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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to describe learning that occurred among participants who engaged in a short-term education abroad program using a modified situated learning theoretical framework. In situated learning theory, experience becomes activity and takes on a dynamic relation to learning. For the study, I selected a specific case to examine one type of education abroad program that students can engage in, which was a short-term education abroad program where a group of nine students traveled as part of a course for one week. Methods of data collection for this qualitative study included direct participant observation, field notes, and in-depth interviews. I asked the participants to describe their experiences during their short-term education abroad program, and I analyzed their descriptions based on the four elements of context that I defined for the study in an education abroad program - activity, tools, situation, and community of learners. I examined how these elements of context related to learning for them. I applied this theoretical framework by looking at the ways in which participants described how they learned in their education abroad program. I also looked at the ways in which the descriptions of learning provided by the participants contribute to new ways of understanding learning in context in an education abroad program.
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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Coming to the problem

There are several ways in which students participate in an education abroad program: traditional study abroad, in which students take courses during a semester at an overseas institution for academic credit, international internships, and short-term programs in which students follow courses or engage in structured learning opportunities during a compressed schedule of time. In all of these types of education abroad programs, students pursue learning in their field of study in a foreign country, spend time in a new culture, and learn to function within a novel and often quite different environment from what they are accustomed to.

During these education abroad programs, students navigate many areas of life both inside and outside of the structured program while abroad, and need to adjust to changing circumstances while their experiences open up new ideas, practices, and learning for them. They find themselves in new and constantly evolving environments, ones in which they become personally linked and where they are required to adjust their own views and practices to reflect and support the new environments in which they live. Their challenging and unfamiliar settings are what often bring them new opportunities to learn. When students are faced with an unfamiliar environment in which to live, study, and work, they are required to become aware of new information sources and to make decisions based on what they can learn (Ormsby, 1989). This experience may push students to either grow or seek escape from the pressure (Ormsby, 1989).
My interest in understanding learning in education abroad programs stems from when, as an undergraduate student, I participated in an education abroad program where I took university courses and lived with a native family in France. I recall that much of the learning that I can still remember years later revolved around how I learned from being in a new environment and how that newness of what I was experiencing really shaped what I learned: it was the new environment that shaped and created many of my significant, long-lasting learning experiences. I learned from interacting with others in a social environment, and my learning depended on and was formed by those interactions I had with people within that particular situation. Each situation presented a unique learning experience for me, one in which I was often required to start from scratch in terms of my knowledge, abilities, and competencies to get by on my own. I had to learn how to use new tools and resources to figure out what people were saying to me, and had to figure out how I could navigate the new environment in which I was living.

An example of how I learned from the actual setting I was in was that of being at the dinner table each night with my French host “family”, an experience that shaped a lot of learning for me. I would observe how the family talked with each other and how they would interact at the table: certain ways of holding the silverware, how much food they would eat, what kinds of foods they would eat, and the types of conversations that they would have at the dinner table. I do not recall the exact conversations or many of the specific foods that we had, but I remember how it felt to be at that table each night, and how it affected my learning of what it was like to be part of a real French family. Being at the dinner table each night with my host family really impacted what I learned about being a part of French culture and family life. It was the experience of actually being at
the table with my French family, interacting with them and adjusting my own behavior to reflect their practices, that allowed me to internalize notions and understandings of what French family life is like in general. In other words, I learned what it meant to be a part of a French family by being a part of one myself and in understanding the family’s actions and ideas by participating in their family dinners as a group each night. Each night presented a new experience, one in which I was negotiating within a new environment, with new social cues and new levels of interactions that I would have with the family. My learning would deepen with each opportunity to be part of that setting of having dinner together on a nightly basis.

I do not believe that I would have acquired this knowledge and understanding of French family life without experiencing it within its specific, real-world setting. In other words, the acts of eating dinner, family members being present around the same table each night, having diverse conversations, and enjoying dessert together is what shaped my learning of the meaning of French family life. I do not believe that I would have had the richness and depth of learning about French family life by reading about having dinner with a French family in a textbook or hearing about it second-hand from someone else. I needed to experience it for myself, within a real-world environment, in order to form a deep understanding of what it meant. Furthermore, it was the fact that I was part of that particular example of being at the dinner table each night interacting with my French family that allowed me to gain a real understanding of the social and cultural practices of meal time in that environment. I acquired knowledge of being French by participating as a new member of that culture, adjusting my behavior and actions according to what I observed in others around me. The depth and authenticity of actually
being with a French family created a rich environment in which I could acquire understanding of what it meant to be French.

In addition to my experience of an education abroad program as a student, as part of my past and current work as an instructor and international programs director, a few years ago I lead a group of undergraduate students on a week-long short-term study abroad program in France two different times. Seeing how the students engaged in their environment while abroad on this program made me wonder what level of depth and understanding they could attain during such a brief and limited amount of time. It seemed like there was a lot going on in terms of the students interacting with each other as a group and with people and places they encountered during the program, but I was unsure of how their experience really affected any learning for them.

I now support students who participate in different types of education abroad programs, including traditional study programs where students take academic courses for credit, as well as in international internships and short-term programs, and as part of my own professional development, I wish to learn more about their learning experiences while participating in education abroad programs. In other words, I want to understand how being overseas during an education abroad program shapes and creates learning for them, and what they gain from being in the new overseas environment while abroad. I wish to learn what it means for the participants to learn from their context in their education abroad program, and more specifically, how students who participate in a short-term education abroad program learn from context together during the program.

Another issue that has led me to want to learn more about the learning experiences of students who participate in an education abroad program is that there
seems to be no agreement in the current literature on education abroad programs as to what exactly constitutes context in these programs. Even though students I now work with participate in different types of education abroad programs, they all seem to share with me stories about how where they were, who they were with, and how they navigated their environments abroad deeply affected what they learned – in other words, the particular context in which they lived during their education abroad seems to have had a major impact on what and how they learned.

Statement of the problem

In examining the literature on education abroad programs, there is no working definition or model of what constitutes context in education abroad programs. There are descriptions of the attributes of certain education abroad programs (Engle and Engle, 2003; Goodwin and Nacht, 1988), but there is no clarity or descriptions as to what the constituent parts of context are in an education abroad program. This has lead to a lack of attention in the literature of the role of context in these programs, and particularly, a lack of acknowledgement of how context impacts the quality and kind of learning that occurs for students who participate in the various education abroad programs. It seems particularly surprising to me as a professional in the field of education abroad to discover that although we insist that the whole point of participating in an education abroad programs is for students to experience first-hand what it is like to live and learn in a different context, we do not seem to know how to capture what this different context actually is, and moreover, how participants navigate and learn from it.

By ignoring context, learning is reduced to an artificially constructed set of simulations (Wilson, 1993). Rather than present “knowledge” in traditional pedagogic
fashion whereby students acquire it, the situated, or context-based view, proposes modeling, coaching, and practice approaches to learning (Wilson, 1993). What this means is that learning from a situated perspective takes into account the social processes that shape learning. Learning occurs within a community, through interaction and negotiation of meaning, and cannot happen in isolation, removed from the social sphere. Learning cannot be separated from the setting and set of circumstances in which a learner happens to be at that point in time. To separate learning and context means that learning is something that occurs in isolation, where learning is transferred to an individual from some external source in a de-contextualized way.

Short term education abroad program: Significance for the study

Short term education abroad programs are designed to allow participants to experience and learn in an overseas setting as a group, in a brief and highly structured time frame. In my professional role, one of my main activities is to design short term education abroad programs for engineering undergraduate students. The programs I design all attempt to involve the participants as much as possible in the context in which they find themselves during the program, whether that context means working on a project with a group of students who hail from the country in which the program takes place, or having the students examine a problem at a manufacturing facility in the country in which the program takes place. These short term programs are by design meant to directly engage the participants in the various contexts that they experience throughout the brief duration of the program.

I am interested in studying how these groups of students in these short term education abroad programs engage in the overseas context, and in how they go from
forming a group brought together by a program, to becoming a community that works
together to achieve their learning goals, and finally how they interact as a community
within the context of the program.

Overview of the study

Chapter One, Introduction, explains how I have come to the problem as a
researcher and describes the problem I am investigating. Chapter Two, Review of the
Literature, presents an overview of the main theory that I apply in the study: situated
learning. I describe four elements of context that come out of situated learning theory,
which are:

1. Activity
2. Tools
3. Situation
4. Community of Learners

In addition to defining these elements, I discuss the limitations of situated learning theory
as they relate to the study. I present aspects of the theories of constructivism and activity
theory to supplement the definitions of these elements and to bring in additional issues
under consideration in the study.

After presenting my theoretical framework, I provide an overview of the types of
education abroad programs that are described in the empirical literature in which U.S.
undergraduate students participate. I address where these types of education abroad
programs account for context and where they fail to do so. I also provide a review of
empirical studies on education abroad programs to point out areas where researchers have
focused their attention and where there has been a lack of attention paid to the role of context in education abroad programs in the empirical literature.

In Chapter Three, Research Methods, I explain my research design. I provide an overview of my research methods, and discuss how and why I enlist participants for the study. I also provide an overview of the case that is under investigation for the study. I have chosen a particular case as a unit of analysis for the study – a short-term education abroad program – and explain my rationale for selecting this unit of analysis. I also give an overview of my epistemic orientation as a researcher, how I conduct sampling and site selection, and the methods of data collection I employ. I explain my data analysis processes, and provide illustrations that give detail about how I conducted the data analysis. I then present the limitations of the study, and a timeline for conducting the research and completing the study.

In Chapter Four, Research Findings, I present the findings of my study. The findings address the research questions that guided the study, which are outlined in Chapter Three. These findings are presented to shed light on how this particular group of participants learned from context in their short-term education abroad program.

Finally, in Chapter Five, Discussion, I discuss theory that has emerged from the study, how the theory informs practice, and present recommendations for further research.

Glossary of terms

Several key terms are used throughout the study. Definitions of these terms follow.
a) **Education abroad program**: A structured academic program where U.S. students study in a foreign country for a fixed period of time

b) **Short-term education abroad program**: An education abroad program that lasts between one to six weeks

c) **Situated learning**: A theory of learning whereby individuals learn as a social practice, in a contextualized setting, and create knowledge by being actively engaged in a social environment

d) **Context**: The elements that create the structure and meaning of an experience

e) **Activity**: Actions that are carried out collectively by a community of practice, or a group of individuals who share a common motive, to achieve a defined and collective purpose; these practices are considered ordinary because they happen in day-to-day life, and are shaped by day-to-day events and contexts

f) **Tools**: Objects that individuals use to carry out an activity – they are used to facilitate the fulfillment of a motive

g) **Situation**: Awareness by which an individual determines his or her moment-by-moment reality

h) **Community of learners**: A group of people who participate in activities that share a common learning goal
Chapter 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

I begin this review of the literature by examining situated learning theory as a framework to understand learning in education abroad programs. I also present some limitations of this theory as they apply to my study. I supplement my review of situated learning theory by incorporating aspects of related theories – constructivism and activity theory – that contribute to the development of a new theoretical examination of learning in education abroad programs. Next I present a typology of different education abroad programs to describe their characteristics, structure, and unique attributes, and then examine how these different types of programs address and account for the contexts in which students who participate in them live and learn. Because there are several contexts in which students can engage in an education abroad program, I wish to define how these different programs are structured, and to discuss what their benefits and limitations are for participants. This typology illustrates the similarities and differences in the way each of the education abroad programs structure and utilize context as a means to provide learning experiences for participants.

Situated learning theory

Situated learning is a term championed by Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger in their 1991 study *Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation*. In situated learning, experience becomes activity and takes on a dynamic relation to learning. This means that an activity that one engages in, be it joining a club or visiting a museum, for example,
becomes a vehicle for learning and that learning is shaped by a particular set of actions within that activity. Lave and Wenger (1991) explain that adults learn as they act in new situations and are acted upon by situations in which they find themselves (Wilson, 1993). In situated learning, learning becomes intricately integrated with the tools, social interaction, and activity of its use (Wilson, 1993).

The main components of situated learning theory that I discuss and apply in this study are activity, situation, tools, and community of learners. In situated learning theory, activity is a set of collective actions that carry a learning goal; it is an intentional and organized series of actions that lead to an outcome of learning. A situation is where an actor finds him or herself in carrying out an activity. Tools are the means by which an activity is carried out and are used to accomplish the learning goal of the activity. A community of learners is where social interaction forms a specific activity in which those who engage in the social interaction work together to fulfill an intentional learning goal of the activity. These four main components, for the purpose of the study, define the meaning of context – that is to say, context in an education abroad program is defined as an intersection of the components of activity, situation, tools, and community of practice.

Activity

Activity is a major concept in this theory. Activity can be defined as a motive-driven, collective effort (Baptiste, 2007). Two criteria differentiate a human activity from other intentional behaviors, such as an action: collective effort and motive. Collective efforts are distinguished from individual acts in that the former involves a community (or communities) of learners with divisions of labor. Embedded in divisions of labor are hierarchies or authority and rules and/or sanctions that govern the collective effort. The
behavior of a *solitary* individual may be part of a collective effort (Baptiste, 2007). Activity within this theory therefore depends on and is defined by a community of learners, since it occurs within the context of a group of individuals who form a collective. I discuss the term community of learners in more detail later in this review.

In situated learning theory, activities that are coherent, meaningful, and purposeful are considered authentic and are instrumental to the theory. Authentic activities are defined by Brown et al. (p. 25) as the ordinary practices of a culture. It is in authentic activities, or ordinary practices of a culture, that individuals have the opportunity to adopt the behavior and belief systems of the members of a culture, and gradually act in accordance with its norms (Brown et al., 1989). The term ordinary practices of a culture is defined as those actions that are carried out collectively by a community of practice, or a group of individuals who share a common motive, to achieve a defined and collective purpose. These practices are considered ordinary because they happen in day-to-day life, and are shaped by day-to-day events and contexts. Authentic activities, or ordinary practices of a culture, would include things such as a town meeting or a yoga class – regular, daily life events where participants share a common motive and work together as a collective to achieve their objectives.

According to Brown et al. (1989, activity provides experience for learners, and produces products that are “indexicalized” (p. 31) as representations of the learner’s experiences. The term “indexicalized” refers to how a learner categorizes each experience uniquely, based on the specific context in which the experience takes place. Perceptions resulting from actions are a central feature in both learning and activity. How a person perceives an activity may be determined both by tools that person uses to carry
out the activity and the tools’ appropriated use – but what that person perceives contributes to how they act and learn. I discuss tools in more detail later in this overview of the salient aspects of situated learning theory. As Brown et al. explain, different activities produce different “indexicalized” (p.31) representations – not equivalent, universal ones. Thus, the activity that led to those representations plays a central role in learning (p. 31).

Situation

Situation is another significant aspect of the theory. A situation is defined as the awareness by which an individual determines his or her moment-by-moment reality (Harley, 1996). It is the individual who defines this moment-to-moment reality according to his or her unique interpretation and experience at that moment in time – the individual as an actor in the social world defines the reality he or she encounters (Harley, 1996) through his or her own lens and biography. A situation is always unique and creates an opportunity for learning to happen that cannot easily be transferred to a different situation (Wilson, 1993; Lave and Wenger, 1990). In other words, a situation uniquely influences how learning will take place and how activities will be carried out by members of a culture – the situation is what shapes the activities that members of a culture carry out and calls for a new set of assumptions and behaviors to be enacted by the members of a culture (Brown et al., 1989).

Situation is not simply another term for the immediate, physical context (Lave, 1991; Brown and Duguid, 1996). A situation needs to be understood in social and historical terms (Brown and Duguid, 1996). As Brown and Duguid explain (1996), two people together in a room are not inevitably in an identical situation, and the constraints
in that situation do not simply arise in and through such isolated interactions. The people and the constraints importantly have social and historical underpinnings, and these underpinnings need to be accounted for and understood in a situation.

As Dewey (1938) explained, the word interaction assigns equal rights to both factors of experience – the objective and internal conditions. Any normal experience is an interplay of these two sets of conditions. Taken together, or in their interaction, they form what is called a situation (p. 42, emphasis in original). Dewey further states that conceptions of situation and interaction are inseparable from each other – an experience is always what it is because of a transaction taking place between an individual and what, at the time, constitutes that individual’s environment (p. 43).

Dewey (1933) stated that thinking and learning are specific, in that different things suggest their own appropriate meanings, tell their own unique stories, and do this in very different ways with different persons. As Harley (1996) explains, the situated specificity of thought referred to by Dewey is both specific to the circumstances of a situation and the unique way that an individual constructs his or her reality. However, as Harley (1996) points out, that people come to agree on anything supports the position that learning in most settings can be a communal activity in that it is a sharing of an individual sense of developing knowledge, recognized as viable by the mutual agreement on the part of other participant individuals within a culture. Schoggen (1989; see Harley 1996) defines this as reciprocity among individuals and context.

Rorty (1989) argues for an understanding of such socially structured arenas as a fluid concept, subject to change in response to the defining activity of participants. Harley (1996) explains that what creates communal understanding in a context has to do
with the indexical links that are established through the collaboration of individuals and their ability to come to sufficiently similar interpreted conclusions. An example of an indexical link is how playing a game of poker involves specific rules and interpretations of those rules, no matter who is playing the game or where the game is being played. In other words, Blackjack employs the same rules no matter who is engaged in playing the game – the context in which the game is being played, which could differ depending on the location of the game or the level of the players, does not alter how the game is carried out by participants.

Harley (1996) states that the process of learning is not necessarily one whereby individuals make their knowledge their own independently of other contextual influences, but one in which they can make it their own in a community of others who recognize and share a sense of belonging and knowing within a context (Bruner, 1986). Harley (1996) further explains that in doing so, individuals learn an extensive set of specific common adaptations that organize and define relations among objects and people to form situations that they encounter (Cole, 1979; Lave, 1988).

**Tools**

Tools are another central aspect of situated learning theory that I apply to my study. Tools are the objects that individuals use to carry out an activity – they are used to facilitate the fulfillment of a motive. For example, a motive for an individual could be to lose weight, and the activity to carry out that motive could be participation in a dieters group. A tool that this dieters group could use is a scale, in order to track weekly weight loss and record changes. The scale acts as a tool in this situation, because it motivates the
group to remain accountable for weight loss and acts as a motivator to keep the group focused on the activity of weight loss.

As Brown et al. (1989) explain, tools share several significant features with knowledge: they can only be fully understood through actual use, and using them entails both changing the user’s view of the world and adopting the belief system of the culture in which they are used (p. 22). They further explain that people who use tools actively rather than just acquire them – meaning, they understand how the tool applies to a particular situation in order to solve a problem – build an increasingly rich implicit understanding of the world in which they use the tools and of the tools themselves (p. 23). The understanding, both of the world and of the tool, continually changes as a result of their interaction (p. 23). Learning and acting are indistinct, learning being a continuous, life-long process resulting from acting in situations (p. 23).

As Brown at al. (1989) illustrate, the occasions and conditions for the use of a tool arise directly out of the context of activities of each community that uses the tool, framed by the way the members of that community see the world (p. 23). In other words, the community and its viewpoint determine how the tool is used. An example Brown at al. (1989) provide is that carpenters and cabinet makers use a chisel differently – it is the same tool, but its use is completely different and thus this particular tool cannot be applied in a universal way to all situations. Because tools and the way they are used reflect the particular accumulated insights of communities, it is not possible to use a tool appropriately without understanding the community or culture in which it is used.
Community of learners

In situated learning theory, a community of learners is a group of people who participate in activities that share a common learning goal. Socio cultural practice is a group of people who come together as a community and whose activities are rooted in social interaction; meaning that one member of that community cannot achieve a goal without the help and involvement of the other members. It is the community that creates a socio cultural practice.

In this concept, Lave and Wenger (1991) explain that a person’s intentions to learn are engaged in and the meaning of learning is configured through the process of becoming a full participant in what they call a socio cultural practice. This means that a person sets out to become a member of a specific group that is comprised of individuals who are working together to attain a goal – and that group forms the socio cultural practice to which the newcomer wishes to belong.

The term community of learners denotes a locus for understanding social practice (Brown and Duguid, 1996). Community does not have to be a warm, friendly, cohesive group of individuals to be a community of learners (Brown and Duguid, 1996; Williams, 1976). In fact, communities of learners can be, and often are, diffuse, fragmented, and contentious. A community of learners acts as the boundary lines within which a group works towards achieving a common goal.
Limitations of situated learning theory

Although I am using situated learning theory as the main theoretical framework for my study, I wish also to critique some of the theory’s shortcomings, particularly as they relate to how participants in education abroad programs experience context. I discuss some limitations of certain aspects of situated learning theory in terms of several of its central tenets about learning and its relationship to cognition, as presented by others in the literature.

Jarvis (1987) questions the extent to which individuals are the agents in creating the social situations or whether they are reacting to the pressures created by the social structures (p. 66). In situated learning theory, the emphasis on how learning occurs rests
on the community of practice acting as the agent (Lave and Wenger, 1991). Jarvis explains that individuals may be agents in some situations and reactors in others and their motivation to learn in any situation may differ according to the role that they have played in creating it (p. 66). This points out a problem with situated learning theory in that there is no real attempt to understand how the individual contributes to the way in which learning occurs within the community of learners. I discuss this more in detail in my overview of supporting theories.

Jarvis also states that it should not be assumed that people will learn more when they are pro-active since they may only be pro-active in situations with which they are familiar, so that they take for granted a great deal that occurs (p. 67). Jarvis explains that in contrast, the unfamiliarity of specific situations may act as a spur to learning so reactive situations may result in people learning a great deal (p. 67). This point also addresses a limitation of situated learning theory, in that the theory does not place emphasis on the motives of the individual in learning. Again, my overview of supporting theories addresses this limitation.

As Engestrom and Cole (1997) point out in situated learning, the way in which individuals become part of a community of learners seems to have one dominant direction of movement, namely from the periphery of the novices toward the center dominated by the well-established, competent masters (p. 306). They explain that the practice itself is depicted as stable and relatively unchanging (p. 306). They state that not only is the individual who is entering the new community of learners developing, but the practices in which he or she is involved develop too (p. 306). In situated learning theory, this process of entering into a community of learners is presented as a rather stable and
predictable process, which is a limitation that I address again by incorporating supporting theories that examine this process as a more dynamic and unpredictable process.

Engestrom (1987) explains that the development of collective activity systems is intimately interwoven with the emergence of novel actions by individuals, and that it is in this interpenetration that novel motives, cultural models, and collective movements are initiated. A limitation of situated learning theory is the lack of concern with the way in which the individual shapes his or her situation, tools, activities, and community of learners – in other words, situated learning theory does not attempt to understand the way in which the individual contributes to the formation of his or her context.

Another issue I wish to point as a limitation of situated learning theory is the often interchangeably used terms cognition and learning. In fact, I was initially confused by the distinction between situated learning theory and situated cognition theory. As Kirshner and Whitson (1997) explain, the central philosophical assumption against which situated cognition theories struggle is the functionalist belief in mind-body dualism (Lave, 1988). They state that viewing the world of a person’s ideas, beliefs, and intellectual knowledge as autonomous – essentially disconnected from their lived experience, and therefore from their socio cultural context – provides broadly for a devaluing of lived experience in favor of abstracted contemplative activity (p.4). They further state that within a framework of situated cognition theory, despite the pragmatic realization that knowledge entails lived practices and not just accumulated information, putting into operation educational plans that seriously consider students’ experience remains a mysterious assignment for many educators (p. 4).
Related theories: Constructivism and Activity Theory

For the purpose of this study, I present aspects of some other theories that address the limitations I have identified in situated learning theory. Specifically, I draw upon elements of the theories of constructivism and activity theory in order to further develop my own use of the key components that I have identified in situated learning theory as defining context in learning: activity, tools, situation, and community of learners.

Constructivism and context in learning

The notion of identity formation is where constructivism enhances and adds to situated learning (Wilson & Meyers, 2000). Also, the concepts of assimilation and accommodation – where an individual uses what he/she already knows and then incorporates new knowledge into his/her framework, and adopts a new identity – these concepts, which were developed by Jean Piaget (1950), are most notably linked to constructivist theory in the literature and are explained differently than in situated learning theory. Situated learning theory uses the term “legitimate peripheral participation” to explain these processes of assimilation and accommodation, but I am not interested in applying the concept of legitimate peripheral participation in my study, because I am not interested in examining how the participants begin as a novice and enter into a higher level of engagement in their community of learners as is described in situated learning theory as the process of legitimate peripheral participation.

The concept of identity formation being a result of the processes of assimilation and accommodation is strongly emphasized in constructivist theory and this concept is what I use in my study to enhance understanding of context for participants in education abroad programs. In constructivist theory, people’s notion of self – of continuing identity,
separate from others yet belonging to various groups – is a constructed artifact with many uses that develops and changes over time. People have multiple identities, which can serve as tools for acting in the world (Wilson & Meyers, 2000).

More specifically, I explore in my study how accommodation can be understood as the mechanism by which failure leads to learning. When we act on the expectation that the world operates in one way and it violates our expectations, we often fail. By accommodating this new experience and reframing our model of the way the world works, we learn from the experience of failure (Piaget, 1950). This concept of failure is not emphasized in situated learning theory, but is accounted for in constructivist theory. Failure represents an important issue for understanding how individuals deal with their situation in a way that becomes productive and useful to that individual. In my study, I examine how participants in an education abroad program cope with this failure and accommodate new understanding in the situations in which they are located.

Activity theory and context in learning

In activity theory, it is the object that shapes the actions of participants within that community, and over time, forms the dispositions and identity of the members of that community (Hung and Chen, 2002). The division of labor (or roles) and tools involved in mediating toward an object assists in shaping the identity of those members who use the tools and perform their roles and functions (Hung and Chen, 2002). It is the transformation of the object into an outcome that motivates the existence of an activity (Hung and Chen, 2002; Hung and Wong, 2000). I am interested in how activity theory emphasizes the division of labor within communities of learners and use this aspect of the theory to better understand how participants in my study act accordingly within their new
community of learners. Specifically, I am interested in who determines the use of a tool (both what is used as a tool and how it is used) within a community of learners, and how this determination of tool use impacts the dynamics of the community of learners in question. I am also interested in how the rules developed by the community of learners impact the interactions of the participants with that community.

In closer analysis of situated learning theory, there is a tendency to look only at a collective perspective, rather than the perspective of the individual as she relates to the collective group she joins (Engestrom and Cole, 1997). Social world as a unit of analysis may easily lead to a neglect of the perspective of an individual subject, whereas mediated action has difficulties in constructing the perspective of a community (Engestrom and Cole, 1997). Activity theory (Vygotsky, 1978; Leont’ev, 1978, 1981; Cole & Engestrom, 1997) may be seen as one attempt to overcome this distinction between collectively and individually based units of analysis (Engestrom and Cole, 1997). Activity theory attempts to provide a basis for understanding and explaining the connection between individual learner and the community in which the learner exists because it is concerned with the way in which an individual mediates her role in a community using tools in order to transform an object into an outcome. This makes activity theory a stronger basis for comprehending the nature of situated learning given the theory’s explanation of how the relationship actually works between and individual learner and his or her collective community.

Benefits of paying attention to context in learning

Context and its relationship to learning is important for educators who are concerned with how learners acquire knowledge through enculturation within a
community of learners, or within a social environment. Learning from a community and the appropriation of an identity according to that practice have been gaining currency in recent studies on social cultural perspectives of the mind – where mind and environment (social, cultural, and physical context) – are deeply intertwined or interwoven (Hung and Chen, 2002). Enculturation means that people’s identity or behavior changes through participation in an activity within a community, and in the process, become prepared to engage in subsequent similar activities (Hung and Chen, 2002, p. 248).

The nature of the interactions among learners, the tools they use within these interactions, the activity itself, and the situation in which the activity takes place all shape learning (Hansman, 2001). Lave (1996) argues that it is not enough to “add situated contexts to learning experiences…a more promising alternative lies in treating relations among people, tools, activity as they are given in social practice (p. 7). That suggests that real-world contexts, where there are communities of learners, tools, activities, and situations, make the most meaningful learning environments (Hansman, 2001).

Therefore, examining the contexts in which students abroad spend their time and make meaning of their experiences would be useful to educators concerned about how to maximize and best understand the value of learning for these students.

**Typology of education abroad programs**

Education abroad programs, also called international exchange programs, represent a major and significant segment of international education (Arum, 1987; Goodwin and Nacht, 1988; Goodwin, 1988; National Task Force on Undergraduate Education Abroad, 1990). Much of the literature on international exchange programs focuses exclusively on study abroad as the primary vehicle in which students cross
cultures to learn in a formal educational setting (Arum, 1987; Engle and Engle, 2003; Goodwin and Nacht, 1988; Hess, 1997). Study abroad is often defined as a formally-organized academic program, in which students are taught by a U.S. faculty member who travels with the students and acts as the program director, or who are taught by foreign faculty hired by the U.S. institution that is sending its own students abroad (Arum, 1987). Less vigorously discussed in the literature are other forms of international educational exchange, such as internships or short-term study programs, which encompass either summer study or a short, faculty-led study tour (Chieffo and Griffiths, 2003; Engle and Engle, 2003; Hanningan, 2003; Holland, 2003; Honigsblum, 2002; Vondrova, 2003). However, these types of programs have become increasingly central to international educational exchange, and represent a significant movement within it (Goodwin 1988; Holland, 2003; Hopkins, 1999).

It is the intent of this part of the literature review to explain the meaning and constituent parts of education abroad programs by presenting an overview of the literature. This review presents the characteristic features, educational benefits, and challenges of various types of education abroad programs. These programs include study abroad, and more specifically semester or academic year study abroad, international internships, and short-term study abroad programs, all of which are the most commonly presented forms of education abroad programs found in the literature. In addition, I point out where each type of education abroad program accounts for how participants experience context in learning – meaning, activity, situation, tools, and community of learners - and where the programs do not address context in learning for participants.
Semester and Academic Year Study Abroad

Total immersion

Semester or academic year abroad programs are the most frequently discussed forms of education abroad in the literature on this aspect of international education (Carlson et al. 1990; Engle and Engle, 2003; Goodwin and Nacht, 1998; Hess, 1997; Laubscher, 1994). Goodwin and Nacht (1998) provide a comprehensive overview of the differences in how semester and academic year study abroad programs are structured and delivered.

Engle and Engle (2003) create a typology of study abroad programs that describes the constituent parts found in various program models, and focus much (though not all) of their discussion on semester and academic year study abroad programs. Because Goodwin and Nacht and Engle and Engle present such detailed descriptions of the elements of the different types of semester and academic year abroad programs (that is, what levels exist among different semester and academic year abroad programs and how they are comprised), and no other such richly descriptive typologies are found in the literature on international educational exchange, these works will be presented as the main sources for comparing and contrasting the constituent components of semester and academic year abroad programs. Additional sources will be used to describe the constituent components, benefits, and challenges of the other international educational exchange programs being discussed in this review, internships and short-term programs.

Goodwin and Nacht (1998) further explain that this model is often considered the ideal among faculty and study abroad directors, who believe that it provides the most
authentic experience for American students, and who also see study abroad participants as cultural ambassadors, who will be judged by their ability to perform by overseas scholars and students (p. 35). Furthermore, Goodwin and Nacht assert that some faculty argue that weaker and less well prepared students simply cannot benefit from an educational experience overseas – from tourism perhaps, but not from a serious intellectual challenge (p. 35). Unless students can engage fully in a foreign culture through access to the language, higher education, and an understanding of their surroundings, students will not be able to comprehend what they see (p. 35).

Goodwin and Nacht (1988) also present the critics’ view of this total immersion model, who complain that the rigor and restrictive requirements limit this type of program to a very select few, and object to the very elitist nature of this program that makes it so appealing to its faculty supporters (p. 37). They explain that the critics say that the theoretical base of this kind of program is flawed, as there is no evidence in the social sciences that direct participant participation is a more effective pedagogical or analytical technique than, say, indirect observation, and, moreover, that the objective of foreign study should be not to create a bicultural person, able to reflect the culture of another nation as well as his or her own, but rather to form a truly transnational student able to assess critically the cultures of all nations (p. 37).

Finally, Goodwin and Nacht (1988) report that the critics point out that nearly all systems of higher education around the world have too many structural differences from the American system to make widespread direct exchanges practical (p. 37). They further detail that the critics believe there are often no equivalents to college life, personal advising, required class attendance, or regular tests and examinations in total immersion
programs, and that the problem of direct credit transfer can be insurmountable (p. 38).

According to Goodwin and Nacht, critics illustrate that this type of program, although often considered an academic utopia among faculty, can be much too restrictive to be of much use to the majority of American students (p. 36).

Engle and Engle (2003) present a typology of study abroad programs, and call Goodwin and Nacht’s “total immersion program” a “cross-cultural immersion program” (p. 10). In fact, they create what they call a hierarchical model of different levels of study abroad (p. 9), starting with the lowest form, level one: study tour; moving up to level two: short-term study, then level three: cross-cultural contact program; next to level four: cross-cultural encounter program, and finally ending with level five: cross-cultural immersion program (p. 10). The other levels within this hierarchy will be presented later.

Engle and Engle’s level five cross-cultural immersion program contains many of the same elements as Goodwin and Nacht’s total immersion model, but with some notable differences. First they explain that participants in this type of program do course work uniquely in the host language, organized in partial or complete direct local enrollment, with the target language replacing English in all circumstances, both curricular and extracurricular (p. 12). They state that participants are housed directly in the community, usually through a home-stay wherein the student becomes an active member of the host family, and that the duration of this program would be at least one semester, and ideally an entire academic year (p. 13). This incorporation of a home-stay where the student becomes an active member of the host family echoes the process of becoming a member of a community of practice.
Where Engle and Engle (2002) differ from Goodwin and Nacht (1988) in their description of a total immersion program is that they include students who choose not to do traditional academic work at an overseas institution, but instead are integrated directly into the host culture through independent projects, service learning, or professional internships (this will be discussed in greater detail later). Additionally, Engle and Engle distinguish this level by including the presence of a mentor or cross-cultural facilitator who accompanies the student’s adaptation process with concrete orientation information and guides reflection upon the student’s direct cultural encounters by helping to analyze the cross-cultural elements they reveal (p. 13). This facilitator represents a way of making the community of practice more accessible and open to the student as a newcomer. Additionally, the students’ direct cultural encounters can be viewed as tools that allow them to enter their new community of practice overseas. Goodwin and Nacht do not include such a mentor or facilitator for students at this level; rather, they explain that students should be left to fend for themselves and not receive any special treatment or American-style educational support services while abroad.

Partial immersion

The partial immersion model, as described by both Goodwin and Nacht (1988) and Engle and Engle (2003), presents a picture of students who, although exposed to a certain level of cultural authenticity, are nonetheless held back from a complete cultural integration, unlike those students who participate in a level five, cross-cultural immersion program. Partial immersion programs, by design, are almost always limited to no more than one semester in length, according to both sets of authors. Again, although there is some overlap in how Goodwin and Nacht describe the characteristic features, benefits,
and challenges of these types of programs and how Engle and Engle classify partial immersion programs, there are also some notable differences.

Goodwin and Nacht (1988) describe several models of partial immersion programs. One way is to place American students in schools exclusively designed for foreigners, which are freestanding institutions often linked (though not always) to a local university and operated with the special needs of non-natives in mind (p. 38). Another form of this model is to provide a resident advisor from the home college or university who lives near the students abroad and who is charged with ensuring the student’s welfare, by providing academic and personal counseling, negotiation for living facilities, interpretation of the local curriculum, and transferring grades back to the U.S. home institution (p. 39). This model does not view the resident advisor as a central actor in the activities of the student, but rather as a facilitator who assists the student in negotiating his or her environment. This potentially limits the ability of the student to fully enter a new community of practice abroad.

Another model of partial immersion described by Goodwin and Nacht (1988) involves the construction of a facility abroad to allow for only occasional and selective immersion in what they call the river of foreign higher education (p. 42). In this model, the U.S. institution sets up a special program overseas, sometimes pejoratively called an enclave, which uses U.S. teaching staff and U.S. curricula and teaching methods, with virtually no regard for local customs and practices in higher education (p. 42). Goodwin and Nacht further explain that these types of programs are designed to expose American students to the foreign system of higher education only from afar, under controlled conditions, and with ultimate responsibility for quality and content resting with the U.S.
institution (p. 42). They conclude that the primary focus of these programs is upon the culture and artifacts of the region where they are located, explored from the stance of an outside observer (p. 42). Context in this example is not defined in the way that I have for this study – there is no emphasis on helping students to engage in activities with a community of practice that is comprised of individuals who are from the country in which the student resides for the education abroad program.

For Engle and Engle (2003), level four, Cross-Cultural Encounter programs, distinguish themselves by their requirements of pre-advanced to advanced entry-level host language competence, severely reduced reliance on English language course work, and home stay rental housing for a period of a semester or academic year (p. 12). They continue to explain that students at this level would take their class work in an island student-group context, with the level of immersion limited by frequent reliance on English among members of the student group (p. 12). Finally, they state that while participants adopt behavior with norms neither strictly American nor strictly faithful to the host culture – students often make significant progress in the recognition of and adaptation to local cultural rhythms (p. 12). Here is a hint of a model that accounts for a student becoming part of a community of practice overseas.

Engle and Engle (2003) present level three, the Cross-Cultural Contact program, as a program type that would organize course work on-site for the student group based on that particular group’s educational level, and mixing classes in English with some limited courses in intermediate target-language instruction (p. 12). They further explain that for students wanting host-family contact without the commitment of full integration, they can choose a short home stay visit or full home stay rental for the time period that they are
abroad (no more than one semester at this level), without an expectation for the student to become integrated into the host family (p. 12). Here is an example of a program that does not address the impact of community of practice when a student lives with a new family in a new culture. However, host-family contact can be viewed as a tool for learning for the student, in particular within a foreign language environment where contact with a host family can help to facilitate better foreign language learning for the student.

Engle and Engle (2003) state that a potential benefit of this level is that even though participants are guided primarily by their own cultural norms and usually draw their most positive memories from student group contact, some students can move toward meaningful, memorable exchanges with host nationals during the semester abroad. They state that those students who do move toward meaningful interaction with host nationals are often those who at the end of their semester recognize their progress and sometimes plan subsequently for a more in-depth international exchange opportunity (p. 12). This example accounts for the role of activity for the participant – by engaging in organized, intentional activities, the student has the opportunity to more fully realize the impact of their situation as well as their community of practice.

The main difference in how Goodwin and Nacht (1988) and Engle and Engle (2003) present their descriptions of partial immersion programs is that Engle and Engle provide support for possible benefits of this type of program, whereas Goodwin and Nacht point out a more limited (in terms of benefits for students) and less optimistic view of partial immersion programs. Goodwin and Nacht suggest that partial immersion programs are a far less strenuous immersion in a foreign educational system, under
conditions that safeguard life and limb, and that presume to provide students with a civilizing and liberating educational experience where the ramp of challenge and rigor should not be too steep (p. 38).

Other studies on semester and academic year study abroad

Although thus far the literature reviewed on the various forms of semester and academic year abroad programs has focused on the detailed Goodwin and Nacht (1988) and Engle and Engle (2003) typologies, there is some additional literature that gives limited descriptions of what constitute these types of programs, although only to contribute a working definition that is part of an investigation of another aspect of these programs. There is no other literature that focuses as its main purpose on what makes up a semester or academic year abroad in and of itself; rather, brief working definitions of semester and academic year abroad programs are generally included as part of a larger-scale presentation of outcomes and measurements of these programs (Carlson et al., 1990, Institute of International Education, 1988; Dwyer, 2004; Akande and Slawson, 2000). This dearth of in-depth analyses of what constitutes semester and academic year abroad programs contributes to the lack of a consistent and accepted typology in international educational exchange programs, and more specifically for semester and academic year abroad programs.

For example, Carlson et al. (1990) conducted a much-cited study that aimed to measure the long-term impact of a semester or year of study abroad, but do not give a description of what constitutes the programs themselves, in terms of the settings for the programs, length of time or administrative structure for the programs. Other aims of studies on semester and academic year abroad programs include identifying the merits of
the programs (American Council on Education, 1997), listing problems and obstacles in developing programs (Goodwin, 1998), providing figures on who participates in these programs (Council on International Educational Exchange, 1988), explaining why and how to expand programs and increase diversity among the participants (National Task Force on Undergraduate Study Abroad, 1990), and describing how to help students to make the most of their program (Laubscher, 1994). However, none of these studies or reports gives a description of what makes up a semester or academic year abroad program, thus further adding to the confusion over what constitutes working and agreed-upon program models.

**International internships**

Thus far this review of the literature has focused on presenting and discussing a typology of semester and academic year abroad programs, which represent a significant option for students to participate in international educational exchange. However, there are other ways students can and do participate in international educational exchange, and one emerging example is through international internships (Holland, 2003; Hannigan, 2003; Goodwin and Nacht, 1988; Engle and Engle, 2003). The literature on international internships is very limited, which makes it challenging to identify and discuss a typology of this type of international educational exchange program. However, there is some discussion in the literature on the benefits, challenges, and outcomes of international internships, which provides the necessary elements to create a working typology.

Holland (2003) defines the term internship as an experiential learning opportunity that builds upon the theoretical foundations learned in the classroom and that exposes students to the type of work individuals at entry-level perform in an industry they have
considered pursuing, most for a duration of 10 to 12 weeks (p. 200). As far as connecting the term internship with the international context, Holland explains that the three to six month duration of most international internships allows students to move beyond the status of a casual tourist, and instead live the life of locals in the overseas environment, fully immersed in its customs and practices (p. 200). This aspect directly points to a community of practice, as students in this type of program experience their day-to-day life surrounded by people who create different types of communities of practice: one could be the community of practice at the internship site itself, and the other could be the broader community of practice in which the student lives abroad.

Goodwin and Nacht (1988), though they focus primarily on a discussion of the attributes, challenges, and limitations of semester and academic year abroad programs, also discuss the necessary elements of international internships. Continuing with the metaphor of students facing a river of foreign higher education and how to swim in it, they categorize international internships as “row your own boat” (p. 46), where students participate directly in the overseas culture and are in intimate contact with its facts and circumstances (p. 47). They report that they have encountered a wide variety of styles of internship: some are conducted during the academic year, some during the summer; some are unstructured, other require a student to keep a log and submit a report; some are combined with course work, others stand alone; some bear academic credit, while others do not (p. 47). They conclude that internships are one good way of introducing study abroad to students from fields that previously stood aloof or were not given good opportunities in traditional semester or academic year abroad programs (p. 48).
Engle and Engle (2003) explain that students choosing not to do traditional academic work but integrated directly into the host culture through internships would be classified as level five, Cross-Cultural Immersion program (the highest level in their hierarchy of international educational exchange programs). They show internships as being programs that give provisions for deep cultural interaction and experiential learning (p. 10). This mention of deep cultural interaction and experiential learning suggests that the community of practice for the student in an internship, as well as the situation he or she engages with during the internship, the tools he or she applies to achieve learning during the internship, and the activities in which the student participates, are all central to the experience.

Hannigan (2001) points out that virtually no research has examined what he calls “overseas practical experiences” (p. 21), which is another term for international internships. What he does suggest is that one research question about overseas participants in practical experiences that needs to be addressed is “why do certain students pursue the overseas practical experience option?” (p. 21). This question suggests that the international internship is an area needing much further empirical investigation in order to better contribute to the knowledge base of all international education programs.

**Short-term study abroad programs**

Short-term study abroad programs are a popular choice for many students who wish to go abroad as part of their education (Chieffo and Griffiths, 2004a; Vondrova, 2003; Chieffo and Griffiths, 2004b), but who may perceive that they do not have adequate time or resources in which to participate in a longer international exchange
program (Chieffo and Griffiths, 2004a). The very limited literature on short-term study abroad programs, which include examples such a summer term or a faculty-led study tour lasting no more than a few weeks, mainly focuses on outcomes and benefits, if any, of these types of programs, and often to serve as a point of comparison to the more commonly assessed semester and academic year abroad programs (Vondrova, 2003; Chieffo and Griffiths, 2004a; Chieffo and Griffiths, 2004b). There is very little discussion of what actually constitutes these types of programs, again adding to the lack of agreement on terminology and a lack of consistency in defining program types. What is mentioned in terms of a working typology is that most short-term study abroad programs last between one and eight weeks (Vondrova, 2003), and are highly varied and individually tailored to meet student needs, as well as faculty and institutional interests (Chieffo and Griffiths, 2004a; Chieffo and Griffiths, 2004b).

Goodwin and Nacht (1988) and Engle and Engle (2003) do make brief mention of short-term study abroad programs as part of their larger discussions focused mainly on semester and academic year abroad programs. Goodwin and Nacht describe the study tour (p. 44), which they explain makes relatively little use of the local environment in which it is located. They state that this type of program can be either inter-semester special projects, summer sojourns, or other forms of speedy visits to a foreign area for which very limited or no preparation is required. They mention that faculty members are most dubious about this category of study abroad, and as a result of this low esteem for such programs among faculty and administrators, correctable problems frequently do not get handled and the very considerable opportunities for constructive contribution that they can yield are not recognized and exploited (p. 45). Goodwin and Nacht conclude
that institutions need all the help they can get in determining the legitimacy and designing the details of such programs (p. 45). In this model, there is no mention of the role of community or activities in which participants would engage to further their understanding of the overseas environment.

Engle and Engle (2003) use their classification scheme to describe the features of short-term study abroad programs via levels one, which they call the “study tour” (p. 10), and level two, “short-term study” (p. 10). In the level one study tour program, field trips and other such site visits of limited duration would occur, and cultural encounters leading to adaptation are not a goal (p. 10). They explain that for many students, such tours constitute a first international exposure with an experience of greater intellectual density than that offered by simple tourism (p. 11). In a level two short-term study program, students participate in on-site summer or in other short-term programs that offer elementary and intermediate target language instruction and subject-matter course work in English (p. 11). They state that the typical four to six week summer course allows students a first exposure to language and civilization in its cultural setting while, in theory, acting as a possible springboard for a longer and more in-depth overseas experience later (p. 12). Engle and Engle provide a more positive description of potential benefits of short-term study abroad programs then do Goodwin and Nacht (1988), who see such programs as not making any conscious effort to engage the local culture, but who are “just there” (p. 44). The literature on short-term programs does not make an attempt to present how students might interact with the local culture while abroad, as it assumes that there is little to no significant interaction among students who participate in these programs.
Empirical studies on learning in education abroad programs

There is a greater amount of empirical literature on education abroad programs that focuses solely on predetermined outcomes, rather than on the processes that lead to any outcomes of learning (Shougee, 1999). Shougee (1999) explains that studies that consider outcomes have generally been based on causal/comparative designs that attempt to measure knowledge, skills, and attitudes that students develop by participating in an education abroad program (Bennett, 1986; Lambert, 1994). He further states that some studies also associate the knowledge, skills, and attitudes developed during study abroad in terms of creating intercultural, multicultural, and/or global competence (Carter, 1994; Lambert, 1994). He also points out that research directed at discovering outcomes assumes that an education abroad program is an intervention that leads to a set of measurable, fixed outcomes (p. 44), and that researchers bent on identifying measurable outcomes seek to explain their results by indicating the relationships between cause and effect (p. 44). Shougee states that four broad categories of learning emerge from quantitative studies on education abroad programs: global awareness, global competence, intercultural competence, and language acquisition (p. 44). None of these empirical studies examine context and its components, nor do they attempt to define the meaning of context in an education abroad program.

One major study measuring the impact of education abroad programs is that of Carlson and Widaman (1988), who adapted Barrow’s (1981) much-cited test, comprised of a 96-question instrument that tested such global knowledge areas as international aspects of the environment, food, health, energy, human rights, and several other topics to create a base-line knowledge of what constitutes global awareness. Carlson and
Widaman (1988), in adapting Barrow’s test, studied the impact of an education abroad program on 450 undergraduate students from three universities, and included a control group of 450 students who had not participated in an education abroad program. They found that the education abroad group showed higher levels of cross-cultural interest, cultural cosmopolitanism, and awareness of international political issues than the control group who remained on campus (Shougee, 1999). This study did not, however, look at which components of these education abroad programs impacted these outcomes; in other words, there was no attempt to define the components of the education abroad programs that lead to the outcomes they measured.

Another much-cited study by Hammer, Gudykunst & Wisements (1978) conducted survey research involving 50 education abroad program students in order to identify what they called the imperative conditions for the formation of intercultural competence. These conditions include the ability to deal with psychological stress, the ability to effectively communicate with others, and the ability to establish meaningful interpersonal relationships. The study did not take into account how the context of learning (ie. Situation, tools, activity, or community of practice) for participants shape these imperative conditions for participants to become interculturally competent. Shougee (1999) concludes that the quantitative studies use large sample sizes to attempt to increase what he calls “generalizability”, and that their central focus is to examine “facts” (quotations from author) about students, their opinions, and their attitudes for the purpose of systematically describing characteristics about a given population (p. 44). He calls these studies “extrinsic”, which are “generalizable” and “solid” (quotations from author) outcomes of education abroad programs (p. 43).
These systematic characteristics that other researchers have identified are often what additional quantitative studies list as the desirable and expected learning outcomes for education abroad programs. Shougee (1999) suggests that learning outcomes that are less generalizable and more embedded in students’ subjective meaning of education abroad programs come from qualitative studies, which he calls “intrinsic” outcomes (p. 55). He describes these intrinsic outcomes as dynamically evolving learning processes, subjective and personal to each individual student. In effect, the qualitative studies on education abroad programs focus almost exclusively on the processes, rather than the outcomes, of learning. However, the processes that are described and analyzed in the qualitative studies on education abroad programs do not include consideration of how context affects or has any direct relationship with the processes of learning for the participants. My study aims to describe the contextual factors of learning for participants in education abroad programs.

One well known qualitative study conducted by Laubscher (1994) aims to examine the processes of learning among education abroad program participants that occur outside of the formal classroom. Laubscher explains that participants in education abroad programs have the opportunity to immerse themselves in a living laboratory that forces them to become actively involved in the learning process on every level – intellectual, psychological, and emotional (p. xiv). He uses a qualitative case study approach based on participant interviews to find out how students on their own use their out-of-class experiences to enhance their learning. This study does take into account the influence of time spent immersed in a community of learners (although the term community of learners is not used), but does not attempt to describe the context in which
learning occurs for the participants who are interviewed, and does not view the out-of-class experiences as tools the participants apply in order to learn during their education abroad program. The study removes these out-of-class experiences from the overall learning that happens for the participants, viewing them as separate and distinct from other forms of learning.

Furthermore, Laubscher (1994) points out that most research on education abroad programs deals only with the impacts and outcomes of participation in education abroad programs, with little to no attention paid to examining out-of-class learning activities as a separate and distinct component of the education abroad program experience (p. 8). He adds that education abroad research has paid little attention to the processes that produce the outcomes of learning (p. 8). He states that the outcomes-based research has been inconclusive in connecting learning outcomes directly to the education abroad program experience, and that those research efforts have failed specifically to address the question of process. He defines process in an education abroad program as what students actually do, especially in the non-curricular domain, and how those activities contribute to the generation of desired learning outcomes (p. 117). Again, the study is concerned with what constitutes learning for participants in education abroad programs, and how that learning occurs, but rather than tying learning into all facets of a participant’s experiences, the study instead focuses on explaining that more meaningful learning for participants happens only in the domain of their out-of-class experiences.

Shougee (1999) aims to explore the in-depth experiences of education abroad program students by employing a multiple case-study design that considers the participants as representative cases. His study’s conceptual framework assumes that the
curriculum of study abroad emerges from each participant’s reflection on his or her lived experiences, and also assumes that study abroad is a holistic learning process involving three temporal phases: before, during, and after (p. ii). He explains that participating in an education abroad program is a process that leads to academic and personal change, and he further states that it is a process that moves participants toward a transformation of perspective and development of self. Shougee states:

“By conducting this study I am hoping to provide an alternative approach to study abroad research. My approach conflates students’ experience of the study abroad journey and the meaning they attribute to it. By using qualitative research I want to present the quality of students’ study abroad experience in their own words. My approach is quite different from the dominant trend in study abroad research. Regrettably, survey studies based on causal/comparative designs and the scaling of attitudes continues to dominate study abroad research” (p. 64).

Shougee points out that the majority of studies in the field of education abroad focus on educational outcomes and measurements, and not on an understanding of what happens to participants to contribute to those outcomes. Not only does he illustrate that qualitative studies concerned with understanding the learning processes as they unfold for each participant in an education abroad program are uncommon, but he also shows that it is indeed unlikely to find much, if any, research that attempts to examine at once the processes of learning in education abroad programs and the outcomes that the learning processes produce in the participants during the education abroad program experience. He effectively demonstrates that studies generally focus on one side of the coin or the other, staying in separate camps and disregarding the interrelationship of learning processes and outcomes in the context of an education abroad program. Although Shougee (1999) asks participants to describe processes of learning in their education abroad programs, he does not describe which elements constitute processes of learning
for the participants. In other words, he does not discuss any central elements that define learning processes among his participants, but rather discusses these processes as being very individualistic and difficult to articulate. My study describes how the elements of activity, situation, tools, and community of learners create context for participants in an education abroad program, and how that context affects learning.

Of those few studies on education abroad that do focus on processes that lead to learning and use learning theories to frame the studies, none of them frame the study from a situated learning theoretical perspective; rather, these studies use experiential and other learning theories to frame their approach. This is a problem because as explained earlier, experiential learning and other learning theories do not define or use context as their main framework to understand learning, nor do they focus on the centrality of participating in a community of learners and using tools and activity in situations to achieve learning as a central means to explain or understand learning.

Studies on education abroad programs do not examine the interplay of context and learning, and how participants make meaning within the context of their experience and how the context itself shapes and creates the learning experiences. The closest example is Laubscher’s 1994 study that looks at learning that occurs outside of the classroom. However, Laubscher’s study does not examine how learning occurs for participants as part of a socio cultural community, interacting as novices with experts and learning cues and systems from those experts within that community.

There is a lack of theoretical tie-in with adult learning theories in the education abroad program literature; most studies use educational psychology theories to explain their approach, which do not necessarily place learning as the central issue to examine in
education abroad programs. Additionally, there is also a lack of education abroad programs as a context for examining and understanding learning processes and experiences in the adult and higher education learning theory literature.

Also, there is very little empirical research in the adult education literature on context-based learning. As Hansman (2000) points out, the ideas of learning in context and situated cognition have yet to be fully explored and developed in adult education.

Finally, no studies on education abroad programs have used situated learning theory to frame their approach to understanding learning among program participants. An additional search in the literature for theoretical frameworks such as situated cognition, constructivism, socio cultural theory, and activity theory yielded no results in the empirical literature on education abroad programs.

Who is concerned with learning in context in education abroad programs

Education abroad program professionals at colleges and universities are responsible for sending students overseas and manage the development and execution of these programs. These professionals should concern themselves with the quality and impact of the students’ education abroad program. Most of these professionals focus on measuring the outcomes of learning for the students via questionnaires and “bubble-sheet” multiple choice surveys, but spend little to no time attempting to understand the context of learning for these students, and moreover, how the students’ context while abroad shapes and determines their learning. By not taking into account how the context that students are in and how those students interact and negotiate with their contexts affect and determine their experiences while abroad, professionals in the field are disregarding a major aspect of this type of educational experience.
This is a problem because not understanding the contexts of learning for these students limits the education abroad professional’s ability to fully address learning needs and development of students when they participate in an education abroad program. If students are not getting programs that are tailored to enhance their learning experiences and that do not take into account the importance that context plays in learning in education abroad (ie. how the activities, tools, situations, and communities of practice create learning for the participants), then education abroad is not providing a very rich experience for students as it claims to give them. Context is an integral aspect of education abroad programs and education abroad professionals need to develop programs that capitalize on the richness and depth that context provides for learning. In effect, context cannot be separated from the learning experiences that occur during education abroad programs for its participants; education abroad professionals should therefore consider context the highest priority in terms of program design and development if the goal is to enhance learning for the participants.

**Uniqueness of context in education abroad programs**

Context in education abroad programs warrants unique attention. Other educational programs have as their aim to engage students in their context as part of the program. An example of this is the Laboratory for Public Scholarship and Democracy, which is a program at a state university in the northeast United States in their Division of Undergraduate Education that facilitates public scholarship for students. The Laboratory defines public scholarship as a program that commits academic and creative work—including teaching, discovery, and artistic performance—to the practice of effective student and faculty engagement in public sovereignty and the democratic process.
Programs that are promoted by the laboratory include two that occur in an international setting: Engineers for a Sustainable World, which brings students into direct contact with problems in several developing countries to come up with sustainable solutions, and Monkey River Project, where students from a large state university in the northeast conducted three projects in women's leadership, ecotourism and integrated pest management in the Monkey River Village in Belize. These students were part of a course in the state university’s Department of Rural Sociology (the course was called “Central American Field Research”) and spent their Spring Break in Belize conducting the field research.

These programs are set up to engage student participants directly with the setting abroad and take into account the uniqueness of having students directly interact with communities in an overseas setting by having the students conduct much of the work in directly in that setting. These programs do not define themselves as education abroad programs, but rather as service-learning student programs. The context of being abroad is essential to the kinds of projects they engage in, but the context is only one element of a larger goal of students working on problem solving through active engagement with a community.

Education abroad programs differ from these service-learning programs because the goal of education abroad programs is to immerse student participants in the overseas setting in order to expose them to different cultural and social environments among people in a foreign country. This emphasis on immersing students in the foreign environment in education abroad programs is why context is so central to these programs.
Activity, tools, situation, and community of learners could all be considered central elements of education abroad programs, and are likely to differ from other educational programs that emphasize direct engagement with the setting because these elements are not made explicit to students who participate in them. In service learning programs, for example, students are informed that they will be heavily engaged with people from the local environment in which they carry out their work, so they expect to be affected by their interactions in a specific, defined way. In education abroad programs, because context is not clearly understood, student participants do not really know what their experiences of the context will mean for them and how they can best prepare for these experiences.
Purpose of the study

The purpose of the study is to describe learning that occurred among participants who engaged in a short-term education abroad program using a modified situated learning theoretical framework. Specifically, I asked participants to describe their experiences during their short-term education abroad program, and I analyzed their descriptions based on the four elements of context that I defined for the study in an education abroad program - activity, tools, situation, and community of learners. I examined how these elements of context related to learning for them. I applied this theoretical framework by looking at the ways in which participants described how they learned in their education abroad program. I also looked at the ways in which the descriptions of learning provided by the participants contribute to new ways of understanding learning in context in an education abroad program. For the study, I selected a specific case to examine one type of education abroad program that students can engage in, which was a short-term education abroad program where a group of students traveled as part of a course for one week. The unifying elements for this study are: 1) all participants were in a course that I taught, ENGR 301 (described later in the chapter), during the semester prior to when they participated in the short term education abroad program and 2) all participants experienced the short term education abroad program together as a group. Context is a key construct examined in this study.

For my study, I describe the relationship between the elements of context (listed above) and the learning participants experience in their education abroad program.
Research questions guiding this study are:

1) How do participants describe their education abroad experience?
2) What conceptions of contexts do these descriptions reveal?
3) In describing their experience what forms of learning do they discuss?
4) In describing their learning, what role do they accord context?

Applying the theoretical concepts in the study

Activity, tools, situation, and community of learners (discussed in Chapter Two) are the theoretical categories that define context in my study. Below is an illustration (Table 3.1) of how I examined these categories in the data.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories of theoretical concepts that define context</th>
<th>Method of examining theoretical concepts in data</th>
<th>Method of application of theoretical concepts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Activity</td>
<td>Identify examples of motive-driven, collective efforts</td>
<td>Categorize activities and discuss how they constitute learning for participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tools</td>
<td>Seek examples of when participants use artifacts, language, group communication</td>
<td>Describe tools used by participants and discuss how tools facilitate learning for them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Situation</td>
<td>Identify examples of points in time when the participants must make decisions about what they do and how they do things</td>
<td>Categorize situations that I observe and that participants describe, and analyze how these situations create learning for participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community of Learners</td>
<td>Seek examples of when participants experience the short-term program as an intact group</td>
<td>Categorize instances in the data where participants function as an intact group, and analyze how the group interactions facilitate learning</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The salient aspects of activity that I examined in my study include how a group of students who participated in a short term education abroad program describe the kinds of motive-driven, collective efforts (activities) they engaged in during their education abroad program, and how these activities happened – in other words, what were the features of these activities, and how did these activities unfold in the group setting of the short-term program.

I also examined activity in my study by looking at how students who participated in this education abroad program used various tools - such as artifacts, language, and other forms of group communication and group negotiation tactics - to produce their different learning experiences, and how they described their perception of what they learned from applying these various tools during their short-term education abroad program. Additionally, I looked to see how participants described what tools they used during their experiences in their education abroad program which helped them to learn. I examined how participants applied specific tools in particular settings in which they found themselves as part of their group activities during their education abroad program.

In my study, I looked to see how participants described situations during their participation in their short-term education abroad program. Situations are points in time when the participants had to make decisions about what they did and how they did things during their short-term program. I sought examples in my data when participants described their interpretation and experience of their identified situations at the moment in time in which the situation occurred, and how they described how they interacted as actors in the social world they were a part of during their program (Harley, 1996). The
participants’ descriptions of the situations in which they learned are a central element of my study.

Finally, I searched in my data for moments when participants described their experiences as part of a community of learners. The community of learners in this study is defined as the group of participants in this short-term education abroad program – the participants as a group made up a community of learners since they experienced the short-term program as a socially connected group throughout the entirety of the program.

A broader community around this smaller community of learners existed, and was made up of those with whom these students interacted as part of the short term education abroad program – in this case, the faculty and administrators who created and led the program abroad, the parents of the students who acted in a supporting role to these students, and the French students with whom this group interacted as part of the program. Therefore, there were at least two communities to which this group of participants belonged in this study – their own small group that was made up of just the nine student participants, and the larger community that was made up of these external members who served a vital role in influencing the experiences of this smaller group of participants in the program. For the purpose of this study, my core unit of analysis is the group of nine student participants with their particular experiences, whereas the larger communities around this core unit served as units of observation. I explain these units of analysis and observation in greater detail later in the chapter.

In terms of applying my theoretical framework to the data analysis, I also looked for moments where the students provided details about how, when, and where they experienced their community, and instances when they described what they learned from
having been a part of it. I sought details about the members of their identified community, and what roles the members of this community enacted.

As a result of this investigation, I have produced a detailed written overview of students’ learning experiences in a particular short-term education abroad program, which can serve as a guide for education abroad professionals in the field to develop programs that acknowledge, incorporate, and make active use of the elements of context that I have identified for the study.

Epistemic Orientation

Case study

My research design is structured as a case study, and I also use phenomenology and elements of grounded theory as guiding frameworks in collecting and analyzing the data. I have selected case study as the research design because I am interested in learning how this particular group of students experienced this specific short-term education abroad program. As Stake (1995) explains:

The real business of case study is particularization, not generalization. We take a particular case and come to know it well, not primarily as to how it is different from others but what it is, what it does. There is emphasis on uniqueness, and that implies knowledge of others that the case is different from, but the first emphasis is on understanding the case itself (p. 8).

Instrumental case study

More specifically, I am employing an instrumental case study approach because I wish to examine this short-term education abroad program as a particular type of education abroad program that possesses its own unique and particular attributes and structure that differs from the other types of education abroad programs that I outlined in Chapter Two (such as semester-length programs). I want to look at how students in this
type of program experience the program and how the program itself influences and contributes to the ways in which students learn.

Furthermore, I wish to maximize what we can learn about short-term education abroad programs as a model for all education abroad programs, and am choosing this particular case because I believe it will lead to a greater understanding of how students learn in this kind of program. This further supports the use of an instrumental case study approach (Stake, 1995) because I am interested in studying the case, not for its own sake, but to understand broader issues I have identified in chapter 2 regarding short-term education abroad programs. Finally, I have chosen a short term education abroad program to investigate because of the dearth of empirical research on this type of education abroad program, as outlined in Chapter Two of the study.

Rationale for selecting specific case under investigation

The case under investigation is a short-term education abroad program for first year engineering students from a large state university in the northeastern region of the United State that takes place in northern France for approximately 10 days. Although administrators, faculty, and colleagues abroad are all instrumental in the execution of a short term education abroad program, as stated earlier I have chosen to focus on students as my primary unit of analysis because their experiences of meaning-making during a short term education abroad program are of great interest to me as a researcher and practitioner who designs short term programs for university students. I want to focus on understanding how the students as participants in a program form a community of learners as a result of their participation in the program together. I believe that understanding how students make meaning out of their experiences during a short term
education abroad program will allow me in my practitioner role to develop future programs that incorporate opportunities for students to create a strong community of learners. Other participants, such as the faculty and administrators of the program – as outlined earlier -are therefore treated as units of observation (Babbie, 2006, pp. 94ff).

Also, I am more interested in the experiences of the students as a group (collective experiences) than in their individual experiences. When I examine individual student experiences, it is as a strategy to shed light on the group experience. From those individual descriptions, general meanings are derived, in other words, the essences of structures of the experience (Moustakas, 1994, p. 13). Spalding et al. (1999) found that where students experience working in a socially cohesive group, the learning process is enhanced. As Cartney and Rouse (2006) explain, the experience of being in groups can be powerfully emotionally charged both positively and negatively. Cartney and Rouse (2006) further explain that in groups, students, ideally, will have an experience of cooperation, which would include creative disagreement, excitement and enthusiasm about their shared task, but equally may feel antagonistic and blocked, unable to make their voice heard, or to contribute as they would like. I am interested in searching for these moments when the group of students faced these experiences and challenges during their program.

Researcher role in the study

As a researcher, I chose to investigate this program for several reasons: one, this program has been offered to first-year students in the College of Engineering at a large state university in the northeastern United States once a year for the past six years, so it is well-established and efficiently organized for the participants. The program has a
structure in place that lends itself well to case study research – it is a clearly bounded system that has a specific start and end date, and a specific aim of introducing first year students to the way in which engineering practices are carried out in a foreign country. In my researcher role, my aim was to learn more about how this particular short-term education abroad program functioned as a means for this group of students to learn together.

Another reason I investigated this particular case is that, in my capacity as a practitioner, I have led previous groups of students on this tour in the past and am therefore familiar with the sites, agenda, and setting of the tour. This means that as a researcher I was less likely to be distracted by the environment in which the program takes place since I was already familiar with it, and was more able to focus on the actual experiences of the participants. Because I was already familiar with the site and the structure of the program, I was more easily able to shift away from my usual role of having been a leader of the program several time before (thus previously being exclusively a practitioner), to being a researcher for this particular program who could spend time observing and interacting with the participants during the program.

It is important to add that although I have previously led groups of students on this same short-term education abroad program, for the purpose of this study, I did not lead this group on this particular program. Instead, I acted in a completely unofficial capacity, going as an observer of the program this time. I funded my travel expenses entirely on my own, and therefore was not an administrator for the program and was not given any financial support to act in a formal leadership or educator capacity for this specific group. I wanted to be certain that I could participate as an observer and
researcher of the students, not as a leader of them. Also, since I was collecting my data in a foreign country, I did not want to be distracted by the novelty and excitement of an overseas location, which is why I believed it best that I had already spent considerable time in the location prior to collecting the data. This prior exposure to the environment allowed me to focus more on the participants than on the physical setting.

Being an observer allowed me to more accurately describe the experiences of the participants, and enabled me as a researcher to take on the role of interpreter and gatherer of interpretations, a central goal of case study research (Stake, 1995). Whenever possible I attempted to integrate into the regular activities of the participants, so that I would feel more like a co-participant in the program. Since I was still there in the capacity of being a researcher, I was not truly able to be a real co-participant in the program as the students were, but I did attempt to integrate myself into the participants’ full roster of activities as much as possible throughout the study. Additionally, by striving to be an active co-participant in the program, I was supporting a constructivist view of how knowledge is constructed by those who experience a phenomenon – in this case, the short-term education abroad program. In other words, the participants and I constructed knowledge together during the program – I did not examine their learning as an outsider looking in, but rather as a co-creator of the knowledge and experiences of the group (Stake, 1995).

However, just because I attempted to be a co-participant in the study, did not mean that there were not power dynamics that likely influenced the interactions the participants had both with me and with each other (during the moments when I was present). Although it was very helpful that I had previously acted as an instructor to the participants, which allowed me to get to know the participants as students prior to asking
them to become participants in my study, it also very likely influenced the ways in which
the participants interacted with me as a researcher. In my previous role I did have power
over the participants by the mere fact that I was their instructor, who gave them each a
grade for a course that I taught. I did explain to the participants that my role of instructor
ended when the course that I taught ended, and that time happened to be several weeks
prior to when I observed them for the study. However, it is very possible that some of the
participants may have had a difficult time transitioning into the role of co-participant with
me.

Also, my relationship with the individual participants affected the kind of data I
collected throughout the study. I had a better relationship with some of the participants,
whom I had gotten to know during the time that they were students in my class. This
meant that those participants with whom I had already formed a closer relationship were
more apt to share their opinions, stories, and viewpoints with me as I spent time with
them during the study. Those whom I had not already gotten to know as well while they
were students in my class may not have felt as comfortable and open to discuss their
viewpoints and experiences with me as a researcher. In my presentation and analysis of
the data in Chapter four, I will discuss some examples of when certain participants may
not have provided as much rich data because of their different relationship with me as a
researcher.

In terms of how my role as a researcher affected the interactions I had with the
participants, those with whom I had already formed a relationship during the class I
taught provided more data during the unstructured, individual interactions I had with
them during our free time. This meant that the data I collected in my field notes (when I
had individual interactions with each participant) was richer with those participants with whom I had already established a friendly relationship, as those participants naturally were more comfortable with interacting with me in an informal, one-on-one fashion. Already knowing some of the participants on an individual basis did give me greater access to them and provided a greater level of openness and candidness when I was collecting my field notes.

However, this also means that those participants with whom I had not already forged an individual relationship (outside of just having been their instructor in a classroom) most likely did not reveal as much of their experiences and perceptions to me during the time I took my field notes. As a researcher, I strove to include all of the participants as much as possible during both the time I took field notes as well as when I conducted the group interview, but it is likely that my field notes were more reflective of the viewpoints of those participants who felt more comfortable and open with me.

In qualitative research, it is common for the researcher to forge a close relationship with research participants so as to gain a richer and more robust understanding of the experiences of the participants. However, it is important to acknowledge that issues and challenges can arise when the researcher is so integrated into the experiences of the participants. In my study, it is very likely that my presence often affected the decisions and interactions of the participants, and may have interfered with nature of the activities they chose to engage in and the discussions they had with each other. I present and discuss some examples of how my presence affected the activities and decisions of the participants in Chapter Four.
Use of phenomenology and grounded theory as guiding frameworks for analyzing data

My interest in phenomenology as a research framework comes from previous experience in using this approach to conduct empirical research (Baptiste et al., 2001). Phenomenology is particularly appropriate as a research framework when the goal is to learn how participants describe their experience of a certain phenomenon; in this case, the experience of participating in a short-term education abroad program. For this study, I wanted to examine how students in the context of a short term education abroad program developed meaning out of their social interactions – whether that meaning was conscious and immediate, or unconscious and not fully realized until after the program had concluded. This particular analytic approach was guided by phenomenological research methods.

As explained by Borgatti (2008), the basic idea of the grounded theory approach is to read (and re-read) a textual database (such as a corpus of field notes) and "discover" or label variables (called categories, concepts and properties) and their interrelationships. The ability to perceive variables and relationships is termed "theoretical sensitivity" and is affected by a number of things including one's reading of the literature and one's use of techniques designed to enhance sensitivity to the data. I therefore also used grounded theory as a guiding framework for analyzing the data because I kept going back and forth between my own theoretical framework of the elements that constitute learning in context in the program under investigation, and what the categories of data I created presented in relation to my theoretical framework. In other words, I created categories from the data that both supported my own concept of what learning in context was, and that did not support my theoretical framework (negative or deviant cases). Grounded theory as an
analytic strategy allowed for this process of constant comparison between my own theoretical approach and openness to creating new theoretical categories that came from the data.

Sampling: Units of analysis

As noted earlier, the primary unit of analysis for the study is a group of student participants. The group of participants was made up of first year engineering honors students who were selected among their peers from a first year design course competition as the winning design team. The first year design students in the course worked collaboratively on projects with students from a French technical university, using computer technology including web-based class meetings and online chat groups to execute their design projects virtually. The group of students who were judged by faculty as having the best design project was selected to participate in the short-term study abroad program in France that was used for this study.

The short term study abroad program was structured such that the participating students interacted with engineering faculty, French engineering students, and practicing engineers to study design and industry issues that they had previously examined during the first year design course. Therefore, the participating students had had some prior preparation in the issues they would eventually observe and experience during the short-term education abroad program. The engineering faculty, French engineering students, practicing engineers, and administrators of the program are treated as units of observation in the study (as mentioned earlier), since they impacted the experience of the participants during the program, but are not a central unit to analyze and observe in the study.
Description of the case under investigation

The case under investigation for this study was a short-term education abroad program for a small group of engineering undergraduate students that took place for 11 days in the north of France. The participants were students who had just completed their first year of university studies in the college of engineering at a large state university in the northeast. These students were selected to participate in the short-term education abroad program in France because they had won a first-year engineering design competition in a course they had taken during their first year of studies in engineering. The course they had taken for this design competition was a first-year engineering design course for honors college students; therefore, the curriculum was presented at an accelerated level as is appropriate for an honors-level course. The students were selected to participate in the short-term education abroad program in France based on a design project they presented in teams where they had collaborated with engineering students from France using web-based communications tools to create their team designs.

Profile and background of the participants

As described earlier in the study, the students who were selected to participate in the short-term program were expected to take a semester-long course with me (I both designed the course and served as the instructor) as a means to prepare them for having an international experience. The course, called “International Engineering Seminar” (ENGR 301), was a one-credit course that met once a week for 14 weeks, with each meeting running one hour and 15 minutes. The course ran during the spring 2007 semester and led up to the short-term program in May of 2007. The course covered
issues of how to prepare to be a globally aware engineer, what it is like to work in teams that deal with intercultural challenges, and discussing practical information about being prepared for an international experience (see Appendix A for a copy of the course syllabus).

My role as the group’s instructor is an important factor to consider in this study, because it shaped the dynamics of this group and influenced why I am interested in examining the importance of forming a strong learning community. In this course my role was as group facilitator, where I encouraged the group to learn how to work as a team to accomplish their learning goals. I wanted them to get to know me as someone who had experience in leading a short-term program in France with other students, and who worked regularly with French colleagues who were involved in the short-term education abroad program. I also wanted them to learn the importance of working closely together to help each other best prepare for the group experience on the program, since the program is structured around group interactions and group work.

During the course the group of students formed a close community who helped each other to prepare for the short-term education abroad program that they were to participate in after the course ended. I noticed during the course that the students viewed me as someone who could help them to be ready for going abroad, both from a culturally-ready standpoint, as well as from a practical standpoint where I helped them to figure out what international travel is like, what they could expect in terms of the visits they would be making, and how they should prepare themselves to interact with the French students, administrators, and company representatives they would interact with during the program. I wanted the students to feel comfortable with me, and to view me as someone
who was there to support them, but not to lead them around once we all went on the program together.

**Access to participants**

During the ENGR 301 course, I asked the students if they would be willing to act as participants in a study I was conducting, and explained to them that I would essentially be participating in the short term program with them, as a co-participant, not a leader of the program – so that they could begin to understand the nature of the research I was conducting. I got a very positive response from them that I would be participating in the program alongside them. They expressed to me that they were not familiar with research being done in this way – where the researcher lives among the group as one of them, and observes them on a day-to-day basis in a natural, non-laboratory setting.

I distributed a letter of informed consent to the students at the end of the course (after they had already received their final grade), asking them to act as participants in the study. I told students that their participation in my study was completely optional, and if they chose not to participate, that they would still be able to participate in the short term program with everyone else. I explained to them that if they chose not to participate in the study, that I would not include them in my observations or interviews, even though they would be participating in the short term program alongside of students who had consented to be participants in the study. See Appendix B for a copy of the e-mail I sent to the participants to obtain informed consent.

**Structure and time frame of the short-term program under investigation**

The short-term program began on May 18, 2007, and the group of students arrived in Paris, France one day prior to my arrival. I arranged to arrive a day later than
the students because I felt it would be best for them to experience arriving in a foreign
country without the benefit of having someone (me) with them who speaks French and
who has been to Paris numerous times, so that they could figure things out on their own
upon their arrival in the country. There were nine students in the group – all male, and all
first year engineering students – and all of whom had provided written informed consent
to participate in the study. I met the group outside of their hotel in Paris the day after
their arrival, as we had arranged in advance to do.

The program was set up such that for the first three days the students were in
France, the time was completely free for them to do as they pleased. I told them that
although I would be willing to help them when they were unsure of what to do, that I was
not going to lead them around during this free time, because I was not a formal, “paid”
leader of the program this time. I explained to them that I would be hanging out with
them and going along on any of their chosen visits and activities – just as if I were a
fellow student participating in the program with them (see Appendix C for a copy of the
program itinerary)

It was a little hard for them to get used to this arrangement where I was a co-
participant in the program, but they told me that they would do their best to switch gears
and get used to me being “one of them”. It actually felt quite natural for the group to
accept me as one of them, and I am hopeful that it is because I was very open and clear
with them about my goals, and also because I had already forged a trusting relationship
with them during the semester-long course prior to the program.
Relationship between researcher and participants

I expect that because I was a co-participant in the program, the students were willing to share a lot of detail with me given the informal adviser/instructor relationship I forged with them before they embarked on the program. I expect that this relationship of trust and openness yielded more descriptive and information-rich data from the participants. This emphasis on gathering information-rich data that comes from an established relationship of trust and mutual respect between the researcher and the participants is an aim of qualitative research (Patton, 1990; Creswell, 1998).

To achieve the trust I was aiming for, I revealed to the participants that I did not want them to hold back in sharing anything they wanted to with me during the program, and that they should not feel like they had to edit or be on their best behavior while I was with them during the program. I could not control for whether or not the participants would in fact be completely open and comfortable with me, but I hoped that by having this conversation with them about being open and honest with me, they would know where I was coming from. I did not want them to think that I was not aware of the fact that my role as having been their instructor prior to going on the program might be awkward for some of the participants, so I took measures to explain as best as possible to them that I would try not to interfere in what they decided to do during the program, particularly during the first few days when the participants were free to choose their own activities to pursue in Paris.

The group and I spent each day together exploring the locations we were in for the program – the first few days we were in Paris, France sightseeing and exploring the city, and there was no pre-planned agenda in the program. The participants stayed
together in a small hotel in Paris, and I stayed nearby in a rented apartment. I chose to
rent an apartment in case there would be opportunities for the participants to spend some
of their time talking with me at my rented apartment (which would have more space and
would be more conducive to having these kinds of interactions).

We arranged to meet each day in Paris at a chosen location that the group selected
together. For ease of communication, I had a cell phone with me and was able to provide
the participants with a toll-free number that they could call to reach me on my cell phone.
This way if the participants decided they wanted to change plans before I had met them,
they could call me and they could inform me of their new arrangements. I also had phone
numbers of several of the participants who had brought along cell phones and who were
willing to share their numbers with me.

Day to day overview of the short-term program

After the first few days in Paris, the next few days the group and I were in a small
town in the north of France, about 2 hours northeast of Paris. This small town is where
the French partner university is located, and this partner university served as the host
institution for the short-term program. Engineering students from the partner university
in the French town had been involved in the design projects using web-based meetings
with the study participants prior to when the short-term program took place (as described
earlier in this chapter), and several of these French students served as informal hosts to
the participants while there. The participants stayed in a residence hall during this part of
the program, and lived alongside French students attending the partner university.

During the program in the small town in France, we met with faculty and
administrators from both the partner university, as well as the professor from the state
university in the northeast United States (and his spouse) who had taught them the Engineering Design course from which this group had been selected to participate in this short-term program abroad. The program was set up to have the students visit various companies, led by an administrator from the French partner university and accompanied by the state university professor, to examine some of the engineering issues and challenges that the students had studied in their design course.

The company visits were set up to allow the students to interact with practicing engineers and business managers from the companies so that they could ask questions about what they were observing and could come up with some ideas for how the issues and technical problems they observed at the companies could be resolved. The students also had the opportunity to learn through these visits about some of the cultural differences in how business and engineering is practiced in France, by asking questions of the French engineers and business managers about the cultural influences at work in their organizations. These company visits comprised the formal, structured part of the short term program, where each day’s activities were pre-planned by the administrators of the program and were meant to supplement the Engineering Design course that the participants had taken earlier.

Methods of data collection

Data was collected through multiple sources, as is congruent with a case study method. Modes of observation for the study included participant observation and one semi-structured group interview. As part of my participant observation, I conducted multiple informal, one-on-one interviews with several of the participants during the
program, which I documented in my field notes. I conducted the semi-structured group interview with the participants in a mutually agreed-upon location. All participants were available for the group interview since the group was staying in the same place during the program; therefore direct, face-to-face access to them was convenient. The interview was conducted in a group format during the formal part of the program in France, allowing for a free exchange of dialogue and informal discussion of experiences among the students. I carried out the group interview approximately mid-way through the short-term program (after the informal time in Paris but early in the formal part of the program where the students were visiting and studying local industries), and conducted the interview in a hotel meeting room that was convenient for the participants. My goal in conducting the interview in a group format was not only to obtain rich description of the students’ experiences, but also to observe the dynamics of the group and to sustain the group culture that was embedded in the program for the students.

The interview was audio taped in a private and quiet location and participants were asked to identify when and where they participated in the education abroad program. This means that the audiotapes contain some identifying information about the participants. Care has been taken to ensure that this identifying information remains accessible only to the researcher, hired tape transcriber, and dissertation committee members. This has been achieved by storing the audiotapes in a locked and private location, directly accessible only to the researcher. The professional tape transcriber was hired based on having had previous experience in transcribing taped interviews used for research purposes.
I also observed the participants by spending as much time as possible each day with the entire group during the program in France, and took extensive field notes during this time. This means that I joined the group as many times as possible when they went out to do something, be it during the formal part of the program where the students visited companies and discussed their observations, as well as when they went out for social and cultural events together. In essence, I was a co-participant in the program with the students, having spent all available time going through each experience with the group. I carefully documented my observations on a day-to-day basis during the program and include examples of my field notes in my section on data analysis below.

Data analysis

In reviewing, classifying, and analyzing my data for the study, I can identify four key phases of my data analysis processes: defining the analysis, classifying the data, making connections between data, and conveying the message (Baptiste, 2001). An overview of how I carried out these four phases of data analysis follows.

Defining the analysis:

For the first phase, defining the analysis, I wish to list the goals I had set out for analyzing the data. These goals, which changed over time, guided me throughout the initial conceptualization of the study through the analysis of the data, and also guided me in discussing my findings. These goals helped me to define how I was going to conduct my analysis. I regularly referred back to these analytic goals during the entire data
analysis process so that I kept my analysis focused and consistent with my researcher interests.

**Goals of data analysis:**

a) To present a picture of how a group of students experiences a short term education abroad program together

b) To find examples of when the group experiences the four theoretical categories that I have defined: activity, tools, situation, and community of learners

c) To seek other examples of how students experience context in the program that do not fall under the theoretical categories I have defined

It is important to define my own stance as a researcher analyzing the data – in other words, explaining how I planned to interpret the data and how I interacted with it based on my own experiences. Because of my previous experiences in education abroad programs, both as a student and as a leader of students, I was interested in learning what some of the essential, invariant structures of context and learning are for participants in an education abroad program. In analyzing the data, I did not separate myself as the researcher from the experiences of the participants, and made no attempt to bracket or suspend my knowledge and experience of the program in which I previously participated. This approach places me as the researcher squarely in the constructivist, subjectivist camp of qualitative inquiry (Moustakas, 1994; Baptiste, 2001).

In other words, I approached my data collection and subsequent analysis as a researcher who brought a significant amount of practical experience in the field of education abroad. I did not approach the data as though I had no bias or preconceived understanding as to how students go through a short-term education abroad program as a group. In fact, I view my previous experience as a practitioner in the field of education
abroad as a distinct asset in terms of how I was able to approach the analysis of the data I collected, as I was able to relate my experience developing and leading short term programs to how I understood and interpreted the data I collected. I believe that my prior experience also allowed me to better understand the experiences of the participants since I had previously spent time as a practitioner with other groups of students going through a short-term program, which gave me some insight into how the group of participants I enlisted for the study might experience their program.

Additionally, prior to embarking on the data collection for this study, I had spent a great deal of time developing a theoretical framework that would guide me in my data collection and subsequent analysis. This likely predisposed me to lean too heavily on my own theoretical concepts and constructs that I had developed before I actually analyzed the data. I may have been too focused on findings examples in the data that supported my four theoretical constructs that constituted learning in context (activity, tools, situation, and community of learners), and therefore less open to discovering potentially more meaningful and rich categories for classifying and interpreting the data. I discuss how I managed emerging categories later in this chapter.

Classifying the data:

For the second phase, classifying the data, I applied methods that are congruent with grounded theory. For my study, I did see a very close connection between phenomenological and grounded theory approaches and therefore employed methods that come from each approach – but I was primarily guided by grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006). I describe how I employed methods from each of these approaches next.
For the phenomenological framework of my data analysis, I worked on horizonalizing individual statements (i.e., I listed out significant statements about how the individuals were experiencing the phenomena), created meaning units, clustered themes, and advanced textural and structural descriptions into an exhaustive description of the essential, invariant structure (or essence) of the experience (Moustakas, 1994; Creswell, 1998). I accomplished this by searching among the discourse of the participants for instances when they each described a particular experience in a very similar way; this required me to examine the individual statements of the participants to look for how that individual participant’s description captured the group experience. In other words, I searched for multiple instances of when an individual participant described an experience in a similar way to how another participant described the same experience, and then listed those statements in clusters Table 3.2 below provides an example that illustrates this process:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phenomenon: Experience of wandering around without a plan</th>
<th>Data source: Field notes</th>
<th>Data source: Group interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Example #1: They told me that they learned so much more just stumbling upon places</td>
<td>Going by foot we got to see places that we weren’t supposed to see. You feel like – I felt like it was more of an adventure.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example #2 They all said it was much more interesting and they learned much more when they randomly came across things</td>
<td>We definitely had our little excursions and stuff and we were put into situations where we had to try to interact with the people.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example #3 They had more fun when they did not have a plan in</td>
<td>We just walked until we found whatever. We just wanted to see everything. We all did.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.2: Description of shared phenomenon
For the grounded theory analytic framework, I conducted both open and axial coding with the data. Open coding is the part of the analysis concerned with identifying, naming, categorizing and describing phenomena found in the text. Essentially, I read each line, sentence, and paragraph in search of the answer to the repeated questions "What is this about? What is being referenced here?" (Borgatti, 2008). A more detailed overview of how I conducted open coding and axial coding is explained below. My methods of coding the data using a grounded theory approach included four phases: open coding, axial coding, making connections between the data, and connecting my theoretical approach to the data. As stated earlier, however, I believe there is a great deal of overlap in how I analyzed the data in terms of my use of methods ascribed to a phenomenological approach as well as to a grounded theory approach, so the phases I ascribe to grounded theory also contain elements of phenomenological analysis.

Each phase of coding the data led to the next phase – that is to say, the first phase – open coding – led to axial coding, and then led me to making connections between the data and connecting my theoretical approach to the data. Open coding was the first step in understanding the data, where I was the most open to what the data would show me. Then, axial coding allowed me to further refine the data into meaningful units that would allow me to organize the data and begin to subsume it under categories. After I conducted axial coding, I was better able to connect the various data within the categories that I had both imposed and that had emerged after conducting these analytic phases. This then permitted me to consider my theoretical approach and tie that approach into the
categories of data. Next I describe how I conducted these various stages of analysis, and provide some examples from the data that illustrate these phases.

**Coding data: Open coding:**

During the initial phase of classifying the data, I examined the discourse of the study participants, and began doing open coding. Open coding meant that I went through the field notes and transcripts to begin to identify major concepts and significant statements by the participants. It is important to stress that open coding was the beginning of my analysis, so it was the first phase of my formal review of the data. I had only collected and typed up the field notes and had the interview transcribed at this point, but had not done a systematic review of the data at this phase of analysis. N vivo was the qualitative data analysis tool I used to structure these concepts and to begin to create connections among the data by listing important concepts and phrases that had meaning (see Appendix D for example from N vivo). At this stage, I began to compare similarities and differences among the concepts that I identified.

An example from my field notes that illustrates how I conducted open coding follows, with a description of my analytic process at this phase.

“A couple of the students got a kick out of the self-checkout at the supermarket, and used it. Ben told everyone that he put his credit card into the machine, but it was the wrong one. He figured out that the one he incorrectly used required that your credit card have a magnetic code reader that most U.S. cards do not have. He said he figured out that he had to use the other machine at the check out.”

When I reviewed this excerpt from my field notes, I noted several things – what the participant was doing, how he handled the situation he was in, and how he resolved
his issue. At this phase of my analysis, I was interested in trying to understand the big picture of how the participants were experiencing their time in the program – I did not want to jump to categorize any of the findings at this early stage of reviewing my data. I was merely trying to note the main things that were happening among the participants in each moment that I had captured in the data.

I used N vivo to structure tree nodes and free nodes among the phrases and concepts. Tree nodes – the major categories of data – became the four theoretical categories that I had identified as guiding the analysis of the data: Activity, tools, situation, and community of learners. The tree nodes acted as a means to classify the concepts and phrases that were contained in the data, and created the major categories that would then allow me to structure the data into meaning units (Creswell, 1998). I also worked towards identifying additional major categories that emerged from the data (as opposed to being classified under those categories that I already created) during this phase of analysis. I did not want to impose my categories on the data at this early stage of analysis, and I wanted to be sure that I was maintaining openness to discovering emerging major categories in the data. I will discuss some emergent themes that also describe context in learning that came from the data in Chapter 5. At this stage of my analysis, however, I had not yet discovered these other emergent themes.

The free nodes became the subcategories in the data that captured all that the participants had described to me during the time that I did the participant observation, as well as during the group interview that I conducted. During this phase, I also began to consider other concepts that might allow for a different way to classify the data other than
what I had come up with in terms of theoretical concepts. This lead me to the next phase of data analysis, axial coding.

Coding data: Axial coding

As an analytic method, axial coding begins to reassemble the data to look at relationships of categories to their subcategories, developing a more complete explanation of the major concepts and categories. The key strategy at this stage was to link all the categories of the data, both main categories (tree nodes in N vivo) and their subcategories (free nodes in N vivo), at a conceptual level. It was through this linking process that major categories emerged that connected to the main theoretical framework that I had developed for the study. By doing axial coding, I was able to look for categories that emerged from the data that connected to the concepts that I created to understand learning in context in an education abroad program. During axial coding, I used the categories that I had created to classify subcategories in the data. I had not yet discovered other major categories, and chose to use those major categories that I had created to organize and make sense of the subcategories and the relationships among the various pieces of data at this particular stage of my analysis. In particular, the categories I had created helped me to better understand as an analyst how the subcategories of the data shed light on what learning in context meant. Table 3.3 below illustrates how I connected my main categories of activity, tools, situation, and community of learners to explain learning in context.
Table 3.3: Connecting main categories of activity, tools, situation, and community of learners

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity to cause learning</th>
<th>Tools to cause learning</th>
<th>Situation when they had to make decisions that caused learning</th>
<th>Community of learners when they worked together to cause learning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Two examples from the data that illustrate how I conducted axial coding follow. I present an excerpt from my field notes and the group interview to illustrate how I conducted this phase of the analysis with these different sets of data.

Example One (from field notes):

One thing that a couple of the students pointed out (T. and J., specifically) is that they needed to change U.S. dollars into Euros, and they wanted to do so at a regular bank, rather than at a Bureau de Change, because they felt that they could get a better deal exchanging their money at a bank. So, they all agreed to stop at a bank to do this.

This excerpt lists other activities – changing currency, deciding to go to a regular bank rather than a Bureau de Change in order to save some money, and agreeing to undertake this important effort so that these participants had the money they needed. The tool they used in this example was their negotiations. The situation was that they had to have money in the local currency, so they had to decide how and where they were going to get the money they needed. The community of learners was that they all decided as a group that they wanted to stop at a bank together to take care of this matter.

In the excerpt above, a theme that emerges is that the group helped each other to figure out how they could solve a problem that they all shared – which is that they needed
to have enough money in the local currency to be able to function. They used different methods to solve their problem together – discussing where they could change their U.S. money into local currency, figuring out through these discussions that there were other options for them to pursue, but finally also agreeing on one of the options, in this case, a regular bank. They were strengthening their community of learners by problem solving together in a way that supported the groups’ members to achieve their shared goal of getting money. Their problem solving was based on a real problem that they encountered on the program (the need to have enough local currency), and they had to solve this problem in real time as a group. During this axial coding, I chose to link those categories that I had created (tools, activity, situation, and community of learners) to the data to understand how they were experiencing context in learning.

Example Two (from group interview):

*Interviewer:* Did anybody feel like something that happened was really uncomfortable or – yeah?

*Male #1:* When we first got out of the train station the first night –

*Interviewer:* In Paris when you got there?

*Male #1:* In Paris and trying to find the hostel at 11:30 at night, which we found out is that late, too.

*Interviewer:* Yeah.

*Male #1:* Well, I was definitely off my guard. Just it was – then I grew to be comfortable with the neighborhood and stuff but the first night was like, “Whoa we’re like” –

*Interviewer:* Yeah. You’re not in Kansas anymore.

[Crosstalk]
Male #6: Actually this is one of the first times where I was glad other people did all the planning. I just felt a lot of trust in the people who were finding me a hostel. I was _____.

[Interruption]

Interviewer: So that leaves me – that’s a good – I’m really glad you brought that up. Have you guys felt like a few of you – I know I should have asked this earlier but I want to make sure I capture this. A few of you have kind of emerged as, I don’t want to say leader but decision – “responsible” meaning – I keep looking at you guys because they’re all pointing at you.

Male #1: I don’t think that’s actually happened.

Interviewer: Well I haven’t observed that. I –

[Interruption]

Male #1: Everything seems to be fluid. We’re democratic about it. We always seem to come to some kind of conclusion that’s based on everyone talking or at least everyone who has an opinion on it. Basically we all kind of come to some kind of idea and we all accept it. No one has ever been like someone who’s taken the idea and said, “Okay, we’re doing this,” and then sort of like - I don’t want to say leader because leader implies –

Interviewer: Bossy, maybe.

Male #1: Bossy, yeah – a boss of everybody.

Interviewer: Controlling.

Male #1: No one’s been bossy or controlling and everything seems to be very well run, very smooth and very _____.

Interviewer: Do you think that’s because you all already have kind of a connection with each other knowing each other or –

Male #2: Some of us we have that –

Male #1: Really –

[Interruption]

Male #2: But I know I at least didn’t have as much of a connection to most of the people in the room other than people – some I knew really
well. Some I didn’t but now I feel like we definitely all know each other, know what we’re all like and everything. I think that also it seems like because not a single one of us has been kind of - has been to France before. None of us had an agenda or anything. We all just kind of wanted to go with the flow and kind of see what we could see.

We just walked until we found whatever. We just wanted to see everything. We all did. It might be different later on with – just there were certain sites that we just wanted to see but we all wanted to see them and then there were certain ones that we didn’t and for the rest we just walked. We all kind of worked together, our particular group. We worked together well, I guess.

In the example above, there is a clear indication that the group formed into a community who worked together to help to have a positive, shared experience during the program – and they acted specifically as a community of learners because they were all working together and relying on each other to learn as much as possible about where they were. Since none of them had been to France before, they wanted to help each other to make the most of it, and wanted to keep things flexible and open to allow for discovering new things – the situations and activities of just walking around and seeing everything created opportunities for them to learn about unexpected discoveries.

After conducting the axial coding, I was then ready to search for different categories to see if there was more to understand in the data as to how they were experiencing learning in context – which led me to the next phase, making connections between the data.

**Coding data: Making connections between data**

For phase three of the analytic process, making connections between data, I employed several strategies. In the study, the phenomena under investigation include the elements of learning in context as defined in the study: activity, tools, situation, and
community of learners in education abroad programs. I searched among the forms of data that I collected – the interview responses and field notes – in order to identify themes and statements that describe the participants’ experience of learning in context in their education abroad program. I looked for connections between the participants’ descriptions of context in their education abroad program and the learning that they explained occurred for them as a result of their education abroad program context.

Additionally, I compared the descriptions given by the individual participants about the features of their education abroad program in order to examine connections between how the program was structured and the kind of learning that occurred for the participants. If I encountered descriptions that were incongruent among the participants, I noted this incongruity and determined if this was due to an individual difference in how a participant experienced the program, or if it was simply an instance that called for direct interpretation. This direct interpretation meant that as a researcher I looked at this single instance and drew meaning from it without looking for multiple instances of it among the data (Cresswell, 1998). During the analytic process, I made sure to refer to any inconsistencies in the data as I was organizing it and coding it, so that I could ensure that I had exhausted the data as best as possible.

At this stage of making connections between the data, I began to see some additional major categories that described learning in context which differed from the four main categories I had created. To illustrate, here is an excerpt from my field notes where I began to see new major categories that described learning in context for the participants.
Example from field notes: New emergent major category

“The bank was magnificent, and T. and J. commented that the rest of the group outside was missing out on not seeing it. The two of them got into a line that appeared to be the correct one, and then quickly learned it was not (it was for regular bank customers). They saw a couple of booths behind glass that said “change”, and realized quickly this was the right place. But, as they waited, the woman behind the glass said in French “this one is closed, you need to go over there” and pointed towards the lines that we had been in before. They laughed because they had been there, but it did not seem right. Then, some people who were in line behind them called out in English “this one is open” and they got behind them. It was the booth right next to the one where the woman said it was closed! They then went out and shared their tale with the rest of the group, and they were all amused. “

When I reviewed this excerpt from my field notes, I noticed that the physical and social environment/setting in which these participants found themselves created a learning experience for them. The bank itself, the signs, and the way the people who worked there as well as some of the other customers who spoke English were all factors that influenced how the participants learned. These elements were in fact another form of learning in context – this time, the actual physical environment emerged as a major category of learning in context. I had not accounted for physical environment as a major category of learning in context during my previous analysis. I discuss this emergent category in more detail in Chapter 5.
Conveying the message:

For the fourth phase of my data analysis, conveying the message, I provide (in Chapter Four, Research Findings) a detailed written overview of the participants’ descriptions of how they learned in context in their education abroad program. I exhaust the data that deals with the participants’ descriptions of the elements of learning in context – activity, tools, situation, and community of practice – by listing out the significant statements about how the individuals are experiencing the phenomena of learning in context in their education abroad program. Additionally, I provide a detailed description of the features of the education abroad program based on all of the data under investigation – the participant group interview, the field notes, and the informal one-on-one interviews. In this detailed description I present a written summary of the features of the program based on how the participants share their impressions of what these features were and how they played into their experience of the education abroad program.

Research quality

Quality for the study was enhanced by triangulating the three forms of data that I collected: the field notes, the participant interview, and the artifacts. By doing this, I checked each data source against the others to determine that the information included in the data was comprehensive and exhausted the descriptions of the phenomena under investigation in the study. I also conducted member-checks (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), which means that I solicited some participant feedback about the various data sources. By sharing my interpretations of participants’ viewpoints with the participants and other members of the group, I hoped to clear up any areas of miscommunication, and to learn if
the participants agreed with what I had said about them. While this strategy is not perfect, because some participants may have attempted to put on a good face, useful information is frequently obtained and inaccuracies are often identified by employing this strategy (Johnson, 1997). If I encountered contradictory data from conducting triangulation and member-checks, then I examined this contradiction to see if I may have made errors in the way I conveyed the data, or in how I interpreted the statements and input of the participants. I also looked at any contradictions in the data as potentially having meaning in the case perhaps signaling a significant difference in how the group members experienced the short-term program. I further explain how I managed divergent data later in this chapter, and provide an example of how I did this with the data.

**Interpretive validity**

Another strategy I used in the study to enhance quality, and as is congruent with a phenomenological method (Moustakas, 1994; Creswell, 1998; Johnson, 1997) is interpretive validity. Interpretive validity refers to accurately portraying the meaning attached by participants to what is being studied by the researcher (Johnson, 1997). More specifically, it refers to the degree to which the research participants' viewpoints, thoughts, feelings, intentions, and experiences are accurately understood by the qualitative researcher and portrayed in the research report. An important part of qualitative research is to understand research participants' inner worlds (i.e., their phenomenological worlds), and interpretive validity refers to the degree of accuracy in presenting these inner worlds.

Accurate interpretive validity requires that the researcher get inside the heads of the participants, look through the participants' eyes, and see and feel what they see and feel.
In this way, as the researcher I can understand things from the participants' perspectives and provide a valid account of these perspectives (Johnson, 1997). Because I was a co-participant in the case under investigation, and spent most of the time with the participants in their group, I was able to get to know them well and had a lot of time to interact with them as a group during the program. This allowed me to come closer to really understanding the participants’ inner worlds, thoughts, and feelings, which I believe strengthens my ability to ensure a greater level of interpretive validity in the study.

Managing divergent data

As explained by Creswell (1998), the qualitative researcher looks to confirmability rather than objectivity in establishing the value of the data. I particularly strove for further verification of the data by examining where the patterns in the responses of the participants fit together logically and whether the same elements could be arranged to constitute an entirely different pattern (Creswell, 1998), and whether as the researcher I could subsume the responses under the other data. This action can be considered, for the purpose of the study, critical interpretation, which is defined as recognizing in the data the multilayered and often contradictory nature of human experience that can produce divergent meanings (McAllister, 2001). For example, if I observed a pattern of data that diverged into a different category than one that I had already identified, I examined the data within a different possible category to determine which category was the best, or most appropriate, fit for the data. I strove to categorize the data in the most clear, logical, and accurate way possible, and account for any
divergent meanings that I found in the data. Table 3.4 below illustrates how I managed emergent or differing categories of data.

Table 3.4: Data analysis - Critical interpretation of the data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Steps</th>
<th>Processes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3: Addressing divergent meanings in the data (critical interpretation)</td>
<td>1)</td>
<td>Label standard and divergent meanings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2)</td>
<td>Explore the explicit and implicit meanings looking for connections to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3)</td>
<td>broader social, cultural, and historical influences</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Create new categories of the data that diverge from theoretical framework</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Limitations of the study

All research has limitations based on its chosen paradigm. Because this is a qualitative study, certain limitations apply:

1) The results of this study cannot be generalized. The research design used a method of purposeful sampling to enlist participants who could offer rich information that was of interest to the researcher.

2) The study was conducted with a small group of students who study engineering and who were from the same large public research university in the northeast United States, so it cannot be assumed that experiences of other students in a similar program would be the same.

3) Researcher bias is also a potential limitation of the study (discussed earlier in Chapter Three).
A limitation of the study is that as the researcher I only conducted one in-person interview with the group of participants, and this interview occurred during the informal, unstructured part of the program, before any organized study activities took place. My data collection schedule was as follows: The first three days of the informal, unstructured part of the program I spent doing individual, informal interviews with the participants (which I recorded as field notes), as we spent free time together in Paris. The next three days I spent with the participants during the structured, formal academic study abroad program. During these three days, I continued to conduct individual, informal interviews (captured as field notes), but I also conducted one formal group interview, where all of the participants were present.

This is a limitation of the study because it would enhance the findings of the study to have conducted an additional formal group interview, since I am interested in examining group processes during a short term education abroad program. I was, however, bound to the calendar of when the participants were accessible for conducting a formal group interview during the program, and that was only possible to do once during the tightly scripted program. I wanted to conduct the group interview during the actual program so that the information that the participants shared with me was fresh and recently experienced. Conducting only one formal, structured group interview limited the ability to conduct a comparison of the responses of the group over distinct periods of time, which could enhance the confirmability and dependability of the study.

Although I also took field notes during the formal, structured, academic portion of the program, these field notes were more focused on the individual participant experiences, since I was better able to observe individual activities during the formal
academic part of the program. This was because many times during the formal, academic part of the program, the participants were forced to break into smaller sub-groups – often due to safety issues when visiting manufacturing and other company sites. This meant that my ability to observe the group in its totality (meaning, with all of the group members present) was very limited and was not conducive to my being able to collect much data on the whole group process during the structured, academic portion of the program.

Also, because I conducted the interview during the informal, unplanned part of the program, when the participants were on their own to choose how to manage their own time and activities, it limited my ability to assess how they were learning during the formal, structured, academic part of the program, where nearly all of their activities were planned by program administrators. My field notes did capture how the participants learned during the informal, unstructured time of the program, but they did not adequately capture how, as a group, the participants learned during the formal, academic part of the program. Also, as mentioned earlier, my field notes were more focused on the individual participants’ experiences, and not as much on how the participants learned in the context of the entire group. This limits the understanding of how participants learned as a group in the context of the structured, highly scripted parts of the program – which would be useful to understand because of the centrality of structured time, as well as the centrality of the group, during a short term education abroad program.

Furthermore, this limitation of not spending more time with the participants during the formal, structured part of the program does limit my ability to assess in greater detail the academic aspects of a short term program. This limits my assessment of how
participants experienced the planned academic portion of the program, which limits its use in the empirical literature that focuses on the formal, academic aspects of short term education abroad programs. This is because most of the literature on short term education abroad programs attempts to provide data on the impact and centrality of the formal, academic aspects of the program, in terms of how the academic structure exerts influence on what type of learning occurs among the participants.

Another limitation of the study is that as an instructor to the participants in my professional life, it was challenging to focus the interviews on their rich, detailed responses, since the typical interactions I have with the participants is one of back-and-forth, instructional dialogue. It was a challenge to shift focus away from this instructor dynamic to one of researcher and interviewer, where I facilitated an in-depth discussion of their experiences without going into instructor mode of providing guidance and structure to my interactions with them. It was also difficult to switch from my usual role of having been a leader of this short-term education abroad program to become a co-participant in the program. My previous role of having been a leader of the program is a limitation of the study, because my previous experiences influenced many of my observations of this group and injected bias into my interpretation of my observations of this group.

To address this limitation, I chose to emphasize to the participants this change in our dynamic for the study, and requested that they provide as much rich, detailed description as possible, without assuming that I already knew what the program was like because of my previous experience of having been a leader of this program with different groups of students. I accomplished this by probing them for more information as each
An interview question was posed to them, and asking them to elaborate on any points they made so that they did not assume that I had enough information to fully understand what they were describing to me. However, there is a possibility that the participants discerned a power imbalance in this dynamic and thus probing for more information may in fact have exacerbated this problem, which could limit the richness and authenticity of the participants’ responses.

An additional limitation of the study is that all nine participants in my study were male. I was hoping to have some female participants join the study, but there were only two female students who participated in the short-term program, and both of these students were not available during the first few days of the program when the group traveled to Paris for informal sightseeing and to spend time exploring the city. This informal time in Paris was a central part of the experience of the group of research participants and therefore all consenting participants needed to be able to travel as a group. It is possible that female participants might have contributed in a unique way to the experiences of the participant group, and it would have been interesting to examine any differences in the group dynamics by having female participants. However, because these two female students were not available to participate in the entirety of the short-term program, I chose to exclude them from the study. These two female students do serve as units of observation, however, because they were present with the study participants during the formal academic part of the program and therefore impacted the dynamics of the group of research participants.

By not including female participants in the study, it is likely that the group dynamics that I investigated with all male participants would have been different. It
would have been useful to observe any unique interactions among the group of participants with the inclusion of female participants; therefore the data I collected for the study may not reflect the full potential scope of interactions and learning that might occur with a more diverse group. I provide more discussion on this point later in this chapter.

Finally, a limitation of the study is that a larger period of time has elapsed between when I was a co-participant in the program and collected the data, and when I actually analyzed the data. I was unexpectedly offered a new position at a new university shortly after I collected the data during the program, and subsequently had to delay the time when I could in earnest analyze the data and write up my research findings. This means that I had to rely primarily on my written observations and the written transcript of the group interview, but I could not rely on my memory as well since nearly a year elapsed between when the program took place and when I analyzed the data. Since so much happened during the program and since I was trying to observe them throughout my time with them, I am certain to have missed some key data that I would have been able to retrieve had I been able to conduct the data analysis just after the program ended.

Timeline/Overview of data collection and analysis

Timeline for conducting the study is as follows: A set group of 9 students were selected and confirmed their participation in the short-term study tour program in France for the year 2007. The participants were contacted to solicit their participation in the study during April 2007. The short-term study tour was held during the week of May 21-29, 2007. I observed the group beginning at the time that I joined them on the program on May 22nd, and I remained with the group to collect the data until May 26th. During
my data collection, I arranged for a time where I interviewed the selected participants as a
group in person while in France, during a free evening.

I spent the first few days of the program - specifically from May 22nd through
May 24th - with the participants during their own free time, where they determined how
to spend their time as a group, prior to the start of the formal, organized academic portion
of the program. Then the formal, structured part of the program began on May 25th,
when I acted as an observer of the participants. During both the informal and formal
parts of the academic program, I observed and documented their activities, and conducted
individual, unstructured interviews with the participants when time and resources
allowed. I took detailed field notes during this entire time. Next I present a more
detailed outline of how, where, and what type of data I collected during my research, as
well as a description of the research participants, so that I can best describe the contexts
in which I conducted my data collection procedures.

Data collection: Approach

My main approach to collecting data for the study involved close observation and
direct interaction with the participants, much of it during the unstructured, unplanned
time during the first few days when the group came together for the program. The reason
that I chose to spend more time observing and interacting with the participants during the
unstructured, first few days when they came together for the program was that I wanted
to observe how they interacted as a group when they were in a new, foreign setting with
which they were unfamiliar. During my observation and interaction with the participants,
I took notes to document their interactions and activities, both among themselves as well
as with me. As discussed earlier, the participants already knew each other and me from having taken the ENGR 301 course, but that was a structured, formal classroom environment where their interactions were part of a course. In the first few days of the program, the participants came together to explore Paris on their own, without any externally-imposed agenda or itinerary. They came together as a team to work out how they were going to spend their free time in a city where most of them spoke minimal to no French. Although they had done some team exercises in the ENGR 301 course, they were not responsible for choosing those team exercises and were assessed for their performance in the course. This time, they were acting independently of any formal educational structure, and faced a new team dynamic where they had to figure out their own agendas. I wanted to see how this would unfold and how this unstructed time together would affect their group interactions, which is why I chose to spend the majority of my time as a researcher collecting data during these first few unstructured days.

Data collection: Participants

Because I had been an instructor for the participants in the ENGR 301 course, I had some knowledge of them prior to acting in a researcher capacity for this study. The participants for the study were all first-year honors engineering students, and had spent not only the semester in the ENGR 301 course, but had also previously been enrolled in a first-year honors engineering design course. Their enrollment in the ENGR 301 course was a result of their having been selected for collaborating with French university students to produce a winning design plan for an international company in their first-year honors engineering design course. The reward for winning in that course was an
opportunity to visit industries in France after they had engaged in teamwork with French students using distance learning (such as web meetings and email). Their enrollment in the ENGR 301 course was required as a means to prepare them for the industry tours in France and to help them learn more about appropriate cultural issues so that they could also more comfortably interact in person with French students, faculty, and industry representatives during the program. Therefore, the participants did have some prior exposure to French culture and people, but only from their limited distance learning enabled interactions with the French students during the design course and from the limited information they received during the ENGR 301 course. In collecting data for the study, I wanted to observe how they interacted with each other and with those they encountered while in France. I wanted to directly observe how the participants' group dynamics unfolded in this novel and foreign setting, which is a rare opportunity to do as a researcher and practitioner in the field of education abroad. Most studies of education abroad programs collect data from participants after they have returned from the program abroad, thus limiting the researcher's ability to capture any direct observational data about the context of the program.

As mentioned in the limitations section, there were two female students who joined the program during the second phase, when the planned industry visits were scheduled. Because I wanted to collect data both during the unstructured time in Paris as well as during the industry visits, I had to exclude these two female students as research participants. However, their presence during the formal industry visits portion of the program did impact the interactions of the group of research participants, because the two female students became members of the group when they arrived. The two female
students had been in both the first-year design course as well as the ENGR 301 course, so they already knew me and the research participants. Although I interacted with the two female students during the industry visits, I did not record any observations of them, apart from how they may have impacted the dynamics of the group of research participants during the structured visits. Ideally I would have included these two female students as research participants, but because they could not be present during the free time in Paris with the rest of the participants, I could not include them in study. I wanted to collect most of the data during the free time in Paris since that was when the participants had the most autonomy and freedom to act as a group coming together to determine their activities and interactions with each other. However, it is important to note that their presence did impact the research participants' group interactions during the industry tours simply because they became members of the group who were experiencing the program with the research participants.

Data collection: Context

Because my study is focused on describing the meaning of context in a short-term education abroad program, context was a key variable to observe during all phases of data collection. In choosing my methods of data collection, I was interested in being able to closely observe as many elements of context that I could ascertain - the setting, the places the participants visited, the things that the participants did, and the nature and frequency of the participants' interactions with each other.

As described earlier, the first few days of my data collection, the participants were free to choose what they wanted to do in Paris, France. Although they were without a faculty leader at this time, they were still in Paris under the auspices of the academic
program - meaning, they were given the free time at the start of the program as part of the overall program. The participants had planned some of their agenda in Paris prior to arriving there, but they left much of their time open and unplanned. Therefore, I was uncertain exactly how the participants were going to spend their free time in Paris, but I was prepared to follow them wherever they chose to go to conduct my observations and informal interviews.

The second part of my data collection focused on observing the participants during the planned and structured part of the academic program. At this point, a faculty leader joined the group to act in a formal capacity as an educator and facilitator of the industry visits. The data I collected during this part included additional observation, informal interviews with the individual participants, and a group interview. During this phase of data collection, the participants did not have the ability to choose how they would spend their time during the days because the industry visits were the main focus of the academic program. The participants spent their days visiting two or even three industrial sites, ranging from a steel mill to a tire producing plant. At each site, there was always a company representative present to lead the group and to explain what the group was seeing. I observed the participants interacting with each other, as well as interacting with the faculty leader and the industry representatives. I did not spend time with the participants after the industry visits in the evenings, because I wanted to spend time writing up my field note observations and I also did not want to impose my presence with the group during their more limited free evening time at this point in the program.
Data collection and analysis: Summary of timeline

From June 2007 through September 2008, I analyzed the data and developed recommendations for further study of the issues I present in my findings. I wrote up my findings while I analyzed the data, conducting it as an iterative process. During the summer and fall of 2008, I made edits to the study based on the recommendations of my advisor and committee, and prepared to conduct the final oral defense of the study in October of 2008.

An itemized timeline for conducting the study is below:

- Jan – May 20, 2007: Taught the prospective study participants in my class, ENGR 301 (Introduction to International Engineering); received IRB approval for the study in April 2007; solicited participation in the study among the students in my class who were also selected to participate in the short term education abroad program
- May 21: Group arrived in Paris, France
- May 22: I arrived in Paris, France and joined the group for informal sightseeing and exploration of the city and cultural sites
- May 23-24: Spent time with group during informal, unstructured portion of the program in Paris
- May 25-26: Spent time with the group during formal, structured, academic portion of the program in northern France
- May 27-29: Industry tours continued without my involvement as a researcher
Interview protocol

The interview protocol emerged during the program based on my observations and experiences as a participant in the short-term program with the group. This type of emergent interview protocol was vital to maintain a more open format for dialogue with the group and to address issues during the program as they arose.

Office of Research Protections approval of the study

The forms required by Penn State’s Office of Research Protections were submitted in early April 2007 in order to obtain permission as a researcher at Penn State to collect and analyze data as part of an organized research study. The study was approved in late April 2007. A copy of the required paperwork showing approval for the study by the Office of Research Protections is included in the study as Appendix E.
Chapter 4

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Introduction

As outlined in Chapter Three, research questions guiding this study are:

1) How do participants describe their education abroad experience?

2) What conceptions of contexts do these descriptions reveal?

3) In describing their experience what forms of learning do they discuss?

4) In describing their learning, what role do they accord context?

In this chapter, I discuss how the research findings address questions one, three, and four. I address question two in Chapter Five (Discussion and Conclusions), because that question informs our understanding of theory and practice. In this chapter, I provide examples that illustrate various ways in which the participants described their education abroad experience and the major themes that emerged from these descriptions. I detail how their descriptions demonstrate the ways in which they learned during their program, which I carry out by relating the themes to each other and discussing the implications of the emergent themes. I conclude by relating how the emergent themes relate to learning in context.

Two major themes were generated in response to questions 1, 3 & 4; they are: Groupness and authentic experience. The themes are discussed below. In the discussion, attempts are made to show relationships between and among the themes.
Theme: Groupness

A major theme that emerged from the data revolved around how the participants experienced their education abroad program as an intact group, who went through the entire experience of the program together. I refer to this experience of being in a group as “groupness”. In this section I discuss the constituent elements of groupness in order to describe how the participants experienced this phenomenon.

Groupness: Constituent elements

Groupness can be defined as the experience of having a sense of positive group process, wherein the group members have a sense of their membership in the group, share a common goal, and have some degree of interdependence (McGrath, 1984). It is this process of sensing being part of a group that constitutes groupness – the members have to be aware of being in a group for groupness to be experienced. I discuss these constituent parts of groupness – positive group process, membership in the group, sharing a common goal: Creating interdependence, and provide examples from the data of when the participants experienced these positive elements of groupness.

The experience of groupness can also be challenging. Debates, disagreements, and frustrations also define the experience of groupness for the participants. I also discuss these challenging elements of groupness.

Positive group process

Positive group process is achieved when two or more individuals interact in a way that produces a favorable outcome (Bernard, 2002). For the participants, this was achieved consistently throughout the program. Positive group process was the experience
of making decisions together and reaching consensus on those decisions, which resulted in the group members engaging in activities of their own choosing, and engaging in activities that all the group members agreed on. As one of the participants said, “I didn’t have an expectation for what we should be trying to look out for or even trying – like what we should expect to – or not expect to be doing everything but try to go around, do we think and not get upset about what’s going on or not worry about anything even when there’s issues raised. Everyone’s just kind of cool with it.” Positive group process contributed (along with the other constituent elements of groupness) ultimately to the formation of a community of learners, which I discuss in greater detail in Chapter 5. This positive group process impacted the way in which the participants interacted with each other throughout the program. They joked, shared funny stories, and helped each other to make decisions about what to do and where to go throughout the program. There was minimal conflict among the participants, although when conflict arose, typically over a difference of opinion about how to spend their time, the participants did work hard to come up with an agreed-upon decision that most of the members of the group would agree to.

Although positive group process was the hallmark of groupness for the participants, there were also elements of difference and disagreement among them, which created a different type of group dynamic throughout the program. I will both illustrate and discuss these elements of difference and disagreement and how these elements also impacted their experience as a group later in this section.
Membership in the group

Another constituent element of groupness is having awareness of being a member of a particular group, and being aware of what the role of one’s membership is in the group. As one of the participants shared, “We’re finding out how everyone seems to sometimes take a leadership role, though there’s really no defined so-called leader or boss… Well I think that that might be because I know I find when I’m in groups with just my friends from home or whatever, everything usually comes back on me to seek out all the planning, decision making and that hasn’t happened here.” The participants were aware of being a part of their group during the program, and were aware of the role each of them held in the group. Because none of the participants acknowledged that anyone in the group acted as the “so-called leader”, membership roles in the group were that of equals, or more specifically, teammates. Groupness compelled the members of the group (the participants) to view each other and to interact with each other as shared decision-makers who were driven by shared goals, which is what teammates do. Teammates share in the decision-making process and hold each other accountable for the decisions they undertake. This awareness of their membership as teammates in the group created the experience of groupness. Their team membership was defined by the ways in which each of them contributed to the positive group process.

An example of how the participants demonstrated their awareness of their membership in the group was a time when they were in a restaurant with me, and they seemed to demonstrate that they viewed themselves as being members of their group who relied on both themselves and on me (as a member of their group) to make decisions
about what they were going to eat and how they were going to pay for their meals. Here is an excerpt from my field notes:

“They asked me for some recommendations for lunch, and I suggested a Croque Monsieur, since it is such a classic French lunch item. Most of them ordered that, but some ordered different items. They were happy that the waiter brought free bottles of water for the table, since they had learned that you often have to pay for bottled water at restaurants. The waiter practiced some English with us, but admitted that he did not speak much of it. Everyone seemed to enjoy their lunch and they were especially pleased that I asked the waiter (per their request) if it would be possible to pay the bill separately, which he gladly obliged. The group thanked me for that since they said they would not have been able to ask for that and it made things easier for them since they were not able to speak the language on their own, even in their group.”

In this excerpt from my field notes, the participants act as members of a group, who consult each other and work together to make their decisions and to communicate with the waiter and with me. They are aware of their membership in the group because they show dependence on each other, and function as a unit in this example.

Although it appears that the group members were depending on me to help them make decisions in this excerpt, I actually observed that they were consulting more with each other than with me throughout the lunch we were having together. I noticed that they looked to each other to figure out what they needed to do in the restaurant, and were simply conferring with me because it seemed they wanted some level of reassurance that they were on target with their choices and with the words they were using in French with the wait staff. In this example, the group evolved from being individuals who were
functioning as separate units who were not that concerned for each other, to becoming members of a group who acted with concern and support for each other. They really seemed to demonstrate in this example that they had become a united group who were there to support each other and to go through experiences together.

Furthermore, the group members, in this example, learned that they needed to help each other out in even the seemingly simplest of situations – in this case, when ordering food in a restaurant. When brought together for a simple reason, like ordering food for lunch in a restaurant, the participants transformed into a supportive group who helped each other out. They learned that they needed each other, even in what seemed to be a mundane setting, like a restaurant – they recognized that being members in the group helped them to survive in this setting. They also learned that they needed to trust each other so that they would all ensure each other’s well being during the program. In this example, they trusted each other as members of their group to help ensure that no one was misinformed about what to eat and that everyone would feel good about what they helped each other choose to order in the restaurant.

However, the participants also pointed out that there were times when they believed it was necessary to split into smaller sub-groups of two to four at different times, and that having membership in a large group detracted from some of their experiences.

Here is an excerpt from the group interview that illustrates this belief:

*Interviewer:* So what about being in this big group has been good?

*Male #4:* I thought definitely in Paris the most that tall people would like stick out together. So being nine people together, dead giveaway that you’re tourists. I don’t know why they don’t travel in like – they don’t like go out to dinner it seems like in more than four or five people.
Interviewer: Yeah.

Male #1: Well I guess it’s like a sense of maturity of being a big group out there obviously but I honestly think it hurt our chances being like locals and blending in.

In this example, their membership in the group was not experienced as a positive process, but rather as a limiting factor in experiencing the city and the culture more intimately.

Their membership in the group did not enhance their experience when they felt that being in a larger group meant that they were more obviously tourists who were not able to blend in more discreetly to their environment. Another example of the participants’ critique of being in a large group during the program follows.

Male #1: It was nice to be in a big group but then dissolve and enjoy being two, three or four so we’re not by ourselves and make it a little better that way.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Male #3: I actually didn’t think it was as safe like. Yeah, because that’s the target. If you’re by yourself you’re not going to be targeted.

Interviewer: So you think it’s almost more problematic to be in a big group like you were?

Male #3: Well I didn’t say that. I’m just saying it could be.

Interviewer: It could be. Well, yeah.

Male #3: It feels safer than it really is. I’m sure we’ll be safe if someone tries to come up and like –

[Crosstalk]

Interviewer: Well sure.

Male #3: - with a fist but they move out and yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah, that’s very true.
Male #1: Besides like pickpockets – I guess if you’re in the back of the group you’re just as much as a target but if you’re in the front there’s not as many people watching you.

Male #3: Yeah, and if you’re in the middle of the group you’re good. The back person will be occupied with looking forward at everyone.

In this example, their perception of being members of a larger group was that it gave them a false sense of security and detracted from their individual engagement with the environment. Membership in the group, although often helpful and positive, also limited their experiences and prohibited the members of the group from having a more up-close and intimate experience within the new setting.

Sharing common goals: Creating interdependence

Groupness also meant that the participants shared common goals. Sharing common goals was the experience of deciding what they wanted to experience together during the program, whether it was to see a particular cultural site, eat at a certain restaurant, or interact with other university students from France. The essence of this experience of sharing common goals was articulating their goals to each other, negotiating the goals they settled on, and pursuing the goals. As one of the participants described, “We always seem to come to some kind of conclusion that’s based on everyone - or at least everyone who has an opinion on it. Basically we all kind of come to some kind of idea and we all accept it. No one has ever been like someone who’s taken the idea and said, “Okay, we’re doing this.” This respect for each other’s ideas was an important element of groupness for the participants, and contributed to the process of sharing common goals. Sharing common goals also led to the formation of a community
of learners, because some of their shared goals were oriented towards learning. I will discuss this formation of a community of learners in greater detail in Chapter 5.

Another example of how they shared common goals was when the participants needed to buy tickets to use the Paris metro. The participants negotiated a system that allowed them to split up their money and buy tickets in bulk, thus saving each of them money. The example, which I documented in my field notes, follows:

“First, they had to buy their metro tickets. They asked for my suggestion about how many tickets to buy, and I told them about a carnet, which are ten tickets sold at a bit of a discount from individual tickets. They thought that was great, and came up with the idea that one person would buy two carnets and that the others could pay him for their tickets (each person would get two tickets, and the student who bought the tickets would get four). They had to use an automated machine, and they did it on their own using cash in the machine.”

In this example, the participants looked to each other to carry out a shared goal of getting the tickets and not spending more for the tickets than was absolutely necessary. By coming together to buy the tickets, the participants carried out a shared goal of saving money and helping each other to get to their destination together. They learned that as individuals, they actually shared many of the same goals during the program, and by forming into a group for the program, they could assist each other to carry out their shared goals. The formation of their group allowed them to create an environment whereby they could discuss their individual goals and transform them into shared goals.

Interdependence can be defined as mutual reliance based on mutual reliability; a sense of self-sufficiency in which the self is recognized and depended upon in the form of
a larger body of humanity (two or more people) rather than as an isolated individual. Interdependence was the experience of relying on each other throughout the program and in recognizing that this reliance on each other was beneficial and led to novel and interesting experiences. As one of the participants said, “I think it’s that we’re all pretty smart and I think we can trust each other. We know none of these guys screw up too badly and even if something happens we can figure it out together. It’s a novel thing to do that.” They recognized that there was great power in being part of a larger body of humanity – in this case, their group – and that not being an isolated individual meant that they had greater opportunities to engage in activities that were of interest to all of them.

An example of where they evidenced interdependence was when the participants and I decided to go see the Arc de Triomphe, a famous historic landmark in Paris. The participants showed great trust in each other and in me (perhaps too much trust) in the following excerpt:

“We then walked up the Champs-Elysees towards the Arc de Triomphe, and the group debated about whether or not to go up the Arc. I tried to stay out of their decision, and told them it was up to them to decide. The decision was made to go check it out. We could not see where you cross the Rond Point de l’Arc de Triomphe (one of the busiest roundabouts in all of Paris), so we saw some others run across it. We then decided to go for it when there was a bit of a break in the traffic. We ran fast, and as we did Tran ran his video on his digital camera and captured all of us looking like a bunch of idiots running across many lanes of fast-moving traffic to get to the Arc de Triomphe. Although it was funny, it was pretty stupid to do. But hey, it was an experience and they had a lot of laughs about it.”
The participants banded together to do this, and watched out for each other while they were all dashing across this busy intersection. They showed concern and care for each other’s well being, and also wanted to share in a crazy and memorable experience together. Interdependence here meant that not only did the participants see themselves as part of a larger group, but also that they exhibited concern and care for each other.

These constituent elements of groupness led to the next theme, which is the experience of groupness. These constituent elements of groupness are what created opportunities for the experience of groupness – in other words, these elements were necessary for the members to experience what groupness was in their program.

**Experience of groupness**

Groupness formed the entire essence of the program – the participants spent their time, from the beginning of the program to the end, in their group, and this group experience shaped each day and each moment during the program. Each day they woke up and joined their group right away, and then embarked on their day’s activities in their group. Each night ended with the participants being together in their group, whether it was having dinner together or going out and exploring their surroundings together. This is what groupness meant – it was a central part of the experience of the participants, and shaped each and every activity they engaged in. Their experiences were colored by the dynamics of their groupness – their decisions were made together, they reached consensus only when they had discussed their options, and they lived and functioned as a unit. Next I describe some examples of the meaning of groupness for the participants – these are the lived experiences of groupness.
The participants spoke many times about how they went through the entire program in their group, and how the structure of the program allowed them to really work together to experience a different culture and to figure out how to travel and how to get around on their own. The structure of the program that I am referring to here is the time during the program when the participants were by themselves, and were not being led by anyone in authority or anyone with expertise of any kind. It was a lack of structure in their schedule that gave them time and opportunities to experience groupness, (I discuss this point later in the chapter). Free time allowed them to get to know each other better and to form a closeness that brought them together as a unified front. Experiencing groupness is what empowered them to make decisions on their own and to engage themselves in their surroundings. Groupness for them made them feel safe and secure. Many of the participants indicated that this program was the first time they had ever traveled abroad, and moreover, was the first time that they had to navigate in a foreign country where the language was not English. Being together was helpful to them in removing the barriers that might have otherwise been there for them had any of them been on their own rather than in their group.

The experience of groupness made them feel more comfortable to take risks and to get out there and see things that they might not have otherwise seen. Risk-taking was an important experience for the participants, because it opened up new experiences to them that they might not have pursued if they had not been in their group. This risk-taking helped them to form their unified front and to grow closer to each other (I discuss risk-taking in more detail later in the chapter). This closeness and unified front is what groupness was for them – they functioned as a connected single unit who acted as a
single entity, despite the fact that they were all unique persons in the program. Groupness for them – being a part of this unified front - made it easier to spontaneously go out and explore places and sites, without having to worry about getting lost or being alone in a country where they did not speak the language. Groupness meant looking out for each other, and doing this made them feel more inclined to get out there and do and see as much as possible during the program. The experience of groupness made it much more fun for them, because it allowed them to feel free to be able to go out and just stumble upon new places and new things together, so that they could share the experience and have others to enjoy it with. Groupness for the participants allowed them to take more chances and try new things during the program and to feel secure in knowing that they were not alone in their new experiences.

Helping each other out was an important aspect of their experience of groupness; groupness created an environment of care and respect for each other. Care and respect for each other became a critical piece of their experience and meant that the participants genuinely wanted to share their experiences of the new environment and culture with each other, and that they cared about what each of their group members thought and respected each other’s contributions.

At one point, I asked the participants to share with me if they thought that because they had all taken both the Engineering Design course and the ENGR 301 course together during the preceding semesters and thus had gotten to know each other because of that, that they naturally would have a better time together in their group experiences during the program. I asked the participants,
“Male #1: No one’s been bossy or controlling and everything seems to be very well run, very smooth and very ...

Interviewer: Do you think that’s because you all already have kind of a connection with each other knowing each other or –

Male #2: Some of us we have that –

Male #1: Really –

[Crosstalk]

Male #2: But I know I at least didn’t have as much of a connection to most of the people in the room other than people – some I knew really well. Some I didn’t but now I feel like we definitely all know each other, know what we’re all like and everything.”

Being in the two classes before they participated in the short term program did not necessarily mean that they all knew each other well. Because the participants seemed to be so friendly and helpful with each other during the program, I assumed that all nine of them knew each other well and considered each other friends prior to when they participated in the program. The groupness that they experienced during the program allowed them to form a closeness that they did not have before, because they needed each other while they were abroad, and because the experience of groupness brought them together, and led to depending on each other to navigate the foreign environment. In their previous classes, they did not all need to interact with each other frequently, so they did not form closeness as I had assumed. Groupness developed during the program because the program brought them together for a new and unfamiliar experience. Groupness meant that they formed a trusting bond together because they were in a new
and unfamiliar setting, and felt compelled to grow closer to each other because of this newness of their experience.

Groupness meant that it was natural for the participants to get to know each other better and to figure out how they would spend their free time during the program. This “being together” for the program is what facilitated their experience of groupness, and is what shaped the meaning of groupness for the participants. Groupness meant that they negotiated with each other throughout the program about what they were going to do, and each time they assumed that what they ended up doing would be done as a whole group, rather than a few participants breaking off into their own little subgroups to do their own thing. Groupness meant that the participants agreed on what they would do with their time; it meant that they would settle on a decision as a group and would “go with the flow” with the rest of the group members. As one participant discussed, “We always seem to come to some kind of conclusion that’s based on everyone - or at least everyone who has an opinion on it. Basically we all kind of come to some kind of idea and we all accept it. No one has ever been like someone who’s taken the idea and said, “Okay, we’re doing this.”” This respect for each other’s ideas was an important element of groupness for the participants.

The support they gave each other in their group was powerful and helped to shape their experience of groupness. Groupness was a given for the participants in the program, and was their natural way of doing things, regardless of whether or not they needed to be or were expected to be together. There was no questioning the necessity of groupness – it was the norm and there was no desire to break away from experiencing the program in the group. Groupness was a pleasant and enjoyable experience for the participants,
because it allowed them to share in and reflect on their experiences as they were happening in the moment. As one of the participants shared, “None of us had an agenda or anything. We all just kind of wanted to go with the flow and kind of see what we could see. We just walked until we found whatever. We just wanted to see everything. We all did. It might be different later on with – just there were certain sites that we just wanted to see but we all wanted to see them and then there were certain ones that we didn’t and for the rest we just walked. We all kind of worked together, our particular group. We worked together well, I guess.” Groupness was the experience of working well together and in seeing everything they could together.

**Challenging experiences of groupness**

As mentioned earlier, groupness also included challenging experiences. Groupness, although primarily experienced by the participants in a positive manner, also was defined by some challenging experiences, such as disagreements, frustration, and factions. In fact, groupness was not fully realized by the participants without some of these challenges and trying elements. In other words, the full experience of groupness included both the positive elements I outlined earlier, as well as moments where the participants did not agree with each other or support each other’s ideas and suggestions.

An example of when the participants had a challenging experience of groupness is when the participants had relied on each other in a way that was not helpful – when they had to ride a train and had not arranged for the purchase of their tickets in the right way. This created some confusion and frustration for the participants. The example, which I documented in my field notes, follows:
“Then the train conductor came up to us and asked in French if he could see our tickets. The students all had rail passes, and had not made seat reservations in advance. I told them that I did not think that it was necessary to make the seat reservations, but I was not sure either since it had been a long time since I had used a rail pass. It turned out that the conductor told me in French that it was necessary for each of them to have a seat reservation for the train, and that they each had to pay 11 Euros for that. No problem, each of them paid it, but they were confused and a bit ruffled by it since they felt caught off-guard and felt like they should have known this before they got on the train. A.told me that he had researched and recalled that the web site he consulted said it cost 11 Euros for a seat reservation for the TGV. So, it was a real learning experience for us all.”

In this example, relying on each other as a group proved to be unhelpful. The participants had assumed that someone else had the knowledge that the rest of the participants needed, so none of them ended up having the right information when they got on the train. This reliance on each other to know what they should each have individually known did create this moment of not being prepared for what happened. Although they resolved the problem, they felt frustrated that they had assumed that someone else in the group knew what the right thing to do was in that situation.

In this instance, the group members did begin to see that things were not always smooth and easy for them. Their frustration and disappointment made them question how much they should rely on each other, and did create some doubt about how much the members of the group should trust each other. This example demonstrates how the group went from mostly being very trusting of each other, to being annoyed and mistrustful of
each other. They learned in this example that they should each have known, as individuals, what they should do in this situation – and should not depend on others to have the right answers. They also learned that being in a group can mean that they do not plan enough as individuals for problems that might arise during the program – that the group created a false sense of security and complacency at times. The context of being in a group created this challenging situation for them, because had they been on their own as individuals, this would not have happened – the individual participants would have had to know what to do individually, and could not have relied on others to know what to do.

In another example, some factions formed among the participants, which created some conflict and disagreement among them. An example of when the participants shared how their factions formed is when some of the participants wanted to go out and spend money at bars and nightclubs, while some of the others were not interested in going to these places. An excerpt from my field notes illustrates this:

“I went to the hotel at about noon and was met only by Andy, who was kind enough to tell me that it must have been a really late night for everyone because everyone was still asleep! I told him I understood and then I gave him written directions on how to get to my apartment, and asked him to have everyone meet me at my place between 2 and 2:30 PM that afternoon. Chris called me at about 5:45 PM, after I had been out for a while, and explained that they had a very late start today! He said they had gotten my note and then headed to Pere Lachaise cemetery to check it out. Chris mentioned to me that things were weird today because the reason they were so late was that several of the others had been out really, really late partying, and the rest of them who had not been out partying were annoyed because they had wanted to meet up with me to see more
places today. He felt like some of them were too focused on going out really late, instead of enjoying the cultural sites and beauty of the city during the day.”

This example points out that the participants did not always agree on how they should spend their time, and sometimes this disagreement caused them to feel frustration and to create some sub-groups who were divided in how they wanted to spend their time. The frustration became clear to me when some of the group members noticeably did not talk as much to those other members whom they were in disagreement with about how they should spend their time. Frustration also manifested itself in the ways in which some of the members of the group decided that they simply were not going to go along with the plans of the other members, and that they would instead form their own smaller sub-group who did their own thing. The group changed in this example from one where there was a lot of camaraderie to one where their differences created smaller sub groups within the large group. In this case, the existence of a group created moments for the members to learn just how different several of them were in terms of how they wanted to experience their time during the program. Although they still stayed in the large group most of the time, in this example, the participants showed that they did not feel compelled to spend each and every moment with each other, doing exactly the same things throughout the entire program.

Theme: Authentic experience

Another theme that emerged from the descriptions of the participants was authentic experience. Merriam-Webster’s defines authentic as true to one's own personality, spirit, or character, and experience as practical knowledge, skill, or practice derived from direct observation of or participation in events or in a particular activity.
The constituent elements of authentic experience, therefore, are participating in events through direct engagement and that are true to one’s own character, as well as participating in activities of one’s own choosing. Additionally, the juxtaposed experiences of adventure and restriction also constitute elements of authentic experience, which I discuss.

**Participation in events through direct engagement**

Authentic experience was true to the participants’ character and personalities because they engaged directly with their surroundings and environment, rather than abstractly reading or hearing about them. As one participant discussed, “Well no matter how much you read about a place or whatever you can’t – you don’t really understand what it’s like until you’re there. So it’s like – especially Paris or something like that I only know that as like cartoons or some – like something old or whatever – but it’s different to actually be there and see that there’s different – the city has character and different places are different. It’s just cool to experience it and something. There’s no way we could have known what exactly it’s like.” Their engaging in the overseas environment constituted authentic experience.

This theme relates directly to the theme of groupness, because agency was what brought about authentic experience for the participants. The participants’ positive group processes of deciding how to spend their time, and their ability to reach consensus on their decisions, created opportunities to have authentic experiences. Their shared goals of wanting to experience their environment true to their own characters allowed them to have authentic experiences. Interdependence created a sense of reliance and trust in each other, which in turn facilitated confidence to have authentic experiences, because
groupness compelled them to feel secure in their shared decision-making and in their pursuit of shared goals. This sense of security in sharing their experiences even meant that they began to protect each other when they felt threatened by an outsider. One of the participants noted, “I know it seems like if there’s somebody that looks kind of shady walking through the group – but who’s not with us - everyone will kind of look around and make sure we’re not – I know I’ve checked on people and made sure that nobody’s reaching for anyone in our group or anything... Everybody’s very supportive of everybody else.”

The theme of groupness also meant that their experiences of direct observation – where they went out to experience the culture and its offerings – were colored by their shared decision-making and their shared goals. It was not an individual who determined what the experiences of direct observation would be – the group shared in the decision-making process together, and experienced the events together. Because groupness created interdependence, experiences of direct observation – authentic experiences – were colored by a sense of reliance on each other and trust in making good decisions on how to directly observe their surroundings.

This direct engagement in the environment was not something that the participants had ever experienced as a group before, and changed the way they interacted with each other. Before they went on the program (when they were students in the ENGR 301 class), they had only heard about places they might be able to see and things they might be able to do once they arrived in France – but when they arrived at the start of the program in France, they quickly learned what it meant to experience the places they had only heard or read about first-hand, and in person. Directly engaging in the
environment led the group to form new understandings of what places in France were really like – and led them to become aware of what it felt like to interact with the people and places in this new environment. This was a change in how their group came together, because they learned that the group allowed for a more comfortable and stimulating experience of the environment – they had previously not understood just how significant the group could be for how they experienced the program until they had the opportunities for direct engagement with the program environment.

In addition, by directly engaging in the environment during the program, the participants transformed from being individual students who had taken a class together, to a cohesive group who banded together to share in their experiences during the program. It was interesting to observe the participants becoming a unified group because of the structure of the program – the nature of their interactions with the environment brought them together so that they could help each other to have good experiences. It was the way in which the program was structured – allowing them to have free time for a few days at the start of the program – which allowed them to form into a cohesive group. Giving them time to explore their surroundings on their own gave them the chance to get to know each other better and to transform into a group who supported each other and chose to engage in their surroundings together.

Participating in activities of their own choosing

Authentic experience was also made up of surprise and discovery. By having the ability to choose for themselves how they would engage directly in their surroundings, and by not having a plan in advance, the participants experienced surprise and discovery in their surroundings. The connected theme of adventure and its informality also meant
that their experiences of spontaneity and unplanned activities led them to have authentic experiences. As one of the participants said, “It was nice just being able to wander because my favorite memories happen to be when we’d just stumble upon the rarer gems in the middle of nowhere. That one park that we found – we found when you weren’t with us an awesome church in the middle of nowhere in Paris.” Wandering around on their own and choosing to see things spontaneously during their wandering constituted authentic experiences.

Another example of authentic experience, where their spontaneous actions created opportunities for them to learn more about their surroundings and about themselves follows:

Male #7: We were probably proud when we found –

[Crosstalk]

Interviewer: You were proud when you found the all night bakery. I can understand that.

Male #2: How about that place we ate the first night we got here, the next night? We all went along. We were up on the top through the door and there were outdoor things. We were like – we didn’t know what was going on. We just knew there were lots of things going on. We kind of looked and we found a place that we thought was great. Just all alone. It was only our second night there and we were still jetlagged or whatever. We were kind of proud of that because it was a good find, great food.

Authentic experience was the act of discovering something unexpected, without assistance from anyone else and by simply allowing themselves to wander and find something that was interesting.

As a result of participating in activities of their own choosing, the participants transformed from being classmates who were on a program together because of a class
that they had taken where they were told what they had to do, to a group who now had autonomy and self-direction. These self-determined activities led the participants to change from being in a position of not having had to make decisions on their own, to one where they had to make decisions by themselves. The participants learned that they were responsible for making their own choices during the program, and that they could have a direct impact on the quality and outcome of their participation in the program. This autonomy and self-direction was a new experience for the participants, and was what brought them together as a group to engage in their chosen activities together.

**Participating in activities true to the group’s character**

Because groupness created a shared purpose and shared goals, activities that were authentic for the participants were guided by their shared sense of interest in getting to know more about their peers in the foreign culture. Since authentic experience meant that it was important to engage in their surroundings through direct observation and direct interaction, they chose to spend some of their time having discussions with French student peers. This direct engagement with their French peers constituted an authentic experience, and was guided by the shared decision of the group wanting to learn directly from interacting with French people. As one participant shared, “‘Here we had (the French) students talk to us and talk about laws. They were talking about the gun laws and that we have guns and stuff like that."

**Interviewer:** Yeah. I remember you were – you were telling me that about the guns.

**Male #3:** It’s just a lot easier to stay in the loop here when we have people that kind of recognize us for what we are, Americans”. Authentic experience with the French students created an opportunity for the participants to recognize a shared group identity,
which was that of being Americans. Their awareness of being Americans came about because of their shared interactions with “others”, and these “others” existed outside of their shared group identity. The “others” in this case were the French students, and it was the differences that the French students introduced to the participants that brought about this awareness of being Americans. They were able to comprehend the meaning of “being Americans” because of their authentic experiences with people of a different culture, whose identity was different from that of the group of participants. The authentic experience of interacting with “others” brought about a self-awareness of their group identity.

This interaction with French students changed the group of participants in terms of how they viewed themselves in the context of being in a foreign country. They had not really understood what it meant to be seen as “American” before they encountered this perception among the French students, and this new awareness led them to discuss how they had not really given a lot of thought to what it meant to be “American” in the eyes of people from a different country. The group developed a new identity that acknowledged that they were in fact different from the French students, and they embraced the difference as something that was normal and to be expected. The participants had not had the opportunity to really comprehend what this new identity was going to feel like until they spent time interacting with the French students.

Interacting with the French students also led the participants to form a new group identity – one that moved away from their perceptions of sharing commonalities among themselves, to one where they became aware of being a group that is different from people who are outside of their group. This was the first time I observed any change in
how the participants viewed themselves as a group, because leading up to when they interacted with French students, they were only interacting among themselves, and spending their time forming their own group identity in which they discovered their commonalities and shared preferences. The interactions with people who were outside of their cohesive group made them aware of differences that existed outside of themselves. The context here – situations where they were interacting with French students – led them to develop a new group identity that was marked by an awareness of being different from others.

This points to the importance of context – in this case, the participants would not have known what it meant to be different culturally from French students had they not experienced these interactions with the students during the program. The structure of the program, whereby the group of participants were able to spend time getting to know French students, is what led the participants to learn what it means to be different culturally from those who come from another country. The participants did not know about this difference until their authentic experiences – interacting with the French students in the program environment – allowed them to develop this new understanding of difference.

Authentic experience also led to the group “messing up”. Authentic experience meant that they could go out and try new things, and have new experiences, without worrying about having a successful outcome. The essence of “messing up” was that it was safe to go out and do things that normally might be intimidating or frightening. Their interdependence is related to this concept, because their sense of trust and reliance...
on each other created this comfort with “messing up”. As I discussed with one of the participants, “...You learn things a lot better.

Interviewer: By what?

Male #3: By being here in person.

Interviewer: And messing up, too?

Male #3: And messing up. A lot. We all do. It helps a lot. You’ve got to mess up.

Male #6: If I mess up I learn more...”

“Messing up” was an authentic experience that led to learning. The experience of "messing up" changed the participants because they learned that it was actually a good thing to "mess up" by doing things that they might not normally do if they were not in the group. They learned that "messing up" led them to go outside of their comfort zones and embark on new discoveries and challenges. I discuss the relationship between authentic experience and learning later in the chapter.

Another example of how “messing up” was an authentic experience that led to learning follows:

Male #1: When I was going to change money with the person because they wouldn’t _____ . They wouldn’t accept American dollars. I was talking to them in English. They were talking to me in French and I sort of got the idea what they were trying to say which was actually pretty interesting to me that they were like, “No.” Then she had to eventually write down ______ , “No, you have to” –

Male #4: I think they did actually they just didn’t take one hundreds.

Male #1: They wrote down, “No U.S. _____ .”

Interviewer: Oh really? Oh that’s funny. But still the whole thing was probably just sort of, “What’s going on,” right, because you’re not knowing what she’s saying back to you.

Male #1: She didn’t speak any English and I didn’t speak any French.
Interviewer: So you just had to – but it worked.

Male #1: You got the idea across but it was awkward because I didn’t think that that would be the way _____.

In this example the participants reveal that struggling with communicating in a language that they did not know was what led them to figure out how to get by despite this limitation. Even though they were not able to speak in French, at least attempting to communicate resulted in a successful outcome. Being willing to “mess up” in this example was what led the participants to learn that they could in fact function fine without knowing the native language.

Adventure and restriction

Adventure and restriction were two sub-themes of authentic experience that emerged from the data. In this section I describe the constituent elements of adventure and restriction, how adventure and restriction were juxtaposed against each other for the participants, and discuss the meaning of experiencing adventure and restriction during the program.

Adventure and Restriction: Constituent elements

Merriam-Webster’s defines adventure as an exciting, unusual, or remarkable experience. Restriction is defined as a principle that limits the extent of something. Adventure was at the core of the participants’ experiences when they were making their own decisions and were able to choose how they were spending their time. Exciting, unusual, and remarkable experiences (adventure) formed the essence of what I refer to as
the informal parts of the program, or the experience of informality. These informal parts of the program (informality) were the moments when the participants were outside of the structured, scripted, and scheduled portion of the program (which was experienced as formality). This included both the time at the start of the program in Paris, when the group was without a formal guide or leader, and also when the participants had free time outside of the structured industry visits. Spontaneous visits to various cultural sites, restaurants, and other unplanned activities constituted the informal parts of the program. Adventure existed only during these informal parts of the program.

Moments when the participants felt excited about what they were doing, and felt in control of what they chose to do with their time constituted adventure. Not having a plan or a schedule also constituted adventure – the informal parts of the program facilitated the experience of adventure. I discuss the meaning of informality later in the chapter.

Juxtaposed against the experience of adventure is the experience of restriction. Restriction is the experience of being limited in doing something that one wants to do. Not being able to do something that one wants to do results in frustration and dissatisfaction. Furthermore, when one is limited to or forced into doing only what someone else has determined that person should do, the person experiences restriction. The person needs to have agency, or self-determination and the ability to take action willfully and with intention, in order to avoid the experience of restriction.

Restriction was experienced during the formal, structured portion of the program, which was when the industry visits and formal, academic parts of the program took place. As one of the participants shared, “We don’t really have to think when we’re doing the
visits and we don’t fend for ourselves. Everything’s sort of taken care of for us. Part of that’s good, but not really”. Restriction prohibited the experience of agency and “fending for themselves”. Restriction also led to the participants not having to think for themselves, which prohibits agency; thinking for one’s self is what constitutes agency. Not being able to determine how they spent their time and what they did each day during the formal, academic part of the program constituted restriction. Therefore, the constituent elements of restriction are being limited in agency, not having choice in how to spend one’s time, and being required to do things that are not of one’s choosing.

The elements of informality and formality in the program are significant and fall under the sub-themes of adventure and restriction, because informality and formality were experienced within the parameters of adventure and restriction. Next are overviews of the constituent elements of informality and formality.

**Informality**

Informality is the absence of a pre-determined plan or schedule. This ties directly into the experience of adventure. When the participants experienced informality in the program, they also experienced adventure; in addition, adventure created opportunities to engage in the experience of informality. These two concepts – adventure and informality – cannot be viewed as distinct experiences because they were completely interwoven for the participants. Informality was what brought about opportunities for adventure to happen. When they were free to do what they wanted, and were not constrained to follow a predetermined plan or schedule, the participants experienced adventure. As one participant described, “‘Going by foot we got to see places that we weren’t supposed to
see. You feel like – I felt like it was more of an adventure. We went to places that were more uniquely free, more uniquely French than just sort of like, “Oh this is what France is supposed to be like,” like the Eiffel Tower.”

The experience of informality was a pivotal moment for the participants. Because they had not known what it would be like to spend time on their own in the first part of the program, they had not realized just how important this freedom would be in their overall experience. They learned that having the freedom to do as they pleased during their own free time was a valuable experience, and led them to form a stronger group identity. This stronger group identity was a result of coming together to share in decision-making during the informal part of the program.

Formality

Formality means rigid or ceremonious adherence to established forms, rules, or customs. For the participants, they experienced formality when they had to conform to the established schedule set forth for them by others. Because formality was experienced as rigid adherence to this schedule, they were unable to spend time reflecting on what they experienced during this time, and did not have opportunities to process what they had seen at each company. One of the participants shared “We got up, got moving, and kept on going all day and didn’t have time to talk about what we were seeing and doing at the companies”. This rigid adherence to a schedule prohibited reflection and discussion among the participants about what they had experienced, whereas experiencing freedom and informality gave them time to positively process as a group (experienced as groupness) what they had experienced.
The experience of formality changed the group’s dynamics. They became less motivated, and more reserved when they experienced the formality of the program. During the informal parts of the program, the participants were engaged, motivated, and energized – and this changed once they entered the formal part of the program. The participants learned that there was a distinct difference between the informal and formal parts of the program, which they had not known would be the case until they experienced these differences.

Relationship between themes and learning in context

Groupness and learning in context

The experience of groupness led to group learning. Group learning is the act, process, or experience of gaining knowledge or skill among individuals who are together because of similarities (Wenger, 1999). The participants experienced positive group processes – and learning was one of their positive group processes. What this means is that learning was itself a process that led to a change in knowledge, skills, and behaviors among the participants, and for the participants, this process produced favorable outcomes for them. Because they experienced groupness, and this groupness brought them together because of their similar and shared goals, the act of carrying out their shared goals led to learning.

Shared goals and interdependence are at the crux of the nature of learning for the participants. Learning was a process of sharing goals, and carrying out the shared goals led them to learn more about their environment and about each other. Context was experienced through the interdependence they formed with each other – their reliance on
each other shaped the decisions they made, and created the backdrop for how they engaged in their environment. Learning was dependent on, and defined by, groupness.

Furthermore, groupness led to the formation of a community. Community was the result of the development of interpersonal relationships that came about because of their engagement in shared goals and shared activities (Kirshner and Whitson, 1997). Their positive group processes, and their agency, occurred within a local, subjective, and socially constructed world – and therefore the experience of groupness meant that created their own community. They created community through the shared goals that they created for themselves, and through their shared experiences. Their community existed within the larger context of the program – the program leaders, the French students with whom they interacted, the places they explored on their own, and the companies they visited. Their community was formed because of their experience of groupness. Sharing common goals, having interdependence, and being aware of their roles in their group were all elements that led to the formation of a community – and it was within their community that they learned. Groupness led the participants to become a community of learners. I discuss their experiences as a community of learners in Chapter five.

**Authentic experience and learning in context**

Situated learning recognizes the interconnectedness of learning and the contexts in which it occurs, and capitalizes on the inherent significance of real-life contexts in learning (Bransford et al., 1992). Knowledge is assumed to be the dynamic byproduct of unique relationships between individuals and their environment; learning, therefore, is a process that occurs for individuals engaged within contexts in which knowledge is
embedded naturally (Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989; Choi & Hannafin, 1995). An authentic, rather than a de-contextualized environment, is what cultivates authentic learning experiences, which I discuss further in Chapter five.

Authentic experiences are made up of coherent, meaningful, and purposeful activities that represent the ordinary practices of a culture (Brown et al., 1989). The participants engaged in authentic experiences together during the program, both during the informal parts of the program as well as during the formal parts of the program. The motivation behind the authentic experiences during the informal parts of the program differed, however, for the participants, because they were the agents who determined those authentic experiences. During the formal, structured part of the program (the industry visits), although the participants were visiting real-world – a.k.a. authentic - settings (such as manufacturing facilities and steel plants), they were not the agents behind the decision to engage in those real-world settings. When the participants were the agents driving the choices for engaging in authentic experiences, a different form of learning occurred as a result of these self-directed, self-determined authentic experiences. I discuss this observation in more detail in Chapter five.
Chapter 5

DISCUSSION

In this chapter, I discuss what the research findings have confirmed about our knowledge of theory and practice. I also discuss how the data have challenged what we know about theory and practice. I conclude by discussing what kinds of additional studies would help us to further understand the theory and practice outlined in this study.

Context in learning

The research findings have confirmed several aspects of the theories presented in this study. The findings particularly confirm the main theoretical framework guiding the study, situated learning. As defined in Chapter 1, situated learning is a theory of learning whereby individuals learn as a social practice, in a contextualized setting, and create knowledge by being actively engaged in a social environment (Lave and Wenger, 1991). The main theme of situated learning theory for this study is the role of context in learning, and how context shapes learning for participants in this short term education abroad program.

Situated learning theory: Role in shaping the experience for study participants

In examining the data to determine how the participants’ descriptions of their experiences reveal conceptions of context, several findings emerged. As explained in Chapter Three, I initially developed a theoretical framework based on the elements of situated learning theory that defines context in an education abroad program. Context in an education abroad program, according to my theoretical framework, is made up of activities, tools, situations, and a community of learners. However, because I
incorporated a grounded theoretical approach in analyzing the data, I also searched for ways in which the descriptive data revealed other forms of context in an education abroad program. In this section I describe emergent themes that came from the data that also provided a conception of context for the participants in this education abroad program.

**Emergent theme defining context: Interactions with the environment**

The participants spoke a lot about how they responded to and interacted with the environment around them. This included how they interacted with the places they visited during the program. Their descriptions of how they interacted with the environment – such as when they went to restaurants, wandered the streets, and navigated the metro system in Paris – revealed that much of the context of their program consisted of how they dealt with their physical environment. It is interesting to note that their descriptions of how they interacted with their physical environment focused on the informal, unplanned parts of the program, and not on the times when they interacted with the physical environment during the formal, planned part of the program. Their groupness led them to focus on discussing the experiences of interacting with the physical environment when they were the agents who decided what to see and do, rather than when the program leaders led them around the industry sites and made the decisions on where the participants would go.

**Emergent theme defining context: Interactions with each other**

Since much of the participants’ description revealed their experience of groupness during the program, the interactions they had with each other formed a major part of context for them. Their interactions with each other shaped the entire experience of the program, whether it was during the unstructured, informal times that they were together,
or when they were brought together during the formal, structured industry visits. The nature of their interactions was different during the unstructured parts of the program than during the formal parts of the program, but throughout the program, these interactions among themselves formed the cornerstone of the program’s structure. As discussed in Chapter 4, the nature of their interactions during the unstructured part of the program were more authentic because they were driven by their collective identity – they chose what they did together, and wanted to learn together. Their interactions were more authentic because the participants had agency and determined for themselves how they spent their time during the unstructured part of the program, so they were the ones who determined their own activities, rather than the program leaders. Collective identity and authentic experiences are both key aspects of situated learning theory.

**Extant theory of learning in context**

The participants did not know what my theoretical definition of context in an education abroad program was (I did not discuss this with them during the study), but their descriptions often revealed an understanding of the elements of context I developed for the study. Their descriptions of groupness, the differences between the formal and informal parts of the program, and the importance of experiencing things for themselves during the program all revealed aspects of the meanings of activity, tools, situation, and community of learners, and contributed to the development of extant theory. I discuss this extant theory of learning in context next.

**Activity**

Their descriptions revealed that activities were most meaningful when they were triggered by spontaneous, unplanned opportunities. They valued activities that allowed
them to do their own thing, without having a plan in advance. As one of the participants said, “*When we were in Paris - I think it’s still fun (at the university), it’s just we have a schedule now and it was nice just being able to wander because my favorite memories happen to be when we just stumbled upon the rarer gems in the middle of nowhere*”. Their motives were most meaningful when they were not pre-planned, but were instead carried out on a whim. Motives, according to situated learning theory, are planned towards fulfillment of a specific, pre-planned goal (Lave, 1999), but for the participants, motives were geared towards discovery and surprise in what they found and experienced. In this sense, activity for these participants diverged from the meaning of activity accorded by situated learning theory, which I discuss later in the chapter.

**Tools**

Their descriptions showed that the most useful tool for them was the communication they engaged in with each other. This is because they used communication as a way to negotiate their experiences with each other throughout the program. As one of the participants said, “*Well, I think that that (our decision making) might be because I know I find when I’m in groups with just my friends from home or whatever, everything usually come back on me to seek out all the planning, decision making, and that hasn’t happened here. I think that that might be because everyone’s operating at higher level.*” This “higher level” that the participant described referred to how they all contributed to the decision making processes together, rather than just one person taking the lead and deciding for everyone else in the group. Communicating their ideas with each other constantly created a forum for them to come up with ideas together for how to spend their time. All of these factors were part of their experience of
groupness, where shared decision-making constituted a tool they used to pursue their negotiated interests.

Situation

Situations where the participants had to take action in order to fulfill a desire were most prevalent during the informal, unstructured part of the program. This is because they were free to choose their own way of doing things during this time, and that experience led them to create their own situations. Situations that led to learning for them carried agency – meaning, they were the agents of their program and they called the shots together. One of the participants said, “I think it’s that we’re all pretty smart and I think we can trust each other. We know none of these guys screw up too badly and even if something happens we can talk and figure it out together. It’s a novel thing to do that.” Their situations allowed them to trust each other because they knew they could rely on each other to make good choices.

Community of learners

The whole notion of groupness for the participants really ties into the concept of community of learners. The group formed a community of learners during the program because their experiences depended on the ways in which each of them as individuals formed a group that set out to learn about the culture and uniqueness of the environment around them. As discussed in Chapter four, the group could potentially have begun to form a community of learners prior to participating in the program (during the design course and the ENGR 301 course), but that had not happened. Instead, the program itself created the opportunity to become a community of learners. As one participant described, “But I know I at least didn’t have as much of a connection to most of the
people in the room other than a few people – some I knew really well. Some I didn’t but now I feel like we definitely all know each other, know what we’re all like and everything. I think that also it seems like because not a single one of us has been to France before - none of us had an agenda or anything. We all just kind of wanted to go with the flow and kind of see what we could see.’’ The experience of groupness – where they shared common goals and experienced interdependence – is what led them to become a community of learners, because they gained knowledge and skills from being brought together. The elements of groupness – positive group process, awareness of membership in their group, sharing common goals, and interdependence – contributed to their formation into a community of learners. Learning happened because of their community.

Factors leading to positive expression of groupness

Factors that led to the positive expression of groupness – which was another form of context for the participants in the study – include the level of trust and equality that the participants felt towards each other, having sufficient opportunities to make their own decisions, and not having too much time that was scripted by program leaders. Experiencing groupness – which led them to form a community of learners – meant that the participants learned best because they were able to positively contribute to their own learning and were able to create their own shared goals for learning during the program. By having sufficient time to experience their surroundings on their own – without a structured plan that was imposed on them from program leaders – the participants were able to learn how to rely on each other and were able to build trust and interdependence. The findings of the study inform our understanding of the factors that can lead to a
positive expression of groupness among learners in a short term education abroad program.

**Form of learning: Authentic learning**

As discussed in Chapter four, authentic experiences are made up of coherent, meaningful, and purposeful activities that represent the ordinary practices of a culture (Brown et al., 1989). In the study, authentic experiences facilitated and led to learning. Learning happened when the participants were engaging in authentic experiences, and meaningful learning was the result of the participants creating their own authentic experiences.

As discussed in Chapter four, motivation for and agency in determining learning are what differentiate authenticity in learning from merely imposing real-world settings on learners. Imposing real-world settings on learners does not guarantee that authentic learning will occur. Authentic learning occurs when participants choose what they want to learn about and determine for themselves – and not anyone else – how they go about their own learning. Authentic environments in educational settings are not the same as authentic learning, because the learners do not choose these environments themselves – the environments, although representative of real-world settings (such as industrial sites), were selected by program leaders and usually without the input of the participants in the program. It is important to distinguish these two elements – authentic learning and authentic educational settings – because they are often not clearly distinguished in the literature (Choi & Hannafin, 1995). The findings from this study contribute to an understanding of what authentic learning means, how its meaning should be clearly
differentiated from authentic learning environments, and how it occurs in a short term education abroad program.

The form of learning that emerged in this example, which I call authentic learning, took shape because the participants created and chose for themselves the opportunities and experiences throughout their program. The fact that the participants had decision-making abilities during the program, whereby they could determine how they were going to spend their time and where they were going to visit, led to this form of learning – authentic learning. The factors that contributed to this form of learning were the moments when the participants were able to choose how they were going to interact both with each other and within the settings in which they found themselves. The main factor that distinguished authentic learning as opposed to another form of learning in this case was that the participants had agency. Agency led them to create their own motive-driven opportunities to learn from each other and from the environments they selected.

Form of learning: Spontaneous learning

As described in Chapter four, adventure led the participants to engage more directly in their environments, and facilitated the experience of freedom and agency. Learning from adventure is a powerful experience, and can lead to a deeper sense of connection to learning, because adventure allows the learner to explore and experiment without fear of failure or punishment. As the findings indicated, adventure can be more powerful when it is facilitated by the experience of groupness, since groupness as a phenomenon creates a sense of security and confidence that the other members of the group will protect the learner as that learner ventures out into the world with the group. Groupness acts as a shield for individuals who want to learn but might be reluctant to
explore and experiment individually, and also provides a context through which learning naturally leads to adventure. Adventure is a much more palatable experience when others in one’s community act as a safety net and help the learner process the meaning of the adventure.

Also, adventure facilitated a greater willingness to take risks, which led to a comfort level in spontaneously engaging in their environment. A form of learning that emerged during the study is what I call spontaneous learning, where the learners decide on what they want to do and how they want to learn. This form of learning was a powerful experience for the participants, because it was in the unplanned, spontaneous moments when learning was experienced in the most meaningful and lasting way. The factors that led to this form of learning were the many moments throughout the program where the participants did not follow a pre-determined plan for how to spend their time. The participants revealed how these moments of spontaneous discovery of places, people, and other surprises gave them a better sense of what was unique about where they were, and moreover, allowed them to see that they could rely on themselves to figure things out on their own. They learned from the moments of stumbling across the unexpected and unforeseen – not from carefully planned and pre-determined ideas for where they should go or what they should do.

Spontaneous learning was a byproduct of experiencing adventure during their time together – adventure led them to have spontaneous moments of learning and discovery, which they would not have experienced if their entire time during the program had been scripted by a leader or even if the participants themselves had carefully pre-planned their entire time before they actually embarked on the program. By not
following a strict schedule, the participants were able to discover many things that they had not considered prior to their arrival on the program.

**Form of learning: Intrinsically-motivated learning**

Another form of learning that emerged is what I refer to as intrinsically-motivated learning. This form of learning is where the learner is motivated not by external factors of reward and punishment, but rather by the learner’s own interests (Rigby et al., 1992). Intrinsically-motivated learning created opportunities to experience adventure, and allowed for the participants to determine the nature and the meaning of learning. Adventure put the participants in the driver’s seat to determine the processes that lead to their learning. I discuss how adventure and intrinsic learning can be facilitated in a short term education abroad program later in the chapter.

Factors that led to intrinsically-motivated learning for the participants included the free time that was a part of the beginning of the overall program. Because the participants spent the first several days of the program on their own, without a planned agenda for academic and cultural experiences, they were able to experience intrinsically-motivated learning. The participants were able to pursue their own chosen activities and could decide what they wanted to do. They were driven by their own sense of interest and curiosity about their surroundings, and were able to determine how they were going to interact with their surroundings. It was completely up to them – not anyone else – how they spent this valuable free time in the beginning of the program, which contributed to the experience of intrinsically-motivated learning.
Learning in context: How findings challenge our understanding of theories of learning

As discussed in Chapter Two, situated learning theory assumes that the way in which individuals become part of a community of learners seems to have one dominant direction of movement, namely from the periphery of the novices toward the center dominated by the well-established, competent masters. In this study, the participants became part of their community of learners on equal footing, where none of them took on the role of competent master who led the novices towards some greater understanding of their experiences. The participants formed a democratic, shared way in which they learned, and learned from each other. They did not look towards an expert among them who could teach them what they should know, but instead treated each other as equals in their knowledge and understanding of their experiences. They were not concerned or bothered that they did not have an expert leading them around during their unstructured time together, because they learned from interacting together with their surroundings.

Their groupness – which led to the formation of their community of learners – did not support the theoretical notion within activity theory (outlined in Chapter Two) that there is a clear division of labor and multiple roles adopted by members of a community who share goals and objectives. The participants, in forming their community of learners, did not evidence divisions of labor or demonstrate that they had decided on strict roles or objectives for what they wanted to accomplish or gain. Their fluid interactions, and resistance to having a leader or a dominant decision-maker among them, showed that there was a tendency among them to not want to define their own specific roles or determine a clear division of labor. They resisted dividing their tasks among
themselves, and instead chose to share most of the decision-making in a democratic manner. This was a surprising finding because it would seem that there would have been some level of dividing the labor among their community of learners, but I did not observe this happening with the participants. Further study of how a group of participants in a short term education abroad program form their own community of learners would help to better understand the dynamics of role and identity formation in a community of learners.

Short term program: How findings inform our understanding of this type of program

Because this case was a short term education abroad program, the condensed time frame was an important factor to consider in terms of how the participants experienced the program. The participants discussed that the brevity of the program did limit their ability to really understand the culture and overseas environment, but they also revealed that they were not surprised that this would be the case. As discussed in Chapter 2, short term programs do not aim for participants to have an in-depth, deep cultural experience, since the condensed format of this type of program does not allow for such experience. Therefore, it is not surprising that the participants themselves acknowledged that they “scratched the surface” during the program and only gained a very superficial understanding of the culture and even of the industry practices in France.

The findings of this study also confirm that a short term education abroad program can serve as a means to encourage participants to pursue more long-term, in-depth study abroad later in their academic careers. The participants discussed how they would have been able to get to know the French students and the culture, as well as
gained a deeper understanding of industry and engineering in France, had they been able to extend their time abroad. As one of the participants said, “If I had the time I could get things out of the way and be getting all the things I need to see and then after that you could just sort of meet people and actually have a more long term relationship, actually find – really compare what’s better than other things…We scratched a nice, even surface. One layer off the top but we didn’t dig. How’s that analogy?” A deeper connection to the people and the culture could be experienced in a subsequent, longer-term education abroad program, and could allow a participant to tie in their learning from the short term program to build upon in a subsequent long term program.

Several participants did indicate that they hoped they would be able to pursue a long term education abroad program in the future, and that the short term program helped them begin to understand what it is like to experience a different culture, but did not give them enough time or opportunity to immerse themselves in a foreign setting. If time and resources permitted, I would have been very interested in following up with the participants to determine how many of them actually pursued subsequent long term education abroad programs because of the interest that was sparked from participating in the short term program. I discuss this issue later in the chapter in the section on recommendations for future research.

As discussed in Chapter Two, there is little empirical research on short term programs, and any research that has been done on short term programs aims to measure outcomes of learning and benefits of the short term program model. There is no empirical research on the processes of learning in short term programs, and no examination of how participants in short term programs experience their program. This
study fills a missing gap in the literature by examining processes of learning in a short
term education abroad program. This study aimed to understand how participants
describe their experiences in a short term program, and moreover, the processes through
which the participants learned in the context of their program. By studying how
participants in a short term program experienced context in their program, the findings
have shown what it means to learn in context in a short term program.

The findings give practitioners an in-depth description of what the meaning of
learning in context is for participants in a short term program, and as a result challenge
what we assume about the benefits and limitations of a short term education abroad
program. The findings reveal that although a short term program is by its very nature,
short in length and limited in scope, nonetheless there is a lot of learning that happens
among participants. The findings show that participants learn a great deal from the
interactions they have with each other, and in the community of learners that they form.
Perhaps rather than focus on the limitations and shortcomings of short term education
abroad programs as has been presented in the empirical literature, it would be better to
acknowledge that a great deal of learning can happen among the participants themselves,
and that the greatest benefit for the participants in this type of program is that they have
an opportunity to learn how to form a community of learners, which can create a
meaningful and deep learning experience for them. As practitioners, we may in fact be
paying too much attention to the outcomes of learning in this type of program, and not
enough attention to the processes of learning that occur for participants and that are
driven by the interactions the group of learners have together.
One question to ask from the findings is: How can we incorporate adventure into the formal aspects of a short term education abroad program? A short term program by definition has an academic rationale and focus, so how can the experience of adventure be brought into the structured and scripted parts of a program? Allowing participants sufficient opportunities to explore their surroundings on their own during the formal and academic parts of a program would help to incorporate adventure into a program. Participants should be encouraged to explore the formal settings of their program – such as a visit to a company or to a cultural site – on their own terms. One way to facilitate this would be to create an activity for participants to explore a setting within the formal part of a program that allows them to identify what they want to learn from the setting and how they want to go about pursuing that learning. Encouraging the development of agency among the participants, where the participants come up with their own plans and goals for learning from their surroundings during the formal part of a program would help to facilitate the experience of adventure.

It is also important to figure out how to facilitate learning among participants when they are on their own during the informal parts of a program. Informality and free time does not guarantee that learning will naturally occur among participants, so we must consider the factors that can lead to learning during unstructured, informal, free time. This is where intrinsic learning comes into play – encouraging participants to think about and articulate what might really be driving them and what it is that really interests them – can bring about deeper learning for the participants during their unstructured, free time. Participants should be encouraged to develop a connection to their fellow participants prior to embarking on the program, if possible. This fostering of a connection among the
participants can lead to the development of a sharing of goals and an exploration of interests, which in turn can lead the participants to experience groupness and to eventually form themselves into a community of learners.

The findings of this study can help us to design short term programs that account for and emphasize the formation of a community of learners, and that build in time for the participants to explore and have adventure on their own terms. So often short term programs are designed to try to maximize formal and structured experiences given the short amount of time available, when in fact it may be better to design programs that minimize the formal and scripted experiences, and instead build in ample time for participants to form their own agendas for how they want to spend their time together during the program. It might be better to allow for more time for participants to get to know each other so that they can help each other learn and can have a more meaningful experience during their program. Adding opportunities and time to allow the participants to get to know each other better and to form their own community of learners, who determine their own activities, would enhance short term education abroad programs.

Recommendations for further research

More studies on the processes of learning in all education abroad programs are needed. Processes of learning – as opposed to outcomes of learning – in education abroad programs are still not well understood in the literature and have not been sufficiently explored. Studies have focused too much on what the products (outcomes) of learning in education abroad programs are – such as deeper cultural knowledge, foreign language acquisition, and intercultural awareness – but have not focused on how, and in what
ways, participants actually learn during their participation in an education abroad program. Studies based on qualitative forms of inquiry that are designed to study the experiences and meanings of experience that participants attach to their learning can help to address this lack of attention to processes of learning in education abroad programs.

Additionally, whenever possible, researchers should directly observe participants during education abroad programs, so as to gain an understanding of what is actually happening during the participants’ experiences. Researchers typically collect data when participants have already returned from their education abroad program, mainly due to constraints with being able to finance a study that allows the researcher to be present during the overseas programs. Researchers should apply for funding to cover the travel and other expenses of such studies that allow direct observation of participants’ experiences. Collecting this type of rich, living data would contribute to a greater understanding of what context means for participants as they experience and define it for themselves.

Studies that examine the elements of context in education abroad programs would help to enhance the findings from this study. It is important to understand what context is and what it means for participants in an education abroad program, and not to assume that the context of an education abroad program is simply the overseas setting itself. As the findings have shown, context for participants in the program I investigated was multifaceted and complex, and went well beyond simply the physical environment in which the participants spent their time during the program. Context is a critical piece to help us understand processes of learning in an education abroad program, and more
studies that look at what it means and what it is made up of would enhance our ability to design programs that use context effectively to facilitate learning for participants.

Studies that examine the meaning of groupness and adventure in learning in an education abroad program would enhance the findings of this study. Qualitative inquiry would allow for a study into the processes that lead to the experience of groupness, and would shed light on the meanings that participants accord to groupness. This type of inquiry would also help to contribute to an understanding of what adventure means in education abroad programs to participants who engage in these programs. Understanding the meanings that participants accord to their experiences in education abroad programs can facilitate a deeper understanding among practitioners of how participants experience programs, and can lead to more inclusive and richer program design.

Studies that investigate a relationship between participation in a short term education abroad program and subsequent participation in a longer-term education abroad program would enhance the findings of the study. Since participants indicated that they would have liked to have had more time to get to know the people and places in greater depth than what was possible during the condensed amount of time in the short term program, it would be interesting to explore in a subsequent study if the participants in the study had chosen to participate in longer term education abroad programs. A longitudinal study on which (if any) participants in this study embarked on a subsequent long term or additional short term education abroad program as a result of their participation in the short term program, and what the relationship between the short term and long term programs meant, would enhance our understanding of learning in education abroad programs.
Studies that examine the meaning of context in longer-term education abroad programs would provide insight into any differences in how context is construed and experienced by participants in this different model of education abroad. Observing how participants in a semester-long education abroad program experience context, and assessing how they describe the meaning of context, would contribute to an understanding of any discernible differences in the quality and nature of the experiences of participants who spend a longer amount of time on a program.

Research that focuses on the different ways in which students learn during education abroad programs would also enhance the findings of this study. Rather than assessing learning outcomes after students have already participated in an education abroad program, studies that look at the processes and meanings of learning for participants during their participation would enhance the literature and allow for higher quality program design among practitioners in the field. By understanding processes of learning in education abroad programs, practitioners would stand a greater chance of being able to adjust the structure and activities while a program is taking place, thus providing a richer and more meaningful experience for students.

Because I examined learning as a process, analyzing data collected from this type of study as representative of a moving picture over time would enhance the findings. In other words, the data collected were not merely snapshots taken at isolated, static moments, but were a collection of live, changing events that captured evolving activities over a period of time. A follow up to this study that assesses the data from this evolving perspective would enhance the findings.
Furthermore, investigating what kinds of learning endured after the participants returned would enhance the findings. It would be useful to assess via in-depth interviews with the participants one year or more after the program which attitudes and skills they acquired from their participation in the program were most lasting, if time and resources permitted. It would also enhance the findings to assess a year or more after participation how the participants describe their learning experiences from the program to determine if their perspectives have changed in any way.

Finally, studies that further examine situated learning theory as a way to understand the meaning of learning for participants in an education abroad program would enhance the findings of the study. Short term programs typically bring participants together in an intensive, fast-paced format, where they must work and learn together, but there is little known about how the participants learn as a social practice, and how participants form a community with a shared sense of purpose and identity. Because the findings demonstrated that the participants learned from becoming members of a community of learners who shared goals and experiences, it would be useful to further explore what elements contribute to the formation of a community of learners. Also, it would be useful to further examine what context is in education abroad programs. Context was a rich and multidimensional phenomenon for the participants, and was essential in shaping the ways in which they learned. Context, to be best understood, needs to be explored through a study of the lived experiences of those who experience it. In this case, exploring how participants in a short term education abroad program describe their context and reflect on its meanings for the ways in which they learned from engaging in it, would provide a compelling case for using situated learning theory as a
guiding framework for understanding the phenomenon of learning in context in other short term education abroad programs.
References


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ENGR 301
International Engineering Orientation

Kristine Lalley, Instructor
Office: 205 Hammond Building 863-1032; E-mail: kxlcop@engr.psu.edu
Office Hours by appointment

SYLLABUS: (subject to change)

#1) Introduction, overview of course; discussion of goals and objectives

#2) Globalization: Good, bad, or both?

#3) Discussion about globalization and its impact on engineering – Guest professor of engineering TBD

4) Cross-cultural communication I; issues and problems

#5) Cross-cultural communication II; international teamwork

#6) Cross-cultural communication III: teamwork continued; introduction to cross-cultural nonverbal communication

#7) Cultural clashes I: What to do about them and how to resolve them

#8) Cultural clashes II

SPRING BREAK

#9) Safety while abroad: issues and considerations: Also practical matters: What you need to know before you go (discussion about travel plans; how to prepare, etc.)

#10) Real-world, no holds barred student perspectives on going abroad: what you always wanted to know but were afraid to ask (guest speakers)

#11) Becoming a global engineer: issues in career development (guest speaker)

#12) What do engineering leaders of the world have to say about American engineers?

#13) Student presentations #14) Student presentations #15) Student presentations;

Wrap-up of course
COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND ASSIGNMENTS:

There are no required texts for this course. I will give articles and other handouts for you to read throughout the semester. Three texts that are highly recommended are:


Assignments:

1) In-class presentation (40% of grade): Present information about an international topic of your choice to the class. Presentation should be about 10 – 12 minutes in length, with a 5 minute class discussion (questions and answers) to follow. Must include some visuals and handouts for the class on your topic. You are welcome and encouraged to make a multimedia presentation (using web sites, PowerPoint, etc.)

Some ideas might include:

- Speak about a specific country (customs, history, lifestyle, food, etc.)
- Discuss engineering practices in another country
- Explain how business is conducted in another country
- Conduct a workshop on an international professional development topic (eg. How to conduct a global meeting)

2) Class participation (50% of grade): Since this is a seminar, class participation is key! You will be required to sign in each week. But don’t only sign in…get involved in the class! Good class participation will really make the course what it should be…interactive and fun for everyone.

3) Preparation for International Experience Journal Assignment (10% of grade): Maintain a journal of activities related to preparation for your international experience. This includes engaging in activities that increase your understanding of global issues. Journal will be collected during the semester (unannounced), so keep it updated. Journal should provide a description of the activity, the date it occurred, and a description of what you learned from it.

Some activities might include:
- Trying a new type of international food
- Seeing a foreign film
- Attending an on-campus international event
- Reading a new international newspaper or watching an international news program
Dear France Industry Tour Participant:

I am contacting you to request your participation in my doctoral research study entitled “Learning in context in an education abroad program: A qualitative study”. This study is being conducted to fulfill the requirements for completion of my doctoral dissertation in the Department of Learning and Performance Systems at the Pennsylvania State University.

I am contacting you because I am seeking volunteers to participate in my study. Your participation is entirely voluntary and you may withdraw from the study at any time. I am attaching the informed consent form for your review.

Once you have read the informed consent form, please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions you may have about the study. I can be reached by telephone at either (814) 863-9899 (office), or at my cell phone at (814) 880-4507. You can also reach me in person at my office in room 205 Hammond Building, or by e-mailing me with any of your questions.

If you decide to volunteer to participate in my study, please sign the consent form and return it to me by Friday, May 18th.

Thank you,

Kristine Lalley
## Appendix C

### AGENDA FOR STUDENTS – MAY 2007

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Monday May 21st</th>
<th>Tuesday May 22nd</th>
<th>Wednesday May 23rd</th>
<th>Thursday May 24th</th>
<th>Friday May 25th</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>08H15</strong> Bus departure</td>
<td><strong>09H00</strong> Bus departure</td>
<td><strong>07H30</strong> Bus departure</td>
<td><strong>08H45</strong> Bus departure</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>09H00</strong> HERTA</td>
<td><strong>09H30</strong> FIRESTONE Béthune</td>
<td><strong>09H30</strong> ARCELOR</td>
<td><strong>09H30</strong> AQUARESE Z.I Artois Flandres – Secteur A – Billy Berclau Tél : 03 21 74 91 00 M. DEGORGUE – S. FOSSIEZ</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L. DEGRUIL – M. EVRARD – D. SAINTIVE – S. FOSSIEZ</td>
<td>JM MARICHEZ – L. DEGRUIL Tel : 03.21.64.77.00</td>
<td>Jean Dunkerque 03 28 29 38 90 A. ROLAND – D. SAINTIVE Lunch offered by Arcelor</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>13H15</strong> Bus Departure</td>
<td><strong>14H00</strong> Bus Departure</td>
<td><strong>14H30</strong> UIMM ZAC Bord des Eaux – rue Holler – Hénin Beaumont 03 21 75 04 04 B. ALEXANDRE – L. DEGRUIL</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>13H45</strong> Arrivée Hôtel de Ville –</td>
<td><strong>14H00</strong> Visite des Boves</td>
<td><strong>14H30</strong> Mairie de Béthune Grand Place Béthune</td>
<td><strong>15H00</strong> Free time in Lille Return to Bethune by train – on your own</td>
<td><strong>14H00</strong> CALFA F. BREABAN</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>13H30</strong> Cafetaria</td>
<td><strong>14H45</strong> Visite de l’Hôtel de Ville</td>
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<td><strong>15H45</strong> Hall of Residence Baggages</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>14H30</strong> Meeting with S. FOSSIEZ (International Office)</td>
<td><strong>15H15</strong> Accueil par un élu</td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>16H30</strong> Meeting with French students &amp; free time</td>
<td><strong>14H30</strong> TGV for Paris</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>16H00</strong> Meeting with French students &amp; free time</td>
<td><strong>15H30</strong> Conférence Bruno NAVARRO - EDF M. EVRARD</td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>16H00</strong> Return to Paris</td>
<td><strong>16H00</strong> Arrival in Paris</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>18H00</strong> ARTOIS COMM 119 rue Conseil de l’Europe Bruay la Buissière</td>
<td><strong>18H30</strong> Mairie de Béthune Grand Place Béthune</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Any problem, please dial:
17 : POLICE; Hall of Residence : 03.21.57.31.87; Sylvie FOSSIEZ : 03.21.63.23.05 or 06.72.43.64.96; Marc EVRARD: 06.81.42.32.62.37
Appendix D

SAMPLE FROM N-VIVO
VITA

Kristine Lalley, D.Ed.
315 Elysian Street, Pittsburgh, PA  15206 E-mail: krl33@pitt.edu

EDUCATION

M.A., French Literature, University of Pittsburgh, April 1996
B.A., French, New York University, May 1994

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Director, International Engineering Initiatives
Swanson School of Engineering, University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, PA (August 2007 to present)

Instructor and Adviser
The Pennsylvania State University College of Engineering, State College, PA (August 2002 to August 2007)

Graduate Student Assistant
The Pennsylvania State University, State College, PA (January 1998 to August 2002)

Training Consultant
Lingua-Call International, Glenside, PA (December 1996 to January 1998)

Teaching Assistant
University of Pittsburgh Department of French and Italian, Pittsburgh, PA (August 1994 to May 1996)

SELECT PUBLICATIONS

