically. Additionally, while instructor-facilitated situations successfully fostered their desired learning outcomes, they fostered unintended ones as well, just as situations not facilitated by the instructor—both directly and indirectly—fostered both intended and unintended, positive and negative outcomes.

The methodological and analytical approaches of this study move beyond the inputs to outputs relationship that outcomes assessment so often assumes (Astin, 1982). In doing so, it successfully captured learning outcomes and learning spaces that were largely unknown and unobservable to educators and other educational researchers. The PCI method helped to make learning observable and was ultimately enjoyable for my informants (Gibson et al., 2013). Interviews and focus groups lasted well beyond my intended time frame partly because the conversation was so rich and partly because students had so much that they wanted to share about their experiences—things they did not feel capable of sharing in their reflective assignments.

The PCI method also provided a space in which students could openly reflect upon their experiences without the fear of judgment or the lowering of their grade. The reflective assignments devised by the course professors, while undoubtedly well-intentioned, failed to capture authentic representations of students’ experiences abroad. Students often felt incapable of sharing accurate and complete accounts of their program experiences. The physical and psychological presence of the course professors influenced students in many ways, leading the students to edit and censor their blogs, the purpose of which caused considerable confusion and controversy. Not wanting to appear unruly, inappropriate, or disrespectful, students learned to
write their blogs in ways that would please their professors (see e.g., Bower, 2003; Smith, 2000; Lemke, 1990; Reinsvold & Cochran, 2012), which prohibited the professors from accessing more authentic representations of their students’ experiences and ultimately hampered the benefits that reflection brings to individual learning and development.

The PCI method helped to capture more authentic representations of reality. I was perceived to be the powerless ethnographer. Students explained that their openness with me, as opposed to their professors, resulted from my lack of power over them. Marcy explained her ability to be open with me below:

You made it pretty obvious. You said, “I’m not going to tell [the professors], it’s fine.” So I don’t feel particularly paranoid with you. And I think you did a pretty good job because you also shared a lot of aspects of your life, so it wasn’t like, “Who are we telling our life story to?” or whatever.

I tried my best to make myself approachable to the students. I positioned myself as a researcher-colleague, expressing my interest in their overall experience during the program rather than whether or not they are learning what they are “supposed” to learn. They did not feel that I was “assessing” them (even though I was informally assessing them in the study), and expressed that being relatively “young” and “personable” was to my advantage. I was invited to join them during their free time in Sweden—bars, clubbing, shopping, gaming. They added me to their secret group chat, affectionately named “Hell’s Angels,” of their own accord, where they discussed things they did not want the professors to know (things that, as I discovered during the interviews and focus groups, often resulted in significant learning). Because they perceived that I held no power over them—I was not assigning grades or writing them recommendation letters, like their professors—the students felt free to be themselves around me and during our PCI
discussions, whereas they were admittedly more reserved and less authentic around their professors.

This dissertation does not do justice in presenting everything the students learned during their program. However, during our discussions, students demonstrated profound learning gains, both intended and incidental. Thus, learning on this particular short-term program was not minimal, but was instead rather profound. Learning in any situation is highly contextual. As Angela points out in the quote at the beginning of this dissertation, the learning she experienced was just as much related to her classmates as it was the program. It cannot be assumed that what these students learning during this program will be evidenced in similar programs. However, the evidence presented in this case study does suggest that students on short-term programs may be learning much more than we thought and in ways we have not been considering.

As readers have undoubtedly noticed, some of the incidental learning that students shared with me involved spaces where they consumed alcohol, sometimes to the point of severe intoxication and causing personal harm. As I previously stated, I am not advocating for or condoning the party reputation that many study abroad programs hold, but I am not ignoring it either. What I am suggesting is that by recognizing that this reputation exists, and that, based on this research, students are learning something in these spaces, educators can come to more holistic understandings of students’ experiences and learning outcomes. However, since all experiences are pre-reflective (Van Manen, 1990), students need to be given spaces to reflect on these experiences so that the learning moments can be realized. Rather than ignoring, censoring, or redacting these incidences, educators should acknowledge them and use open, non-judgmental
reflection techniques and spaces as a way to bring those educational moments to the surface for themselves and for their students.

Ultimately, educators must turn power on its head and equitably wield the influence they inherently hold as a tool to elicit more accurate and authentic representations of student experiences, and demonstrate to students that they are first and foremost interested in student learning. Reflection can be “practiced, assessed, and perfected” (Rodgers, 2002), but it can also be suppressed, censored, and fabricated, and until educators demonstrate their desire to hear and understand the whole of student experiences—the good, the bad, and the ugly—assessment efforts based on reflective tasks may be misguided and misrepresentative of what students learn on these programs.

**Implications**

This study implies that educators and education researchers need a greater focus on both learning and authenticity. As evidenced throughout this dissertation, the students in this short-term embedded program learned academically and social-emotionally. However, their own perceptions of their learning were limited to their pre-conceived notions about what learning looks like. Although they demonstrated learning in many personal, interpersonal, and academic ways, many students did not see this as learning because it did not fit the mold for what learning is supposed to look like. What constituted learning, for many of these students, was what they were supposed to learn: Swedish employment practices, human resource management strategies, and other topics covered in course reading materials and formal lectures. Considering what
counts as learning and communicating this to students is an important step in coming to understand their subjective learning experiences more holistically.

Second, this dissertation brings to light the issue of student authenticity. The students in this study explicitly stated that what they shared with their professors about their experiences was largely inauthentic: fake, sugar-coated, incomplete, redacted, edited, etc. The stories they told in their blogs and presentations—read by professors, administrators, and parents—purposefully did not provide an authentic, accurate, or complete account of their experiences in Sweden. This inauthenticity obscured a large portion of what students learned during this program from these audiences in comparison to what they shared with me during their PCI interviews and focus groups. As explained in Chapter 6, the students felt incapable of sharing their authentic experiences with their professor in these spaces for a number of reasons, and understanding how to mitigate such an effect in future assessment efforts is important for being able to capture more holistic representations of student learning.

### Recommendations for Practice

**For Educators**

1. *Educators should practice greater reflexivity.* As educators, it is easy to see that we impact the lives of our students. From teaching them to count or sing the ABCs to facilitating difficult and critical discussion around identity, teachers leave lasting impacts on the students they teach. However, it is also easy for educators to remember that their simple presence—both physical and psychological—impacts their students as well. Teachers must, therefore, practice a greater reflexivity that examines the ways in which their presence may influence the behavior of their students and the work they produce in order to understand and evaluate the authenticity of
student representations. Educators must understand how students perceive and define their situation—i.e., the power dynamics between the teacher and the student—before they can make sense of their reflections on it (Delamont, 1976). As mentioned in Chapter 2 of this dissertation, teachers must ask themselves: What processes have helped produce these representations of reality? How have I influenced this representation? Are there other possible representations that are not being shared? And, how can these other representations of reality be better accessed?

2. Educators must facilitate and provide students with open, non-judgmental reflective spaces. As evidenced in this study, the reflective assignments crafted by the course professors, regardless of their intention, failed to capture a great deal of evidence of meaningful and significant student learning. For a variety of reasons, students did not feel capable of sharing more authentic representations of their experiences in these spaces, but did so in their conversations with me. If educators hope to capture authentic reflections, from which they can better understand students’ subjective experiences, then providing more open, judgment-free spaces for student reflection may be a step in the right direction. Educators should make more explicit their interest in student experiences broadly speaking and be less judgmental and more accepting and understanding of more negative occurrences and the learning they can incite.

This study also suggests that these students may have benefitted from more purposeful and pointed reflective discussions during their program. It is often easy for educators to assume that the lessons we intend for our students to learn have been learned. However, as this study repeatedly shows, students often come away from these lessons with very different understandings than we original intended. To prevent students from walking away with potentially incorrect or misguided assumptions and conclusions about their experiences (e.g., the Vasa warship, Swedish demeanor, a shame for American behavior, the (in)applicability of
lessons learned, etc.), teachers should more regularly facilitate mediated discussion in which such mis-educative experiences can be identified and corrected.

3. Educators must openly acknowledge that learning and teaching can take many forms and can happen anywhere. Many students in this study felt that the learning moments they had experienced were largely inconsequential, if they even considered it learning at all. This perception partly arose from the academy’s narrow focus on learning related specifically to course content. When educators fixate on whether or not students learn specific things, students can miss out on incredibly meaningful learning moments. If a student believes that only A, B, and C is considered valuable learning, then the lessons they glean surrounding X, Y, and Z can be devalued, and go unnoticed altogether. This dissertation suggests that educators should be more cognizant of and encouraging about learning that extends beyond formal learning and the situations in which it typically occurs. What constituted learning for the students (e.g., Swedish employment practices) limited their perceptions of what they had actually learned (e.g., intercultural competence, grit, openness). As educators move toward valuing a more expansive view on what constitutes learning and more clearly convey those values to students, students may begin to recognize, value, and reflect on their learning moments more purposefully and pronouncedly. In order to facilitate a more expanded view of what constitutes learning, educators can begin to ask students the following types of questions to help them move beyond their focus on expected course outcomes and traditional thoughts on learning: What have you learned today? Is there anything else you learned today that is different? What about [other topics]? Can this count as learning? Why or why not?

Not only do we as educators need to consider what constitutes learning, but also what constitutes teaching. Teaching facilitates learning, but who (or what) is considered a teacher in a
given moment is contextual and contentious. The various learning experiences described by the 
students in this study demonstrate that the role of the teacher can be played by someone other 
than the course teacher, or in this case the faculty members. While the two faculty members for 
the course certainly acted as teachers who facilitated learning, so did the Swedes the students 
encountered (e.g., formally in lectures and company and visits, and informally on public 
transportation) and the students themselves. The learning experienced by students was facilitated 
by a variety of different teachers, both purposefully and incidentally, knowingly and 
unknowingly. However, some students felt compelled to share experiences facilitated only by the 
formal teachers of the course, thus leaving out important details about learning facilitated by 
other types of teachers. In order to gather more complete and authentic data on student learning, 
educators must acknowledge—to themselves and to their students—that anyone can be a teacher, 
and that learning facilitated by teachers other than themselves is equally important. In addition, 
asking questions such as, “Does [this] make [this person] a teacher? Why or why not?” can help 
students expand their views on what counts as teaching in a learning environment.

For Study Abroad Professionals

1. Study abroad professionals should actively promote research efforts targeting 
embedded short-term programming. As the number of embedded short-term program offerings 
continues to grow, study abroad professionals would do well to capitalize on this popularity and 
support research efforts in examining their effectiveness and legitimacy. Since such 
programming is very young in the field of study abroad, it is crucial to develop a list of best 
practices for future faculty leaders to consult when designing and implementing their embedded 
short-term programs. Study abroad professionals should invite collaborations with university
researchers and learning outcomes specialists to conduct research on these programs so that future programs can be designed in the most effective manner possible.

2. Study abroad professionals should provide greater support in curricular design. Related to the previous suggestion, university study abroad offices should provide greater support for faculty leaders regarding curriculum design decisions. Focusing on burgeoning evidence-based best practices, study abroad professionals could develop materials such as brochures and webpages and facilitate presentations highlighting various curricular approaches to facilitating different student learning outcomes. For example, as evidenced in this study, faculty members should be trained to consider the various ways in which the activities they plan may facilitate the same learning outcomes. By identifying overlap, faculty could redevelop program itineraries to include different kinds of activities that could promote other types of learning outcomes, or provide for more group reflection opportunities.

Future Research

Short-Term and Embedded Programming

Future research studies should examine learning and development in study abroad that is specifically related to short-term and embedded programming. As both types of programs continue to gain popularity over semester or year-long programs, more research that seeks to understand the impacts of short-term and embedded programming can help course designers more intelligently design programs in ways that will best foster the learning outcomes they desire. More research can also enhance the legitimacy of short-term and embedded programming, which may lead to greater financial support from both the academy and the federal government.
Delayed Inductive Research

This study also highlights the imperative for conducting delayed research. Because all experiences are pre-reflective (Van Manen, 1990), and because many students—even at the time of our interviews—had not yet adequately reflected upon their experiences, conducting follow-up interviews and focus groups may allow the impacts of those experiences to be more pronounced. If re-contacted six months, nine months, and even a year after they have returned, students may exhibit more profound growth in these learning outcomes, and may demonstrate growth in new ones.

As a follow-up to Preschool in Three Cultures, Tobin and his research team returned to preschools in Japan, China, and the United States to understand how practices may be viewed both cross-culturally and cross-generationally (Tobin et al., 2009). His rationale was that it is easy to compare cultures with each other, but it is more difficult to compare cultures with themselves as time passes. This time focusing on the effects of globalization, Tobin and his team repeated their previous approach and tried to understand how the practices of each culture may have infiltrated or influenced one another over time.

This diachronic approach (Tobin, 2014) helped Tobin and his team to locate educational practices in both space and time, and responded to common criticisms of ethnography failing to acknowledge the historical context of culture. What is reality in one time period may not be reality in another, and diachronicity affords researchers the ability to investigate those differences across time. Future research studies should examine student learning and development across time, as opposed to current approaches that only collect data at one fixed point—generally during or immediately upon returning from the program.
As part of my own research agenda, I intend to follow-up with these students in Spring 2017 (nine months to one year after returning from Sweden). The follow-up interviews and focus groups will utilize slightly modified protocols to understand how students’ perceptions of what they learned have changed in light of time that has passed. The processes undertaken during the initial interview and focus group phase will be repeated in order to understand how increased reflection may have yielded further learning outcomes. Students will be given the opportunity to share different photos if they feel that another photo best represents what they have learned as of then, though the original three photos can also be used.

**Refining the PCI Method**

In order to refine the PCI method, future research exploring the benefits and drawbacks to the method must be conducted. Future research on PCI should continue to examine its efficacy in producing insights into informants’ subjective experiences and also look to the ways in which PCI can, if at all, be used to assess the quality of those subjective experiences. Withnall (1990) argues that the quality of incidental learning can be difficult to assess, and while PCI helped to elucidate incidental learning moments in this study, future research should examine the ways in which it may or may not be useful in assessing the quality (depth) of that learning.

Based on the findings of this study, I anticipate the following adjustments to the PCI method. First, the instructions provided to the participants should be much clearer about the types of photos that can be submitted for discussion. While the photos students shared with me opened up fruitful discussions on their academic and social-emotional learning, some students shared that they did not have photos to represent their most meaningful and significant moments. For example, as detailed in Chapter 5, Tony explained that a picture of his confused face looking
at the arrivals and departures boards in the Stockholm Central Station would have better captured how he felt and what he learned in that moment. While Tony did not have such a picture to share, I would have seen any photo that reminded him of this moment as appropriate: a passing train, a sign written in Swedish. Like Tony many students seemed to think that the photos themselves had to depict the moment they were to discuss. While I did attempt to mitigate this in my protocol—asking things like, “What might a more representative photo look like?”—being more explicit about the nature of the photos students could share may have helped me elicit photos with more abstract connections but more concrete significance.

Second, I need to refine my PCI protocol to allow for greater fluidity of topics. I did not anticipate that the photos students submitted would generate conversations that spanned such a wide variety of topics and issues. For example, Marcy began discussing her photo of the elderly swing club dancers (Marcy, Photo #1) by saying that it was a very picturesque and metaphorical scene of Swedish work-life balance, but ended that segment of the interview by talking about the hidden/ignored social spaces (e.g., bars and clubs) in which some students learn important lessons about Swedish culture. The tangential topics prompted by the photos made me stray further from my protocol than I had anticipated. Refining my protocol to consider the ways in which conversations may twist and turn, and to allow for those tangents to be reconnected in some way (and not forgotten or ignored) can help make PCI data collection stronger and more synthesized.

**Final Reflections**

I was preparing to enter my final year as a French and English Secondary Education major at Marshall University when I heard about the Fulbright Franco-American Teachers-in-
Training Institute. My advisor, Dr. Kathy Seelinger, explained that the program would allow me to teach English and Pedagogy classes in France for four months. I was a poor kid from Appalachia; my family’s socioeconomic situation made it so that my dreams of going abroad were just that—dreams. Recognizing the forlorn expression of a student presented with the opportunity of a lifetime but with no hopes of being able to afford it, Dr. Seelinger added that Fulbright would cover all of my travel and living expenses, and that I would receive a monthly stipend as well. Despite strong pushback from the university's teaching certification office, which nearly toppled my chances of participating, and with the unwavering advocacy of Dr. Seelinger, I boarded a plane to Paris in August of 2011—my first plane ride ever—and never looked back.

The main goals of the Fulbright-FATITI program, from what I gather, were to increase our knowledge of and experience with teaching pedagogies and the French education system, and to hone our language skills. Interestingly, I was only assessed on the latter. I took a pre- and post-Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) with a French professor from the University of Akron. For what it is worth, I moved from the most basic level to “advanced-low”, though much of that gain has diminished in the last five years. I vaguely remember taking an “exit” survey, but it was satisfaction-oriented. And that is it—no discussions, no surveys, no exams, and no continued assessment.

Until recently, I had not been able to put into words how much that experience meant to me; the assessment strategies employed by FATITI, while assessing growth in my language proficiency, utterly failed to capture the learning and development that was, at times, much more meaningful and significant than language acquisition. Upon reflection, I learned much more during my time in France than even I initially realized. As I looked through the hundreds of
photographs I took during my time abroad, even years later, I am able to reflect on my experiences and draw conclusions about the ways in which I grew—patience due to the numerous train strikes, humility because of my countless misinterpretations and incorrect translations, self-efficacy and independence as I navigated solo trips across Europe. Had it not been for this experience, I may not have realized the complexity of French identity and cultural customs. I may have continued my path to becoming a high school French and English teacher. If I had passed on this opportunity, I would not have entered the Higher Education master’s program at the University of Kentucky and met the mentor who would lead me to studying international education at Penn State. Ultimately, if I had not gone to France with this program, I would not be who I am today, personally or professionally.

Admittedly, my trip to France was not a short-term or embedded experience, but the idea that an international program can have such profound impacts on one’s life—and in ways that few people are intending, assessing for, understand, or recognize—means that the ramifications of such experiences should be more carefully and closely examined. Just as my life was turned upside down in the most wonderful way by studying abroad, so too were the lives of these students, and probably even more so than they are capable of realizing now.

While the blogs and other assessment strategies failed to capture the entirety of student learning that resulted from the program, PCI allowed me to gather a much broader understanding of students' subjective experiences abroad. In 10 short days, these students learned valuable lessons about Swedish employment practices and human resource management, which they will likely carry into their careers as human resource managers. They cultivated valuable social-emotional skills, which can aid future academic and personal development. And, the students demonstrated that learning moments arise from multiple types of situations, and many in
unanticipated and unintended ways. PCI allowed the processes and products of student learning to become more observable.

These course professors, much like Dr. Seelinger, could not know all of what studying abroad can do for student learning and development, but they believed in it enough to spend their time and energy facilitating those international opportunities for their students. For study abroad to remain a priority in the academy, educators, administrators, parents, and students must continue to see the value in such opportunities—that students walk away from these programs with much more than an expanded vocabulary and good memories. This embedded short-term program was not uniquely superior in its design or facilitation, but it fostered numerous valuable outcomes for the students who participated. Much like myself, many students find themselves in situations where short-term programs are all they can afford, and they should know that such brief international experiences can provide meaningful opportunities for learning that make it worth their money. We must continue to promote the value of study abroad, and by conducting research that more clearly elucidates its benefits we can restore study abroad—even short-term programming—as a viable avenue for significant, meaningful, and life-changing student growth and development.
References


Brown, B. (2010). *The gifts of imperfection: Let go of who you think you’re supposed to be and embrace who you are*. Center City, MN: Hazelden Publishing.


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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Abridged Course Syllabus
Appendix B: Sweden Itinerary
Appendix C: PCI Interview Protocol
Appendix D: PCI Focus Group Protocol
Appendix E: Student Photographs
Appendix A: Abridged Course Syllabus

Human Resource Management in a Social Welfare Context:

The Swedish Experience

Credit hours: 3 credits (2 credits in Spring and 1 credit during Maymester)

Course Description

This course explores human resource management (HRM) in a social welfare context through trip preparation and intensive field experience in Sweden. Topics covered during the course will provide a cultural and historical perspective of Sweden; describe human resource management in Sweden; and provide examples of particular policies related to employment. Pre-trip learnings will provide a background for students to begin to understand the current challenges and opportunities of HRM in Sweden, Sweden culture and history (compared with the USA and other cultures); the Swedish (social welfare) business context; and traditions of HRM in Sweden. Students will travel to Sweden May 18-27, 2016 and link pre-trip learning to experiential learning while in-country. Students should demonstrate an understanding of issues that have been, and are, important to the country as they relate to HRM. Upon return to the USA, students will reflect on what they learned and how it affected their perspectives on HRM in a social welfare country, their own cultural identity, and career goals.

Course Objectives

By the end of the course, students should be able to:

4. Demonstrate knowledge of HRM applied in a range of organizations in a social welfare context (Sweden and other Scandinavian countries).
5. Compare and contrast the institutional and cultural contexts of the USA and Sweden.
6. Demonstrate intercultural competencies that can be applied throughout a later career.

Required Text(s)

Tbd: Collection of readings that focus on HRM in Scandinavia

Assessment

Reflections (10%): Before we leave for Sweden (during the Spring semester) you will have four seminars to help prepare for the trip. Within 24 hours of each seminar you must submit a reflection paper via ANGEL. The reflection should be 1-1.5 pages, single spaced, 12-point font, and using 1-inch margins. Your reflection should be meaningful and well-written.
**In-Country Presentations (30%):** While in-country at the host university, you will be asked to give two presentations. The goal of the first presentation is to introduce our group to our Swedish hosts. You will either present alone or in pairs, describing where the group is from and something about the LER and HPA programs. You can explain briefly what we have already studied, and some of the things the group is hoping to get from the visit. The presentation should last approximately 5-6 minutes, and be prepared to be presented orally, not using any presentation aids.

Later during the visit, you will be asked to give a second 6-8 minute PowerPoint presentation to the host university faculty and students. You will work on this presentation while in-country and will work in a group with one or two other students. The presentation should be a reflection of your time in Sweden, what you learned about HRM, comparison to the USA, and your personal experiences. The grade allocated will be for the pair/team as a whole.

**Blogs (30%):** Blogs are meant to enhance learning and allow students to voice their opinion on a topic. These are typically one-page responses to a question posed to the class or a reflection on learnings or experiences. They are more experiential, but should be taken seriously. Blogs should be completed online daily while in country.

**Final Trip Summary (30%):** Students will submit a final video summary of their experiences via ANGEL by two weeks after the trip to Sweden ends. The summary should be 7-10 minutes in length and should reflect on topics such as comparison of initial expectations to actual experiences, main concepts learned and evidence of that learning, thoughts and feelings on own cultural identity, thoughts and feelings on Sweden cultural identity, comparison of the two HRM systems, thoughts on HRM policies, and plans to incorporate this experience into future endeavors. Summaries should include audio and video using VoiceThread or YouTube.

In addition, for this embedded study abroad program, students should also submit in the drop box slides based on the format of their oral video keeping in mind that seniors may then complete an abstract for a poster submission and showcase their work at the next Senior Showcase in spring 2017. When completing your abstract next spring, you want to keep in mind the below topics.

- Title
- Your name
- Background- of the study abroad program meaning where did you go and what were the learning objectives, etc.?
- Lessons Learned- this could be tied to the learning objectives of the class or your own personal lessons learned. Photos are encouraged.
- Conclusions- what impact did this study abroad have on you personally, your career choice, and what could future HPA students get out of a similar opportunity?

**Seminars**

In addition to the assigned reading, there will be six hours of mandatory instruction during Spring Semester 2016, i.e. four meetings of 90 minutes each, during which the following topics will be covered.
• Swedish culture and history (compared with US and other cultures)
• Swedish (social welfare) business context
• Traditions of HRM in Sweden (and across Scandinavia)
• Preparing for the visit: etiquette, background to site visits, risk management.

**Grading Policy**

At the end of the semester the number of points you have received for each component of your grade will be totaled and multiplied by the appropriate percent. Grades will be given on the following scale:

- A 93.00% and above
- A- 90.00-92.99%
- B+ 86.67-89.99%
- B 83.00-86.66%
- B- 80.00-82.99%
- C+ 76.67-79.99%
- C 70.00-76.66%
- D 60.00-69.99%
- F 0-59.99%

Be aware that I do not round, at all, for any reason. If you earn an 89.99%, your grade is still B.

Attendance and regular participation is required. Behavioral issues cited in the PSU Code of Conduct apply to your classroom performance as well as to attendance in class or on field trips. Infractions of the academic agreement will have a negative impact on your grade.

Note: While in-country blogs are due each night. Upon return your final summary is due within 14 days.
# Appendix B: Sweden Itinerary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Organizers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Wednesday, May 18</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Afternoon</td>
<td>Arrival in Jönköping</td>
<td>Hotel Marcy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Evening</td>
<td>Welcome &amp; student introductions</td>
<td>Hotel Marcy</td>
<td>PSU/JU</td>
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<td><strong>Thursday, May 19</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Morning</td>
<td>Company visit in Jönköping</td>
<td>Board of Agriculture</td>
<td>JU</td>
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<tr>
<td>Afternoon</td>
<td>Seminar (Jönköping faculty)</td>
<td>Jönköping University</td>
<td>JU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evening</td>
<td>Group hike in Jönköping w/ faculty</td>
<td>Jönköping</td>
<td>JU</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Friday, May 20</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>11am-2pm</td>
<td>Guest seminar (faculty, Örebro University)</td>
<td>Jönköping University</td>
<td>PSU</td>
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<tr>
<td>Afternoon/Evening</td>
<td>Train departure</td>
<td>Hotel Sign</td>
<td>PSU/JU</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Saturday, May 21</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Morning</td>
<td>Vasa Museum</td>
<td>Stockholm</td>
<td>PSU</td>
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<tr>
<td>Afternoon</td>
<td>Free time</td>
<td>Stockholm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Evening</td>
<td>Free time</td>
<td>Stockholm</td>
<td></td>
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<td><strong>Sunday, May 22</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Morning</td>
<td>Free time</td>
<td>Stockholm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Afternoon</td>
<td>Free time</td>
<td>Stockholm</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evening</td>
<td>Train departure</td>
<td>Hotel Marcy</td>
<td>PSU/JU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Monday, May 23</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Morning</td>
<td>Seminar (Jönköping faculty)</td>
<td>Jönköping University</td>
<td>JU</td>
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<tr>
<td>Afternoon/Evening</td>
<td>Free time</td>
<td>Jönköping</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Tuesday, May 24</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Morning</td>
<td>Seminar – student presentations</td>
<td>Jönköping University</td>
<td>PSU/JU</td>
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<tr>
<td>Afternoon</td>
<td>Jönköping tour with students</td>
<td>Jönköping</td>
<td>PSU/JU</td>
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<tr>
<td>Evening</td>
<td>Free time &amp; Dinner with JU students and faculty</td>
<td>Jönköping</td>
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<td><strong>Wednesday, May 25</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>8:30-12:00</td>
<td>Company visit</td>
<td>IKEA, Jönköping</td>
<td>PSU</td>
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<tr>
<td>Afternoon/Evening</td>
<td>Bus to Gothenburg</td>
<td>Quality Hotel</td>
<td>PSU/JU</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Thursday, May 26</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Morning/Afternoon</td>
<td>Company visit</td>
<td>Volvo, Gothenburg</td>
<td>PSU</td>
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<tr>
<td>Evening</td>
<td>Free time</td>
<td>Gothenburg</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Friday, May 27</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Morning/Afternoon</td>
<td>Gothenburg city tour/ Gothenburg University seminar</td>
<td>Gothenburg</td>
<td>PSU</td>
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<tr>
<td>Evening</td>
<td>Reflection meeting over dinner</td>
<td>Gothenburg</td>
<td>PSU</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Saturday, May 28</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Flights home</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Appendix C: PCI Individual Interview Protocol

[Show photo] (Repeat x3)

Q1: Tell me about this picture.
Possible follow-ups:
  • Why did you choose this particular moment to share with me?
  • What makes this photo significant for you?
  • Why is this photo so meaningful?

Q2: What were you thinking when you first took this picture?
Possible follow-ups:
  • What were you doing that led you to take this picture?

Q3: What do you think about this picture now?
Possible follow-ups:
  • How have your thoughts changed?
  • Why do you think your thoughts about it have/have not changed?

Q4: In what ways has this moment impacted you?
Possible follow-ups:
  • Do you do anything differently now?
  • Did you realize then that this was meaningful/significant?

Q5: What other photos could you have taken that would have represented something meaningful that happened to you while abroad?
  • What would they be of?
  • What would a more (or less) representative photo depict?

Q6: Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience in Sweden?
Appendix D: PCI Focus Group Protocol

[Show photo] (Repeat for each participant)

Q1: Tell me about this picture.

Possible follow-ups:
- Why did you choose this particular moment to share with me?
- What makes this photo significant for you?
- Why is this photo so meaningful?

Q2: In what ways has this moment impacted you?

Q3: [To other participants] What are your thoughts on what [student] just shared?
- In what ways do you agree? Disagree?
- In what ways did your experience differ?

Q4: What conclusions can we come to about our similar/different experiences?

Q5: Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience in Sweden?
Appendix E: Student Photos

Angela

Photo 1: Classmate Peering out Window in Stockholm Hotel
Brandon

Photo 1: View of Gothenburg from Park

Photo 2: Tram in Gothenburg

Photo 3: Street in Stockholm’s Old Town (also used in focus group)
Photo 1: Seafood Meal in Modern Restaurant in Stockholm

Photo 2: View across the Waters of Stockholm’s Old Town

Photo 3: View of Lake Vättern from Hill in Jönköping
Photo 1: View of Gothenburg Archipelago Islands (*also used in focus group*)

Photo 2: Bikes on Gothenburg Archipelago Islands

Photo 3: Anchor in Gothenburg Harbor
Emily

Photo 1: Train Station in Copenhagen, Denmark

Photo 2: Old Mill and Lake Vättern from atop Hill in Jönköping

Photo 3: View of New York City from Emily’s Father’s Plane
Photo 1: Group of Students Enjoying “French Hot Dogs” in Jönköping Bus Station (*used in focus group only*)

Photo 2: Breakfast in Hotel

Photo 3: Group of Students at Gothenburg Amusement Park

Photo 4: Street in Gothenburg
Photo 1: Students on Ferry to Visit Gothenburg Archipelagoes

Photo 2: Canal in Gothenburg (also used in focus group)

Photo 3: Group of Students posing with lion statue outside of Gothenburg Hotel

Photo 4: Group of Students at Gothenburg Amusement Park

Photo 5: Dessert Purchased from Market in Gothenburg
Marcy

Photo 1: Swing Dancing Club in Jönköping

Photo 2: Edited Panorama of Gothenburg
(also used in focus group)

Photo 3: Unedited Panorama of Gothenburg

Photo 4: Kari Swimming in Lake Vättern
Rachel

Photo 1: Rachel Riding Wooden Moose in Gothenburg park

Photo 2: Rachel Enjoying a Donut in Gothenburg

Photo 3: Students and Professors outside of Gothenburg University (also used in focus group)
Tony

Photo 1: Boats in Lake Vättern in Jönköping

Photo 2: Tony Posing at Gothenburg Archipelagoes

Photo 3: Group Posing on Ferry to Gothenburg Amusement Park
VITA

Kayla Marie Johnson

Ph.D.  Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA
Higher Education & Comparative and International Education
Graduate Certificates: Teaching & Online Teaching

M.S.  University of Kentucky, Lexington, KY
Higher Education
Graduate Certificate: International Education

B.A.  Marshall University, Huntington, WV
Secondary Education, English, & French (Summa Cum Laude)

SELECTED PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Jan. 2017-May 2017  Teaching Assistant, Penn State Dept. of Education Policy Studies

August 2016-Present  Co-Founder & Director of Curriculum and Development, Centro Educativo Pallata Ayllu, Peru

August 2015-Present  Student Impact Evaluator, Rustic Pathways

May 2015-July 2017  Managing Editor, American Journal of Education

Aug. 2015-June 2016  Embedded Programs Specialist, Penn State Global Programs

Feb. 2015-Aug. 2015  Assistant Mentor Coordinator, Penn State Learning Edge Academic Program (LEAP)

Aug. 2012-May 2014  Seminar Coordinator & Assessment Team Researcher, University of Kentucky Academic Enhancement

Aug. 2011- Dec. 2011  English as a Foreign Language (EFL) & Pedagogical Strategies Instructor, L’Institut Universitaire de Formation des Mâitres d’Amiens, France

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS
