# Northumbria Research Link

# Change and transformation:

## Exploring variations in learning during a study abroad journey

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# The research: Morgan (2019)

- **Background:** Study abroad generates positive learning outcomes[1,2]. 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[3]. N = 20 student nurses. X 2 semi-structured interviews per participant (return & follow up).Phenomenological Hermeneutical Method of Analysis[4].

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# Focus of this paper

- Apply a **change-transformative learning theory lens** to consider the nature and extent of learning.

- **Learning as Change**
  - Learning is manifest in a changed or more experienced person[5].

- **Learning as Transformation**
  - Learning is a process evidenced by transformed "problematic frames of reference (mindsets, habits of mind, meaning perspectives)"[6].
  - "Perspective transformation"[7] occurs when a person develops a completely new frame of reference[8] resulting in "an altered state of being"[7].

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# The findings

# Transformations: Personal and professional growth

- **'I am a totally different person** … I realised I can do more than I thought, I can do anything. I take a lot more pride in my achievements, now it's "I went to [country] and I did that and how amazing is that".' *(P16SE);*

- 'We're told in uni, not to get too emotionally attached. I previously found that very hard. Being at the orphanage, **it gave me that perspective** to be able to say, "I can't do everything for them but what I can do is make that time as special and as good as possible".' *(P2DC).*

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# Variations when considering the global graduate and cultural competence

# Change: Global graduateness[9]

- '... once we introduced ourselves, and give them a smile and say "good morning" in [local language], they were quite welcoming.' *(P19DC);*

- 'The social thing that I did was eat food with them at the end of the shift. Quite often I would take food, 'cos I realised that that was kind of the way they made food and everyone shared it.' *(P12SE).*

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# Change: Cultural awareness & knowledge

- 'They had drawn eyebrows on this baby, and they would do it 'cause if you looked at the baby you know it is a happy baby, so the mum draws eyebrows on the baby.' *(P18DC);*

- 'Spirituality was massive for the communities. Maybe I'd been ignorant to it. 'Cause it was a massive part of their lives, it was positive to see how it brought everyone together and I took that away with me. … I'm more open and accepting of it and can see it has a positive role in society.' (P17DC).

# Declining or Intervening in Care

'The midwife decided, she didn't check a single thing, she decided the baby's dead.

And I was looking at the baby and thought "what's that moving on the baby's chest? it's got a heartbeat" so she started to bag-mask the baby. She was there for 5 minutes and then she passed the bag to me and walked off.

And the baby is starting to pick up colour, so me and [student name] thought "what shall we do? this baby has a heartbeat, it's alive so what do we do?"

So I started doing the breaths and compressions … then it made its first cry and me and [student name] started crying 'cause we weren't supposed to be there that day, so if we hadn't been, the midwife would have left the baby …' *(P2DC).*

# Non-trusting

'I don't know if it was a language barrier, but you just didn't believe anything they said. Apparently, they've got degrees but I don't know how they train … I think it was completely different.

You could ask some questions, but I don't know, you just didn't have any faith in what they were saying, because sometimes it really didn't make sense.' *(P10DC).*

# Impression formation

- 'All here are drunk, and drink. I think it's because you go more north you drink more… I think in [city] many people that are obese, and salads not so much, they don't cook I think.' *(P5UK).*

- Well you can tell people about it, but until you're there actually experiencing it, I don't think it actually sinks in, like what you're actually physically seeing in front of you ... It's totally, totally, horrifying... And you just wouldn't let anyone treat your patients the way that they would treat their patients.' *(P10DC).*

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# This appears to suggest

- Whilst learning as change, in terms of cultural awareness and knowledge acquisition, and aspects of global graduateness may be demonstrated…

- There also appears to be a concurrent reinforcement of existing frames of reference and (potentially) ethnocentric values...

- Therefore transformation in relation to ethnorelativism, global graduateness and culturally competence is not complete.

# Reasons for these variations

# Threshold concepts[11,12,13,14,15], transformative learning[6,7] & communities of practice[16,17]

- Disjuncture or disorienting dilemmas trigger learning when existing frames of reference do not aid understanding & students strive to actively make sense (CR, RD,CU) but..

- When differences are too great, students cannot make sense and they are in a stuck place.

- Here ethnocentric views are reinforced and a mimicry may emerge.

- If students can make sense of troublesome-ness they may cross a threshold and gain transformation – eg. Compassion has emerged to be such a threshold concept when caring in a different culture.

- Communities also influence this learning.

# Threshold crossing

- 'I understand now that it's the culture, the way nurses and doctors treat people out there it's a totally different culture and we don't understand it....It was one of the Sisters on placement, her daughter went to an orphanage and we had a chat about that and she said it's their way of dealing with it. And that made me think, it is their way of dealing with disease and things they come against, they're not cruel people. … **It was a little moment that made me think differently**.' (P10, DC).

# Conclusion

- Study abroad positively impacts upon students.
- When learning is considered as a change, students develop as global graduates and they progress toward cultural competence (awareness/ knowledge).
- When learning is considered as a transformation, variations arise.
- Students may transform personally and professionally, but for some, a reinforcement of existing frames of reference may occur (ethnocentric rather than ethnorelativist).
- Demonstrates complexity of study abroad & IDs support needs.
- Highlights multi-faceted frames of reference and suggests that study abroad should be considered more in terms of a journey toward becoming, rather than one of arrival.

**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.**

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