Enhancing learning during the liminal journey of study abroad:
Developing a study abroad transformative learning framework

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The research: Morgan (2019)

- **Background:** Study abroad generates positive learning outcomes. Experiences of learning, & processes during unaccompanied study abroad are unclear.

- **Aim:** To investigate student experiences of learning during study abroad (comprising a professional placement) in all contexts (formal & informal) in order to gain empirical understanding.

- **Methods & Participants:** Hermeneutic phenomenology. N = 20 student nurses. X 2 semi-structured interviews per participant (return & follow up). Phenomenological Hermeneutical Method of Analysis.
The findings

- Learning is experienced within the context of difference.
- Study abroad is a journey of liminality\textsuperscript{5,6}.
- The journey comprises preliminal, liminal and postliminal stages\textsuperscript{5,6}.
- Students are ‘liminal entities’ as they are ‘betwixt & between’\textsuperscript{6}.
- Learning processes and strategies comprise students taking responsibility and undertaking active sense-making activities. This learning is also influenced by others.
- Students may struggle to make sense and troublesome-ness continues until a threshold of understanding is crossed\textsuperscript{7,8,9,10,11}.
- At the end of the journey students experience transformation\textsuperscript{12}: personal & professional development, progression toward cultural competence\textsuperscript{13}; global graduateness\textsuperscript{14}.
The innovation

- Development of a study abroad transformative learning framework

- Blended approach – face-to-face interactions/ activities & online supported learning activities & interactions

  - Stage 1: Programme of learning developed as a framework
  - Stage 2a: Development of teaching and learning materials
  - Stage 2b: Develop online programme and interactive content
  - Stage 3: Implementation
  - Stage 4: Evaluation
### Study abroad transformative learning framework

**Before study abroad**

- Student's usual frame of reference is stable & unproblematic
- Student anticipates difference
- Student has a cultural desire and motivation to study abroad

**During study abroad**

- Student experiences culture shock as usual frame of reference is insufficient to permit immediate understanding
- Student needs to learn to live, learn and make sense of the different reality
- As the different reality becomes familiar, culture shock reduces but can occur at any point during the experience when exposed to difference

**After study abroad**

- Student experiences reverse culture shock as frame of reference now changed so previous usual reality is now experienced as different
- Outstanding troublesome-ness persists

### Preliminal stage

- Tutor to meet with student to discuss need to be active learner & to take responsibility: discuss strategies for learning
- Student to meet with peer who has returned from study abroad (SA): discuss experience & strategies
- Student to complete a cultural study to begin to learn about host culture living & professional practice; prepare for exposure to difference
- Student & tutor to agree student role and rules for SA

### Liminal stage

- Student assigned a local enabler (with cultural & professional experience)
- Enabler to brief student to be a ‘friendly stranger’ in the local community & community of practice
- Enabler to make introductions in community of practice. Student assigned a practice mentor & local student buddy (if relevant)
- Student to take responsibility for learning and apply role & rule agreements: discuss & negotiate with enabler & mentor
- Student to be facilitated by enabler to form a community with international peers (communitas, social & practice)
- Student to have time to reflect & make sense of difference, alone & with others (enabler/mentor/buddy/communitas)

### Liminal stage continues

- Student to meet with tutor to debrief
- Student to form an alumni of returned communitas
- Student to continue to reflect & make sense of outstanding troublesome differences, alone & with others (returned communitas/local enabler/buddy/tutor)

### Postliminal stage

- Student re integrated into home culture but in a transformed manner: applies cultural competency development & global graduateness to life, education & professional practice
- Student to share experiences with others (wider student population, professional practitioners)
- Student to support future SA students (home & visiting)
- Student maintains membership of their new global community of practice

### Summary

- Demonstrates the application and further development of cultural competence
- Demonstrates application of acquired global graduate attributes

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Media</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student’s usual frame of reference is stable &amp; unproblematic(^\text{12})</td>
<td>Tutor meet with student - discuss need to be active learner &amp; take responsibility: discuss strategies for learning</td>
<td>Face to face meeting</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>Online learning - eLP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student anticipates difference</td>
<td>Student meet with peer returner from study abroad (SA): discuss experience &amp; strategies</td>
<td>Face to face meeting(s)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Social media establishment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student has a cultural desire(^\text{13}) and motivation to study abroad</td>
<td>Student commence cultural study to begin to learn about host culture living &amp; professional practice: prepare for exposure to difference</td>
<td>Online learning activity</td>
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<td>Storyline. – creative approach –</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Reflections. PebblePad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-requisite: cultural desire(^\text{13}) &amp; motivation</td>
<td>Student &amp; tutor agree student role and rules for SA/ learning contract</td>
<td>Face to face meeting</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>Upload online. PebblePad</td>
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<tr>
<td>Experience</td>
<td>Activity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student experiences culture shock as usual frame of reference insufficient</td>
<td>Student assigned local enabler</td>
<td>Face to face meeting(s)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student needs to learn to live, learn and make sense of different reality</td>
<td>Enabler briefs student ‘friendly stranger’; makes introductions to community of practice</td>
<td>Face to face meeting(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As reality becomes familiar, culture shock reduces (can re-occur)</td>
<td>Student assigned professional practice mentor &amp; local buddy student</td>
<td>Face to face meeting and working</td>
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<td>Student continues to take responsibility for learning &amp; apply rules set. Discuss &amp; negotiate with enabler &amp; mentor</td>
<td>Face to face</td>
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<td>Student facilitated to form communitas</td>
<td>Continue cultural study – online or hardcopy</td>
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<td>Reflect alone &amp; with community</td>
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### After study abroad – liminal stage continues

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

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

- The study abroad transformative learning framework is underpinned by research findings and aims to maximise student learning during each stage of the study abroad journey.

- The framework necessarily requires a blended approach to meet the requirements of students who study remotely from their home university. And promotes inclusion of a global community of practice.

Thank you

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References

- This paper is an impact output from my doctoral research. Further details of this research can be found online in Morgan, D.A. Learning in liminality: Student experiences of learning during a nursing study abroad journey: a hermeneutic phenomenological research study. *Nurse Education Today* 2019; 79: 204-209.


