DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis is my own work and that to the best of my knowledge, it does not contain material previously published or written by another person, except where acknowledged in the text.

William Shannon

19 May 2018
Ehara taku toa, he takitahi, he toa takitini. The research presented here is supported by an Australian Government Research Training Program (RTP) Scholarship. This thesis is my own work, but it owes much to the work of many other scholars, including all of those cited herein. I am also greatly indebted to the following three research centres: the Australian National University Centre for European Studies, which gave me the opportunity, means and support to undertake this project; the National Centre for Research on Europe located at the University of Canterbury, which generously hosted me whenever I found myself in Christchurch; and the Transformative Power of Europe Group at Freie Universität Berlin where I was based while undertaking fieldwork in Europe. There are also many individuals to whom I owe much. I will thank these people individually. However, it would be remiss of me not to single out my supervisors, Professor Paul Pickering, Dr Margaret Kiley and Professor Jacqueline Lo, who have provided much valued encouragement, support and advice throughout this process. Finally, I want to thank my parents, Peter and Helen, for all that they have done for me, and my wife, Georgina, for her patience, belief and much more.
This dissertation is the product of a study that examined the experiences of 21 Australian and New Zealand undergraduate students who spent a semester or more on exchange in Europe. It examines what the students learned from their experience, focussing specifically on the insights that they acquired with regards to their host society. It does so guided by the idea of deep understanding, a concept developed for this study drawing primarily on literature from the discipline of anthropology. It is a concept that describes a level of understanding that students may acquire vis-à-vis their host society. It has three central elements: (1) it is a level of understanding that avoids or transcends stereotypes and sweeping generalisations, (2) it is more than the mere observation of certain practises or peculiarities, but also involves understanding the values, beliefs and assumptions that underpin these, and (3) it is based on wide and meaningful engagement with members of the host society. This thesis also focusses on the difficulties that the students involved experienced while abroad, guided by the stress-adaptation-growth model, which considers the challenges associated with being in an unfamiliar environment to be a key antecedent to intercultural growth (Kim, 2001, 2008, 2015). This focus on the difficulties associated with study abroad and their pedagogical implications allows us to better understand the process by which students learn, mislearn and do not learn through study abroad.

Data was collected in three phases. The students completed an online questionnaire before their departure, which collected basic demographic information about them, as well as their reasons for going on an exchange and their choice of country; they were then interviewed during their exchange at their destination and they completed a follow-up questionnaire upon their return home. The analysis of the resulting data focused primarily on the interview transcripts and the responses to certain questions asked in the follow-up questionnaire, although the responses to certain questions asked in the pre-departure questionnaire were also analysed to provide important background. The analysis
was an iterative process that involved attaching codes to each unique aspect of the dataset considered relevant to the analytic interests of the study, examining the coded data with a view to adding context where necessary and drawing conclusions, guided by the question: What can be learned from my research?

The thesis constitutes an original contribution to knowledge in two main ways. Firstly, there is insufficient research that has examined the insights that study abroad students acquire vis-à-vis their host society. This matters because study abroad holds the potential to cultivate the capacity to live with difference, but do students achieve the level of insight necessary to cultivate this on their own or is some form of intervention necessary? Secondly, there are few studies to have employed conceptual frameworks that account for the processes by which learning occurs, including testing the applicability of the stress-adaptation-model in the study abroad context and examining the difficulties associated with study abroad in terms of their pedagogical implications more generally. This is despite research indicating that students often resort to generalisation and stereotypes to make sense of challenges experienced abroad (Beaven, 2012; De Nooy & Hanna, 2003).

This thesis addresses these gaps, casting doubt on the applicability of the stress-adaptation-growth model to the study abroad context (Shannon, 2016). The students either did not experience sufficient difficulties due to unfamiliarity, or they were not compelled to learn new cultural elements due to the short duration of the experience. Nonetheless, they did frequently resort to generalisations and stereotypes to make sense of difficulties experienced, contrary to the idea of deep understanding. This thesis raises questions about the level of insight that study abroad students acquire with regards to their host society, as well as the extent to which they grow in related areas. This requires a level of inquiry, host national contact and reflection that my analysis shows does not occur automatically, corroborating the growing body of literature that emphasises the importance of academic intervention in the study abroad process. This dissertation concludes by presenting a possible model of academic intervention, which centres around an ethnographic research project students must undertake abroad. The aim is to actively shape the study abroad experience, requiring students to step outside
the international student bubble that they regularly find themselves confined within and investigate a particular area of observed difference in detail.
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“It is hardly a new discovery that sending young Americans abroad promotes better understanding of global affairs and has other profoundly positive impacts at home. Many current and past leaders in U.S. business, government, science, education, the nonprofit and foundation sectors, and the arts participated in overseas study, service, or work experiences at an impressionable stage in their lives. Their time spent in other countries broadened their perspectives and deepened their appreciation for the many different ways that other societies approach common problems.”

The above quote is taken from an article titled “The Study Abroad Solution: How to Open the American Mind,” which argues that there is a need to “massively increase the number of U.S. college and university students who go abroad for some part of their education” (Ungar, 2016, para. 4). However, does spending a study period abroad inevitably open the minds of those who do so? Research increasingly shows that the benefits associated with study abroad cannot be expected to accrue automatically (P. Anderson, Lawton, Rexeisen, & Hubbard, 2006; Engle & Engle, 2004; Medina-Lopez-Portillo, 2004; Tarrant, Rubin, & Stoner, 2014; Vande Berg, Connor-Linton, & Paige, 2009). More specifically, there is evidence that studying abroad does not guarantee better understanding and that it can even produce or fortify negative stereotypes (Beaven, 2012; De Nooy & Hanna, 2003).

My study takes this research as its starting point, examining the insights gained by 21 Australian and New Zealand undergraduate students who spent a semester or more on exchange in Europe, guided by the idea of deep understanding. This is a level of understanding that students may acquire vis-à-vis their host society. The concept has three central elements: (1) it is a level of understanding that avoids or transcends stereotypes and sweeping generalisations, (2) it is more than the mere observation of certain practises or peculiarities, but also involves
understanding the values, beliefs and assumptions that underpin these, and (3) it is based on wide and meaningful engagement with members of the host society. It also focusses on the difficulties that the students experienced while abroad, guided by the stress-adaptation-growth model, which considers the challenges associated with being in an unfamiliar environment to be a key antecedent to intercultural growth (Kim, 2001, 2008, 2015).

This chapter begins by discussing the ways in which this thesis makes an original contribution to knowledge and presenting its main findings. It then explains my rationale for focussing on the phenomenon of student exchange specifically, as well as the experiences of students from Australia and New Zealand who went to Europe. The chapter then concludes by outlining the structure of the dissertation.

**Original contribution to knowledge**

My thesis constitutes an original contribution to knowledge in two main ways. Firstly, there is a distinct lack of research that has examined the insights that study abroad students acquire with regards to their host society. Despite prior studies touching on it, this is often little more than a side note. This thesis addresses a need for more systematic, conceptually grounded research into this phenomenon. The idea of deep understanding was developed for this study drawing primarily on work from the field of anthropology. It provides a benchmark against which to examine student learning in this sense. My interest in the understanding that students acquire vis-à-vis their host society as opposed to intercultural competence or other possible learning outcomes—including language acquisition or disciplinary knowledge—stems from an interest in study abroad as holding the potential to cultivate the capacity to live with difference. More than two decades ago, (S. Hall, 1993, p. 361) argued that “the capacity to live with difference is… the coming question of the 21st century.” The question of how to cultivate this capacity remains a critical issue today. Globalisation has created a world characterised by greater contact between people from diverse cultural backgrounds. This has the potential to be a source of great richness or great conflict. Conversations across difference can challenge habitual thinking and inspire innovation. Sen (2009, p. 130) argues that they are essential to the mission of making societies less unjust because what others “see from their
respective perspectives of history and geography may help us to overcome our own parochialism." Bouncken (2009) contends that cultural diversity can drive organisational creativity in a global marketplace where this is increasingly necessary to deliver novel products. Nonetheless, she notes that it can also precipitate excessive disagreements within organisations (Bouncken, 2009). Moreover, recent developments such as banning the wearing of the Muslim burqa or niqab in some places are indicative of the fear and suspicion that people from distinct cultural background can arouse (Abu-Lughod, 2013; Nussbaum, 2010).

Intercultural competence is central to the capacity to live with difference, but the capacity for deep understanding as conceptualised here is equally important because the issues that divide human beings along cultural lines are often the product of misunderstanding. Distinctive practices or features branded fundamentally different gain attention and prominence. They are deemed representative of an entire culture, but little is understood about the inevitably complex reality—nor the beliefs and values that underpin the practices and features deemed fundamentally different—based on wide and meaningful contact with in-group members. The way in which Muslim women are represented in Western societies is a prime example of this (Abu-Lughod, 2013; Nussbaum, 2010). The practice of veiling has become a symbol of male domination and coercion in the West, but as Nussbaum (2010, para. 12) contends, people who make this connection "typically don't know much about Islam and would have a hard time saying what symbolizes what in that religion." This is not to deny the existence of oppressive practices, but these are also present in Western societies and they are not representative of the diverse Muslim experience (Abu-Lughod, 2013; Nussbaum, 2010). Study abroad provides an opportunity to cultivate what Martin and Griffiths (2014, p. 943) term "a more open-minded, less judgemental stance towards difference." This is used here to describe the intellectual habit of not settling for one’s initial interpretations and trying to understand things before judging them. However, does study abroad have this effect? It is frequently presented as an opportunity to experience, learn about or get an insight into a different culture, something that is discussed in Chapter Four, but what do we know about the kinds of insights that students acquire abroad? Can students be expected to achieve the level of insight necessary to cultivate this intellectual
habit on their own or is some form of intervention necessary? There is insufficient research to have examined the relationship between study abroad and student learning from this perspective, whereas other learning outcomes have received considerable attention elsewhere, especially intercultural competence (P. Anderson et al., 2006; Engle & Engle, 2004; Medina-Lopez-Portillo, 2004; Vande Berg et al., 2009).

My study also makes an original contribution to knowledge by examining the difficulties that the students involved experienced, utilising the stress-adaptation-growth model. This model considers the challenges associated with being in an unfamiliar environment to be a key antecedent to cultural learning (Kim, 2001, 2008, 2015). There are few studies to have employed conceptual frameworks that account for the processes by which learning occurs through study abroad. The advantage of the stress-adaptation-growth model is that "it accounts for both processes and outcomes" (Murphy-Lejeune, 2002, p. 41). However, there is a notable lack of research that has tested the applicability of this model in the study abroad context, or examined the difficulties associated with study abroad in terms of their pedagogical implications more generally. My interest in the difficulties associated with study abroad also stems from research indicating that students often resort to generalisations and stereotypes to make sense of challenges experienced abroad (Beaven, 2012; De Nooy & Hanna, 2003). By examining the difficulties that the students experienced and the impact of these on their learning, this study contributes to a better knowledge of the processes by which students learn, mislearn and do not learn, guided by the concept of deep understanding.

This study addresses these gaps by joining a growing body of work (Beames, 2004; Menard-Warwick & Palmer, 2012; Murphy-Lejeune, 2002; Papatsiba, 2006; Pitts, 2009) in adopting a qualitative approach that goes beyond many qualitative studies on the subject, which rely on student self-reporting with the resulting analysis involving little more than summarising the responses (Bull, 2004, 2007; Nunan, 2006; Parry, 2005, 2006). The problem with this type of study is that they take the student's word for it based on "hypersensory memories" (Hammer, 2012, p. 128). On the other hand, quantitative studies typically suffer because the student voice is missing (Daly, 2007; Engle & Engle, 2004; Vande
Berg et al., 2009; Williams, 2005). The reader gets little insight into the diverse experiences of the students involved, limiting the conclusions and lessons that can be drawn from them.

In terms of its findings, my study casts doubt on the applicability of the stress-adaptation-growth model to the study abroad context, constituting an important theoretical contribution (Shannon, 2016). The new environment was not deemed different enough to demand cultural learning by most students involved, while the experience was too short to require action by even the minority of students who reported experiencing some kind of culture shock. However, this does not mean that study abroad does not carry the potential for cultural learning. There are always differences to be found, no matter how small these may seem. They may not demand cultural learning as per the stress-adaptation-growth model, but opportunities to learn still exist by engaging with them. Nonetheless, my analysis shows that this cannot be assumed to occur automatically; it must be supported.

This study not only raises questions about the idea of laissez faire study abroad, adding weight to existing research that supports the idea of academic intervention in the study abroad process, it signals that there is specific a need to foster more meaningful and deliberate engagement with the host society. Previous studies and existing models of academic intervention tend to overlook this, focussing on the need to cultivate reflection amongst students. This is certainly important, but it is also important to foster engagement aimed at understanding. This is necessary because as my analysis shows, not only were students not compelled to learn as per the stress-adaptation-growth model, they often described their host population using sweeping generalisations and stereotypes, contrary to the idea of deep understanding that is central to this study. Examples of this were prevalent in their descriptions of the challenges that they experienced and not just those directly linked to the encounter with difference that accompanies study abroad. Challenges like pre-departure problems or issues enrolling and getting set-up are often overlooked in the study abroad literature, but this study shows that they are important because the students involved frequently resorted to generalisations and stereotypes to make sense of them. Moreover, the cases of two students show that they can play a powerful role in creating a sense of
discontentment and distress that influences the image that an affected individual 
develops of their host society. As we shall see, Eva and Josh both resorted to 
generalisations and stereotypes to describe their host society as a way of 
justifying their overall discontentment and distress, which was the product of 
multiple different issues.

My analysis reinforces that the benefits associated with study abroad cannot be 
expected to accrue automatically. More specifically, it reveals that students will 
not inevitably acquire a deep understanding of their host society as 
conceptualised here. Contrary to this ideal, the students involved regularly 
described their host societies and various observed practises or peculiarities in 
terms of sweeping generalisations and stereotypes, as well as displaying little 
understanding of the values, beliefs and circumstances underpinning these 
practises or peculiarities. Moreover, these were commonly associated with 
backwardness and strangeness, suggesting there was limited movement to “a 
more open-minded, non-judgemental stance towards difference” (Martin & 
Griffiths, 2014, p. 943). This does not mean that the experience was not 
educative. My study suggests that spending a study period abroad is likely to be 
transformative in some way, but for many this may simply mean becoming more 
self-sufficient or resilient and these outcomes alone seem insufficient to justify 
the resources needed to promote and maintain the phenomenon of study abroad.

The implication here is not that institutions and governments should lessen their 
commitment to study abroad. Rather, my argument is that they need to think 
about what they want students to gain from it and whether the current model is 
the best way to achieve this. My study joins a growing body of research, which 
argues that study abroad is not fulfilling its potential and calls for greater 
academic intervention in the study abroad process to address this (Engle, 2013; 
Lutterman-Aguilar & Gingerich, 2002; Vande Berg et al., 2009; Vande Berg & 
Paige, 2012). The thesis concludes by presenting a specific model for 
intervention informed by my analysis and relevant education research. Its main 
aim is to promote greater contact with host nationals, but contact that is a means 
of enquiry, not just contact for contact’s sake (Cousin, 2012), a goal often 
overlooked in existing models. It is designed to achieve this by engaging students
in an ethnographic research project as part of a course offered by the home institution that spans the three stages of the study abroad cycle: pre-departure, in-country and return.

The main principles that underpin this model are: (1) the idea that experiences on their own will not necessarily be education—they can equally be non-educative or mis-educative (Dewey, 1998; Lutterman-Aguilar & Gingerich, 2002); (2) the idea that to maximise student learning it is important to engage students in activities that are likely to lead to the desired learning outcomes (Biggs, 1999); (3) the idea that in the context of learning about difference, it is important to get students to go beyond their initial interpretations through host national contact and that this requires promoting contact that is a means of inquiry, not just contact for contact’s sake (Brewer & Cunningham, 2009; Cousin, 2012; Gothard, Downey, & Gray, 2012b); and (4) the idea that it is important to introduce students to appropriate concepts before they leave so that they can make sense of the things they encounter and to encourage reflection along the way aimed at facilitating growth (Beaven, 2012; Brewer & Cunningham, 2009; Dewey, 1998; Engle, 2013; Lutterman-Aguilar & Gingerich, 2002; Vande Berg & Paige, 2012).

**Explaining the focus**

**Student exchange**

In Australia and New Zealand, the term study abroad has come to be associated with the phenomenon of students studying overseas for part of a degree and paying fees to their host institution, but it is used here more generally to describe the practice whereby students spend a study period in one country as part of an education in another country. There are different avenues by which students can do this, but the study reported here focused specifically on students who do so through an exchange, meaning they spend one or more semesters at a partner institution abroad with which their home institution has a reciprocal agreement. Students who undertake an exchange are not required to pay fees at their host institution and any credit gained is recognised towards their degrees at the home institution. Research shows that going on an exchange was the most popular avenue by which Australian students studied abroad in 2009, 2010 and 2011, although short-term study programmes have since overtaken it (Australian

**Australia and New Zealand**

This study examines the experiences of students from both Australia and New Zealand. It was never intended to be comparative, but during data analysis special attention was paid to whether there were any significant differences between the Australian and New Zealand students with none being detected. My first reason for focusing on students from Australia and New Zealand was pragmatic. My home country is New Zealand, while my country of residence for the duration of this study was Australia. However, there were also more important reasons. Most notably, there has been increasing recognition of the importance of higher education students spending part of their education abroad in both countries, but limited research that has investigated this phenomenon. Little value was attached to this phenomenon in either country until recently, or at least not at the governmental or institutional levels. This began to change in the 1990s (Adams, 1998; Clyne & Rizvi, 1998; Smith & Parata, 1997). Kim Beazley, the then Australian Minister for Education, released a statement in 1992 in which he argued that “more than the estimated current 3,000 Australian students should study abroad for at least part of their courses” (Beazley, 1992, p. 13). He held that it was especially important to get more students to go to Asia (Beazley, 1992). Similarly, a 1994 report emanating from a government-commissioned review of international student recruitment in New Zealand, pointed out the value of two-way student movement, not just inbound movement (New Zealand Study Group on International Education, 1994b). It noted that “the number of New Zealanders studying for formal qualifications overseas is still largely limited to our top university graduates going to elite overseas universities for postgraduate study,” and that “the challenge is to give a much larger number of less academically able New Zealanders an opportunity for a period of international study” (New Zealand Study Group on International Education, 1994a, p. 13).

The intervening years have seen an increase in both the number of study abroad agreements that Australian and New Zealand universities have with their
international counterparts, as well as the number of students who spend a study period abroad. In 1992, Australian universities had a total of 540 agreements in place with international institutions, while in 2014 they had more than 8000, over 50 percent of which include a student exchange component and just under 25 percent of which include a component covering some other form of study abroad (Universities Australia, 2014). Meanwhile, in 1998, 3,375 students from 33 participating Australian universities undertook some kind of international study experience (Davis, Milne, & Olsen, 1999), while 38,144 students from 36 universities did so in 2015, including 24,715 domestic undergraduate students representing 19.3 percent of all domestic undergraduate completions that year from the 36 participating universities (Australian Government, 2017).

In New Zealand, the publicly available data is less up to date and not as thorough. One survey participated in by all seven New Zealand universities that existed at the time, 24 out of 25 Polytechnics and all four Colleges of Education found that in 1997 these institutions had a total of 175 programmes or exchange agreements or Memoranda of Understanding in place involving the international movement of students on an exchange basis, while 281 of their students went on an exchange and 345 took up other international study opportunities, such as study tours, international clinical placements and international work experience (Back, Davis, & Olsen, 1998). Seven years later in 2004, a follow-up survey completed by all eight universities (the Auckland University of Technology had since changed from a polytechnic to a university), 19 out of 25 Institutes of Technology and Polytechnics, Colleges of Education and Wananga, as well as a small sample of Private Training Establishments, found that these institutions had a total of 495 agreements or Memoranda of Understanding, while 453 of their students went on an exchange and 798 students took up other opportunities (McInnis, Peacock, Catherwood, & Brown, 2006). This meant that 1,251 students undertook some kind of international study experience, which equates to 1.42 percent of the total domestic completions at all public tertiary providers that year (New Zealand Government, n.d.). However, this is a conservative estimate because the authors noted that a number of the institutions did not have accurate information available. Daly (2007) also investigated the number of university students that went on an exchange each year from 1996-2005. Not all universities participated
and some provided information for certain years, but not others. Nevertheless, the resulting data shows that the number of students that went abroad from the participating institutions taken as a percentage of the number of students enrolled in those institutions increased from 0.12 percent in 1996 to 0.46 percent in 2005. More recent unpublished data shows that the percentage of university students who undertake a study abroad experience has continued to increase, although it is considerably lower than the Australian figure (Australian Government, 2017).

Despite the number of students who spend a study period abroad increasing in both countries, the proportion of students who study abroad remains low and further increasing the number of students who spend a study period abroad has become an important political objective in both countries, especially the number who go to Asia. In 2007, the then New Zealand government released a white paper outlining its strategy towards the Asian region. The Our Future with Asia White Paper set the objective of increasing the number of New Zealand students that spend a study period in Asia, primarily as a means to ensure more New Zealanders become “Asia literate” (New Zealand Government, 2007b). It stated that “we need more New Zealanders who are confident in their dealings with Asia and Asian societies, and that will only come through greater familiarity and knowledge of the region and its peoples” (New Zealand Government, 2007b, p. 7). The rationale given is that this is necessary if New Zealanders are to take up the opportunities the region offers and New Zealand is to remain competitive in a global economy (New Zealand Government, 2007b). The same year, the government released a new international education strategy. The 2007-2012 International Education Agenda stated that it is important New Zealand students graduate with well-developed global knowledge, especially of the Asia Pacific region, and as such, that more students must take up opportunities to spend a study period abroad (New Zealand Government, 2007a). More recently, the International Education Leadership Statement included the following statement: “Our economic future will be determined by interactions with the rest of the world – and especially the national ability to increase trade and wider economic connections with Asia,” adding that “this will require an increased level of understanding of Asia, and the rest of the world, for many New Zealanders. The education system will need to provide students with the required knowledge and
skills” (New Zealand Government, 2011, p. 5). This policy document does not mention study abroad as such, although two years after its release, the Prime Minister’s Scholarships for Asia scheme was launched, which provide funding for New Zealand tertiary education students to study in Asia for a period of six weeks to two years. Tertiary Education Minister Steven Joyce noted in announcing the inaugural recipients of these scholarships that “New Zealand’s economic future is very tied in with our key trading partners in Asia… We need more young Kiwis who have had the experience of spending some time studying in Asia, and can help strengthen our people-to-people links with those countries” (Joyce, 2013, para. 3).

Meanwhile, in 2008, the Australian Government initiated a review of higher education. The final report (known as the Bradley Report) noted that it is important more Australian students study abroad (Australian Government, 2008). This was also mentioned in a discussion paper released by the International Education Advisory Council (2012), a group appointed by the government to help it develop a new international education strategy. Then in 2012 the Australian government released a similar white paper to the aforementioned New Zealand one. The Australia in the Asian Century White Paper set the objective of substantially boosting the number of Australian students who study in Asia specifically, noting that greater knowledge of the region is essential if the Australian people are to benefit from the “Asian century”, which then Prime Minister Julia Gillard stated in her foreword, will see the region “become home to most of the world’s middle class”, as well as “the world’s largest producer of goods and services and the largest consumer of them” (Australian Government, 2012, p. ii). This objective received support in the final report of the International Education Advisory Council (2013), while the Asia Bound programme and New Colombo Plan were launched in 2012 and 2013 respectively, both of which provide funding for Australian students to undertake an internship or period of

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1 A new International Education Strategy is currently being developed to replace the International Education Leadership Statement. The draft strategy released for consultation in 2017 refers to the importance of developing global citizens. It states that government will “encourage the development of New Zealanders’ international capabilities and perspectives through support for language learning, curriculum resources, collaborative learning, and exchange programmes” (New Zealand Government, 2017, p. 13). However, this is the only mention of outbound mobility and the main focus is the recruitment of international students to study in New Zealand.
study in Asia, with the aim of increasing people-to-people links and knowledge of the region or “Asia-literacy” among Australians (Australian Government, n.d.; Bishop, 2014, para. 13).²

Increasing the number of students who spend a study period abroad has also become an important goal at the institutional level in both countries. There are 43 universities in Australia and eight in New Zealand. All of these institutions provide options for their students to spend a study period abroad on exchange or by other means, including short-term study tours. Meanwhile, 28 refer to the importance of study abroad in their overall strategic plans and 25 of these include some kind of specific commitment to increase the number of students who spend a study period abroad, or to provide more opportunities for students to do so. Moreover, another five refer to the importance of study abroad in a separate internationalisation plan, one of which includes a commitment to improve uptake.³

**Europe**

The decision to focus on students going to Europe may seem a curious one, especially given that the main focus at the government level in both countries is on increasing the number of students who go to Asia specifically. However, the phenomenon of moving from Australia and New Zealand to Europe for the purpose of higher education has a long history, although for many, going to Europe, meant going to the United Kingdom. One important reason for this is a lingering fascination among Australians and New Zealanders for the ‘mother country’, a trope that has its roots deep in the history of both countries when native-born people of British origin referred to the British Isles as home despite having never seen it. Another related driver was what is often referred to as a colonial cultural cringe (Alomes, 1999; Phillips, 1937). That is, the habit of associating “status and significance with ‘overseas’, particularly London achievement” (Alomes, 1999, p. 9). Until well into the 20th century, a sense of

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² Australia has recently released a new international education strategy, but like the one that is being developed in New Zealand, the focus is almost exclusively on the recruitment of international students to study at Australian institutions (Australian Government, 2016).

³ I was not able to access the strategic plans for six Australian universities. If a strategic plan did not include some kind of mention of study abroad, a search was undertaken to see if they had a separate internationalisation plan that mentions study abroad. It is possible that more universities fall into this category, but their internationalisation plans are not publicly available or I could not locate them on their websites.
attachment and inferiority sustained a common belief that travel to Britain was a rite of passage, not least in terms of one’s education. Even today, this rite of passage persists in the form of the Gap Year or Overseas Experience (OE), albeit for different reasons. However, this is not really about education. Rather, it is a well-documented tradition of living and working abroad for a period of time, with the United Kingdom being the most popular destination (Chaban, Williams, Holland, Boyce, & Warner, 2011; Conradson & Latham, 2005a, 2005b, 2007). Nonetheless, Europe is still a popular destination for the small number of students from Australia and New Zealand who choose to study abroad every year and as such, it is important that research examines the experiences of those students that go there. For example, Table 1 shows that 35 percent of Australian students who undertook an international study experience in 2012 went to Europe, making it the most popular region for Australian students that year (Olsen, 2013). 4 Meanwhile, from the eleven Australian and New Zealand universities that participated in my study, 53 percent of their students who were on an exchange when the in-country interviews took place were at a European partner institution. 5

Table 1 – Australian International Study Experiences 2012: Destinations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Destination region</th>
<th>Number of Experiences</th>
<th>% of All Experiences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>8,288</td>
<td>35.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>European Union</td>
<td>7,900</td>
<td>33.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia</td>
<td>7,856</td>
<td>33.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North East Asia</td>
<td>3,750</td>
<td>15.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South East Asia</td>
<td>3,026</td>
<td>12.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Asia</td>
<td>1,081</td>
<td>4.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Americas</td>
<td>5,534</td>
<td>23.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oceania Region</td>
<td>723</td>
<td>3.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub Saharan Africa</td>
<td>540</td>
<td>2.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle East/North Africa</td>
<td>295</td>
<td>1.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>430</td>
<td>1.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>23,664</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Olsen (2013)

4 Asia had overtaken Europe as the most popular region the following year with 34.8 percent going there, although 33.8 percent still went to Europe (Olsen, 2014). More recent publicly available data is not broken down by region, just country.
5 This figure is actually based on data provided by nine universities because two did not release this data.
Thesis structure

The thesis is divided into nine chapters. Chapter Two is the product of a comprehensive review of relevant literature. It discusses themes salient to the idea of deep understanding, looks at the stress-adaptation-growth model in more detail and provides a critical overview of relevant empirical research, discussing the gaps that my study addresses in more detail; gaps that are present in previous Australian and New Zealand studies, as well as the wider study abroad literature.

Chapter Three discusses the methodological choices underpinning the study. Data was collected over three phases. First, an online questionnaire was used to gather basic demographic information about an initially wide sample of students before the start of their exchange, as well as asking them about their exchange destination, their reasons for going on an exchange and their choice of country. From this, a smaller sample of students were selected to participate in the remaining phases of data collection. It was decided to select a small number of participants that represented diversity in a number of areas based on responses to the initial questionnaire, including gender, age, destination, prior overseas experience and host language competence. These students were then interviewed during their exchange about their experiences so far, while the final phase of data collection involved them completing another online questionnaire once they returned home. This was used to follow-up on the in-country interviews, accounting for any subsequent developments and providing the opportunity for students to add to what they said during these having had more time to reflect and looking back on the experience as a whole. There were 21 students who participated in all three stages of data collection. It is the experiences of these students that are the focus of this dissertation, which is the product of a thorough process of analysis that took place over five phases, informed by the analytic interests and concepts mentioned above and discussed further in Chapter Two.

Chapter Four presents the motivations of the students involved for going on an exchange and their choice of destination, as well as the reasons given by Australian and New Zealand universities as to why students should study abroad.
The aim is to provide the reader with important context before they consider the findings and conclusions documented and discussed in the remaining chapters.

Chapter Five focusses on the difficulties arising from the encounter with difference that accompanies a study abroad experience. These are central to the stress-adaptation-growth model because the resulting stress is said to compel individuals “to learn new cultural elements” (Kim, 2015, p. 5). However, the evidence collected as part of my study not only casts doubt on the applicability of this model to the study abroad context, but shows that students often resort to generalisations and stereotypes to make sense of these difficulties, contrary to the idea of deep understanding. Chapter Six looks at the other main challenges experienced by the students and a number of related variables. Cultural differences are just one possible source of difficulty when someone moves to a new environment and the main challenges that the students involved in my study encountered actually had more to do with adjusting to new circumstances, such as the interruption of social relationships, social isolation and having to look after oneself for the first time. Difficulties like these are given insufficient attention in the study abroad literature. My analysis shows that the students also resorted to generalisations and stereotypes to make sense of these challenges and that they can play a role in creating a wider sense of discontentment and distress that is projected on to the host population.

Chapter Seven examines the ways in which the students learned from their time abroad. It shows that spending a study period abroad is likely to be transformative in some way, such as helping students to become more self-sufficient or resilient. However, it raises further questions about the level of insight that students acquire with regards to their host society, when measured against the idea of deep understanding, as well as the extent to which they grow in other related ways introduced in Chapter Two, specifically critical reflectiveness and open-mindedness. This requires a level of inquiry, host national contact and reflection that my research shows does not occur automatically, corroborating the growing literature that emphasises the importance of academic intervention in the study abroad process. Chapter Eight discusses the pedagogical implications of my study in more detail, including presenting my model for intervention developed as
a result of this study; providing a course that engages students in an ethnographic research project. The final chapter then revisits the central findings of this study and reflects on its main implications, also identifying areas for further research.
CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter is divided into two parts. The first part elaborates on the key concepts that structure this study, beginning with the idea of deep understanding, drawing primarily on work from the discipline of anthropology. It then reviews several prominent theories that attempt to explain and predict the experiences of individuals who transition to a new environment, concluding by discussing the stress-adaptation-growth model in more detail. The second part of the chapter identifies the central gaps in the literature that my study addresses through a critical review of relevant empirical research in the field of study abroad.

Movement, encounter and learning to live with difference

This study is especially interested in the experience of encounter that accompanies the phenomenon of moving to a new environment, even if this is only for a temporary period. Wilson (2017, p. 452) argues that the concept of encounter “is not an empty referent for any form of meeting, contact or interaction, but is instead historically coded.” She notes that the first definition of encounter describes “a face-to-face meeting between adversaries or opposing forces” (Wilson, 2017, p. 452). Specifically, it describes a meeting “in conflict; hence a battle, skirmish or duel” (Oxford English Dictionary, n.d., def. 1a). This idea of encounter as the coming together of opposing forces is still evident in modern usages of the term, which tend to emphasise the presence of difference. Indeed, (Wilson, 2017, p. 464) holds that “encounters are meetings where difference is somehow noteworthy.”

My interest in the experience of encounter that accompanies study abroad stems from an interest in study abroad as what former US President Barack Obama describes, an opportunity to “break down the walls between us” (Oaks, 2009,
S. Hall (1993, p. 361) argues that “the capacity to live with difference is... the coming question of the 21st century.” Study abroad provides an opportunity to cultivate this capacity, although it is important to acknowledge that there is the opportunity to grow in this way without even leaving home. Indeed, Valentine (2008, p. 324) notes that the city has been reimagined in much recent research as “a site of connection,” where people are learning to live with difference. This work focusses on the everyday exchanges between people from different backgrounds who engage on a daily basis whether as “customers and shopkeepers, passengers and cabdrivers, members of a bus queue, regulars at cafes and bars, tourists and locals, beggars and by-passers, Celtic fans, smokers looking for a light, and of course ... as neighbours” (Laurier, Whyte, & Buckner, 2002, p. 353). The assumption is that these exchanges and the friendliness or civility that defines them is indicative of both how people are already learning and how they can learn to live with difference. However, Valentine (2008, p. 325) notes that much of this work “appears to be laced with a worrying romanticization of urban encounter and to implicitly reproduce a potentially naïve assumption that contact with ‘others’ necessarily translates into respect for difference.” She challenges this using empirical examples “where contact with difference leaves attitudes and values unmoved, and even hardened” (Valentine, 2008, p. 326). People will typically be polite to strangers in public, including what Valentine (2008, p. 328) terms “the performance of everyday acts of kindness.” Nonetheless, this public tolerance of difference, does not necessarily reflect or change their private attitudes and values. The problem is that “many everyday moments of contact between different individuals or groups in the city do not really count as encounters at all” (Valentine, 2008, p. 326). Proximity and public politeness do not equal “meaningful contact” (Valentine, 2008, p. 334). This study examines whether study abroad is any more likely to produce the type of meaningful contact that cultivates the capacity to live with difference, guided by the idea of deep understanding and the stress-adaptation-growth model.

**The idea of deep understanding**

The idea of deep understanding was developed for this study drawing primarily on work from the field of anthropology to describe a level of understanding that students may acquire vis-à-vis their host society. The aim of anthropology is to
understand modes and products of human behaviour in a way that does justice to them (Bernstein, 1985). It is an attempt to understand what lies behind an observed phenomenon; its rationale or meaning. For this reason, Geertz (1973, p. 6) describes anthropological research—ethnography—as an elaborate venture in “thick description.” He borrows this term from Ryle (1971) who uses the example of two boys rapidly contracting their right eyelids to distinguish between a thin description of what they are doing (rapidly contracting their right eyelids) and a thick description of their behaviour (one has an involuntary twitch, while the other is winking at a friend). The latter description demonstrates an understanding that does more justice to what each boy is doing. It describes not only the observable behaviour, but also the meaning behind this behaviour. This is the first element of the idea of deep understanding—it is a level of understanding that involves being able to do more than describe certain observable practises or features (surface-level, visible culture). It means being able to also demonstrate an understanding of the beliefs and values that are behind these (deep culture).

The second element that comprises the idea of deep understanding is that it avoids or transcends stereotypes and other sweeping generalisations. These can be a central source of misunderstanding and division. For example, the position of women in Muslim culture has become a particularly divisive issue due to practices such as veiling. However, as Abu-Lughod (2013, p. 17) demonstrates: “examples from different parts of the Muslim world illustrate the variety of situations in which Muslim women find themselves, the sorts of debates and strategies they engage, and how frequently their experiences are misunderstood and the complexities of their situations ignored.” Abu-Lughod (2013, p. 17) adds that “intimate familiarity with individuals anywhere makes it hard to be satisfied with sweeping generalizations about cultures, religions, or regions.” She argues that “when one generalises from experiences and conversations with a number of specific people in a community, one tends to flatten out differences among them and to homogenise them,” overlooking the inevitably complex reality—the “contradictions, conflicts of interest, and doubts and arguments, not to mention changing motivations and contradictions” (Abu-Lughod, 1991, pp. 152-153). This theme is picked up on throughout this thesis, including in Chapter Four in a
discussion of the culture concept, which Abu-Lughod (1991, p. 152), along with others, criticises for its implication of “homogeneity, coherence and timelessness”

The third element underpinning the idea of deep understanding is that it is based on wide and meaningful engagement with members of the host society. Fieldwork sits at the centre of anthropological research and it is widely accepted that good fieldwork requires establishing close contact with members of the society under study. It is not enough to simply be present, something Malinowski (1972, p. 5) observed when he made the following comments about fellow foreigners that he met while conducting fieldwork on the Trobriand Islands: “Here were men who had lived for years in the place with constant opportunities of observing the natives and communicating with them, and who yet hardly knew one thing about them really well.” Malinowski is widely considered the founding father of ethnographic research. If the aim of ethnography is to understand the meaning that lies behind an observed phenomenon, Malinowski (1972) argued that the challenge is to establish close contact with in-group members. Indeed, Malinowski (1972, p. 6) contended that the proper conditions for ethnographic fieldwork “consist mainly in cutting oneself off from the company of other white men, and remaining in as close contact with the natives as possible, which really can only be achieved by camping right in their villages.” Of course, it is hardly possible for students to cut themselves off entirely from the company of other foreigners during their time abroad, nor is this desirable. Research suggests that contact with co-nationals or even other international students can be valuable both as a source of social support and as a way of making sense of what one is seeing and experiencing (Pitts, 2009; Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001). Meanwhile, it has subsequently been revealed that Malinowski himself spent much time with his fellow Europeans while on fieldwork (Malinowski, 1967). Nonetheless, contact with ingroup members is still important. The aim is not to achieve some kind of inner correspondence with the host population. As Geertz (1974) notes, this is an impossible goal. He argues that grasping the native’s point of view “is more like grasping a proverb, catching an allusion, seeing a joke – or…reading a poem – than it is like achieving communion” (Geertz, 1974, p. 45). His point is that cultural understanding is an act of interpretation, meaning that it is inevitably “situated and therefore partial” (Moreton-Robinson, 2000, p.
xxiii). However, we are more likely to develop an understanding of the meaning behind a practice in conversation with in-group members. This is also important to develop an understanding that transcends stereotypes and sweeping generalisations, assuming it is with a broad cross-section of in-group members.

There are many possible learning outcomes associated with study abroad, including intercultural competence. Bennett (2010, p. 2) defines this as “competence that can be applied to dealing with cross-cultural contact in general, not just skills useful only for dealing with a particular other culture.” This means “behaving and communicating appropriately and effectively in intercultural situations” (Deardorff, 2006, p. 255). The default model for investigating the relationship between study abroad and intercultural competence is the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS), subsequently revised as the Intercultural Development Continuum (IDC). The DMIS is a six-stage model as shown in Figure 1, whereas the IDC is a five-stage model as shown in Figure 2. There are other important differences, but both models conceptualise intercultural competence as possessing a sensitivity towards cultural differences and a willingness to modify one’s behaviour accordingly (Hammer, 2012, 2015).

Figure 1 – Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity

![Experience of Difference](Source: Bennett (1986))

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Denial</th>
<th>Defense</th>
<th>Minimization</th>
<th>Acceptance</th>
<th>Adaptation</th>
<th>Integration</th>
</tr>
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</table>

Ethnocentric Stages Ethnorelative Stages
Figure 2 – Intercultural Development Continuum

Source: Hammer (2012)

My interest in the understanding that students acquire vis-à-vis their host society as opposed to intercultural competence or other possible learning outcomes—including language acquisition or disciplinary knowledge—is directly linked to my interest in study abroad as holding the potential to cultivate the capacity to live with difference. It is my contention that to do so it must cultivate more than a sensitivity towards cultural differences and a willingness to adjust one’s behaviour accordingly as conceptualised by the DMIS and IDC. This is crucial, but as discussed in the previous chapter, the capacity for deep understanding as conceptualised here is equally important because the issues that divide human beings along cultural lines are often the product of misunderstanding. Distinctive practices or features such as the Muslim practice of veiling gain attention and prominence. They are deemed representative of an entire culture based on uninformed opinion, with little being understood about the meaning behind them through wide and meaningful contact with in-group members. (Abu-Lughod, 2013; Nussbaum, 2010). Study abroad provides an opportunity to counter this habit and to develop “a more open-minded, less judgemental stance towards difference.” (Martin & Griffiths, 2014, p. 943). This includes being able to navigate the dilemma highlighted by Breidenbach and Nyiri (2009, p. 29) of retaining sensitivity to cultural differences and their impacts, “without falling into the trap of
determinism, essentialization, and misrepresentation—a trap that, as we are currently witnessing, can have the dangerous consequences of a self-fulfilling prophesy.” However, it is important to ask what happens in practice and whether students can be expected to achieve the level of insight necessary to cultivate this capacity on their own or is some form of intervention needed? There is insufficient research to have examined the relationship between study abroad and student learning from this perspective. On the other hand, other learning outcomes have received considerable research attention, especially the effect that the experience has on intercultural competence (P. Anderson et al., 2006; Engle & Engle, 2004; Medina-Lopez-Portillo, 2004; Vande Berg et al., 2009). For this reason, data was also collected and analysed with these questions in mind, guided by the idea of deep understanding.

There are other potential ways in which students can grow by learning about their host society while abroad. For example, doing so can challenge people to think critically about things within their own society (Dimen-Schein, 1977; Eriksen, 1995; Marcus & Fischer, 1986, 1999; Nussbaum, 1997; Popper, 1996). This can be a transformative experience (Mezirow, 1978, 1981, 1997), irreversibly changing the way a person views their own society (Hannerz, 1992). Hannerz (1992, p. 253) notes that home should be taken-for-grantedness, but if someone’s perspective is irreversibly influenced by an “experience of the alien and the distant,” they may no longer view “either the seasons of the year or the minor rituals of everyday life as absolutely natural, obvious, and necessary.” They may become more critical of things within their own society, a term that I use here in the way Marcuse (2009) uses it, to describe an evaluative attitude; a questioning rather than acceptance of things as they are. This is an important educational objective precisely because we often take things within our own society for granted. This is not a new problem. Socrates described the Athens of his time as a sluggish horse because many of his fellow citizens took things for granted (Nussbaum, 1997). He described himself as a gadfly, whose mission it was to wake them up (Plato, 2010). This mission ultimately cost Socrates his life and even today it is inevitable that some will fear the effect that the emergence of a more critical population might have on the status quo within their own society. Nonetheless, as Dewey (2004, p. 76) argues, progressive communities
“endeavor to shape the experiences of the young so that instead of reproducing current habits, better habits shall be formed.” A more critical population is essential in this sense. It is essential because as Popper (1996, 2002, 2011) argues, societies develop in much the same way as scientific knowledge. That is to say, they develop through criticism. The term criticism is used here in the way Horkheimer (1972, p. 270) uses it, to describe more than the mere condemnation of a thing: “By criticism, we mean that intellectual, and eventually practical, effort which is not satisfied to accept the prevailing ideas, actions, and social conditions unthinkingly and from mere habit.” To criticise something is to question or examine it. Criticism is essential to the cause of progress because it exposes weaknesses that can then be improved. It is for this reason that Socrates stated in his defence that “if I’m the sort of person I say I am, your killing me will do me less damage than it does you” (Plato, 2010, p. 49). The same question as above applies though; can students be expected to acquire the level of insight necessary for the experience to have a critical effect when they are left to their own devices? This is another consideration that informed the analysis presented in this thesis.

The stress-adaptation-growth model

The stress-adaptation-growth model has not been widely used in study abroad research—its use here derives from a desire to know more not only about what students learn abroad, but to better understand the learning process. The stress-adaptation-growth model is one of a long line of theoretical attempts to explain and predict the experiences of individuals who transition to a new environment. To move to a new environment inevitably involves coming face-to-face with differences of various kinds. This has the potential to be transformative, but early theories that attempted to explain and predict the experiences of individuals who transition to a new environment tended to view differences between the new environment and home from a problem-orientated perspective (Milstein, 2005). The rationale being that differences in any number of areas can cause problems (Furnham & Bochner, 1982). For example, Oberg (1960) noted that strange food can upset people. He also said: “If individuals come to a tropical area from a temperate one they quite often suffer from intestinal disturbances” (Oberg, 1960, p. 144). Meanwhile, E. T. Hall (1959) observed that even things such as small architectural differences can affect outsiders. He illustrated this by referring to
four technicians from the United States living in Latin America where houses are “often built around a patio that is next to the sidewalk but hidden from outsiders behind a wall” (E. T. Hall, 1959, p. 199). The technicians complained that they felt left out of things, or shut off. To make matters worse locals often won’t understand a newcomer’s problems and may seem indifferent to their suffering (Oberg, 1960). The newcomer may also find him or herself in a different role as Ying and Han (2006, p. 624) note, “that of a stranger, an outsider, a minority,” or even experience prejudice and discrimination. It can also be trying to be continually thrust into the role of ambassador as Furnham and Bochner (1986, p. 125) note, referring specifically to the experiences of international students, “often by well meaning people politely inquiring about their home customs and national origins, but sometimes by prejudiced individuals who may denigrate the policies or achievements of the student’s country of origin.” The overall effect can be so severe that an individual is said to be suffering from culture shock. This term was coined by Oberg (1960, p. 142) to describe what he considered a disease associated with living in an unfamiliar environment, which “like most ailments… has its own symptoms, cause and cure.” The symptoms include angrily rejecting the new environment and irrationally glorifying home (Adler, 1975; Oberg, 1960).

Furnham and Bochner (1982) argue that while unfamiliarity with any or all aspects of a new setting can contribute to culture shock, the most likely cause is problems encountered in an individual’s dealings with host members. Research shows that there are many differences in how people communicate from one society to another (Ward et al., 2001). These differences are both linguistic and non-verbal (Adler, 1975; E. T. Hall, 1959; Oberg, 1960; Ward et al., 2001). For example: “Some gestures are used in one culture and not in others, and the same gesture can have quite diverse, indeed opposite, meanings in different cultures” (Ward et al., 2001, p. 58). A raised thumb is one gesture that can mean very different things: “In the United States a raised thumb is used as a signal of approval or approbation, and even has a name, the 'thumbs up' signal. However, in Greece the same sign is employed as an insult” (Ward et al., 2001, p. 58). The consequence is that when an individual communicates in another society his or her messages may be ambiguous, difficult to interpret, or even offensive “and
since receivers are also senders, the spiral of miscommunications can quickly accelerate into a vicious circle of misunderstanding” (Ward et al., 2001, p. 53).

There are also many differences in what Ward et al. (2001) describe as the rules and conventions that regulate interpersonal interactions. They note that “cultures differ in the extent to which people are direct or indirect, how requests are made, and more importantly, how requests are denied or refused” (Ward et al., 2001, p. 54). In addition, rules about punctuality also vary across cultures and there are differences in how an individual should address specific people: “Mainly in terms of whether to use first names, last names, and titles” (Ward et al., 2001, p. 60). To further complicate matters, the rules and conventions that regulate interpersonal interaction often operate below the level of consciousness, therefore “unless they have a host culture friend who can serve as a mentor in this regard, even sensitive sojourners may miss some vital cues and behave inappropriately from their hosts’ perspective” (Ward et al., 2001, pp. 59-60).

These theories remain popular today, but they have been heavily criticised for having limited empirical support (Church, 1982; Ward et al., 2001). For example, they suggest that the transition to a new environment typically involves a number of distinct phases, starting with an initial period of excitement, fascination, enchantment, optimism and elation or euphoria upon arrival (Adler, 1975; Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963; Lysgaard, 1955; Oberg, 1960). This is followed by a period of crisis when culture shock strikes. It is defined by feelings of confusion, disorientation, anxiety, frustration, anger and depression. However, these feelings eventually pass as an individual becomes more comfortable in his or her new environment, although there will still be “moments of strain” (Oberg, 1960, p. 143). The exact number of stages that an individual is said to pass through varies, but the general pattern is the same according to these early theories. Lysgaard (1955) describes this pattern as a U-curve, although Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963) argue that it is more accurate to speak of a W-curve because a process of shock and recovery also follows the return home. Nonetheless, Ward et al. (2001, p. 81) argue that “in contrast to beginning cross-cultural transition in a state of euphoria… it is more probable that the transition commences in a state of at least moderate distress.” Research undertaken by Murphy-Lejeune (2002)
focussing on intra-European mobility adds support to this thesis. The experiences of the students in her study generally started with a period of stress, something that she describes as “a phase that varies in length with each individual according to their personality and the context of their stay” (Murphy-Lejeune, 2002). Subsequent research also suggests that the process of adjustment is more irregular than early theories imply. For example, most of the students involved in the study by Murphy-Lejeune (2002) did not follow a smooth path. Instead, they described experiencing a series of ups and downs throughout their time abroad.

The concept of culture shock has also been heavily criticised, especially the way in which this it is used. Beaven (2012, p. 40) notes that “although instances of culture shock have been reported in the literature, in some cases the terms discomfort, fatigue or simply culture stress… may be more appropriate.” People go abroad under different circumstances. Indeed, Beaven (2012) contrasts the experiences of refugees with those of study abroad students. For this and other reasons, individual responses can vary significantly and the term culture shock may not always be applicable. The students involved in Murphy-Lejeune’s (2002) study considered it too severe to represent what they experienced. She argues that the pathological traits associated with the term “are not relevant to the average student experience” (Murphy-Lejeune, 2002, p. 132). This is because there are a number of variables that “differentiate the traditional migrants’ experience from that of the student traveller” (Murphy-Lejeune, 2002, p. 127). These include motives, previous experience, language competence and duration of the stay. Regarding duration of the stay, Schartner (2014, p. 18) argues that “members of the host society tend to expect greater cultural conformity from those who stay for longer periods.” Kim (2001) agrees, noting that the host population tend to be more forgiving of mistakes made by short-term sojourners. The point is that student travellers are relatively privileged visitors and while this won’t prevent them from facing challenges, “the duration and severity of the personal crisis is lessened as a result” (Murphy-Lejeune, 2002, p. 132). This may have implications for student learning, a theme that is returned to later in this chapter.

The students involved in Murphy-Lejeune’s (2002) study also rejected the term culture shock as being too negative. One student noted that she felt “it is the type
of term that one would use if witnessing a fatal accident, but not an experience which prompts one to change position” (Murphy-Lejeune, 2002, p. 131). The term has traditionally been used in an overly negative way, to describe something akin to a disease or illness from which an individual must recover. However, over time there has been increasing recognition that despite, or even because of the difficulties that accompany the encounter with difference implicit in any transition to a new environment, this encounter provides an important opportunity for growth. For example, Adler’s (1975, p. 13) model of the transitional experience provides “an alternative view of culture shock.” This model does not deny the existence of the phenomenon. Adler (1975, p. 15) notes “that specific psychological, social, and cultural dynamics occur when new cultures are encountered.” Specifically, he argues that “differences become increasingly noticeable as different behaviors, values, and attitudes intrude into the perceptual reality of the sojourner,” and as these “cultural distinctions come into the perceptual foreground tension and frustration increase” (Adler, 1975, p. 16). He also notes that this often leads to the rejection of the host culture “through stereotyping, generalization, evaluation, and judgmental behaviour and attitude,” a central feature of the idea of culture shock (Adler, 1975, p. 17). Nonetheless, Adler (1975, p. 15) contends that “a successful cross-cultural experience should result in the movement of personality and identity to new consciousness of values, attitudes, and understandings.” Despite culture shock “often being associated with negative consequences,” he considers it to be a necessary and important stage in this process “of cultural learning, self-development, and personal growth” (Adler, 1975, p. 14). Murphy-Lejeune (2002, p. 145) similarly claims that culture shock constitutes “a step in the process of cultural discovery.” She argues that it actually provides a necessary jolt; it spurs learning and growth.

The demands placed on an individual by environmental differences are also seen as an important source of growth according to the stress-adaptation-growth model. They are considered important because the resulting stress is said to “spur adaptive responses in individual participants” (Kim, 2015, p. 5). Specifically, it is believed to compel cultural learning in an attempt “to establish (or reestablish) and maintain a relatively stable, reciprocal, and functional relationship with the environment” (Kim, 2015, p. 5). The stress that individuals experience as a result
of these demands are said to trigger a process of adaptation through acculturation. Kim (2001, p. 31) describes adaptation as the dynamic process by which individuals achieve environmental fit “upon relocating to new, unfamiliar, or changed cultural environments.” Facilitating this is acculturation, the process of learning the new cultural system, especially in areas of direct relevance to an individual’s daily functioning in the new environment – “from attire and food habits to behavioural norms and cultural values” (Kim, 2001, p. 51). This includes learning the host language and wider communicative norms, as well as new “aesthetic and emotional sensibilities,” “moral and ethical values,” and practises, such as the appropriate dining etiquette (Kim, 2001, 2008; 2015, p. 5). Kim (2001, p. 51) acknowledges that diversity is inevitable, but argues that while “acquiring minority cultural patterns is a part of the overall adaptation process of newcomers, the most forceful pressure to conform generally comes from the dominant group.” Over time, this process of adaptation via acculturation is believed to “bring about a gradual transformation” in the individual towards a more intercultural identity or personhood, something that Kim (2008, p. 364) describes as a “self-other orientation” defined by two central elements: (1) individuation, or the ability “to see oneself and others on the basis of unique individual qualities rather than categorical stereotypes,” and (2) universalisation, or the ability “to see the common humanity among different cultures and ethnicities, and locate the points of consent and complementarity beyond the points of difference and contention.” However, this study uses the stress-adaptation-growth model to examine the relationship between study abroad challenges and the idea of deep understanding.

Kim (2015, p. 6) argues that “the stress–adaptation–growth dynamic does not unfold in a smooth, steady, and linear progression.” Rather, it involves a series of withdrawals in response to the stress associated with new difficulties and leaps forward as an individual responds to these, “with the overall forward and upward movement in the direction of greater adaptation and growth” (Kim, 2015, p. 6). However, is the stress-adaptation-growth dynamic inevitable when one moves to a new environment, especially when it is only for a matter of months as is the case for study abroad students? The research mentioned above found that the concept of culture shock is not always relevant to the experiences of many study
abroad students. This raises the question of whether study abroad students are likely to experience sufficient challenges to initiate the above chain of events, especially students from Australia and New Zealand who go to the seemingly similar shores of Europe? If not, does this limit the potential for growth? On the other hand, can the challenges that they experience actually have a regressive effect? For example, research shows that study abroad students often resort to generalisations or stereotypes to make sense of their difficulties (Beaven, 2012; De Nooy & Hanna, 2003). The data collected as part of my study was analysed with these questions in mind and they sit at the centre of the present dissertation.

**Empirical studies**

The focus of this study is the experience of encounter that accompanies the phenomenon of moving to a new environment. It is especially interested in the opportunity for learning and growth linked to this. However, it approaches this opportunity from a critical perspective. As Wilson (2017, p. 457) notes, “investment in the possibility of encounter should not be taken as a naive celebration or assumption that any transformational potential is necessarily good or realized.” It should not be assumed that learning and growth will automatically accrue. Encounters can have no effect, or may even have a regressive effect. My study examines what actually happens, focussing on the experience of a particular group of students at a particular time. The answer is inevitably that it depends. As Montaigne (1929, p. 540) wrote, “no quality is so universal, in the appearance of things, as diversity and variety.” Still, studies like this improve our understanding of the way students learn, mislearn and do not learn. The remainder of this chapter focusses on a range of other studies that have done this, identifying along the way the gaps in this research that my study addresses.

There is a vast body of research that has sought to go beyond the assumption that simply by spending a study period abroad students will accrue various benefits and the anecdotal evidence often used to illustrate this. These studies have investigated student learning in a number of areas, including language acquisition (Brecht, Davidson, & Ginsberg, 1995; Engle & Engle, 2004; Freed, Segalowitz, & Dewey, 2004; Ife, 2000; Li, 2014; Vande Berg et al., 2009); global citizenship (Tarrant, Lyons, et al., 2014; Tarrant, Rubin, et al., 2014; Wynveen,
Kyle, & Tarrant, 2012); and intercultural competence (P. Anderson et al., 2006; Engle & Engle, 2004; Medina-Lopez-Portillo, 2004; Vande Berg et al., 2009). They have examined what students actually learn from their experiences abroad and various related variables from numerous perspectives with the evidence increasingly suggesting that going abroad does not guarantee student learning in any given area. For example, Medina-Lopez-Portillo (2004) used the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) to measure the gains made by two groups of students from the United States that went to Mexico; one group participated in a seven week summer programme in Taxco, while the other group participated in a 16 week semester programme in Mexico City. The IDI is a 50-item questionnaire designed to measure intercultural competence as conceptualised by the DMIS and IDC. Medina-Lopez-Portillo (2004) investigated the number of students that progressed from one DMIS stage to another one over the course of both programmes, with just under one third of those students (31%) who participated in the seven week programme moving to the next stage, while two thirds of the students (67%) who participated in the 16 week programme progressed. As Medina-Lopez-Portillo (2004, p. 185) notes: “This difference is substantial and suggests that the longer the program, the more interculturally sensitive students are likely to become.” Nonetheless, a large proportion of even those students who spent a full semester abroad did not make substantial gains.

The Georgetown Consortium Project is another study that used the IDI to measure the intercultural competence of 1163 study abroad students from the United States before and after their experience, comparing the resultant data with that derived from 134 students who remained on campus (Vande Berg et al., 2009). The length of time these students spent abroad ranged from one week to one year with the vast majority (almost 96%) spending more than 13 weeks abroad. It found that the study abroad students generally made significantly greater gains than the students that stayed at home. However, it also found that “a sizable number of students abroad did not learn significantly more than control students” (Vande Berg et al., 2009, p. 25). Williams (2005) conducted a similar study to the Georgetown Consortium Project, albeit one involving substantially fewer students. Her study also found that those students who studied abroad
generally made greater gains than those who stayed at home, but she too came to a similar conclusion, that simply going abroad is not always enough on its own.

These are just three examples of studies that cast a critical light on the effectiveness of laissez faire study abroad. Emerging from and alongside these and related empirical studies there has been increasing recognition of the importance of academic intervention in the study abroad process if student learning is to be maximised in a range of different areas. Engle (2013) contends that there are currently three evolving paradigms or narratives when it comes to student learning through study abroad. The first emphasises that it is the place that counts; that learning will happen by simply being abroad. The second emphasises that being abroad is not enough in itself; immersion is essential. The third stresses that immersion is not enough in itself, because “students, left alone, will see and experience only what their personal orientations and cultural conditioning will allow them to see” (Engle, 2013, p. 5). Vande Berg et al. (2009) identify with the third paradigm or narrative, arguing that there is a need for academic intervention to improve student intercultural learning abroad. Vande Berg, Paige, and Lou (2012, p. 21) agree, stating that most students do not “meaningfully develop either through simple exposure to the environment or through having educators take steps to increase the amount of exposure through ‘immersing’ them.” They hold that instead, “students learn and develop effectively and appropriately when educators intervene more intentionally through well-designed training programs that continue throughout the study abroad process” (Vande Berg, Paige, et al., 2012, p. 21). Engle (2013, p. 7) also agrees, noting that “students learn best and develop intercultural skills when trained professionals intervene in their learning process.” She argues that intervention should be geared towards facilitating engaged interaction with the host culture and its people, as well as providing students “with the vocabulary and concepts to make sense of what they encounter, thanks to that engagement” (Engle, 2013, p. 7). Lutterman-Aguilar and Gingerich (2002) also argue that intervention is important, drawing on the principles of experiential education. They note that “one of the fundamental beliefs of experiential education is that experiences are not educational in and of themselves” (Lutterman-Aguilar & Gingerich, 2002, p. 43). This represents what Vande Berg, Paige, et al. (2012) call a paradigm shift,
employing the renowned concept developed by Kuhn (1962) to describe the scientific process whereby a once widely accepted intellectual framework is replaced by a newer one as an increasing number of scientists reject it in favour of the new one.

Despite recent empirical research advancing our understanding of study abroad considerably, there remain a number of gaps relevant to this thesis. To begin with, there is a paucity of research that has examined the phenomenon of outbound mobility in either Australia or New Zealand, although this is changing in the Australian context. There were only 28 previous studies that had been identified at the time of submission. These include four distinct types of study. The first simply collects information about the number and type of students who study abroad. Two such studies was identified in the Australian context and the same number in New Zealand. The first Australian study is an ongoing one that has been carried out annually since 2002. It gathers information about the international operations of Australian universities, including the number of students that spend a study period abroad (Olsen, 2008a, 2008b, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014). The second one analyses the demographic profile of students from Australian universities who study abroad (Nerlich, 2015). The two New Zealand studies were both one-off exercises, but otherwise they have much in common with the first Australian study, collecting information about the international operations of New Zealand higher education institutions, including student participation in outbound study abroad programmes. Their results were published in 1998 and 2006 respectively (Back et al., 1998; McInnis et al., 2006).

The second type of study goes further than the first, examining the factors that inhibit and promote the uptake of outbound study abroad opportunities, or the characteristics of those students who go abroad. Five such studies were identified in the Australian context (Bakalis & Joiner, 2004; Green, Gannaway, Sheppard, & Jamarani, 2014; Lawrence, 2016; Sison & Brennan, 2012; Young & Harper, 2004) and one in New Zealand (Doyle et al., 2010; Doyle et al., 2008). These studies tended to be of the kind described by Clyne and Rizvi (1998): “Student exchange is assumed to be necessarily a good thing with obvious benefits to both

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6 This report is now prepared by i-Graduate and not published, but used for internal benchmarking.
the participants and, more arguably perhaps, to the society to which they return.” The starting point for each was concern about the number of students choosing to spend a period abroad, or the issue of democratisation (Green et al., 2014).

The third type of study goes further again, asking certain secondary actors for their views concerning the actual value of study abroad. Only one study of this kind was identified in the Australian context and none in the New Zealand context. The one Australian study identified, surveyed 14 university career counsellors and 10 major Australian companies about the value that they associated with study abroad in terms of graduate employability. It concluded that spending a study period abroad is moderately important in this sense, providing those who do so with certain advantages over their peers. The same study also collected data about the number of Australian students who spend a study period abroad and looked at the variables that impede greater participation (Davis et al., 1999).

The final type of study asks the primary actors themselves (mobile students) about their experiences abroad. Seventeen studies of this kind were identified, each of which is summarised in Appendix Two. Here, it suffices to say that only one of these studies had a New Zealand focus, a study that like this one examined the phenomenon of study abroad in both Australia and New Zealand, including interviewing a small selection of exchange students from the two countries about their experiences abroad, as well as surveying a larger group of students upon their return home. Like the study discussed in the preceding paragraph, this project also gathered information about the number of students who spend a study period abroad and examined the factors hindering wider participation (Daly, 2005, 2007, 2011; Daly & Barker, 2005; Daly, Troth, Barker, & Jones, 2004).

These 17 studies all contribute to our understanding of study abroad in the Australian and New Zealand contexts, but the study reported here seeks to address several important gaps that remain, gaps that are also present in the wider literature. Firstly, as already mentioned, there is a distinct lack of research that has examined the insights that students acquire with regards to their host society, at least not in sufficient depth. Indeed, this is often little more than a side note. For example, Clyne and Rizvi (1998), reporting on a study that surveyed students from four universities in Australia who in the preceding three years had
spent at least a semester on exchange, noted that comments made by these students about the societies they had been to ranged from the banal and trite, to the more reflective, but they do not explore this further. Meanwhile, a more recent article by Forsey, Broomhall, and Davis (2012) reports the findings of a study that asked 14 students from one Australian university who had returned from studying abroad what they had learned about the country where they had lived, amongst other questions. The authors note that the “students had to think carefully before giving relatively superficial answers about food, student social life, the cost of transport, differences in the vernacular, and even the weather” (Forsey et al., 2012, p. 133). However, they do not examine this further either, although they do briefly discuss the importance of host national contact, a variable that is central to the idea of deep understanding and which features prominently in this thesis.

I argue that there is a need for more systematic, conceptually grounded research into this phenomenon. This is the primary gap that my study attempts to address, guided by the concept of deep understanding. Tajes and Ortiz (2010) undertook one of the only studies identified as part of this research that focussed directly and specifically on the insights gained by study abroad students with regards to their host society. They examined the extent to which a group of students from the United States who spent a study period abroad in Spain become acquainted with the SLEPT conditions of the host country. The SLEPT framework emanates from the field of business and is based on the argument that businesses must understand the external environment of the society or societies in which they operate, specifically the following five conditions: Social, Legal, Economic, Political and Technological. Tajes and Ortiz (2010) asked the participants in their research to complete two country-specific questionnaires; one before they went abroad and the other just before their return home. Each survey contained five similar assessment questions for each of the SLEPT conditions. For example, one question asked participants about the minimum wage in Spain, while another asked them to name the current President. This is a good way to test the factual knowledge that students acquire over the course of a study abroad experience, but this is very different to the type of understanding that is the focus of my study.
My study is unique in this sense, although there are a number of previous studies that offer closely related and valuable insights. De Nooy and Hanna (2003) conducted one such study. This is actually one of the 17 studies mentioned above that looked at the experiences of Australian or New Zealand students. Specifically, it interviewed 38 Australian students who had recently completed a period of undergraduate or postgraduate study in France. The interview questions encouraged the students “to tell stories of intercultural incidents, asked them to reflect on strategies adopted to deal with difficulties, and elicited advice they had received or wished to pass on to others” (De Nooy & Hanna, 2003, p. 66). One of the main themes identified in the resulting data was that many students reported experiencing difficulties accessing necessary information in France, such as information about enrolment requirements or class times, something that was frequently blamed on French disorganisation and inefficiency. De Nooy and Hanna (2003, p. 75) conclude that “whilst time in France undeniably encouraged personal growth and increased knowledge of aspects of French language and culture, striking intolerance and misunderstanding of French patterns of information distribution produced or reinforced a persistent negative stereotype.” Beaven (2012), who examined the phenomenon of study abroad in the context of intra-European mobility, also found that the experience abroad often reinforced negative stereotypes about the host population amongst the students involved in her study, something that seemed to be a product of the difficulties they had establishing relationships with local students. This is hardly indicative of deep understanding as conceptualised here. These findings highlight a need to further examine the types of insight students acquire and how this can be improved with a view to maximising student growth.

Secondly, there are few studies to have employed conceptual frameworks that account for the process by which learning occurs through study abroad, a gap that my study addresses by employing the stress-adaptation-growth model. There is a surprising lack of research that has utilised this model in the study abroad context, despite it accounting for both processes and outcomes (Murphy-Lejeune, 2002, p. 41). One exception is an ethnographic study conducted by Pitts (2009) involving a group of students from the United States studying abroad in Paris. This investigated the link between sojourner stress, communication
practises and identity transformation. Many of the students involved experienced an initial period of stress upon arrival at their destination, which Pitts (2009, p. 450) attributed in large part to the “gap between their expectations and reality of the sojourn.” Nonetheless, the resulting stress subsequently “triggered patterns of everyday talk” that not only allowed these students “to adjust to living abroad, but also to explore and add new dimensions to their self and social identities” (Pitts, 2009, p. 451). This is said to have occurred in many ways, but Pitts (2009, p. 458) focuses on her observation that “all of the students experienced a shift toward a more complex, multifaceted understanding of what it meant to be ‘American,’ and in a few cases, a better understanding of what it was to be a ‘global citizen.’” Pitts (2009) and Kim (2015) both posit that this provides empirical evidence in support of the stress-adaptation-growth dynamic, but there is little evidence that the difficulties experienced compelled the students to “to learn new cultural elements” in an attempt “to establish (or reestablish) and maintain a relatively stable, reciprocal, and functional relationship with the environment” (Kim, 2015, p. 5). Rather, they triggered “specific patterns of talk” with co-nationals, which ultimately allowed them to make peace with their situation and to explore their sense of identity in light of their experience. This is a very different dynamic. The Pitts (2009) study is important as it helps us to better understand the ways by which students learn abroad. However, there is a need for research that further tests the stress-adaptation-growth model in the study abroad context, as well as examining the difficulties that students experience and the impact that these have on student learning more generally, especially in light of research like the two studies mentioned in the previous paragraph which show that students often resort to generalisations and stereotypes to make sense of difficulties experienced while studying abroad (Beaven, 2012; De Nooy & Hanna, 2003).

There is a vast body of literature that has examined the challenges experienced by international students (Brown, 2008; Cheng & Erben, 2012; Chiu, 1995; Church, 1982; Furnham & Bochner, 1982, 1986; Klineberg, 1970; Pitts, 2009; Pritchard, 2011; Ryan & Twibell, 2000; Sawir, Marginson, Deumert, Nyland, & Ramia, 2008; Singh, 1963; Ward et al., 2001; Ying, 2005; Ying & Han, 2006; Zhang & Mi, 2010). Nonetheless, much of this research deals with longer-term mobility and those studies that have focussed on the difficulties of study abroad
students specifically, tend to either focus on only one source of difficulty, albeit in-depth (Pitts, 2009), or they outline the various difficulties that the students involved experienced, but they do not discuss any in substantial detail (Ryan & Twibell, 2000). From the 17 studies that asked mobile students in from Australia and New Zealand about their experiences abroad, a small body of literature has emerged that refers to certain challenges experienced by Australian study abroad students (Dall'Alba & Sidhu, 2013; Dolby, 2005; Nunan, 2006; Parry, 2005; Penman & Ellis, 2004; Richardson, 2013). Nevertheless, this is generally nothing more than a passing reference. One project that did look at the difficulties associated with spending a study period abroad in more detail is the study conducted by Daly (2007). The students who were interviewed about their experiences abroad as part of this study were asked about the challenges they faced as a result of being in an unfamiliar environment. The students reported experiencing minor difficulties as a result of differences in areas such as communication, accommodation, the climate, shopping and teaching methods, but overall they expressed satisfaction with their experience and few reported experiencing culture shock (Daly, 2007). However, this was the extent of the findings on this topic and the implications for student learning were not really discussed, while the students interviewed all went to the same country: Canada. Moreover, it focused almost exclusively on only one potential source of difficulty. Environmental differences are undoubtedly an important potential source of difficulty when someone moves to a new environment, but the wider literature shows that the interruption of social relationships, social isolation and financial constraints can also be problematic, to name just a few other sources. There is a need to better understand the breadth of difficulties associated with study abroad and the impact these have on student learning, a gap that this study addresses.

There is not only a need to better understand the breadth of difficulties associated with study abroad and the impact that these have on student learning; it is also important that research examines this in different settings because there are key contextual differences that could play a role. For example, Pitts (2009) found that expectation gaps were a major source of stress for the students involved in her study. One of the main gaps that they experienced in this sense was the “gap between their expectations for social relationships abroad and the reality of social
network formation” (Pitts, 2009, p. 454). The students “not only desired complete integration into the French social scene, but they also expected to be accepted into French social networks that would simply replace the social interactions to which they were habituated in the States” (Pitts, 2009, p. 454). However, this proved to be an unrealistic expectation. Pitts (2009) observed that the students’ high expectations in terms of local friendships and interaction were often created or reinforced by external sources with the overall effect summed up by one student who commented, “I feel like I’m failing study abroad.” Nonetheless, it seems that less pressure is placed on Australian and New Zealand students to immerse themselves in the local culture than students from the United States, although this requires empirical testing, something that goes beyond the remit of this study. My rationale is that many universities in the United States have partnered with third-party organisations to provide study abroad opportunities to their students, while the traditional university-to-university pathway prevails in Australia and New Zealand. These dedicated providers appear to place higher expectations on students than universities themselves, where study abroad or exchange offices have to focus more on administrative matters due to resource constraints. This theory is supported by Pitts (2009, p. 455) who notes that the third party provider which organised the programme in Paris that the students involved in her study participated in, was “perhaps the most significant source of external pressures and high expectations,” while in contrast, the students’ home universities “appeared to have the most realistic expectations for the students.” It may also be relevant in this sense that despite the paradigm shift in study abroad theory mentioned above, the findings of the policy analysis presented in the introduction to this thesis suggest that Australian and New Zealand universities still largely operate within the first paradigm in that there is little emphasis on what happens once students go abroad; the main aim is to increase participation. However, in the United States where there is a longer history of study abroad, the second and third paradigms seem to be more accepted and there is more of a focus on the experience itself (Vande Berg et al, 2012). Does this mean that students from Australia and New Zealand who go abroad are less likely to experience problems due to expectation gaps than those from the United States?
One other variable that may differentiate the experiences of Australian and New Zealand students in Europe is geographic distance. It has been suggested that the effect of being away from home is likely to be less severe if the destination is geographically close to home (Fisher, 1988, 1989, 1990; Fisher, Murray, & Frazer, 1985). As Fisher et al. (1985, p. 184) note, “increased geographical distance means decreased possibility of visits home because of time and financial consideration.” Research conducted by Fisher et al. (1985) that investigated the incidence of homesickness as a response to a move away from home by first year university students did find a positive association between geographical distance and feelings of homesickness. They reported that “distance from home (measured in geographical miles) was significantly greater for the homesick group,” although the number of visits home did not differ between students who reported experiencing homesickness and those that did not (Fisher et al., 1985, p. 189). This indicates that it is the perception that one can or cannot return home if they want to that is significant “rather than any amelioration produced by actual home visits” (Fisher et al., 1985, p. 192). Geographically there is no greater distance that one can travel than from Australia or New Zealand to Europe. Does this have an effect? Does it exacerbate the challenges that students experience?

Finally, this study was designed to address these gaps by adopting a qualitative approach that is conceptually grounded and does not rely on student self-reporting. This approach is outlined in the next chapter. Here it suffices to say that while there are numerous important studies that have effectively done this (Beames, 2004; Menard-Warwick & Palmer, 2012; Murphy-Lejeune, 2002; Papatsiba, 2006; Pitts, 2009), many empirical studies to have examined the relationship between study abroad and student learning tend to rely on student self-reporting with the resulting analysis involving little more than summarising the responses (Bull, 2004, 2007; Nunan, 2006; Parry, 2005, 2006) or they are quantitative in their approach (Daly, 2007; Engle & Engle, 2004; Vande Berg et al., 2009; Williams, 2005). The problem with the first type of study is that they take the student’s word for it. However, because the accounts that emerge are grounded in what Hammer (2012, p. 128) terms “hypersensory memories,” students often express strong certainty and enthusiasm about their development in a number of areas, but this says little about their actual development.
Moreover, these studies are generally not conceptually grounded, making any further analysis or interpretation difficult. It is difficult to structure data and draw conclusions from it without a conceptual framework to guide this process (Huggins & Johnston, 2015; Krieger, 2016). On the other hand, the rationale for adopting a quantitative approach is “to bring a statistical objectivity to the evaluation of the… study abroad experience” (Engle & Engle, 2004). The IDI is one measure that has been utilised with this purpose in mind and the resulting research has been central to the paradigm shift mentioned above, whereby there is increased recognition of the importance of academic intervention in the study abroad process (Engle & Engle, 2004; Medina-Lopez-Portillo, 2004; Vande Berg et al., 2009). It has also been effectively used to test the validity of certain intervention models (Bathurst & La Brack, 2012; Engle & Engle, 2012; Hemming Lou & Weber Bosley, 2012; Medina-Lopez-Portillo & Salonen, 2012; Paige, Harvey, & McCleary, 2012; Vande Berg, Quinn, & Menyhart, 2012). However, studies employing the IDI typically suffer because the student voice is missing from the narrative. The reader gets little insight into the diverse experiences of the students involved and while these studies show that the benefits associated with study abroad cannot be expected to accrue automatically and that intervention helps, they tell us little about outliers, where or how students are falling short and what type of intervention is necessary, or how existing models could be improved.

The IDI does include the option to include five open-ended contexting questions intended to capture qualitative data that can be used to relate IDI profile scores to the actual experiences of the individual, but this data is barely visible in the resulting literature. Medina-Lopez-Portillo (2004) did incorporate a qualitative component into her study. Specifically, she examined changes in the “students’ perceptions, definitions, and opinions of culture and cultural differences; their awareness of belonging to a culture; and their perceptions of Mexican culture and its people” (Medina-Lopez-Portillo, 2004, p. 187). This adds value to the study, although the analysis is so focussed on comparing the students who participated in the shorter Taxco programme with those who went on the longer Mexico City one that the reader does not get much insight with regards to the differences and exceptions within each group. For example, we are introduced to a student
named Susan who participated in the longer Mexico City programme to illustrate the ways in which the students on this programme “demonstrated a greater depth of knowledge and understanding” (Medina-Lopez-Portillo, 2004, p. 189). However, we are not introduced to any outliers within this group, despite the quantitative data suggesting that a large proportion of even those students who spent a full semester abroad did not make substantial gains in terms of their intercultural sensitivity. On a related note, it is interesting in the context of the present study that the examples provided to demonstrate the greater level of understanding gained by students participating on the longer programme, inadvertently seem to indicate areas where there was room for further advances to be made if the idea of deep understanding is applied. For example, Susan concludes that Mexicans are “significantly orientated towards the past” (Medina-Lopez-Portillo, 2004, p. 190). This observation may be true in general, but why is this and is it universal amongst all Mexicans? It appears that there is room for Susan to develop a deeper, more nuanced understanding of her host society, but this is overlooked as a consequence of the theoretical orientation of the study.

**Summary**

This chapter shows that there is a need to better understand the insights that study abroad students acquire vis-à-vis their host society, introducing the idea of deep understanding as a framework for examining student learning in this sense. It also highlights that there is a need for further research to examine the processes by which learning occurs and that there is a lack of research that has utilised the stress-adaptation-growth model to do this or examined the various challenges associated with study abroad and their effect on learning more generally. Furthermore, this chapter has documented a distinct lack of relevant research in the Australia and New Zealand contexts specifically. These are the main gaps that the present study addresses.
CHAPTER THREE
METHODOLOGICAL CHOICES

Having outlined the analytic interests and concepts central to this thesis, as well as identifying the gaps in the empirical literature that it addresses, this chapter now discusses the methodological choices underpinning my study in more detail. It begins by outlining the assumptions and beliefs at the centre of my worldview as a researcher so to provide important context for the discussion that follows.

Research stance

The idea of critical realism sits at the centre of my research worldview. This idea is based on the ontological belief that there is an external reality, independent of human thought that we as human beings can seek to apprehend, but that we can only ever apprehend it imperfectly (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). This is because of the epistemological belief that “our knowledge of the real world is inevitably interpretative and provisional rather than straightforwardly representational” (Frazer & Lacey, 1993, p. 182). There is a link here to the ideas of constructivism and relativism, which hold that “our understanding of [the] world is inevitably a construction from our own perspective and standpoint” (Maxwell, 2012, p. 5). There is no objective “God’s-Eye View” from which we can examine the world, making all knowledge fallible (Putnam & Conant, 1992, pp. 17-18). Thus, I agree with Popper (2011, p. 491) that “the quest for certainty (or even the quest for high probability) is a mistaken quest... [because] though we may seek for truth, and though we may even find truth... we can never be quite certain that we have found it.” This is especially so when we are trying to understand the experiences or thoughts of other human beings (Geertz, 1974). These ontological and epistemological beliefs have methodological implications. The conception of knowledge as interpretative, constructed or relative makes it important to give
respondents the space to describe their experiences and thoughts in detail and in dialogue with the researcher so to enable him or her to develop an understanding that does justice to these (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). It favours the use of open-ended questions and semi-structured or unstructured interviews, while the collection of data over multiple phases is deemed important to allow for clarification and expansion in both directions. It also favours the inclusive coding of data and an iterative approach to data analysis. These elements are all visible in the methodological choices outlined in this chapter. Nonetheless, this study is based on data provided by 21 individual students and while I have tried to do justice to the experiences and thoughts of each of them, I am aware that my powers of interpretation are inevitably limited. This means that I consider any conclusions put forward in this thesis to be tentative and awaiting refinement through criticism, something that is discussed in more detail later in the chapter. However, this does not weaken these conclusions. They have been developed via a thorough process of analysis using an extensive body of rich data collected over three phases, including semi-structured in-country interviews.

**Ethical considerations**

The study reported here was approved by the Australian National University human ethics committee. The students who participated in it were all required to complete a consent form, a copy of which is contained in Appendix Three. Amongst other things, this informed them that they were free to withdraw from the project at any time; that the interview would be recorded, but they could access and amend the transcript if they wished to; that while information gained during the study might be published or otherwise used to report the findings of the project, they would not be directly identified, nor would their personal results be divulged in a way that might indirectly identify them;⁷ and that any data obtained would be kept confidential to the extent that the law allows.

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⁷ To protect the identities of the students involved pseudonyms have been used and certain details such as place names have been changed where deemed necessary.
Data collection and analysis

Data was collected in three phases over a period of 18 months beginning in the second half of 2011. First, an online questionnaire was used to collect basic demographic information about an initially wide sample of students prior to their departure, including their age, gender, country of birth and residence, previous travel experience and language profile. It also asked them about their exchange destination, as well as their reasons for going on an exchange and their choice of country. Second, a smaller sample of students who completed the initial questionnaire were selected to be interviewed during their exchange (on location) about their experiences thus far. Third, these students were asked to complete another online questionnaire once they returned home. This asked them to reflect upon their experience abroad. It also asked them about their return home and what they had learned from the experience, including regarding their host society.

The first phase

Questionnaires are not a commonly employed method in qualitative research, primarily because the resulting data is unlikely to be as detailed or rich as that derived from other methods, such as interviews. The benefits of interviews in this sense are discussed in the next subsection. Nonetheless, a lack of richness was not considered a problem at this stage, given the aim was to collect basic background information, with the interviews used in the second phase of the study providing the opportunity to ask students to expand upon their answers where elaboration was deemed necessary or valuable. Technically, the benefit of questionnaires is that they offer a less time-consuming way to collect data than many other methods, including interviews. This is especially true with online questionnaires because these can quickly and easily be distributed to multiple participants via email. On the other hand, it has been suggested that setting up an online questionnaire requires more initial effort and expertise than paper questionnaires (Jones, Murphy, Edwards, & James, 2008). However, there are

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8 In Latin, the word data is the plural form of datum, a term used to describe a particular item of information. The Oxford English Dictionary notes that: “historically and in specialised scientific fields, it is also treated as a plural in English.” However, it is also used as a count noun to describe many items of information collectively. This is the way it is used herein, thus the word “was” is used in this sentence, not the word “were” which some readers might consider more appropriate.
now various services available (such as Survey Monkey), which allow people with minimal expertise to create online questionnaires. For my study, I utilised a service provided by my university that proved to be simple and effective to use. This service allowed me to set-up and distribute the questionnaire quickly and effectively. Nonetheless, the process of developing the actual questions asked so to elicit relevant responses still required a lot of thought and attention. This included running a pilot of the survey with former exchange students from my university to see if they understood the questions. Doing this provided valuable feedback and allowed me to fine-tune the questionnaire before distributing the final product.

An added advantage of online questionnaires is that they make it is easier to ensure that all required questions are answered (Jones et al., 2008). This is because unlike paper ones, online questionnaires can be set-up so that certain questions must be answered before the person completing it proceeds. Meanwhile, collecting data from a large population takes no extra time than it would take to collect data from one person, whereas the amount of time required rises with each extra person interviewed, or even each extra person to whom a paper questionnaire is distributed. This was important for my research because it was decided to distribute the questionnaire to an initially wide population, from which the final sample was chosen. Research does suggest that response rates for surveys distributed by email are lower than those distributed by mail (Couper, 2000; Fan & Yan, 2010; Jones et al., 2008). Nonetheless, this was not deemed a problem for my research, where a representative sample was not sought, as will be discussed in more detail in the sample size and selection section below. Rather, diversity was sought, which requires only a certain number of responses, irrespective of the percentage these represent of the total population to which the questionnaire was distributed. Undoubtedly, it would have been preferable to have more responses, although the possibility that I could have received more responses if a different form of questionnaire had been used is not enough to convince me that another form of questionnaire should have been used. Finally, using an online questionnaire means that the resulting data comes ready to be analysed, while interviews must be transcribed first, or at least it is my belief that they should be transcribed first. It is possible to code directly from audio data, but
in my view, data analysis should be an iterative process and having the data in written form makes it significantly easier to go back to it time and time again. Another alternative is to only partially transcribe the interview, or in other words to only transcribe those parts of it deemed significant. However, in doing this there is the risk that certain statements will lose their context and it is always possible that we will miss something important on first inspection, or even the second time.

The questions asked in the pre-departure questionnaire were designed to gather basic demographic information about the students prior to their departure, including their age, gender, country of birth and residence, previous travel experience and language profile, as well as to ask them about their exchange destination and motivations. This information was collected so to enable the selection of participants who represented a diverse range of students, a sampling strategy that is discussed in more detail below. The questions about previous travel experience, linguistic proficiency and motivations were considered especially important for their potential to explain differences in experiences and outcomes. The literature indicates that prior travel experience is an important variable because it prepares students for what is to follow (Kim, 2001; Murphy-Lejeune, 2002; Ward et al., 2001). As Murphy-Lejeune (2002, p. 74) notes, “young travellers have acquired certain skills and attitudes which will facilitate the route ahead.” Firstly, experience in a similar situation limits the likelihood that students will experience problems while abroad, or at least it limits the likelihood that they will experience significant stress because this arises when someone appraises a situation as taxing or exceeding his or her resources (Lazarus, 1999; Lazarus & DeLongis, 1983; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Previous experience means that one person may appraise the same situation very differently to another. Secondly, previous experience can help an individual to better cope with stress. It can lead to the development of an inner resilience. Thirdly, it can provide a foundation for more substantial learning and growth. This is because “the first experience of adaption is an initiation in the sense that it introduces young people to the first elements of a more complex discovery and is the prelude preparing them for a prolonged learning route” (Murphy-Lejeune, 2002, p. 66). The context may be different, but “having gone through the experience once facilitates and lessens the next” (Murphy-Lejeune, 2002, p. 66). Even internal mobility such as
moving to another city to attend university can help prepare “the ground for later experiences” (Murphy-Lejeune, 2002, p. 66). The pre-departure questionnaire did not ask about internal mobility, but this was clarified in the in-country interviews.

Linguistic proficiency was considered an important variable because navigating an unfamiliar language can be a significant source of difficulty in a new environment, while speaking the host language is beneficial when it comes to cultural learning (Beaven, 2012; Furnham & Bochner, 1982; Kim, 2001; Murphy-Lejeune, 2002; Ward et al., 2001). Indeed, proficiency in the host language constitutes an important part of a student’s mobility capital (Murphy-Lejeune, 2002). Meanwhile, tourism research tells us that to understand tourist behaviour we must look at the reasons tourists travel in the first place (Crompton, 1979). This is considered “a critical variable because it is the impelling and compelling force behind all behaviour” (Crompton, 1979, pp. 409-410). Study abroad is obviously a different phenomenon to tourism, although there are parallels that can be drawn. For example, Forsey and Low (2014) show how tourism imaginaries can act to ensure that students arrive in a country with a particular image of it already embedded in their mind. Nonetheless, the larger point here is that motivations can also play an important role in determining student behaviour in the study abroad context (Beaven, 2012; Murphy-Lejeune, 2002). They are “the engine driving actions in a continuous motion and marking each individual trajectory in a different way” (Murphy-Lejeune, 2002, p. 81). They can also play an important role in determining reactions to certain developments or circumstances. For example, Beaven (2012, p. 51) comments that “if a student’s objectives in going abroad are to obtain a specific qualification not offered at his or home institution, rather than to get to know a particular local culture, then the fact that he or she may not meet local students will not be considered a stress-provoking obstacle”. The influence that motivations can have on individual experiences and outcomes explains my interest in these, although care must be taken not to attach too much weight to this variable. As Crompton (1979, p. 409) warns in the context of tourism, “motivation is only one of many variables which may contribute to explaining tourist behavior. To expect motivation to account for a large portion of the variance in tourist behavior is probably asking too much since there may be many other interrelated influences operating.” The question
on motivations in the pre-departure questionnaire asked the students to give their reasons for going on an exchange generally and to explain their choice of country. These are the two aspects of an individual traveller’s decision making process that research examining tourist motivations has tended to focus on: push and pull factors (Crompton, 1979; Dann, 1977; Uysal & Jurowski, 1994; Yoon & Uysal, 2005; Yuan & Mcdonald, 1990). The next chapter outlines the push and pull factors cited, pondering their implications in light of the analytic focus of the study.

The second phase

Interviews provide a way to generate richer data than that derived from questionnaires. They allow participants to describe their experiences at length, while also permitting the researcher to seek clarification or more information when a response is ambiguous or lacking in detail. Moreover, they allow the researcher to provide clarification if a question is not understood or is misunderstood. It was decided to interview the students while they were still on exchange, rather than simply asking them to look back on their experiences once they had returned home. This was done to increase the immediacy and richness of their accounts.

The interviews themselves were semi-structured, meaning they were guided by a schedule of questions, but the students were also encouraged to think and talk about their experiences more generally and digressions were encouraged throughout. Moreover, the actual questions asked varied slightly from student to student depending on context, while additional questions were incorporated where it was deemed necessary or worthwhile to gather more information about an emerging theme (Potter & Hepburn, 2005). Semi-structured interviews allow themes to emerge that had not been considered previously, while still ensuring that the central issues of a study are covered (Silverman, 2010). The core schedule of questions included the following: What are the main differences that you have noticed between here and home, if any? Did you expect such a degree of difference or similarity? What was your initial reaction to the degree of difference you encountered or noticed? What are your thoughts now? These questions were designed to generate data related to the notion of encountering

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9 The schedule of questions used is included in Appendix Five of this thesis.
difference that is central to this thesis, both in terms of the challenges associated with this and the insights that the students acquire vis-à-vis their host society (Adler, 1975; Beaven, 2012; De Nooy & Hanna, 2003; Furnham & Bochner, 1982; E. T. Hall, 1959; Kim, 2001, 2008, 2015; Oberg, 1960; Ward et al., 2001). The students were also asked the following questions: Tell me about your experience so far. How has it been? What have been the most difficult aspects of your experience so far, if any? Did you initially and do you now feel comfortable with your decision to spend a study period abroad generally and in this place in particular? If not, why not? These questions were designed to ascertain whether the students had experienced any difficulties to that point, from which further information could be elicited as to the nature and impact of these. They provided a rich vein of data for subsequent analysis, including investigating the applicability of the stress-adaptation-growth model (Kim, 2001, 2008, 2015; Pitts, 2009) and the implications that difficulties experienced abroad have for cultural learning (Beaven, 2012; De Nooy & Hanna, 2003), as well as developing a typology of the various challenges that can have an impact. Other key questions included the following: What are the most important things that you have learned so far? Have you come to learn much about the society where you are based and if so, are there any examples that stand out in terms of what you have learned? Based on your experience so far, is there much that you or the place that you call home can learn from this society and if so, what are some examples? These were designed to gather data specific to student learning, especially in terms of the type of insights that the students acquired with regards to their host society, which was subsequently analysed guided by the idea of deep understanding that is central to the present study. The latter question was designed to also get responses relevant to the connected idea that learning about a different society through study abroad can have a critical effect (Dimen-Schein, 1977; Eriksen, 1995; Hannerz, 1992; Marcus & Fischer, 1986, 1999; Nussbaum, 1997; Popper, 1996).
A major criticism of much qualitative research conducted in the field of study abroad is that “interviewers often ask open-ended questions regarding what the student has learned while overseas” (Hammer, 2012, p. 128). This dependence on self-reporting is deemed unreliable because the data is based on “hypersensory memories” (Hammer, 2012, p. 128). Students report with strong certainty and enthusiasm that their experience abroad “dramatically increased their awareness, deepened their commitment to working across cultures, allowed them to form international friendships, and helped them achieve a wide assortment of other outcomes” (Hammer, 2012, pp. 128-129). The problem is that these reflections say little about their actual development. Nonetheless, open-ended questions that ask students about what think they have learned or the most important things that they have learned still provide a useful insight, especially if they are followed-up with subsequent questions designed to collect more specific and detailed data from which learning can be further analysed, guided by a conceptual framework (Huggins & Johnston, 2015; Krieger, 2016). For this reason, my study asks students not only about the most important things that they learned or whether they gained much of an insight vis-a-vis their host society, but they are also asked to provide examples. This data and that collected from other questions like those about the level of difference encountered enabled deeper examination of the level of understanding accrued using the concept of deep understanding, something discussed in the Data Analysis section below.

It was decided to conduct the interviews on location, or in other words in the city where the students were on exchange because it was deemed that physically meeting the students and talking to them face-to-face would make it easier to establish a level of intimacy more likely to lead to disclosure than if they had simply been conducted via telephone or Skype (Johnson & Rowlands, 2012). The interviews were undertaken in cafes or other public places. For example, one was held on the bank of the Seine River. The idea was to hold them in informal settings where the students felt comfortable. We would meet at an agreed point and then find an appropriate setting together, often going somewhere recommended by the student. The walk there provided an opportunity to get to know each other
and to ease any nerves. It meant that we arrived having already established rapport. Financial constraints and problems with timing meant that interviews with four students did end up being conducted via Skype. These were still successful interviews, but it was certainly easier to establish rapport in person, in part because the students generally seemed excited to have someone from home visit them. It also seemed to help that at the time the interviews were conducted, I was also living in Europe, on a six month visiting fellowship in Berlin. I was quite literally a fellow traveller who could relate to what the students were going through at that time. Still, it must be acknowledged that conducting the interviews on location did make coordinating them much harder than it would have otherwise been, while the cost of doing this would have been prohibitive if it was not for the visiting fellowship and additional funding sourced through my home university.

**The third phase**

The final questionnaire was used to follow-up on the in-country interviews. It was an extensive questionnaire, which covered the same themes as the in-country interview. For example, it also asked the students about the hardest parts of their experience, as well as a series of questions about the most important things that they had learned, the insights that they had gained in terms of the host society and whether the experience had challenged them to think about anything ‘back home’ that they had previously taken for granted or accepted without question. This stage of data collection was considered necessary so to account for any developments since the interviews and to allow the students to add to what they said during these having had more time to reflect and looking back on the experience as a whole. Questionnaires do have their limitations when it comes to qualitative research, as mentioned above. However, these were not considered an issue here because rapport had already been established and potential misunderstandings clarified during the interviews. Moreover, the questionnaire deliberately included a number of open-ended questions, which allowed the students to provide detailed, descriptive accounts. There was also a question at the end that asked the students if there was anything else that they would like to say about their experience and the lessons that could be taken from it. Furthermore, the opportunity existed to undertake a follow-up interview if
clarification or more detailed information was needed on any matter, but this was not necessary as a result of the quality of data collected during the second phase.

Data analysis

The analysis of the data collected as part of my study can be divided into five phases. The first phase occurred after the pre-departure questionnaire responses had been received and enabled me to select the students to be interviewed. It involved developing a profile for each student with their age, gender, exchange destination, country of birth and residence, previous travel experience and language profile. The profiles of the final 21 participating students are contained in Appendix One, although the actual profiles used contained information that has been removed here so as to protect the identities of the students involved, including information on the specific countries that they had been to previously and the exact duration of their stay in each one. This data was also tabularised in a form similar to Table 4 contained in the Participants section found later in this chapter. This provided a valuable resource from which to seek context and examine possible relationships or trends during the latter phases of analysis, while the individual profiles contained more detailed data if necessary.

This initial phase of data analysis also involved attaching codes or what Saldaña (2009, p. 3) defines as “summative, salient, essence-capturing” words or short phrases to each unique reason given both in terms of their decision to go abroad in the first place and their choice of country. For example, the codes used to describe their reasons for going abroad included curiosity, to improve language proficiency and academic reasons. Meanwhile, the codes used to describe their choice of country included the host language, culture and geographic location. This was an iterative process, meaning that each response to this question was read and reread multiple times so to ensure that the codes used were as appropriate as possible. The number of students within each category and their names were recorded in a document, which like the table mentioned above, provided a resource from which to seek context and examine possible relationships or trends during the latter phases of analysis, while the relevant extracts were also included so to provide more detail if needed.
The focus of the second phase of data analysis was the interview transcripts. It involved attaching codes to each unique aspect of this data set considered relevant to the analytic interests outlined in the preceding chapters. Table 2 contains examples of the types of aspects coded and the codes used, while Table 3 contains an extract from one of interview transcripts and shows how it was coded. This too was an iterative process. Meanwhile, it was technically a deductive process because it was driven by my preconceived analytic interests in the topic (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Moreover, I made fieldnotes over the course of the interview phase of data collection, meaning I started this process of coding with preliminary analytic thoughts (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Some might not regard this as a good thing, believing that it would have narrowed my “analytic field of vision” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 86). However, it seems inevitable that anyone who collects their own data by what Braun and Clarke (2006) describe as interactive means (such as interviews), will have some initial analytic thoughts. Moreover, if I missed anything during this phase of analysis, which is possible, I don’t think that this is because I started thinking about the data while I was still collecting it. I started this phase of analysis without the assistance of any kind of data analysis software. This had not been a problem when analysing the data collected through the pre-departure questionnaires. Nonetheless, I came to use the ATLAS.ti programme to code the interview transcripts as it became apparent that the nature and sheer size of these required a more sophisticated approach.

Table 2 – Examples of interview data coded and codes used

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coded aspects</th>
<th>Selected codes used</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Descriptions of certain aspects of the experience as being difficult, otherwise problematic, or not.</td>
<td>– Unfamiliarity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– Social isolation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Descriptions of the study abroad experience overall and its difficulty or lack thereof.</td>
<td>– Tough</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– Smooth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Descriptions of the host society.</td>
<td>– Similar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Descriptions of differences encountered/observed</td>
<td>– Attitudes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References to home society</td>
<td>– New appreciation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Descriptions of learning or growth or lack thereof.</td>
<td>– Host society insight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Descriptions of contact with locals</td>
<td>– Little contact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Descriptions of contributing variables</td>
<td>– Expectations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3 – Interview data extract, with codes attached

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data extract</th>
<th>Codes attached</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| I found the uni quite difficult and I felt like I didn’t really get much help. Like the trickiest things are probably getting enrolled in uni, choosing my subjects and getting my residence permit. And like choosing subjects is totally different to how you do it in Australia. I am enrolled in a degree but it doesn’t really have core subjects. There are thousands of subjects on the database and you search them choose subjects and then just turn up and sign up and you can continue with them or not. It’s actually really flexible, but it was a bit overwhelming. I felt like I just wanted someone to hand me a timetable and say these are the subjects that a normal student in their third year of this course does, but there is some flexibility if you want change them; instead of kind of being let loose. And the database is in German and stuff, but now it is fine. But I was kind of stressed about it in the first week of uni. And also you have to sign this form back home with your home uni when you sign up for new subjects and there they don’t offer the same subject. So it was ok for me where I have a lot of flexibility, but if you were doing something that was more rigid it would be very tricky I think. | 1. Described particular aspect as / difficult  
2. Described particular aspect as / stressful  
3. Particular aspect = enrolling and getting set-up |

The third phase of data analysis involved quantifying the responses of the students to certain closed questions asked in the follow-up questionnaire, including questions asking if they had learned from their experience, if they had gained much of an insight in terms of the place or the people of the place where
they were based and whether it had challenged them to think about anything at home that they had previously taken for granted or accepted without question. This phase also involved coding their responses to a number of open-ended questions, such as: Please explain any particular things that stand out in terms of what you learned about the place or its people, i.e. laws, norms, practises or anything else? The wider data set arising from the follow-up questionnaire was also examined in case important information relevant to my analytic interests was contained elsewhere. This constituted another deductive and iterative process.

These first three phases of analysis allowed me to summarise certain aspects of the data relevant to my analytic interests. For example, eight out of the 21 participants described being separated from family and friends as difficult in their interview, while five of them listed this in the follow-up questionnaire as one of the hardest things about spending a study period abroad. Meanwhile, 17 of them answered in the affirmative to the question about whether they had gained much of an insight in terms of the host society. However, this does not mean much in itself or at least not in terms of my analytic focus. Therefore, I examined the coded data again with a view to adding important context where deemed necessary. For example, what reasons did those students who said that they had not gained much of an insight give for this? Did the examples given by those who answered in the affirmative to this question indicate deep understanding according to the criteria outlined in the introduction to this thesis and discussed in the previous chapter? What about the students’ descriptions of differences identified in the interview transcripts or elsewhere in the follow-up questionnaire responses? What level of host national contact did they have given that this is a central element of the idea of deep understanding? This was a key theme in the interview data and a question was also asked about this in the follow-up questionnaire. In addition, were there relationships with other aspects of the data collected, such as student motivations? This phase involved constantly referring back to the data relevant to a particular aspect. To assist with this process, I had deliberately coded the data inclusively, meaning that when attaching a code to a particular aspect, I made sure to include any potentially relevant surrounding data.  

This mainly applied to the interview transcripts because the nature of the questions asked in the questionnaires meant that there was not generally relevant surrounding data to include.
meant that there was less risk of important context being lost (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The wider data set was also read again just in case important information was contained elsewhere. I also examined as much relevant literature as possible with the aim of adding important context. For example, the literature referred to in the previous chapter in the section that discussed the idea of deep understanding. These publications allowed me to understand and explain in greater depth the data relevant to this analytic focus. The literature used during this phase of analysis was often that which I had used when designing the study. However, I also sought out and used additional research where appropriate. This phase of analysis constituted a shift towards a more interpretative form of analysis and coincided with the process of writing up my findings, which Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 86) deem “an integral part of analysis.”

The final phase of analysis involved drawing conclusions from my data, guided by the following question: What can be learned from my research? This process actually began during the data collection process and continued throughout the earlier analysis phases, but it was here that I attempted to articulate my main conclusions in more detail. I also presented them publicly on two occasions, meaning they were subjected to criticism, a process which allowed me to refine them further. They are also waiting to be improved by further criticism. That is, in the words of Popper (2002, p. xi), “by attempted refutations, which include severely critical tests.” Criticism, argued Popper (2002, p. xii), assuming it is listened to, “is always a step forward.” Indeed, as he argued elsewhere, “criticism may be important, enlightening, and even fruitful, without being valid: the arguments used in order to reject some invalid criticism may throw a lot of new light upon a theory, and can be used as a (tentative) argument in its favour” (Popper, 2011, pp. 495-496).

**Sample size and selection**

Kvale (1996, p. 102) notes that in “interview studies, the number of interviews tend to be around 15±10.” However, there is no hard and fast rule for determining the appropriate sample size in qualitative research. The time and resources required to collect and analyse data usually means that a small sample is necessary. For example, Kvale (1996, p. 102) notes that “if the number of
subjects is too large, then it is not possible to make penetrating interpretations.” It was ultimately decided to include between 20 and 30 students in this study because any more would risk rendering it impracticable given its scope. This was always going to be too small a sample to be representative of the entire population of Australian and New Zealand undergraduate students who go on exchange to Europe (Olsen, 2010). Nonetheless, my goal was to understand the experiences of the students involved in as much detail as possible, which meant that collecting a large amount of data from a small number of students was prioritised above collecting a small amount of data from a large number of students, even if this limited my authority to generalise to the wider population. The intent of qualitative research is very rarely to generalise and it was certainly not my aim (Creswell, 2013). To paraphrase the words of Simon Allistone quoted in Silverman (2010, p. 36), my research should not be seen as an attempt to provide categorical truths about study abroad in general, but as an attempt to raise questions about this phenomenon by looking at a small number of cases in detail; questions that might open new possibilities for both research and practise.

Having a sample representative of the entire population of Australian and New Zealand undergraduate students who go on exchange to Europe was not my aim in designing this study for the reasons mentioned above. Nonetheless, it was decided to select participants that represented a diverse range of students. Maximum variation sampling is an important sampling strategy in qualitative research whereby a researcher deliberately chooses a sample that is diverse in one or more ways (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994; Patton, 2005). It is believed that this improves what might be learned from the study (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). For example, it may expose patterns that are linked to variation, as well as those that cut across it (Patton, 2005). For my study, diversity was sought in a number of areas, including gender, age, destination, prior overseas experience and host language competence, based on the responses to the initial online questionnaire. This was distributed by 11 universities that agreed to participate (eight in Australia and three in New Zealand) to all undergraduate students who had been accepted to go on an exchange to Europe in the following semester. Sixty-seven students completed the initial online questionnaire. Two universities did not release data pertaining to the number of students that went to Europe that semester, but there
were a total of 486 students from the other nine institutions. If we extrapolate this figure, the approximate number of students over the full 11 institutions would be 594, meaning the response rate was around 11 percent. From the 67 students who completed the initial questionnaire, 34 were selected to be interviewed, although six subsequently withdrew, meaning only 28 in-country interviews were actually conducted. As noted, four of these were done via Skype, with the remainder done in person. Six of these 28 students didn’t complete the final online questionnaire and the response of another was deemed invalid because this participant did not answer any of the qualitative questions, meaning there were 21 students who participated in all three stages of the study.

**Participants**

Table 4 provides an overview of the 21 students who participated in all three phases of my study. There were 11 students from Australia and 10 from New Zealand. Fourteen were female and seven were male. The youngest student was 17 years old at the start of her exchange, while the remaining 20 students ranged in age from 20 to 24 with the average age being just over 21. It appears from previous research that the gender and age distribution of these students is largely representative of the wider student exchange population. Previous research certainly suggests that more female students go on an exchange than males. Indeed, Clyne and Rizvi (1998) concluded from their survey of former Australian exchange students from four universities in Australia that the model Australian exchange student is female; 70.9 percent of the students from nine Australian and two New Zealand universities that participated in the second part of the study conducted by Daly (2007) were female; and 58 percent of the students from one Australian university who participated in a study conducted by Dall’Alba and Sidhu (2013) were women. Meanwhile, the latest survey of Australian universities conducted by Olsen (2014) found that in 2013, 59 percent of the students that undertook some kind of international study experience from 37 participating universities were female.11 Regarding age, there is less data available. Nonetheless, the mean age of the students who participated in the second part

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11 As mentioned in the Introduction of this thesis, this report is now prepared by i-Graduate and is not published, thus the lack of more recent data.
of the Daly (2007) study was 21.7 years old, while 90 percent of the students that participated in the Dall’Alba and Sidhu (2013) study were between 18 and 25.

The students can be divided into two groups: those who spent only one semester abroad and those who spent two semesters abroad in two different countries. There were 18 students in the former group. Four went to the United Kingdom (three to England and one to Wales), three each went to France and Sweden, two each to Poland and Denmark, and one each to Austria, Germany, Italy and the Netherlands. Meanwhile, there were three students in the latter group who spent two semesters abroad in two different countries: Georgia who spent her first semester in France and the second one in Italy, Josh who went to Poland followed by Germany and Lauren who went to Sweden then France.

Seventeen students went to places where English is not the first language and 12 went somewhere where they had no prior knowledge of the host language. This figure includes Georgia because she spent her second semester in Italy where she had no prior knowledge of the host language. However, the data collected as part of this study largely relates to her time in France where she did speak the host language.12 The students who went to non-English speaking countries, but already had some knowledge of the host language, comprised two groups: those who considered themselves to be fluent in the host language or at an advanced level and those who considered themselves to be at an intermediate level. It is notable that three of the four students in the first group (Luke, Georgia and Max) had previously lived abroad in a country or region where that language is spoken, while this had not been the case for the students in the second group.

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12 Josh and Lauren were the other students to spend two semesters abroad in two different countries. Josh spent his second semester in Germany where he did speak the host language, but he was in Poland at the time of data collection and he did not speak any Polish. Meanwhile, Lauren had no prior knowledge of the host language in either of the countries that she went to.
These students spent two semesters abroad in two different countries. The countries listed here are where they were at the time of data collection.

Luke had lived abroad on two previous occasions, but on both occasions he stayed with relatives in a similarly supportive environment.

Had been on a high school international experience, but only for a short duration. Thus, this was not categorised as living abroad.

Table 4 – Participant summary table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Origin</th>
<th>Destination</th>
<th>Host language proficiency</th>
<th>Lived away from family home before</th>
<th>Travelled overseas before</th>
<th>Lived overseas before</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rebecca</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>UK (England)</td>
<td>Native language</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes - 7 countries</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>No prior knowledge</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes - 12 countries</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>No prior knowledge</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>UK (England)</td>
<td>Native language</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes - 15 countries</td>
<td>No ^</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luke</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>Advanced</td>
<td>No ^</td>
<td>Yes - 2 countries</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>France</td>
<td>Advanced</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes - 5 countries</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Yes - 9 countries</td>
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<tr>
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<td>No</td>
<td>Yes - 8 countries</td>
<td>No ^</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>No prior knowledge</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes - 11 countries</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

^ These students spent two semesters abroad in two different countries. The countries listed here are where they were at the time of data collection.

^ Luke had lived abroad on two previous occasions, but on both occasions he stayed with relatives in a similarly supportive environment.

^ Had been on a high school international experience, but only for a short duration. Thus, this was not categorised as living abroad.
Only one of the students involved had never been abroad prior to the exchange, with the average number of countries that the remaining 20 students had been to sitting at seven. Ten students had lived overseas in some capacity previously, meaning they had spent time with family based overseas when they were younger, they had been on a high school exchange or an earlier university one, or they had lived abroad for a period of time after school. Rebecca and Luke had lived with relatives based in another country for a period while they were still at school. Luke had also lived with his overseas based relatives for a period after leaving school. Georgia, Josh, Max and Molly had been on a high school exchange. Sarah and Charlotte also spent time overseas as part of a high school international programme, but only for one month and six weeks respectively so this was not categorised as living abroad. By contrast, Josh and Georgia spent six months abroad, Molly was away for eight months and Max was away for a full year. Josh, Molly and Max had also spent time living abroad since finishing high school, with Max having done so on two separate occasions; he had lived in Europe for one year previously and Latin America for three months. There were also another four students who had similarly lived abroad since completing high school, including Lauren who had been on an earlier university exchange before deciding to spend another two semesters in Europe. The others were Chris, Bella and Olivia. Finally, for eight of the students it was their first real experience living away from the family home. That is to say, they had never lived away from the family home before; or they had, but only for a very brief period of time or in a similarly supportive environment. For example, Luke had lived abroad twice, but on both occasions he stayed with relatives in a similarly supportive environment.

**Four central protagonists**

Appendix One contains an overview of the final 21 students who participated in this study, but Table 5 presented here provides a more detailed introduction to four participants who feature prominently in this thesis: Eva, Josh, Georgia and Natalie. Their stories have been chosen because they constitute contrasting narratives, highlighting the wide range of possible experiences and outcomes when someone embarks on a study abroad period. They are also featured here because they bring to light the key findings presented in this dissertation. Eva and Josh were very different in terms of their prior experience and outlook, but
both cases demonstrate that study abroad can be difficult even when someone from New Zealand or Australia goes to the seemingly similar shores of Europe. However, neither were compelled to learn new cultural elements as per the stress-adaptation-growth model. Instead, the difficulties that they experienced only seemed to stymie understanding with both developing a negative image of their host society characterised by surface-level observations and sweeping generalisations. Georgia features so prominently because she displayed a willingness to go beyond her initial interpretations and learn more about the alien phenomena that she observed. Natalie’s narrative is important because whereas the other three were atypical, her experience most closely resembles the norm. She did not experience any major challenges or develop a negative image of the host population, but she still appeared to develop only a superficial and simplistic understanding of her host society. The main thing that all four narratives emphasise is the importance of academic intervention in the study abroad process. There is a need to get students like Eva, Josh and Natalie to engage more like Georgia, but even she would have clearly benefitted from intervention.

Table 5 – Four central protagonists

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Eva</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Origin</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Exchange</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Host language competence</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mobility capital</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
previously, including her host destination, France. However, this is her first experience of properly living away from her family home, let alone in another country. For this reason, she observes in her interview that this has been a completely different experience to any of her previous overseas experiences.

Motivations

Eva is motivated to go on exchange by a desire to live in France. Thus, her desire to spend a semester abroad is inextricably linked to a particular country. More specifically, she wants to immerse herself in the French language and to become “truly fluent” in it. She is also driven by a sense of curiosity, noting that she wants to “meet new people, try new things, and generally see what life is like outside of my little corner of the world.”

Encounters with difference

Eva is one of only two students involved in my study who reports experiencing culture shock, but there is no evidence that this compels cultural learning as per the stress-adaptation-growth model. Instead, Eva develops an overwhelmingly negative image of all things French based on superficial observations and mass generalisations, contrary to the idea of deep understanding. Moreover, her view of New Zealand remains unchallenged.

Key variables

Eva had a difficult experience, something that the evidence suggests influenced the image that she developed of her host society and its people. This was the product of a number of issues, many of which were not directly attributable to environmental differences. For example, she found it hard living away from her family for the first time. These wider obstacles magnified the effect of circumstances and incidents that might otherwise have been considered minor, while these circumstance and each incident intensified her overall malaise. One other possible explanation identified through this research is that the experience did not live up to the promise of happiness associated with study abroad. Eva appears to have projected her resulting disappointment on to the host population. It is also significant that Eva had an overly romantic view of France and
extremely high expectations prior to the exchange, something that exacerbated her disappointment. Other important factors that made matters worse included her limited prior experience in situations of a similar kind and the fact that she found it hard to establish social relationships at her host destination.

Pedagogical implications

Despite the frustrations that Eva experienced, there was no suggestion that this compelled her to learn in the way anticipated by the stress-adaptation-growth model, beyond improving her proficiency in the host language. This has pedagogical implications, further corroborating the importance of academic intervention in study abroad because learning is not inevitable, at least not in the way the stress-adaptation-growth model describes. Indeed, the difficulties she experiences actually appear to hinder understanding. Eva’s case points to the importance of academic intervention aimed at fostering constructive engagement with the perceived differences that students encounter abroad. It also shows the importance of paying attention to the various challenges that students may experience while abroad because of the powerful role that emotions can play in shaping our encounters with difference. Specifically, Eva’s case shows how difficulties and disappointment can influence the image that is developed of the host population while abroad, regardless of their source.

Josh

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>21</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Origin</td>
<td>New Zealand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exchange</td>
<td>Poland for one semester¹³</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Host language competence</td>
<td>Josh has no prior knowledge of Polish.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹³ Josh also spent one semester in Germany.
Mobility capital

He participated in an exchange while at high school and has lived in Europe once previously since leaving school. Josh even runs training sessions for students from New Zealand going overseas and international students coming to New Zealand. He speaks as if he already has a very open-minded, non-judgemental attitude towards difference. However, this is contradicted by a number of statements in his interview and there is clearly room for further development.

Motivations

Like Eva, Josh is driven to go on exchange by a sense of curiosity. Specifically, he notes that he wants to have new experiences. He chose to go to Poland because of the low cost of living and the fact that he could study there in English. This dissertation focuses on Josh’s experience in Poland, but he also spent a semester in Germany. He chose to go there because he already has some knowledge of German and wants to improve this.

Encounters with difference

Despite his previous experience and confidence, Josh is the only other student to experience the frustration and malaise associated with culture shock. He observes that Poland is much more different to New Zealand than the previous countries where he has lived, while his inability to speak Polish is also an issue. He copes better than Eva in that he is more philosophical about his situation; he understands what is happening and knows that he will get through it. However, he is also not compelled to learn in the way anticipated by the stress-adaptation-growth model and he similarly develops a series of negative opinions regarding Poland and its people, characterised by superficial observations and sweeping generalisations.

Key variables

The perceived degree of difference from home was clearly an important factor for Josh, although the thing that really distinguished this experience from the other two occasions when he lived abroad was the fact that he didn’t speak the host language this time. It is notable in this sense that of the eight non-English speaking countries that the students involved in my study went to, Poland has the lowest
percentage of people that can hold a conversation in English at 33% according to a Eurobarometer survey (European Commission, 2012). His previous experience was also an important variable, meaning he was not as affected as Eva.

Pedagogical implications

Like Eva, despite the frustrations that Josh experienced, there was no suggestion that this compelled cultural learning. Indeed, Josh also appeared to develop only a superficial understanding of his host society. This is especially significant because of Josh’s previous experience. It shows that even the most experienced of students may still have much to learn. Despite claims that suggested otherwise, Josh was as quick to judge and as prone to using generalisations as any other student involved in my research.

Georgia

Age 20
Gender Female
Origin New Zealand
Exchange France for one semester
Host language competence Like Eva, Georgia describes her knowledge of the French language as being at an advanced level in the pre-departure questionnaire. She has been studying it for eight years, including spending six months in the French speaking part of Belgium on a high school exchange.

Mobility capital Georgia went on a high school exchange. This means that she is better prepared for the experience than Eva. She notes during the in-country interview that it is a very different scenario this time and that she needs to do a lot more herself. However, while there are ups and downs, she notes that she feels “like they’re smaller bumps this time.”

14 Georgia also spent one semester in Italy.
Motivations

Like both Eva and Josh, curiosity is also a driving factor for Georgia. She notes that she loves “French culture and food and people and history and want to learn more about all of it.” She wants to do this by living in France, not just visiting as a tourist. She gives similar reasons for wanting to go to Italy. Georgia also notes that she sees it as an opportunity to learn more about her own culture and to develop as a person. She is also motivated by a desire to improve her proficiency in the French language, while Italy appeals to her because it provides an opportunity to learn a new language.

Encounters with difference

Language is not really an issue for Georgia. Indeed, she reflects in the follow-up questionnaire on “the thrill of waking up every day and knowing you will speak in French all day.” However, she does experience some difficulties keeping up in her classes, which she is taking in French. This is not necessarily a negative thing though as it pushes her to do extra work to improve her proficiency in order to be able to keep up. This is the only concrete example present in my data whereby the stress resulting from problems caused by unfamiliarity compelled a student to learn a new cultural element. Beyond language, Georgia’s experience exemplifies a tendency to resort to stereotypes to describe her host society. For example, her experience of enrolling and getting set-up gives rise to the view that the French are disorganised. However, she also displays a willingness to go beyond her initial interpretations. This is epitomised by her reaction to the discovery that supermarkets are closed on Sunday afternoons in her host city. She initially finds this inconvenient and frustrating. However, she wants to know more and takes the initiative to investigate. This research prompts a change of viewpoint. She comes to view this practise in a positive light, along with the related practise of businesses closing over lunch time. This provides an important lesson in reserving judgement and trying to understand the meaning behind a practise first. The experience also has a critical effect. She reflects on her own society based on what she
has learned, concluding that the French way is better. By contrast, the majority of students returned with their views of home unchallenged, beyond coming to appreciate it more like Eva and Josh. Indeed, Josh also made the point of mentioning the practise of supermarkets closing on Sunday, but only to bemoan what a hassle it this was. It did not give rise to any further inquiry or reflection.

Key variables Georgia’s previous experience in a similar situation was clearly an important factor, combined with the fact that she went somewhere where she can speak the language. This meant that she had less problems, or the problems that she experienced did not have the same effect. However, there is also something within her that drives her to want to go beyond her initial interpretations. This inquisitiveness compared to other participants cannot be explained by any specific variables, or at least none that were analysed or detected through my study.

Pedagogical implications There will always be students like Georgia who do what educators want or expect them to do without any prompting or scaffolding. Biggs (1999) illustrates this in the classroom setting by describing a student called Susan who basically teaches herself. However, he notes that for every Susan there are others who do only the bare minimum. He uses the example of a student called Robert who does only what he thinks he needs to in order to pass the course. The challenge is to get Robert and other students to learn like Susan, or in this case the challenge is to get students to learn like Georgia. She examined, questioned and reflected in a way that Josh and Eva did not. There is a need to engage all students in activities like these linked to the desired outcomes, ideally as part of a credit-bearing course so to incentivise student engagement. Nonetheless, Georgia could have also benefitted from some kind of academic intervention. She still resorted to stereotypes to describe her host society and there was room for her to develop a more nuanced view of practises such as supermarkets closing on Sundays, especially by talking to more host
nationals about the subject. This would have allowed her to learn more about what Abu-Lughod (1991, p. 153) terms internal “contradictions, conflicts of interest, and doubts and arguments, not to mention changing motivations and circumstances.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Natalie</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Origin</td>
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<tr>
<td>Exchange</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Host language competence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobility capital</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Motivations

Natalie had no real choice in her destination. Her home university had only one exchange partner where she could get credit that would go towards her degree. However, this was not a big deal—Natalie just wanted to go on an exchange. She noted that this is something she had wanted to do for a long time, driven by a desire to live and experience another way of life in another country. Thus, curiosity is also her main motivation. Her friendships with a number of incoming exchange students that she met at her home university also strengthened her desire to go on an exchange.

Encounters with difference

Out of the four students featured here, Natalie’s experience is the most typical in terms of the encounter with difference that accompanies spending a study period abroad. She experiences no major problems due to unfamiliarity and does not develop the same kind of negative opinion of the host population as Eva and Josh, but neither does she have any major breakthroughs. She notes that she doesn’t develop much of an understanding of her society, attributing this to the fact that she has minimal meaningful contact with local residents. She lives with other international students and doesn’t spend any time socialising with host nationals. She does make some friends through her classes, but these don’t extend beyond the classroom. Meanwhile, the local buddy that Natalie was allocated never got in touch with her. This meant that her interactions with locals are restricted to the kind of everyday “moments of contact” that are unlikely to be transformative (Valentine, 2008, p. 326). Indeed, Valentine (2008, p. 326) argues that they “do not really count as encounters at all.” The overall result is that the insights that Natalie gains are acquired from a distance and require greater investigation and examination. Her experience is also typical in that it did not appear to have a critical effect. Rather, it actually made her view her own society more positively. This would not necessarily be a problem if it were not for that fact that many of the reasons that she gave for this might not have survived deeper investigation, scrutiny and reflection.
Key variables

Natalie struggled at the start of her experience, noting that the hardest thing was being separated from her family. This was especially hard because it was her first time living abroad. However, things got better as she made friends at her host destination. Natalie’s experience supports the idea that previous experience is an important variable in terms of the effect of being separated from family and friends, but it also illustrates the restorative power of new friendships, something that ensured Natalie ultimately had a very different experience to Eva. However, while this meant that she did not develop the same kind of negative feelings towards the host population as Eva, neither did the data suggest that she develop a deep understanding as conceptualised here. Two key, interrelated variables are identified in this sense: her lack of meaningful contact with host nationals and her inability to speak the host language. Indeed, while it can be easy enough to get by without speaking the language, this is certainly a barrier to understanding.

Pedagogical implications

Natalie’s experience is noteworthy because of the similarities it shares with the experiences of most of the students involved in my research. She did not experience any real challenges due to unfamiliarity, thus she was not compelled to learn new cultural elements. Nor did she take the initiative on her own to learn about the differences that surrounded her in any depth. This was partly attributable to her having limited opportunities to interact with host nationals, as well as her inability to speak Polish. However, the opportunity to dig a little deeper and to gain a better understanding of her host society in all its complexity still existed. This was a missed opportunity, illustrating a need to encourage students to engage more meaningfully with their host society, as well as getting them to engage in a deeper level of reflection with regards to their own society based on what they learn. More broadly, her case further shows the importance of engaging students in activities
Validity

Hammersley (1998, p. 62) describes validity as truth, or “the extent to which an account accurately represents the phenomena to which it refers.” It is according to this standard that research is often judged, although if our understanding of the world is inevitably a construction of reality and if no knowledge is certain, it could be argued that validity is not a relevant concept when it comes to evaluating qualitative research (Hammersley, 1998). However, I agree with Hammersley (1998) that validity is still a legitimate standard by which to assess qualitative research. Specifically, we can search for possible errors or weaknesses in the work of others. Truth is something that we can aspire to as researchers, even if we will never get there with certainty. Criticism has an important role to play in this sense, as mentioned above. However, one problem with qualitative research reports is that it is often difficult to assess their claims because “there is a tendency towards an anecdotal approach to the use of ‘data’ in relation to conclusions or explanations” (Bryman, 1988, p. 77). That is to say, it is normal for only a few examples to be used “to provide evidence of a particular contention” (Bryman, 1988, p. 77). This report was written with this issue in mind. Selected examples are still used to illustrate key points relevant to my analytic interests, but I have tried to incorporate the actual words of the students as much as possible and background information, such as the extent to which these were typical or representative and information on any exceptions. The aim was to provide sufficient context so to allow readers to assess my interpretations and to present alternatives, rather than simply letting a few quotes stand on their own.

Summary

The methodological choices underpinning this study ensure that the resulting thesis has been developed via a thorough process of analysis using an extensive body of rich data collected over three phases. It adopts a qualitative approach, but one that is conceptually grounded and attempts to avoid the pitfalls of student self-reporting. This includes not simply asking students what they learned abroad
or whether they gained much of an insight vis-à-vis their host society—it also asks them to provide examples and to elaborate, enabling a deeper level of analysis guided by the central concepts. The end result is an extended discussion that raises important questions about the phenomenon of study abroad by examining a small number of cases in detail; questions that open up new possibilities for both research and practise (Silverman, 2010, p. 36).
This is a deliberately short and focused chapter designed to provide the reader with further context before considering the findings and conclusions presented in the remaining chapters. It focuses on the students’ reported motivations for going on an exchange and their choice of destination, as well as the reasons given by Australian and New Zealand universities as to why students should study abroad.

Motivations

It is valuable to understand the motives that drive study abroad students because these can be a critical variable in terms of explaining subsequent behaviour and responses (Beaven, 2012; Murphy-Lejeune, 2002). This chapter examines both push factors and pull factors (Crompton, 1979; Dann, 1977; Uysal & Jurowski, 1994; Yoon & Uysal, 2005; Yuan & Mcdonald, 1990). The former are the motives that predispose an individual to travel in the first place (Yuan & Mcdonald, 1990); they explain his or her desire to travel (Crompton, 1979). The latter are the features that attract an individual to a particular place (Yuan & Mcdonald, 1990); they are the factors that explain his or her choice of destination (Crompton, 1979).

The decision to study abroad

The various motives cited for going on an exchange in the first place included curiosity, to improve foreign language skills, academic reasons, self-improvement or enlightenment, to improve employment opportunities, to meet new people and make new friends, to spend time in a place of personal significance, to travel around Europe, and to escape. Curiosity was the most frequently cited of these motives. Thirteen students (Rebecca, Chris, James, Georgia, Josh, Molly, Kate, Eva, Alicia, Rhys, Max, Charlotte and Natalie) noted that this played a part in their
decision to go on an exchange. That is to say, they mentioned one or more of the following reasons: that they wanted to see what life is like somewhere else; to experience life somewhere different; to explore a new place; to immerse themselves in a new environment; to try or experience new things; and to learn about another country, culture or way of life. There was also one other student (Andrew) who did not mention any of these motives directly, but who did comment that one of the reasons that he had chosen to spend a study period abroad was a belief that experiencing a number of different cultures is a necessary component of a complete education. Andrew was one of seven students to use the term culture in describing curiosity as a reason for wanting to study abroad. For example, James noted that he wanted to go overseas for the first time and experience a new culture. The term culture was also frequently used by the students involved in the study of Forsey et al. (2012). They note that “when asked to select words and phrases reflecting why they might like to study abroad, culture was the overwhelming first choice” (Forsey et al., 2012, p. 131). This is notable because of the criticism associated with the term that it implies “homogeneity, coherence and timelessness” (Abu-Lughod, 1991, p. 152). Brumann (1999, p. S1) argues that this is not the intention of the concept, citing various historical and modern definitions. Drawing on these definitions, he holds that “a culture is the set of specific learned routines (and/or their material and immaterial products) that are characteristic of a delineated group of people,” arguing that this does not imply that such routines are shared universally within a group or that they are exclusive to it (Brumann, 1999, p. S6). D’Andrade questions this definition because as Bruman acknowledges, the term “routines” is associated more with behaviour than thought and in most current anthropological writing, the concept of culture is “defined not by the behaviors and artifacts shared within a society but by meanings, symbols, understandings, knowledge, ideas, etc” (Brumann, 1999, p. S16). However, Abu-Lughod points out a much more important issue: “I do not think that concepts have transcendent or true meanings. Concepts are human creations and socially embedded” (Brumann, 1999, p. S14). Therefore, citing numerous definitions to show what the concept actually means is not helpful because “such definitions tell us nothing about the contexts in which they arose or, more important, the contexts in which the concept is put into play and with what impact” (Brumann, 1999, p. S14). The main problem is that unless the
concept of culture is heavily qualified, it tends to imply homogeneity and boundedness, even if this is not the intention of its use.

Previous research has observed that study abroad students often resort to stereotypes and mass generalisations to describe their host population (Beaven, 2012; De Nooy & Hanna, 2003), a phenomenon that my analysis also revealed, contrary to the idea of deep understanding. Beaven (2012, p. 282) draws a link between the culture concept and this phenomenon, reasoning that “it is only a small step between the thought of adapting to ‘the British culture’ and the conclusion that ‘the British’ are cold.” The description of the host population as cold or reserved is typical of the kind of generalisation that appears frequently in her study. It also appears frequently in my study, but can an entire population be cold or unfriendly? The reality is likely to be far more complex, something that is explored in the next chapter. Here, the bigger point is that while it may be too much to blame the culture concept for the tendency observed amongst study abroad students to resort to stereotypes and generalisations to describe their host population, it seems feasible that the frequent use of this term before departure is indicative of a predisposition to view other groups as “homogenous, coherent and timeless.” Either way, its usage presents an opportunity for institutions to try to disrupt the tendency to generalise by inviting students to critically explore the culture concept that they frequently employ and the meaning that its use implies.

Beyond the above observation, the curiosity shown by these 13 students at least indicates a willingness to engage with difference while abroad. This is also evident in the motivations of students participating in other studies (Beaven, 2012; Murphy-Lejeune, 2002). However, as Murphy-Lejeune (2002) comments, their actual expectations in this sense are not always clear. She asks: “Are they interested in a broader discovery of the people whose society they find themselves in temporarily?” (Murphy-Lejeune, 2002, p. 90). It is important to recognise that wanting to see what life is like somewhere else or to experience life somewhere different does not in itself imply a willingness to learn about difference. Indeed, only two of the 13 students who listed curiosity mentioned learning specifically. This may explain why despite widespread curiosity, the data collected and analysed here suggests that most students did not acquire a deep
understanding of their host society, a finding that is documented and discussed in the remaining chapters. One implication is that it would helpful to incorporate activities prior to departure designed to get students thinking about the difference between seeing or experiencing something and comprehending it, an idea that is discussed further in Chapter Eight. These activities would also be used to get students to reflect on the culture concept as suggested in the previous paragraph.

The second most cited motive was a desire to improve one’s foreign language skills. Seven students noted that this played a part in their decision to go on an exchange, including one student (Chris) who was not proficient in any language other than English before his exchange. He viewed the exchange as a way to change this, commenting that “I always wanted to learn another language and I heard going to a country where English isn’t the native language makes it easier.” The other students that listed this were Georgia, Josh, Eva, Alicia, Rhys and Max. These students all wanted to improve their proficiency in a language of which they already had some understanding, although Georgia also wanted to learn a new language, explaining her decision to spend a semester in Italy where she had no prior knowledge of the host language. Linguistic reasons have always been an important source of motivation for students to study abroad, especially amongst language majors (Beaven, 2012; Murphy-Lejeune, 2002). This is the product of a “widespread belief that spending a period in the country of the target language is the most efficient way to learn the language” (Beaven, 2012, p. 104). However, is this belief justified? There is a substantial body of research that has examined the effectiveness of study abroad in terms of language learning. Freed (1998, p. 31) conducted a thorough review of the literature resulting from this research, noting that “it has long been assumed that the combination of immersion in the native speech community, combined with formal classroom learning, create the best environment for learning a second language.” He concluded that it is, indeed, “often the case that the experience of residing in a country where the language spoken is other than one’s own results in the learning of many aspects of the language of that country” (Freed, 1998, p. 32). However, he added the disclaimer that “the extent to which the language (be it oral or written) is learned, and the style and dialect that is acquired, depends on numerous variables” (Freed, 1998, p. 32). For example, Brecht et al. (1995) found
that pre-programme reading and grammar skills are important. Additionally, Freed (1998, p. 51) notes that “student perceptions of their experiences have taught us that their interactions with native speakers may be far less intense and frequent than was once assumed and that the so-called ‘immersion’ into the native speaker linguistic environment may be somewhat less guaranteed than was once taken for granted.” This is something confirmed by my research where more than half of the students involved reported having little contact with host nationals, or at least minimal meaningful contact. Churchill and DuFon (2006) conducted a follow-up review building on the work of Freed. They concluded that while even short programs can lead to gains, “longer programs have the potential to benefit learners more” (Churchill & DuFon, 2006, p. 26). They also noted that “while lower-level learners have the most to gain by definition, more advanced learners may be more likely to find themselves in contact situations facilitative to language acquisition” (Churchill & DuFon, 2006, p. 26). Murphy-Lejeune (2002) also observed that language specialists have an advantage. Does this mean that students like Chris have unrealistic expectations given their lack of prior knowledge? The students involved in my study who went to a country where English is not the main language without any previous knowledge of the host language typically did not make substantial linguistic gains, although as with the students involved in Beaven’s (2012) study, it was language students who expressed a sense of disappointment in terms of the linguistic gains they made while abroad. It was clear that they held much greater expectations in this sense.

Van Hoof and Verbeeten (2005) found that students are not motivated to go on exchange for academic reasons, but Daly (2007) notes that these were a key drivers cited by the Australian and New Zealand students who participated in her study. They were also central to the decisions of a number of the students involved in Beaven’s (2012) study. There were six students involved in my study who noted that academic reasons played a part in their decision to go on an exchange. Hannah was one of these students. She thought that it would be academically beneficial for her to be exposed to new ideas and practices in her field of study: urban planning. Four of the remaining five students (Rebecca, James, Andrew and Matilda) commented in one way or another that they wanted to study in a different academic environment, or experience a different style of
teaching and learning. Two of these students also listed additional academic reasons. James said that he wanted to gain a renewed enthusiasm for his studies, while as mentioned above, Andrew noted that one of the reasons he had chosen to go on an exchange was a belief that experiencing a number of different cultures is necessary to a complete education. Rhys was the sixth student to cite academic reasons, noting that he wanted to sample a university experience different from that offered by his home university. It should be acknowledged that there was another student that made a similar comment: Kate. She noted that she was driven to go on an exchange by a desire “to experience university life overseas.” However, this was not referring to the academic side of university life and was consequently categorised as curiosity, rather than an academic reason.

Three students listed a desire to improve themselves, or gain some kind of self-enlightenment. Rebecca and Eva were two of these students, both noting that they thought they would grow as people from the experience, without giving any specific details as to how they thought they might grow. The other was Sarah who went further, stating that she thought she would acquire certain unspecified life skills and gain more of an idea about what she would like to do with her life, by going away from her comfort zone and being challenged with a level of independence that she had not had before. This desire to gain life experience was the most commonly cited motivation by the students involved in Dall’Alba and Sidhu’s (2013) study. It was also a popular reason amongst the students involved in Beaven’s (2012). As she notes, the experience of studying abroad is seen to offer “the chance to try out a new, alternative life, which can provide the participant with a wealth of experience and knowledge” (Beaven, 2012, p. 109).

Three students (James, Hannah and Rhys) also listed a desire to improve their employment opportunities. This was one of the strongest reasons cited by the students involved in Daly’s (2007) study, whilst a small proportion of the students involved in Dall’Alba and Sidhu’s (2013) research noted that they were driven by an expectation that the experience would enhance their CV. As Daly (2007, p. 125) notes, “students assume employers value the experience they gain overseas” Nonetheless, it is interesting to note that Australian and New Zealand employers were found to be amongst the least likely to value study undertaken
outside of one’s own country according to a 2011 QS report (Molony, Sowter, & Potts, 2011).

Finally, the motives of two students (James and Matilda) included a desire to meet new people and make new friends. There were also two students (Georgia and Molly) who listed amongst their reasons for choosing to go on an exchange the hope that the experience of living abroad would help them to learn about, or gain a deeper understanding of their own culture, while another two (Rebecca and Luke) saw an exchange as an opportunity to spend time in a place of personal significance. These students were both the children of migrants and wanted to spend time in the place where their parents came from. Rebecca’s parents came from England, while Luke’s parents were from Italy. Both identified strongly with their parents’ homelands, despite having lived their whole lives up until that point in New Zealand and Australia respectively. For example, Luke noted: “I am Italian and so I wanted to spend an extended period of time in Italy and the best way to do that without disrupting my studies was to do an exchange.” This was the sole reason that he gave for wanting to go on an exchange. One student (Lauren) noted that she saw an exchange as an opportunity to travel around Europe, while another (Bella) said that she saw it as an opportunity to escape as she was from Christchurch, a city in New Zealand which had recently been badly damaged by a series of earthquakes and aftershocks. She noted that “Christchurch doesn't have much to offer a student at the moment.” There was also one student (Natalie) who observed that her friendships with some exchange students that had come to her home university influenced her decision, although these friendships were not so much a reason for her decision to go on an exchange. Rather, they simply strengthened a pre-existing aspiration to do this.

The choice of destination

Having outlined the various motives that pushed the students to go on an exchange, the features that explain their choices of destination are now presented. However, these are not called pull factors here because it is clear that many of the students involved were not so much pulled to a particular destination. Rather, they came to their decision through a process of elimination, or something to this effect. For example, Charlotte who went to Sweden knew that she wanted
to go to Europe, but she didn’t have a particular country in mind. Rather, she
looked at the institutions that her home university had an exchange agreement
with, eliminating those in countries that she had previously been to, because she
wanted to go somewhere that she hadn’t been to before. She then looked for
places where she could study in English, eventually deciding on one in Sweden.

Olivia, who went to Denmark, is another example of a student that came to her
decision through some kind of process of elimination. She knew that she wanted
to go somewhere that was not an English speaking country. She noted that this
cut out North America, Australia and the United Kingdom. She then looked at all
universities with which her home university had an exchange agreement in other
parts of the world, searching specifically for those that offered anthropology and
biology courses and where she could study these in English. She noted that this
narrowed her choices down to four universities in four different countries:
Singapore, Thailand, China and Denmark. Her initial preference was the one in
Thailand, but she found the website for this university to not be very user friendly.
This put her off, especially because she had been talking to an acquaintance who
had previously been on an exchange. The university that this person liked also
had a website that was not very user-friendly, but she decided to go there
anyway. She later regretted her decision and advised Olivia “that it’s almost like
what the website is like, gives you an indication of what the other things are like.”
Olivia subsequently gave up on the university in Thailand and eventually settled
on the one in Denmark, a decision that she labelled interesting because she had
never really had a desire to go to any of the Scandinavian countries. Nonetheless,
she liked that the city where she would be based (Copenhagen) was a place that
she knew very little about, commenting that she was excited to explore it.

The features listed most frequently as influencing destination choice were, in
order of frequency: language, culture, geographic location and institutional
course offerings. Twelve students commented that language played a role in their
choice of destination. This includes the seven students mentioned above who
were motivated to go on an exchange to improve their foreign language skills, as
well as Olivia who wanted to go somewhere where English was not the main
language, suggesting that linguistic factors played a part in her decision. Olivia
had what she described as an intermediate level understanding of several other languages, but she chose to go to Denmark, a country where she had no prior understanding of the host language. This was not an issue to her; the most important thing was that it was not an English speaking country. The seven students mentioned above included Josh. He was one of the students that spent two semesters abroad in two different countries. He chose to spend one of these in Germany because he already had some knowledge of the German language and wanted to improve his proficiency. Max similarly chose to go to Austria because he wanted to improve his proficiency in German, while a desire to improve their proficiency in French was central to the decisions of four of these students (Georgia, Eva, Alicia and Rhys) to go to France. Georgia also spent two semesters abroad in two different countries, spending her second semester in Italy. That Italy is not an English speaking country was an important factor in her decision to go there. She had no prior knowledge of the Italian language, but noted that she was keen to learn it. That the language used there is not English also played a part in the decision of Chris to go to Sweden. As mentioned above, Chris spoke no languages other than English prior to his exchange and thought that spending a semester abroad would be a good way to change this, thus it was important that he went to a destination where English is not the native language.

It is all very well students going on exchange somewhere where they do not speak the language, but they must still be able to do their courses in English or a language that they do speak. Chris and Olivia both mentioned specifically that an important factor in their choice of destination was finding a university where they could do courses in English. This was also mentioned by two other students: Josh and Charlotte. Josh spent a semester in Poland in addition to his semester in Germany. That there was a university there which offered courses in English was an important factor in his decision. The same was also the case for Charlotte who went to Sweden. This is indicative of the proliferation of English language programmes in non-English speaking countries as the university sector becomes increasingly internationalised. These allow students to go to places that they would not otherwise be able to due to linguistic limitations, places that are considered more culturally distant than those where their mother tongue is also the main language. However, does this limit the experience that is open to them?
For example, does it inadvertently separate international students from their local peers, limiting the insights that they can acquire? On a related note, three further students who went to countries where they did not speak the language (James, Hannah and Matilda), didn’t say anything about still being able to do courses in English, but they did comment that it was important or appealing that English was widely spoken in the countries that they chose. For example, Matilda noted that the Netherlands appealed to her because it offered her a culture change as well as most people speaking English. My analysis did reveal that while students could function relatively effectively without speaking the host language, this did present a barrier to cultural understanding, a finding that is discussed in Chapter Seven.

*Culture* was listed by six students (Georgia, Alicia, Rhys, Matilda, Chris and James). Five of these students gave reasons for going on an exchange in the first place that were categorised under curiosity, but Matilda did not. Nonetheless, her answer here indicates that she also wanted to engage with difference while abroad, albeit using the problematic concept of culture. Georgia cited a love for both French and Italian culture, while Alicia said that she wanted to learn more about French culture by being submerged in it and Rhys similarly noted that he wanted to deepen his understanding of French culture. Meanwhile, Matilda, Chris and James commented that the places they chose to go appealed to them because they were culturally different to home. These comments further highlight the curiosity that underpins the decisions of many students, as well as the opportunity that exists to use a discussion of the culture concept to get students thinking about the habit of describing other societies in terms of generalisations.

It is also worth mentioning here the danger of what Forsey and Low (2014) term tourism imaginaries. They use this term to describe the idealised image of a society, often propagated by its tourism industry, which students may hold at the start of their experience. For example, the view that Australia “is wild and arid, surrounded by enticing beaches, and peopled, very congruently, by rugged men of the bush or the surf” when it is actually “one of the most urbanized nations on the planet” (Forsey & Low, 2014, p. 159). The point is that students can arrive with a particular image already embedded in their mind. Georgia, Alicia and Rhys were all drawn to their destination by an interest in it, which indicates that they
had some kind of pre-existing image of what it would be like. This is not a problem, but it is important to recognise that tourism imaginaries are another potential barrier to understanding. Forsey and Low (2014, p. 168) argue that study abroad “should be pushing students beyond stereotypes and fantasies of place and people towards experiencing and comprehending the day-to-day realities.” It certainly provides an opportunity for students to gain an understanding that goes beyond basic generalisations and stereotypes, opening up a space for them to develop an appreciation of the limits of generalisations more generally. This in turn affords a good foundation from which to teach the value of reserving judgement – an increasingly important attribute in the complex, interconnected world within which we live (Beaven, 2012; Gothard et al., 2012b). It also opens up a space for students to think about globalisation and how it actually functions because as Lewin (2009, p. xvii) comments, “any walk through London or Florence, for instance, shows that these cities are as littered with chain stores as any American city,” while “it is not as if the ‘locals’ are any less interested in Hip-Hop, Facebook, and the Gap than American students.” Nonetheless, travellers can sometimes be so focussed on experiencing the local culture and finding its authentic elements that they overlook this inconvenient reality, which is standing right in front of them (Lewin, 2009). This is why the tourism imaginaries that draw students to a particular destination can be problematic, highlighting another area in which it would be valuable to foster reflection and discussion before departure.

The third most frequently cited feature was geographic location. Five students (Charlotte, Sarah, Kate, Hannah and Alicia) noted that this played a part in their choice of destination. Charlotte was set on going somewhere in Europe, as mentioned above. Meanwhile, Sarah, Kate, Hannah and Alicia all liked that their destination was well-located to travel around Europe. The students wanted to make the most of their time abroad, visiting as many new places as possible and many did travel widely, but does this limit what they learn about their host society? Travel was cited by 14 students as either the most enjoyable aspect, or at least one of the most enjoyable aspects of their experience. However, it was also identified as a barrier to understanding because students tended to spend much of their spare time away sightseeing, another theme discussed in Chapter Seven.
Four students said that *institutional course offerings* played a part in their decision. Lauren commented that her host university offered “good courses” and Andrew said that his offered an “awesome programme,” while James was just happy that his offered courses that lined up well with the requirements of his degree and as mentioned above, Olivia noted that a prerequisite for her was finding a university that offered courses in anthropology and biology, a condition that her host university met. Olivia was also one of three students that considered it important or liked that they knew little about their destination, or that they had not been there before. The other two were Andrew and Charlotte. To be more specific, Poland appealed to Andrew because he had not been there before and as mentioned above, Olivia liked that Copenhagen was a place she knew little about, while Charlotte was set on going to a place that she had not been to before.

There were also many other features cited by individual students. Sarah was attracted to her destination because it was a place of personal significance to her, representing what she described as a large part of her cultural heritage. Molly was attracted to Berlin because of its reputation for being ‘cool’, noting: “I have heard that Berlin is a very cool city but that it is difficult to find a job. I wanted to live there and thought that I should do it while on exchange because I would be able to live off my student allowance.” Matilda was attracted to the Netherlands by its beauty, stating: “It seems very picturesque and historic which really appeals to me.” Georgia commented that in addition to culture; the food, people and history of both France and Italy also appealed to her. Meanwhile, as a student of urban planning, Hannah was attracted to Denmark by its urban landscape, commenting that with well-planned cities throughout and Copenhagen currently being the urban capital of the world, “this is the perfect place for me to conduct my studies.” Finally, Josh was attracted to the low cost of living in Poland and the United Kingdom appealed to Kate because she wanted to live there in the future, while James liked that Sweden is a safe country and “a wonderful place to live.”

There was also one student who didn’t really have a choice of destination and another who could have gone elsewhere, but this would have added time to her degree, something that was not an option to her. Bella was the student that didn’t really have a choice. The available spaces to go to all bar one university were
already taken when she applied; if she wanted to go on an exchange she had only one option. The other student (Natalie) noted that there was only one university with which her home university had an exchange agreement where she could get credits that would go towards the particular degree she was studying.

Before moving on from the subject of motivations, it is worth noting that research examining tourist motivations suggests that the motives that push someone to travel commonly have little to do with a particular place; it is only once an individual has decided to travel that he or she begins to think about the destination. In fact, Crompton (1979) showed that for some, the destination itself is relatively unimportant; it serves merely as a medium through which their broader motives can be satisfied. The motives that pushed some of the students involved in my research to go on an exchange were inextricably linked to a particular place. Indeed, it has already been mentioned that both Rebecca and Luke saw an exchange as an opportunity to spend time in the country where their parents were born: England and Italy respectively. Meanwhile, there were at least two other students (Eva and Alicia) that were set on going to a particular country: France in both cases. Nonetheless, this was not the case for most of the students.

**Promises**

To add context to the motivations of the students involved in my research, this chapter now briefly outlines the reasons why students should spend a study period abroad according to Australian and New Zealand universities as outlined on their study abroad webpages, or brochures available to download from these. These promotional materials are a form of external stimuli, which influence the decision-making process (Pizam & Mansfeld, 1999; Um & Crompton, 1990). They can also help to explain the expectations that students carry with them and have implications for student learning that are discussed in later chapters.
Table 6 – Reasons to study abroad, as cited by Australian and NZ universities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>N&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enhance employment prospects</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience/learn about/get an insight into another culture</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make friends/connections</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop certain skills/attributes, specifically the following (in italics):</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidence</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cross-cultural communication skills/intercultural competence</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independence/self-sufficiency</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Global/cultural awareness</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexibility/adaptability</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maturity</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-knowledge/awareness</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent thinking/learning</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical thinking</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resilience</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resourcefulness</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creativity</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision-making skills</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem-solving skills</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership skills</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learn or improve competence in another language</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop unspecified skills/attributes</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undertake courses not available at home</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop a sense of global solidarity/become world citizens</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expand horizons</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It will be an enjoyable/fun/unforgettable experience</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is a good way to travel/explore the world</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learn about a subject from a different perspective</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study/build connections at a leading university</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gain a new understanding of home society</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have a different academic experience</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gain more clarity in terms of what want to do in life</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It will be an adventure</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Become more motivated/focussed</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>realise potential</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discover new opportunities</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>Note</sup>. These are reasons cited on individual institutional webpages advertising study abroad opportunities, or brochures available to download from them. This data derives from 32 universities as some institutions did not include such information on their webpages, or at least this information could not be found.

<sup>a</sup> N = The number of universities that cite each reason.
Table 6 shows that the most common reason given as to why students should study abroad is that doing so will enhance their employment prospects, because employers increasingly place a high value on international experience. Many of the universities that cite this give no further explanation. However, some note that this is because the very act of studying abroad shows that an individual can take initiative, or something to this effect. Meanwhile, others note that it is because employers are looking for people that understand the countries they do business with, or who have certain skills and attributes associated with studying abroad. This may be true, but universities need to be careful about promises that present the very act of studying abroad as beneficial in itself because this suggests that what students do abroad is unimportant, a perspective that this study and others challenge. This study shows that as with other outcomes, the relationship between study abroad and deep understanding is not automatic; it is a product of what students do while abroad. Employers may value international experience, although it seems less so in Australia and New Zealand than elsewhere (Molony et al., 2011). Nonetheless, international experience is unlikely to get someone a job on its own. It may help get someone in an interview room, but anything further will require students to be able to articulate clearly how this experience is applicable to the job in question. This disclaimer is not something that institutions need to include on their posters or flyers. There is no harm in saying that study abroad can improve employment prospects, but it would be a useful discussion to have before departure and a constructive way to motivate student action while abroad.

Other commonly cited reasons include experiencing or learning about another culture, making new friends and connections, improving one’s foreign language skills, and developing various other specified and unspecified skills and qualities. The thing that stands out the most in analysing the promotional materials that list these reasons is that these are presented not as possibilities, but promises. For example, “learn a new language” is a recurring phrase. This implies that students will learn a new language, despite research showing that there is nothing inevitable about this. Indeed, the students participating in my research who went to a country where English is not the main language generally did not make significant linguistic gains, as
mentioned above. These promotional materials are designed to sell the study abroad experience and must emphasise the positives, but there is a need to be cautious about creating or reinforcing unrealistic expectations because these can lead to disappointment if the experience does not live up to them, disappointment that may be projected on to the host population, hindering cultural understanding. This is highlighted in this study by the experience of one student in particular: Eva. She experienced what Ahmed (2010b) terms a happiness gap, attributing this to expectations created by external sources before and during the experience. It also didn’t help that she had an overly romantic image of her host society before departure, an image that did not live up to the reality encountered and led to further disappointment that was projected on to the host population. This cannot be fully attributed to the promotional materials that Eva’s home university used to promote the opportunity to study abroad. Indeed, tourism imaginaries must also take some responsibility for the romantic image of her host society that she took with her (Forsey & Low, 2014), although institutions are not immune from perpetuating these. Nonetheless, Eva’s experience demonstrates the importance of fostering realistic expectations amongst students before they leave, something that institutions must take some responsibility for by facilitating critical reflection.

My analysis of the promotional materials that institutions use to promote study abroad also revealed further use of the term culture without qualification. Just as students frequently expressed a desire to experience or learn about another culture, institutions presented the opportunity to do so as a reason why students should study abroad. Promotional materials are hardly the place to present a critical discussion of the culture concept. However, there is definitely a need for such a discussion to take place at some point before students depart given the frequency with which this term is used by both students and institutions and considering its association with the ideas of homogeneity, coherence and timelessness. This argument is returned to in Chapter Eight of this dissertation.

Summary

This chapter has looked at the students’ motivations for going on an exchange and the reasons behind their choice of country, as well as the benefits of study
abroad propagated by universities in Australia and New Zealand. It provides the reader with important context that will allow them to view the data presented in the next two chapters and any conclusions drawn from this from a more informed perspective. The content of this chapter and the implications of this data are returned to and explored throughout this thesis. The main point that I wish to emphasise here is the importance of engaging students in activities that require them to think critically about their motivations and the promises associated with studying abroad. What does it mean to experience or see another culture? Why does the term culture have negative associations? What is the difference between seeing or experiencing and comprehending? What tourism imaginaries are associated with their destination and are these likely to be representative of reality? Can extensive travel hinder understanding? Will the act of studying abroad inevitably lead to the benefits associated with study abroad, or does this depend on what students do while abroad? Critical reflection and discussion on these and other important questions before departure is the first step in preparing students to make the most of the experience in terms of what they learn. Motivations and promises can help to explain student behaviour, but they do not need to define it, certainly not where strategic academic intervention is present, an important consideration that is elaborated on in Chapter Eight of this thesis.
CHAPTER FIVE
STRESS-ADAPTATION-GROWTH?

To move to a new environment inevitably involves coming face-to-face with differences of various kinds. Early theories that attempted to explain and predict the experiences of individuals transitioning to a new environment tended to view these differences from a problem-orientated perspective (Oberg, 1960). However, there has since been increasing academic recognition that the resulting challenges are an important source of growth. This idea sits at the centre of Kim’s stress-adaptation-growth model, which holds that the stress associated with these challenges drives cultural learning (Kim, 2001, 2008, 2015). The analysis presented here considers the relevance of this model in light of the data collected. Its primary focus is data derived from the second phase of data collection. It focuses on instances where the students observed or commented on difference, guided by the stress-adaptation-model, as well as the idea of deep understanding that is central to this study. The chapter begins by examining the students’ general observations of difference, before focussing on the effect of two specific area of differences identified in the literature as potentially being significant: communicative variances and academic challenges. It concludes by discussing the cases of Josh and Eva, two students that my analysis found experienced particular difficulties due to cultural differences, examining the impact this had.

The observation of difference

The students involved in my research all observed at least one difference each between their new environment and home. For example, the five students who went to either Sweden or Denmark commented on how different the climate was. This was especially noticeable because they had left home in the middle of summer and arrived at their destination in the height of winter, something Olivia described as a “bit of a shock at first.” Andrew who went to Poland noted that his
host city had a much greater population density than the small Australian city he came from, explaining: “This city has eight million people in a 50 kilometre radius.” Charlotte who went to Sweden commented: “Coming from New Zealand, I am used to good vegetables, but they’re very hard to find here, they’re pretty rubbish in the supermarket here, I am not going to pay money for that.” She also noted that the people can come across as being quite cold. Olivia who went to Denmark made a similar observation: “I think you kind of notice a little bit that people are more abrupt… They’re not being rude or anything. It’s just the way that they are.” This is typical of the kind of generalisation reported by Beaven (2012) in her study that investigated the experiences of European students participating in the Erasmus mobility programme. She observed that the host population were “varyingly categorised as shy and reserved, uninterested, cold or even arrogant and xenophobic” (Beaven, 2012, p. 150). This type of generalisation also features prominently in the data collected as part of the present study. Charlotte and Olivia’s respective descriptions of host nationals at their destinations as cold and abrupt are two such examples, but others feature throughout this dissertation. Research suggests that international students often find it difficult to establish friendships with host nationals and that their contact with them is largely restricted to a limited range of situations; encounters where contact is only fleeting, such as “commercial transactions in shops as a way of surviving” (Murphy-Lejeune, 2002, p. 164). This was the case for most of the students involved in this study, an important finding given its focus, one that is elaborated on in Chapter Seven. It is from these encounters that the image of cold Swedes or abrupt Danes is formed, but would encounters of such limited scope be likely to elicit an image of warmth and openness amongst new arrivals anywhere, including in Australia or New Zealand? Meanwhile, Beaven (2012) observes that the students involved in her study tended to resort to this type of generalisation as a way to justify their lack of meaningful contact with host nationals, contending that this is more likely to occur when students have high expectations in terms of host national contact. Blame is attributed to the host population and their perceived coldness or apathy. It is also notable that the countries where the host populations were represented in this way were all countries where English is not the main language of communication. What image of New Zealanders or Australians would a visiting
international student develop based on their interactions with host nationals if
they did not speak English? Regardless of their source, the main problem is that
these images of the host society are constructed from its periphery and are not
tested by meaningful contact with the host population (Murphy-Lejeune, 2002).

This issue is returned to later in the chapter. Here, the more important point is
that despite students observing differences between the new environment and
home, the data provided few examples where these compelled cultural learning
and adjustment as a means to achieve environmental fit. It suggests that for most,
environmental fit was already perceived, or the environmental demands made of
them were not seen as obstacles requiring adaptive action. As P. Anderson et al.
(2006, p. 303) contends, “it is sojourners’ perception of events in the environment
(and their appraisals of their defences against them) that drive their behavior.
Because situations only have psychological significance to the individual as he
or she appraises them, it is these appraisals that mediate the ensuing behaviour.”
She adds that “for the newly arrived and inexperienced sojourner, virtually
everything in the environment that can be seen, smelled, heard, touched, and
tasted can constitute an obstacle around, through, under, or over which a way
must be found.” Nonetheless, if the demands that a new environment makes of
an individual are not perceived as obstacles, “no obstacle-related (coping)
behaviour will occur.” Similarly, if they are only perceived to be small obstacles,
“they are likely to be surmounted uneventfully, swiftly, and perhaps even
imperceptibly.”

Twelve students commented that the places that they went to were very similar
to home. For example, Sarah who went to the United Kingdom made the following
comment: “I’d say the British are more similar to Australians than anywhere else.
Quite similar actually.” Bella also went to the United Kingdom. She said that she
didn’t even really feel like a foreigner: “I was drinking with my flatmates and I said
all the foreigners are coming over, and they’re like but you’re a foreigner and I am
like but these ones are like Spanish and French, they’re are proper foreigners.”
Even those who went to places other than the United Kingdom commented about
the similarities. For example, Alicia who went to France noted: “If I was going
somewhere in Asia, or something like that, you’re living completely differently,
here there are differences but it’s similar enough to not be a huge shock.” Charlotte made a similar comment: “I really think Swedish culture is quite similar… Swedish people are generally quite similar to Australian and New Zealand people, it’s not like a dramatic change of culture.” She added: “They’re probably a little bit more polite and a little bit more reserved and you just turn it down a bit and fit in just fine.” Besides constituting another generalisation of the kind discussed above, the last statement provides an example of a student adjusting her behaviour in order to better fit in to her new environment. Specifically, she perceived a need to “turn it down.” Nonetheless, the dominant narrative contained in these statements is the perception amongst a large section of participants that the new environment is not that different to home, or at least not different enough to present major obstacles. This indicates that for many of the students, there was little compelling them to take adaptive action, a finding that is now explored further by considering the effect of communicative variances.

**The effect of communicative variances**

It is argued that the greatest demands placed on an individual in a new environment are the result of differences in how people communicate, including both linguistic and non-verbal differences (Furnham & Bochner, 1982; Ward et al., 2001). It is not surprising then that the challenges associated with cross-cultural communication sit at the centre of the stress-adaptation-growth model (Kim, 2001). Nonetheless, communicating with host nationals was not deemed a major obstacle by most of the students involved in my study, or at least not significant enough to inspire adaptive action. Even linguistic differences were dismissed by most as not being a major obstacle, despite 17 students going to places where English is not the main language. This was a major difference between my research and that conducted by Daly (2007), the only previous study to examine the difficulties experienced by Australian and New Zealand students in detail. The students involved in her study all went on exchange to the English-speaking part of Canada, thus linguistic differences were not a relevant variable.

Some of the students involved in my research who went to places where English is not the main language already had some knowledge of the host language. However, 12 (Chris, James, Georgia, Josh, Natalie, Molly, Lauren, Hannah,
Andrew, Olivia, Charlotte and Matilda) went somewhere where they had no prior knowledge. Six students reported experiencing minor issues as a result. For example, Matilda who went to the Netherlands noted: “Everyone here speaks English really well, so that’s good but I just feel really awkward all the time because they always start talking to you in Dutch and then I have to explain that I don’t speak Dutch.” Natalie who went to Poland similarly commented that she had experienced a degree of awkwardness due to her inability to speak the host language, especially at her accommodation where the reception staff typically did not speak English. She noted that they would usually have to find someone who spoke English to act as an interpreter if she needed something or had questions for them. Language was also cited by some students as a factor that made it difficult to form close relationships with host nationals and this was certainly a barrier in terms of the level of understanding that these students acquired with regards to their host society. The implications in this sense of students going to places where they don’t speak the host language are discussed in more detail in Chapters Seven and Eight. Here, it suffices to say that there was only one student who reported experiencing significant problems in his everyday life as a result of being somewhere where a different language was spoken. Josh spent a semester each in Poland and Germany, but this relates to his time in Poland. He was there for his in-country interview and noted: “I go to the supermarket and I have to guess what they’re saying half the time, like if it’s the younger girls there are no problems... if not, it’s really difficult and it can be really frustrating.” Despite the frustration his inability to speak Polish caused, it is notable that Josh did not respond by trying to learn the language. Instead, he chose to bide time, acquiring an increasingly negative view of his host population along the way: “It just means that you build up somewhat negative feeling towards people... It’s not that you honestly believe it... but you just feel like you’re excluded from society.” Josh’s case is explored further below, but the most important point here is that most

15 Georgia and Josh were two of the three students who spent two semesters abroad in two different countries. They each spent one semester in a country where they spoke the host language and another in a country where they had no prior knowledge of it. The data referred to here derives from the in-country interview when Georgia was in France (where she did speak the language) and Josh was in Poland (where he did not speak the language).
students did not find linguistic differences to be a major issue, even those with no prior knowledge of the host language, beyond experiencing mild awkwardness.

The main reason that the vast majority of students did not experience significant difficulties interacting with host nationals despite 17 going somewhere where English is not the main language, appears to be the prevalence of people at the destinations they went who are proficient in English. Charlotte noted: “When I got here I started off by going in to shops and saying things like, do you speak English and they just look at you and they’re like yes, of course I can speak English.” Meanwhile, Andrew observed that everyone under 25 years old spoke English and most people had at least a basic understanding: “They appreciate it if you do try to speak a little bit, that makes it easier, but it’s not necessary.” Natalie noted that despite experiencing a degree of awkwardness as a result of the reception staff at her accommodation not speaking English, this was the only issue that she faced due to language differences and even this was not a major problem. She commented that she only really needed to talk to them to ask for the key to the laundry. Beyond her accommodation, Natalie felt that most people she interacted with spoke English well enough for her to get by without any problems: “Like all the people when you go out for dinner, the waitresses, the waiters, speak English; people in shops, they might not speak English, but all you need to know is how much it costs and you can see that anyway.” This provides an interesting comparison with the case of Josh given he found it frustrating that checkout staff generally didn’t speak English, whereas for Natalie and other students this was not considered a major problem, something that is discussed in more detail below. The main point here is that Natalie and other students who had no or limited prior knowledge of the host language did not find this to be a major issue due to the prevalence of people who could communicate in English at their host destinations. As Natalie lamented, “it’s fine to get by without learning the language which is kind of sad in a way; that I haven’t been pushed to learn more.” The other issue here is that while students might have been able to function effectively without speaking the host language, it was observed that this made it hard to form meaningful relationships, presenting a significant barrier to cultural understanding, a finding that is presented and elaborated on in Chapter Seven.
The only exception to the rule that linguistic challenges did not necessitate learning was in the classroom where the case of Georgia illustrates that students undertaking courses in a language that is not their native language are often pushed to do extra work in order to be able to keep up. Even students who have studied the language of instruction for a substantial period of time can struggle in this sense. As Murphy-Lejeune (2002, p. 166) found in her study of intra-European mobility: “lecturers go too fast, they explain complex ideas at great speed, foreign students do not understand some of the key words and dare not interrupt overcrowded lectures.” This was the experience of Georgia, despite describing her knowledge of the French language as being at an advanced level in the pre-departure questionnaire, having studied it for eight years, including spending six months in the French speaking part of Belgium on a high school exchange. However, she still found it difficult undertaking courses in French, noting: “My French is at a good enough level so that I can understand and follow the class but there are still lots of words that are quite specialized, that I don’t know.” She felt that the teaching style didn’t help: “I find the French dictate a lot… the teacher will talk and you have to write down everything they say.” Georgia observed that she was not fast enough to keep up. She would get stuck on a particular word or name that she didn’t know or that she wasn’t sure about. Numbers were also problematic: “I need to practise listening to numbers, because I can understand numbers, but not that fast.” She said that it would take her time to work out what year a lecturer was talking about and by the time she did work this out, she had missed what happened that year. It didn’t help that notes were not usually provided: “Like at home we have notes, they put them on the internet or they give you a worksheet… They don’t seem to do that.” She overcame this problem by borrowing notes from people and by getting books out from the library: “To do some background research. Just to practise the vocabulary, especially for legal studies.” This phenomenon was also observed in Murphy-Lejeune’s study. She commented that fears of “being at a disadvantage compared to native students who are studying in their own language and who are familiar with the academic content and methods, drive some students to work much harder so as to compensate what is perceived as a handicap” (Murphy-Lejeune, 2002, p. 166).
The students were silent on wider communicative differences, beyond describing their hosts as cold or reserved in comparison to New Zealanders and Australians, observations not tested through meaningful contact with the host population. How can we explain this silence? Is it because the countries that the students went to are simply “not that different” from Australia and New Zealand as the students suggested, or were they oblivious to differences of this kind? It certainly seems significant that most of the students associated primarily with other international students while they were abroad. This is something that Molly who went to Germany made a point of mentioning. She observed that there were not many major differences between Australia and Germany: “I feel like German culture is definitely not as far as Asian culture or even South American culture.” However, she also made the following point: “But also I’m hanging out with a group of people that come from all over the world so there’s a lot of stability in how to do things because everyone has different ideas, whereas if I was the only person who wasn’t German maybe I could accidentally offend someone or something.” The fact that she did not associate with host nationals meant that there was little pressure to behave appropriately. Like most students, her contact with host nationals was largely restricted to the kind of everyday encounters between strangers that has received much recent attention in the field of urban geography (Laurier et al., 2002; Valentine, 2008). This reduces the likelihood of students feeling uncomfortable or causing offence as a result of linguistic or wider communicative differences, lessening the likelihood that such differences will be perceived to be obstacles and removing a powerful incentive for cultural learning.

The other important variable is that the students were relatively privileged strangers compared to those who are visibly different. It is notable that all of the students involved in this study were of European ancestry with the exception of one who came from a Chinese background. One wonders if Middle Eastern or African migrants would have been afforded the same courtesy if they did not speak the host language? Indeed, would they have received the same reception, regardless of language proficiency or cultural competence? There are certainly

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16 Kate who went on exchange to the United Kingdom was born in China, but moved to New Zealand when she was six years old. She speaks Cantonese and Mandarin, but considers English to be her first language.
very different emotional dynamics at play. For example, the students involved in my study did not arouse amongst the host population, “feelings of fear, anger, anxiety, resentment and hatred,” or if they did, this was not noticeable or they were not aware of it (Zembylas, 2012, p. 169). By contrast, some observed that their country of origin actually aroused positive emotions amongst their hosts. For example, Sarah made the following comment: “The second you say you’re Australian they already have quite a positive idea of you formed in their head.” This means that less external pressure would have been placed on them to comply with local practises, customs and norms, contributing to a perception of existing environmental fit, or a feeling that any differences between the new environment and home did not constitute major obstacles. As a side note, the opportunity exists here to get students to reflect on how different their experience might have been if they happened to be a different kind of migrant, as well as different stereotypes that exist and the role that these can play in determining how human beings react and relate to the members of other groups. This is a unique opportunity to cultivate in students a level of understanding and empathy that may not otherwise be possible, or at least that may not be as easy to achieve.

**Academic challenges**

Research suggests that there are certain academic challenges that are unique to international students; challenges that their domestic classmates do not face (Ballard & Clanchy, 1997; Brown, 2008; Zhang & Mi, 2010). For example, they may experience language-based academic problems. They must also adapt to different academic methods and expectations. Most students involved in this study were doing courses taught in English, but seven did one or more courses in the host language. Four of these students reported experiencing language-related academic problems. Molly was one of these students. She did two courses in German despite not speaking the language, noting that one of these was closely related to her studies at home and that lots of slides were used by the lecturer, which made understanding easier. However, she noted that she didn’t understand what was going on in the other course because the lecturer talked particularly fast and did not use slides. It may seem quite remarkable that a student would enrol in courses in the host language without prior knowledge of it, let alone that her home university would allow her to do this. However, Molly
saw this as an opportunity to learn the language in more depth than would otherwise have been possible. Molly was an exceptional student. My fieldnotes refer to someone who displayed a degree of maturity, confidence and perspective that stood out. At 22, she was one of the older students involved in my study. She had also travelled extensively previously, including going on both a high school exchange and a previous university exchange. It helped that she was allowed to do assessments in English, while she didn’t need the credit from these German-taught courses as she was doing more courses than necessary.

The other three students who reported experiencing language-related academic problems were all proficient in the language concerned. Max who went to Austria and did his courses in German was one of these students, although he commented that “sometimes it really feels like it’s the language and other times it’s just, well, it’s something new… whenever we go into something new, it’s always difficult, it’s always blurry.” To illustrate this he referred to an assignment he did on Plato: “I was reading two different German translations… and I was like, I just don’t understand that, I’ll find the English translation, and I read the English translation and I still had no bloody idea what it meant.” Georgia and Eva were the other two students. The language related academic issues experienced by Georgia were outlined above and it was mentioned that she responded by doing extra work so to keep up with her studies, constituting one of the only examples of a student being pushed to improve his or her proficiency in the host language.

One issue that was raised as part of my study was whether the added challenges of doing courses in a language other than English are being fairly recognised by home universities. One proposal was that students should receive the equivalent credit for doing a second year course in another language as someone doing a third year course in English because of the added challenges. However, the problem with doing this was neatly summarised by Max: “In philosophy let’s say… the fact it’s harder to me because of something that’s extrinsic to philosophy doesn’t mean that I’m doing much better… it doesn’t help them be satisfied that I’m doing my philosophy degree.” Indeed, it is hard to imagine that there would be much sympathy if international students in Australia or New Zealand asked to receive credits at a higher level than that which they are studying because they
find their courses harder than native English speakers. On the other hand, the extra difficulties associated with taking a course in another language may be enough to put students off doing so. Max himself said that if students are in a position where they have to do third year courses while on exchange in a non-English speaking country, he would recommend that they do them in English, even if they are proficient in the host language. Meanwhile, Josh, who was in Poland when I spoke to him, but who was going to Germany the following semester made the following comment: “I could take classes in German; my German is borderline good enough to do that, but I’m not going to because I don’t get any extra credit for it.” For this reason, there is a case to be made for rewarding or recognising students who take courses in a language other than English given that this provides a valuable way to improve one’s language skills.

Six students also made unfavourable comments about different academic methods and expectations. For example, Sarah noted: “With assessment they tend to favour final exams which I don’t think is a very good way of judging someone’s skills.” She also noted that her host university didn’t record lectures like her home university meaning if she missed a particular lecture she couldn’t listen to it again. Meanwhile, Luke who went to Italy felt that the lectures were generally less lively than they are in Australia: “The teaching methods are a little bit more archaic, they’re very traditional. They will sit at the front and just lecture the whole time and there is no use of technology and it does get a little bit boring.” Eva who went to France made a similar point, commenting: “It’s very stuffy and old fashioned.” Nonetheless, a number of students also spoke favourably about certain differences. For example, Sarah felt that the tutorials were better than those at home: “There’s about eight or 10 students in them, really small and... if they’re not run by the course convener or the lecturer, they’re run by another lecturer who has research interests in that field.” Kate, who like Sarah went to the United Kingdom, made a similar point, noting that at home only certain courses have tutorials and that there would normally be close to 20 people in each one: “The tutorials here are actually very small, they’re held in the professor’s office and it’s actually the professor who teaches the course, or one of the professors.”
Despite some students complaining about certain academic differences, these did not seem to cause significant problems, largely because the results that students achieve while abroad are generally only recorded as pass or fail on their transcripts. This means that there is less pressure to get good grades while abroad; students simply have to pass. Sarah noted: “Obviously we don't want to do badly, but it takes a lot of pressure off.” Still, it is important not to overlook the awkwardness, anxiety or frustration that can arise when someone is sitting in a class where they do not fully understand the content, or where the methods employed by the teacher are different to what they are used to, even if the results will only be recorded as pass-fail. This can exacerbate other problems as was the case for Eva whose experience is discussed in more detail below and in the following chapter. She had a particularly difficult experience, commenting that “the worst days were always the ones where you go to class and its one of the classes where there are no other exchange students, so you're kind of on your own and then you go to the office and you’ve had another enrolment problem and then you go to another lecture and you might not understand everything and you go home and someone’s smoking at the metro stop.” This shows how classroom difficulties can combine with other incidents and circumstances to result in a student who is already vulnerable because he or she is a long way from home, sitting in his or her room at night crying and feeling angry about the situation they find themselves in. It matters little in moments like these that one’s results will only be recorded as pass-fail, but it does matter that the resulting malaise can have implications in terms of the understanding that students acquire vis-à-vis their host society, something that is discussed in more detail below and in the next chapter. Moreover, if someone is finding it difficult to comprehend what their lecturers are saying, a degree of angst as to whether they will pass can be expected in any case. This may be motivating as was the case for Georgia, but it will not be so for everyone and it can equally be overwhelming and disillusioning.

**The cases of Josh and Eva**

Overall, only two students reported experiencing culture shock: Josh and Eva. Both reported feeling a sense of environmental misfit and listed this as one of the hardest things about their study abroad experience in the follow-up questionnaire. Language was cited as an obstacle by both students, although it appeared to be
less of an issue for Eva who spent her semester abroad in France and possessed what she described before her departure as an advanced understanding of the French language. Despite this, she still reported having some difficult moments: “Yes, I speak the language but not to a native level... It’s definitely helped. I can imagine how difficult it would be if I didn’t speak the language as well as I do, but even the level I’m at, I’ve had some reasonably difficult times.” It is interesting that language was an issue for Eva when most students involved in my study who had no or limited prior knowledge of the host language reported that this was not really a problem, including students who had no prior knowledge of the host language. This can partly be attributed to differences in destination, including the prevalence of people who can speak English and local attitudes towards people who don’t speak the host language. However, this is clearly not the full story because even students who go to the same destination can have very different experiences, as the cases of Josh and Natalie discussed above illustrate. Eva’s case further demonstrates this because she was not the only student to go to France. There were another four students who also went there, including Lauren who had no prior knowledge of French. Nonetheless, she said that this was not a problem: “I’ve found France very surprising, like I’ve heard all the rumours that French people are very rude and if you speak French they don’t want to talk to you but it’s the complete opposite - I haven’t had that experience at all.” She went on to add that “whenever I speak French, people will respond to me in English because my French is that terrible. People are fine and even if they don’t speak a word of English we can still communicate with body language so it’s been fine.” The contrasting experiences of Eva and Lauren show that there are other factors at play. It appears significant in the case of Eva that she experienced a range of other problems, including loneliness. The impact of these is a recurring theme in this dissertation, supporting the view that “culture shock is not always cultural, or at least not exclusively cultural” (Murphy-Lejeune, 2002, p. 130). This means that it is not always or exclusively caused by what Appadurai (1996, p. 12) terms “situated difference, that is, difference in relation to something local, embodied, and significant.” For Eva, wider obstacles appeared to magnify the effect of circumstances and incidents that might otherwise have been considered minor, while these circumstance and each incident intensified her overall malaise.
Eva’s language-related challenges extended to the classroom as already mentioned. Like Georgia, the classes that she took while in France were taught in French. She described some of these courses as easy, but noted that there were two in particular that she struggled with because of the content. One was a linguistics course, which Eva described in the following way: “I’m doing a linguistics course and that’s kind of like, she’s really into philosophy and linguistics so it’s a little less concrete and I’m having trouble with that kind of metaphorical French.” The other course that she found hard was on the history of ancient art, “which is a first year course but I think it would be the equivalent to a third year course at home; it’s really complicated.” These were courses that Eva may have found hard anyway, but doing them in French made them even harder.

Josh was quite a different case to Eva, who had never lived away from her family home before, let alone in another country. He had been on a high school exchange and had lived in Europe on another occasion since leaving school. Living in another country was not new to Josh. However, living in Poland proved to be difficult and he reported experiencing culture shock in our interview. Language was identified by Josh as the main cause of this. The fact that he didn’t speak the host language was one thing that distinguished this experience from the other two occasions when he had lived abroad. Josh had no prior knowledge of the Polish language and unlike other students who were in a similar situation, he described this as being a substantial problem. He felt that it wasn’t as easy to get by without speaking the language in Poland as it might have been in other places, because English isn’t as widely spoken there.17 The frustration that he felt as a result of supermarket staff not speaking English has already been mentioned in this chapter. He also found it frustrating that the staff at his accommodation only spoke Polish. He commented that “the people who do the signing in speak English; people at the desk, however, don’t which is quite frustrating as they’re the ones you need to ask things for on a regular basis, for example, if you wanted a clothes line or something you need to go ask in Polish.”

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17 It is notable that of the eight non-English speaking countries that the students involved in my study went to, Poland has the lowest percentage of people that can hold a conversation in English at 33% according to a Eurobarometer survey (European Commission, 2012). Italy followed closely behind on 34%, but these were the only two countries under the European Union average of 38%. The full breakdown is available in Table 7 in Chapter Six.
He found this especially frustrating because of the presence of international students: “it’s only about one fifth international students, but it’s designed for international students.” This is another example of something that really frustrated Josh, but that Natalie who also went to Poland dismissed as not being a big deal, despite making a very similar observation about her accommodation. There are a number of possible explanations for this, but it seems significant that as with Eva, there were wider issues causing Josh’s angst, which appeared to similarly exacerbate the effect of circumstances and incidents that might otherwise have been easily brushed off.

This phenomenon is discussed further in the following chapter, but here the most important point is that as was mentioned above, Josh did not try to remedy this by learning the language. Instead of taking adaptive action, this became something that he tolerated, although it also led to resentment. He noted that having lived abroad previously, he was not expecting the experience to be easy: “I know sometimes you have frustrations, but… there I was able to get around and manage fine… whereas here I think just the language thing really causes bitterness.” As already noted above, he commented that “it just means that you build up somewhat negative feeling towards people... It’s not that you honestly believe it… but you just feel like you’re excluded from society.” To make matters worse, Josh felt that the host population were not very understanding of his situation, noting that “people in general… as opposed to trying to explain stuff really simply and calmly in basic words in Polish if they don’t speak English, they just say what they want to say, the exact same thing, slower, louder.” He added that “if you don’t speak Polish… that will not help you and at home I would kind of expect more people to draw pictures, or like try to explain things... but no, so that’s kind of frustrating.” This is an example of someone glorifying home in light of their experiences abroad, which is considered a key symptom of culture shock (Adler, 1975; Oberg, 1960). The reality is that in New Zealand many people would do the same thing. Indeed, Josh later admitted that he had fallen into this habit of glorifying home: “I talk about New Zealand as if it’s a paradise on earth.” He added that this was ironic because: “when I’m at home I talk about the rest of the world like it’s much better than New Zealand... my parents get pissed off with me.”
Both students also attributed their perceived environmental misfit to factors beyond language. Indeed, the main environmental challenges that Eva reported were non-linguistic. For example, as an asthmatic she reported struggling with the prevalence and widespread acceptance of smoking at her destination. However, many of the features that both Eva and Josh blamed for their perceived environmental misfit constituted sweeping generalisations or popular stereotypes not tested by meaningful contact with host nationals. Eva variously described the host population as standoffish, arrogant, inconsiderate and unhelpful, stigmatising an entire society based on her experiences there, including her inability to form friendships with host nationals. This had a big impact on Eva. She noted: “I was never going to truly become part of the community – I knew that I wasn’t there long enough for that and my links with home were too strong, especially as I had a boyfriend there.” Despite this, she still envisaged making lots of local friends, because she had arranged to live in a government-run student residence and she was taking classes with local students. She also noted that she had already been to France on holiday twice and had no trouble chatting to people: “I’d found people really friendly.” Nonetheless, it proved much more difficult than she anticipated. It didn’t help that there were actually very few French people living in her residence, nor that she was reluctant to go out at night because of safety concerns and tended to avoid social situations where there would be cigarette smoke, which was difficult in France. Overall, this led to feelings of resentment. Eva blamed the host population for her inability to form friendships with host nationals. This provides an example of the type of stereotyping referred to by Beaven (2012). It is also an example of the important role that prior expectations have to play in this sense. Beaven (2012) argues that stereotyping in this way is more likely to occur when students have high expectations with regards to the level of contact that they will have with locals, something that was an issue for Eva. It was also significant that she had an overly romantic view of all things French going into the exchange, noting afterwards that “before I left, I had seriously idealised France.” This meant that she was almost inevitably going to be disappointed by the reality that she encountered, a feeling that further contributed to her resentment. Ahmed’s (2010a) idea of happiness gaps is also useful in explaining why Eva developed such a negative view of the host population. Ahmed (2010a, p. 576) argues that “some things become good,
or acquire their value as goods, insofar as they point toward happiness”. They are linked to the promise of happiness: “if you do this or if you have that, then happiness is what follows” (Ahmed, 2010a, p. 576). Study abroad is one such object, but what happens when an object like study abroad does not live up to this promise; when there is a gap “between how we feel and how we think we should feel” (Ahmed, 2010a, p. 581)? As Ahmed (2010a, p. 581) notes, “to feel the gap might be to feel a sense of disappointment.” This can lead to “an anxious narrative of self-doubt… or a narrative of rage, where the object that is ‘supposed’ to make us happy is attributed as the cause of disappointment” (Ahmed, 2010a, p. 581). Overall, study abroad did not live up to the promise of happiness for Eva with the resulting disappointment provoking a narrative of rage that was directed towards her host country and its people. This reinforces a point made in the preceding chapter that it is important institutions take steps prior to departure aimed at fostering realistic expectations amongst students, especially given that the materials used to promote study abroad tend to present its benefits as self-evident and automatic. It is also necessary to note here that as already mentioned, Eva experienced various additional challenges, which combined to exacerbate her emotional state, as well as the effect of circumstances and incidents that might otherwise have been easily disregarded. This scenario and the implications for cultural understanding are expanded on in the next chapter.

Josh felt that Poland was much more different to New Zealand than the previous two places he had lived and attributed his malaise to a number of environmental differences, including the climate. He noted: “When we arrived it was minus 20, it was fantastic because everything was new and exciting so we could manage but as soon as that gets old and it’s still like minus five after like a month you’re like ‘I’m getting over this now.’” However, the wider features that he blamed were also often sweeping generalisations or popular stereotypes. For example, he observed that “the rules in Poland don’t really get applied consistently, there’s no real rule as to how you should apply them.” Josh illustrated this by using his accommodation as an example: “In the dormitory some people play music until 4 in the morning... I will tell them to shut up, I’m prepared to do that, but a lot of people won’t.” This was undoubtedly frustrating for Josh, but can it be considered representative? Josh also felt that Polish people were less open than New
Zealanders: “They don't tend to trust people that much I guess, when they first
meet them; they have very little interest in talking to you in general, I think.” He
added that “if they know you very well or they get to know you very well they will
be open to you but it's that first step, whereas at home I think it's a bit easier, that
first step, there are not like mountains to cross.” This perceived difference is yet
another example of the host population being branded uninterested or cold by a
participant, despite reporting having only minimal meaningful contact with them.

Despite the frustrations felt by Eva and Josh, there is little evidence of even these
students learning in the way anticipated by the stress-adaptation-growth model,
beyond Eva improving her proficiency in the host language. The data related to
these students suggests that it is possible to tolerate a sense of environmental
misfit without trying to remedy this if one will remain in the new environment for
only a short period of time. Thus, the stress-adaptation-growth model did not
appear to be applicable even to those students who reported experiencing
significant difficulties due to perceived environmental differences. Nonetheless,
this finding is not incompatible with Kim’s theory as she holds that it is only “over
time” that individuals will be compelled to take adaptive action and that initially
“some people may attempt to avoid or minimize the anticipated or actual ‘pain’ of
disequilibrium by selective attention, denial, avoidance, and withdrawal, as well
as by compulsively altruistic behavior, cynicism, and hostility toward the new
external reality” (Kim, 2008, p. 363). She also adds that “others may seek to
regress to an earlier state of existence in the familiar ‘home’ culture, a state in
which there is no feeling of isolation, no feeling of separation” (Kim, 2008, p. 363).
The implication seems to be that individuals can get by for a while without taking
action, but overtime they must acculturate if they are to survive psychologically.
This does not appear to be the case for study abroad students though; the short
duration of the experience lessens the need for individuals to achieve person-
environment fit because they know that they will be leaving again soon enough.
The idea of sinking or swimming comes to mind; an individual can cling to the
remnants of a shipwreck for a period of time, but at some point they must choose
to try to swim to safety or risk sinking; except, when an individual knows that a
rescue boat is not far away, they are more likely to just wait it out. Study abroad
students can get by with the support of family and friends at home thanks to
modern technology, as well as the support of their fellow international students. They can also occupy their spare time with travel, a popular activity amongst the students in my research. They may also employ some of the strategies referred to by Kim, such as withdrawal and projection. This would not be sustainable over a longer period of time, but study abroad students are typically only away for a matter of months and while this can feel like a long time to someone having a difficult time, it does not take long until they can see light at the end of the tunnel.

**Summary**

The stress-adaptation-growth model describes one possible way by which students can learn as part of study abroad experience. However, the analysis presented in this chapter found that most students involved did not experience sufficient challenges due to differences between the new environment and home, or at least it was their perception that the new environment was not different enough to present major obstacles requiring adaptation through acculturation. It is possible that the students were simply oblivious to differences of this kind due to their lack of meaningful contact with host nationals and their relatively privileged positions. Either way, the end result was that they were not compelled to learn as anticipated by the stress-adaptation-growth model. Even the minority of students who reported experiencing culture shock did not appear to learn in this way. This seems to have much to do with the short duration of a study abroad experience, casting doubt on the applicability of the stress-adaptation-growth model to the study abroad context more generally, constituting an important theoretical contribution of this study. What are the pedagogical implications of this? Does it mean that the potential for cultural learning is limited? My conclusion is that whatever the destination, there will at least be some degree of difference, whether in terms of certain values, attitudes, ideas, opinions, beliefs, laws, customs, practices, styles or systems. Even if the encounter with these differences does not cause significant problems and demand adaptation through acculturation as per the stress-adaptation-growth model, opportunities for growth still exist by engaging with them, but this chapter shows that this cannot be assumed to occur automatically precisely because these differences do not always demand adaptation through acculturation. The findings presented in this chapter raise further questions about the idea of laissez faire study abroad and
add weight to existing research that supports the idea of academic intervention in the study abroad process, signalling that there is specific a need to foster more meaningful and deliberate engagement with the host society. This is something that is largely overlooked in other studies, as well as existing models of academic intervention where the focus tends to be on cultivating reflection based on an individual’s experience. This is important, but it is also important to foster engagement aimed at understanding, especially because the analysis presented in this chapter shows that not only were students not compelled to learn as per the stress-adaptation-growth model, they often described their host population using sweeping generalisations and stereotypes, contrary to the idea of deep understanding that is central to this study. This is a recurring theme in this thesis. Chapter Eight discusses the pedagogical implications of this study in more detail, including presenting a possible model for academic intervention, but there are further relevant findings to be presented and discussed before this is done. The next chapter examines the wider challenges associated with study abroad, looking beyond those caused by cultural differences, arguing that these can have an impact on the understanding that students acquire vis-à-vis their host society.
This chapter documents and discusses the wider obstacles associated with study abroad in light of the data collected, looking beyond those directly linked to the encounter with difference that accompanies study abroad. It focuses on eight different challenges reported in the data, namely pre-departure problems, arrival issues, challenges enrolling and getting set-up, the interruption of social relationships, social isolation, having to look after oneself for the first time, financial concerns and problems returning home. These challenges have in the most part been identified in previous research on international student mobility (De Nooy & Hanna, 2003; Sawir et al., 2008; Singh, 1963; Ward et al., 2001; Ying, 2005), but the impact that they have on the image that students develop of their host society has largely been overlooked. Here, the cases of Eva and Josh suggest that they can play a powerful role in creating a sense of discontentment and distress that influences the image that an affected individual develops of their host society and its people. Eva and Josh both resorted to crude generalisations and stereotypes to describe their host society as a way of justifying their discontentment and distress, contrary to the idea of deep understanding that is central to this study. This was a key theme identified in the collected data, one that also has pedagogical implications, further highlighting the importance of academic intervention. The case of Eva is particularly illuminating in this sense, highlighting how a combination of problems not directly linked to difference can contribute to this sense of discontentment and distress that is projected on to the host population. Moreover, my analysis revealed many examples of other students resorting to generalisations and stereotypes to make sense of such challenges. The chapter concludes by discussing four key variables that my analysis found might help to explain why the experience can have the effect it did
on Eva, while other students report facing only minor and fleeting internal tension: unmet expectations, the role of the internet, prior experience and social support.

**Key Challenges**

**Pre-departure problems**

Twenty students noted in their interview that they had found one or more aspects of their experience hard, frustrating, challenging or otherwise problematic, including nine students who described the period leading up to their departure as challenging. For six of these students, this was at least in part because they did not know until very close to their departure where they were going. These students generally noted that they had found out that they had been accepted to go on an exchange with what they considered to be a reasonable amount of notice, but the biggest issue was not knowing if they had been accepted at their preferred host university. Rhys was one such student. He commented that by the time this was confirmed, he didn't have much time to get a visa organised, making this process much more stressful than it would have been if he had more time. Hannah was another student who didn't find out until quite late that she had been accepted at her preferred host university. She said that it was also stressful watching the cost of flights constantly increase, but being unable to book anything. She added that this was especially concerning because she was coming from so far away, compared to someone from Europe going to another European country where it is possible to access cheap flights on a low cost airline, even at very late notice. Another complaint was the difficulty and stress associated with organising accommodation from afar, especially at late notice. Meanwhile, six students associated their pre-departure problems with what they felt was a lack of contact, information and support from their home and host universities. Georgia was one such student. She noted that it would have been especially helpful to have been provided with more information: “It is not so important to be given information about the local dishes, or traditional dress, but I mean important things like the process for applying for a visa, how much it will cost, where to buy insurance before you go.” Finally, four students described experiencing feelings of doubt about their decision to go on exchange as their departure drew closer and the reality of what they were about to embark on hit
These four students all described the period leading up to their departure as stressful or otherwise difficult, but none of them linked their doubts to this. Sarah, Georgia and Lauren noted that they had second thoughts because things were going really well for them at home, while Kate started to question how she would cope being away for so long when she hadn’t lived away from home before.

There is little that can be done to prevent some students from experiencing stress or doubt in the lead-up to their departure. The main point here is that some students will already be in a vulnerable emotional state when they embark on the journey that takes them to their new home. Moreover, this is a period where students can start to imagine their host society in terms of certain generalisations, associating their frustration and stress with perceived organisational deficiencies. For example, the view that the French are disorganised, unhelpful and overly bureaucratic begins to emerge, something that is discussed in more detail below.

**The first day**

Eight students noted that their first day, or some part of it was particularly difficult. However, things tended to improve quickly for these students. For example, Matilda noted: “I sent my mum a really depressing email and by the time she got the email the next day, orientation week had started and I had some friends so I was like, no, don't worry, I am ok now.” Seven of these students referred to the specific circumstances of their arrival. For example, Hannah said: “I didn’t get to see the beautiful parts of Copenhagen before I went to my dormitory. I saw the train line which was covered in graffiti and it was all grey outside and a bit melancholic.” Meanwhile, others referred to the circumstances of their arrival at their accommodation more specifically. For example, Rebecca had to wait for four hours at the office of her residence before someone arrived to help her, having walked from the train station on a cold and wet day only to find the office closed.

Bella was another whose arrival at her accommodation was hard. She stayed with a friend in London for two nights before getting a train to her final destination located elsewhere. Her problems began when she couldn’t get a taxi from the train station to her accommodation. She noted that it was already dark despite only being 4.30pm and that it had started to snow. She eventually got a taxi, but
on arrival at her residence she was given a key to her room that didn’t work. She had to wait about an hour before someone arrived to let her in. To make matters worse, the room didn’t have any bedding and by this stage it was too late to go buy any. It was only 7.00pm, but it was miserable outside and she couldn’t access the internet because her password wasn’t yet set-up. She said: “I just took a sleeping tablet and went to sleep in my jacket and my towel.” Nonetheless, when asked how she was feeling at the time, Bella said that she felt alright, adding: “I was like there’s nothing I can do, just go with it.” It was significant that Bella had been through the process of moving to another country on her own before, having worked overseas for a period, two years prior to going on exchange. It was clear that this had given her a sense of perspective that others who had not previously gone through this process lacked. This is a recurring theme in the data collected.

It is also worth noting that tiredness was cited as a contributing factor by four of the students. For example, Rebecca made the following comment: “I mean I was jetlagged. I was really, really tired. I booked super cheap flights and it took me 53 hours to get here.” Indeed, while Bella had broken up her trip by staying in London for two nights with a friend before heading to her final destination, many made the long journey directly, meaning they were exhausted and in a vulnerable state upon their arrival. Finally, it is impossible to know whether the other students who had problematic arrivals would have felt any differently if the circumstances of their arrival had been different. Nevertheless, the case of Kate provides evidence that some students will find their first day difficult whatever the circumstances of their arrival. The 21 year old whose exchange experience was the first time that she had lived away from the family home, let alone in another country, had as smooth an arrival as possible. There was even a bus organised by her host university waiting at the airport to take her to her accommodation. She simply felt overwhelmed by the realisation that she was completely alone in a new country.

The difficulties that students experience on their first day are also notable because of the images that students start to develop of their host population as a result. They generalise from their experiences of arrival, characterising an entire society based on them. For example, when asked during the in-country interview if there were any differences with home that stood out, Georgia answered that
“everything is lot more disorganised if I can be so bold,” recalling a frustrating experience that she had on her first day to illustrate this. She noted that she arrived at her accommodation at 2pm in the afternoon, only to discover that the office was closed because the receptionist was having lunch: “She was like I’ll be away for two hours, so I was there with my luggage, couldn’t go and do anything because I had my luggage, I didn't know anything because I just got there and I had to wait for her to come back.” She found this not only frustrating, but also stressful because “I had to rush that afternoon to buy insurance because we had to get it before we even can move in.” This worked out in the end and Georgia reported suffering no lasting damage, but the experience provided an early example of perceived French disorganisation, a common stereotype that appears to often be reinforced by a study abroad experience (De Nooy & Hanna, 2003).

**Enrolling and getting set-up**

Beyond the first day, there are a number of specific obstacles that students must navigate during the initial period of their exchange, including enrolling at their host university and getting set-up at their new home. Eight students described the enrolment process as difficult or otherwise problematic. For example, Bella described it as “hell” and Alicia described it as a “nightmare.” One student (Molly), who had an otherwise smooth experience, even listed this as the hardest part about spending a study period abroad in the follow-up survey. These students often blamed this on the enrolment system at their host university. For example, Eva said: “I’ve had some real issues with course choices and enrolment because the resources [host university] provides are really not adequate, like they put up the course catalogues for the semester after I arrived… which is totally unhelpful in terms of getting my courses approved at home. She also added that “then you have to go to the office to ask nicely to do your enrolments, you can’t do it yourself online.” On the other hand, Molly was more reserved in her judgement noting that it was not the enrolment system that was necessarily the problem. Rather, the main issue was that it was a new system to her: “Like choosing subjects is totally different to how you do it in Australia… It doesn’t really have core subjects. There are thousands of subjects on the database and you search them, choose subjects and then just turn up and sign up and you can continue them or not. It’s actually really flexible, but it was a bit overwhelming.” The other factor that made the
enrolment process more challenging than it might otherwise have been was that students also needed to get the courses that they enrolled in approved by their home university, or at least they needed to do this if they wanted to be sure that they could transfer the credit back. The resulting correspondence back and forth with their home university was an added source of frustration. Rhys noted that he got pre-approval for his courses before he left, “but then I didn’t get into them all, I mean it was fine eventually, but it wasn’t the easiest process in the world and then… as it turned out, I sort of did get into some of those courses so I essentially had to go through all of that again.” This is an added organisational hurdle that most exchange students must navigate, regardless of their origin or destination.

There were also six students who described the process of getting set-up more generally as difficult. Purchasing a sim card, setting-up an internet connection or organising a bank account may seem like simple tasks, but doing so is more complicated than people often think, especially in a new country. For example, Georgia’s accommodation didn’t come with free internet. Instead, she noted that “there was a sign in the hallway, if you want internet this provider offers it for the building, so it was like you call this number.” The problem was that she didn’t have a phone she could use: “so I go buy a sim card but I couldn't buy a sim card because my phone had to be unlocked and then I went to the shop and they were like, this is going to take a week. A week!” It worked out in the end because she was able to set-up the internet another way, but experiences like these are frustrating and can be quite distressing, especially when they threaten access to technology that is considered so important to modern day life; not to mention at a time when students are particularly vulnerable and when the ability to make contact with home is especially important. These tasks can also be particularly daunting and challenging in places where another language is spoken. For example, Rhys found opening a bank account difficult despite possessing a reasonable knowledge of the host language: “The lady was talking fast financially French talk at me and I was just like yep, yep, yep, ok. Like it worked out fine but it was something I wasn't I didn’t exactly have the vocab for that kind of situation.”

Students who found the process of enrolling or getting set-up relatively easy often commented favourably about the support offered by their host university, while
those who found it difficult often commented negatively about the support offered. For example, Sarah noted: “The only thing I had to do was go to print my student card and set up a bank account and... the university already had ready for us one document that we could take to any bank that we chose.” By contrast, Molly who listed the enrolment process as the hardest part of her exchange, commented that while there was an exchange coordinator at her host university whose job it was to help international students navigate the enrolment process, this person wasn't of much help: “He kind of just said this is the database, go here and here.”

It is of particular relevance to this study that the experiences of students like Molly often produced mass generalisations and reinforced stereotypes about the host society, contrary to the idea of deep understanding, the central concept guiding this study. For example, the view that the French are disorganised, unhelpful and overly bureaucratic. This was articulated in different forms by four of the five students who went to France. Georgia and Alicia noted how disorganised things were compared to at home, Rhys referred to the endless bureaucracy, while Eva talked about how unhelpful people are: “They kind of just do their job description and nothing more unless you start crying and then they’re really, really nice.” The tendency to generalise from experiences like this is something that De Nooy and Hanna (2003, p. 68) also found in their study of Australian students who spent a period of study in France, but as they ask: “Can an entire population be rude and inefficient? Is French bureaucracy failing in its own terms, or according to Australian models of operation?” Or, as one of the students involved in my study (Martin) asked, reflecting on his own experience in Austria, is the enrolment process “difficult because it’s new to me or is it difficult because it’s unnecessarily bureaucratic?” It is critical to get students to go beyond their initial interpretations guided by such questions, because left alone, this will not happen automatically. Students may show signs of tolerance – “resigned, bemused or indulgent” – but this does not equal comprehension, as De Nooy and Hanna (2003, p. 65) note.

This subject is dealt with in more detail in the next chapter, but before moving on, there are two further things that stand out on the topic of enrolling and getting set-up. The first is that students who utilised the services of a mentor or buddy generally found this helpful, although not all of the participants were offered this
service or decided to use it. Meanwhile, Natalie was allocated a buddy, but he
didn’t get back to her. She said that she regretted this: “It would have been really
good, especially in the first few weeks, showing you good places to eat and
helping you with all of those things.” She noted that her friends who did have a
buddy had help getting things like a bus pass and their student card: “I was kind
of going by what other people said.” Buddies can serve the dual of purpose of
helping students to navigate the process of enrolling and setting-up, while at the
same time helping them to develop a deeper understanding of their host society,
although this is not an inevitable outcome. Rather, it is an opportunity to be taken.

The second thing that stands out is that fourteen students said that it would have
been beneficial to have received more information specific to their particular
destination and host university about what to expect before they left. It seems
that most were given the opportunity to talk to people from their university who
had gone on exchange previously, but these people had not necessarily gone to
the same city or university as them. Eight of these students described this as one
way their home university could better prepare their students about to go abroad;
by providing opportunities for them to talk to students who had been to the same
university or city as them. Eight students also noted that they had been given this
opportunity and commented favourably about it, although one of these students
(Georgia) said that she did not really know what to ask them at that stage. For
this reason, she noted that it would also be useful if universities created a
document for each university with which they have an exchange agreement,
based on what former students had learned from their experiences. Other
students made similar recommendations and all stated that they would be willing
to help produce a document of this kind, or to contribute in some way once they
were back home. This is something that also came out of De Nooy and Hanna’s
(2003) study, although as they note, “while the availability of more documentation
through the home university might well solve short-term problems, it is possible
to imagine a scenario where students receive too much: kitted out with an
apparently definitive set of information, they never learn French modes of
operation.” The process of enrolling and setting-up provides a valuable learning
opportunity. For this reason, it seems more important that students receive
guidance aimed at helping them make sense of any difficulties they encounter during this process and challenging any generalisations that arise along the way.

**Interruption of social relationships**

Grief is the normal response to the loss of a significant other. It involves feelings of shock, yearning, despair, sadness and anger (Averill, 1968; Bowlby, 1969; Parkes, 1972; Weiss, 1973). Research suggests that a response akin to grief can also follow the temporary separation of one person from another (Brewster, 1952; Weiss, 1990). Eight students described being separated from family and friends as difficult in their interview, while five listed this in the follow-up questionnaire as one of the hardest things about spending a study period abroad. However, because separation is only a temporary interruption of a social relationship and it holds the promise of restoration, the reaction will generally be less severe and the recovery more rapid than that associated with grief. The ease with which students can now maintain contact with loved ones at home is also important to mention. Indeed, eight students made specific comments about how internet-based technology such as Skype had made being away from family and friends much easier than it might otherwise have been. For example, Rhys noted that he didn’t “really feel disconnected from Australia… because I’m able to connect with my family.” Olivia also said that it had been nice to be able to stay in touch with family and friends, although she also mentioned that once she had settled in, having to deal with constant requests for contact from people at home did become somewhat burdensome: “I'm happy to be in contact with them… it's just that it's been quite frequent.” The role of internet-based technology such as Skype is discussed in greater detail later in this chapter, as is the important role of previous experience in a similar situation.

Students such as Molly who had experienced a similar kind of detachment previously, generally seemed to find it easier being separated from their family and friends than those that had not. Molly had been on an eight month high school exchange and also spent three months in Asia as part of an earlier university exchange. She noted that it had been very difficult being away from her family during the high school exchange, but she felt that she had developed some kind of immunity from it. She commented: “I have got friends and family that I miss,
but I will see them in not that long. I don’t feel like a year is that long to not see them.” One student who found it much harder than Molly was Natalie who felt quite homesick early on, noting that the hardest thing had been being separated from her family. Even though she lived in a different city to them at home, she still only lived an hour and a half away by car. This was her first time living abroad and she found it hard being so far away from them. However, things were better by the time we met. Indeed, she made the following comment during our interview: “I still really miss my family… but at the same time I’m enjoying being here and I’ve made some good friends.” The case of Natalie not only supports the idea that previous experience is an important variable in terms of the effect of being separated from family and friends, but it also illustrates the restorative power of new friendships, something else that is discussed in more detail below.

One final thing to note with regards to the interruption of social relationships. Four students said that it was especially hard being away from their boyfriend or girlfriend, although for two of these students this was more because their partner at home was finding it hard. Sarah who made the following comment about her boyfriend was one of these students: “I adjusted very quickly… I mean there are times where it’s been tough for me but nowhere near the same as for him because I’ve got distractions and everything is exciting.” This made her feel guilty about having such a good time, a feeling that was arguably the hardest thing about being separated from her partner. Daniel also said that he felt bad for this reason.

Social isolation

Social isolation is another potential source of difficulty. Some of the students involved in my research knew other students from their university going to the same location; others already knew people at their destination, but most had no prior acquaintances there upon arrival. Consequently, they experienced at least a brief period of social isolation and some experienced at least a brief period of loneliness. Only two students mentioned loneliness in their interview, but eight noted in the follow-up questionnaire that social isolation was one of the hardest parts about spending a study period abroad. Olivia was one of these students. She noted that the effect of being alone was magnified when things went wrong. This corroborates what has been observed elsewhere; feelings of loneliness
often deepen when someone faces other problems (Sawir et al., 2008). However, loneliness is not an inevitable outcome of social isolation; some people are comfortable, or even prefer being on their own. Loneliness is a subjective response to an external situation; two people may react quite differently to the same situation (De Jong Gierveld, 1987; De Jong Gierveld, Van Tilburg, & Dykstra, 2006; Hawkley & Cacioppo, 2010; Rokach, 1989; Townsend, 1973; Weiss, 1973). Moreover, there is a difference between situational loneliness and chronic loneliness. The former is a condition whereby people experience feelings of loneliness following a particular event that results in losses to their social network, such as moving from one place to another for any purpose or period (Shiovitz-Ezra & Ayalon, 2010). Situational loneliness is by definition a transient condition; it can be painful, but it is argued that after a short period of psychological distress, those suffering from situational loneliness typically manage to compensate for their losses and recover (Shiovitz-Ezra & Ayalon, 2010). This implies that those students who suffer from loneliness will typically recover from this in due course, unless they suffer from chronic loneliness. This appears to have been the case for all but one of the students involved in my research who reported suffering from loneliness as part of their experience. The exception was Eva who has already featured prominently in this thesis and whose case is discussed in more detail later in this chapter. Eva struggled to make friends while on exchange and loneliness was a substantial and ongoing problem for her.

**Having to look after oneself for the first time**

Singh (1963) in his study of Indian students in Britain found that for many participating students, it was their first time living away from their families on their own; these students were not used to looking after themselves and for some this caused great inconvenience. This was the same for a number of the students involved in my research. Eight (James, Sarah, Luke, Kate, Hannah, Eva, Alicia and Charlotte) had not really lived away from the family home before. This was not a problem for all of these students. For example, Hannah noted that despite still living with her family at home, her parents were often away and she was already quite self-sufficient: “I’ve got good cooking skills and if I want something clean I’ve got to clean it up myself.” Others such as Luke were less prepared:
“I’ve never had to make my own bed, I’ve never had to mop, I’ve never had to vacuum, I’ve never had to cook, I’ve never had to do dishes... I’ve never had to wash my clothes before.” He commented that he didn’t even know how to use a washing machine. Luke was an extreme case and his statement is surely extraordinary even today. Still, he wasn’t the only one not used to looking after himself. For example, Charlotte also admitted that she didn’t know how to use a washing machine prior to her exchange: “The first time I washed my woollen things I freaked out: they’re all going to come out shrunk; I am not going to have anything to wear; I am going to freeze.” This was a problem for these students, although not a major one, except that for some the resultant frustration and anxiety served to exacerbate the effects of other difficulties, such as loneliness. It also did not remain a problem for long; over the course of their time abroad, these students learned to look after themselves and four said afterwards that this was one of the most important things that they had learned from the experience.

Financial concerns

Research suggests that money is another major possible source of difficulty for international students. Having to worry about money or something to this effect was cited by five students in the follow-up questionnaire as one of the hardest things about spending a study period abroad, although it is clear from their interviews that each of these students had sufficient funds to live on during their exchange. These students noted that they were being careful with their money, that they were worried about it, or that they would appreciate more, but usually only because they wanted to travel as much as possible before they returned home. There were ten students who mentioned something like this in their interview, but money did not appear to be a significant problem for any of the students involved in my research, certainly not beyond the question of where and how they travelled. This is interesting because cost has been identified as a major reason for why more Australian and New Zealand students don’t spend a study period abroad (Daly, 2007, 2011; Daly & Barker, 2005; Davis et al., 1999; Doyle et al., 2010; Doyle et al., 2008; Sison & Brennan, 2012; Young & Harper, 2004). It raises the question of whether the perception of cost is a more substantial barrier to greater participation than the actual cost, something that warrants further investigation.
However, previous research does suggest that Australian and New Zealand exchange students typically come from middle-to-high socio-economic backgrounds (Daly, 2007; Doyle et al., 2010; Green et al., 2014). Data collected in the preliminary questionnaire of my study concerning the secondary schools that the students attended and the postcode of the suburbs where they lived while at secondary school, indicates that these students were no different. This may explain why none of them seemed to experience significant problems due to money. Yet, the students certainly did not all come from wealthy backgrounds. This does not mean that socio-economic status is not a barrier to participation in study abroad in Australia and New Zealand. It clearly is an issue and something that needs to be addressed. On this subject, it is also notable that none of the students involved identified as indigenous, another issue in terms of access that warrants further attention and investigation. Nonetheless, the data reported here does suggest that for many students who stay at home, cost might not be as much of a barrier as they perceive it to be. Indeed, Doyle et al. (2010, p. 485) note that many New Zealand students appear unaware of the support available.

The students involved in my research generally financed their exchanges using a mix of personal savings, university grants and government financial support. Five students noted that they had also borrowed from or were given money by their parents. The students had often been saving for some time specifically for the exchange or they had taken on extra work immediately prior to going on exchange so as to have as much money as possible for their time abroad. For example, Bella said: “Once I got accepted…I was like I am just going to work my butt off over Christmas, I don't care if I don't see my friends because… I wanted to get the most out of it.” The grants that the students received from their home university varied from institution to institution, ranging from $1000 to $3500. Both countries also have means tested government funded student allowance schemes and eligible students can continue to receive their payments while they are on exchange. New Zealand students that do not qualify for the student allowance scheme, can still borrow a weekly amount from the government to contribute towards their living costs and it is also possible to access this while on exchange. Meanwhile, Australian students who go on exchange can access a special loan called OS Help that is designed to assist with the costs of studying.
abroad. Despite the availability of these sources of support, not all of the students utilised them. Sarah chose not to, preferring to borrow money from her parents if she needed it: “I’m doing all of this on my own money but they said if you do run out we’ll loan you the money. I feel like I would rather be in debt to my family than the government.” Meanwhile, Luke was not aware of the existence of OS Help.

These schemes and the existence of university grants certainly make exchange a more accessible opportunity, although there appears to be an issue with visibility (Doyle et al., 2010). For the students involved in this study, the funding gained from these schemes combined with that received from their university went a long way towards covering the cost of travel to and from their exchange destination, as well as the cost of living while on exchange; beyond this it was a question of prioritising what they did based on how much extra money they had.

It is also worth noting here that six students commented that the cost of living at their destination was actually cheaper than at home. The three students who went to Poland all said something about how inexpensive their accommodation and general living expenses were compared to home, but those in other locations also made similar comments. Even students who went to what are generally considered more expensive destinations noted that the cost of living was at least equivalent with home. For example, one student (Chris) who went to Sweden said: “Everyone else complains about it, but the price of food is probably very similar to Australia, maybe a tiny bit more expensive but still quite manageable, especially if you know where to go then it is not a big problem.” Moreover, he noted that accommodation was actually cheaper there. Finally, it has been suggested that spending a study period abroad is likely to be particularly difficult financially for those students who still live with their parents and who normally have a job at home: “Not only do they have to pay extra living costs… they also have to give up their salaries while they are gone” (Sison & Brennan, 2012, p. 121). However, this did not appear to be the case for the students involved in my research. Rather, they spoke favourably about having jobs at home, noting that these had allowed them to save money, putting them in a position to make the most of the opportunity. There are also clear financial advantages associated with
still living at home when one goes on exchange, as Sarah identified: “I’m lucky, I’m going home to live with my parents and I don’t have to worry about rent.”

**Returning home**

Research shows that returning home can also be difficult for students who study abroad (Klineberg, 1970; Pritchard, 2011; Ward et al., 2001). The challenges associated with returning home are unlikely to influence the image that students develop of their host population. Nonetheless, they have been included here because it is important to understand the full study abroad process. The students involved in my research had varied experiences returning home. It was relatively easy for some of them. For example, Lauren noted: “I had been away for a long time and I was eager to go back after so long.” Rhys made a similar comment: “I felt that after six months I was quite ready to come home.” Meanwhile, Charlotte said that she was surprised just how easy it had been: “I slipped straight back into how things have always been and sometimes exchange seems like a strange but wonderful dream.” Some students were happy to be home, but found certain aspects of returning home hard. For example, Sarah noted that it was difficult to resume studying again: “I had been travelling Europe for around two months after my exchange and classes began only days after I returned home.” Meanwhile, Eva reported that she had some relationship problems with her boyfriend because of a lack of communication while she was away, something that she described as inevitable when on different sides of the world. Other students noted that it was hard to return home, but that they were trying to actively counter this using insights gained abroad. Chris was one such student. He commented that “the hardest thing about coming back was giving up that ‘get-up-and-go’ lifestyle. Back home, we have real responsibilities, real deadlines and nowhere near as much freedom.” However, he added that he was now much more open to trying new things and that he was attempting “not to stress about silly trivial things.” Meanwhile, Rebecca commented that she was trying to live more like an exchange student at home, including going on more trips away during weekends.

Overall, fourteen of the students said that they found their return home at least somewhat difficult. For example, Bella noted: “I finished my degree while abroad and travelled for four months on the way home so transitioning into full time work
was always going to be hard.” Alicia similarly said: “It was a bit of a shock to the system to come back to New Zealand and be thrown straight back into study after spending five months in France, studying but nowhere near as intensely as in NZ.” Meanwhile, Kate commented: “Being on exchange has given me the opportunity to experience so many places and adventures, which I feel is really exciting... But being back home it feels like nothing has changed even though I have been away for six months.” Matilda made a similar point: “It all became very ordinary and familiar very quickly, after a bit of a honeymoon period...The exchange life is very active. You’re constantly seeking out adventure but my home life seemed stagnant.” Georgia noted that it was especially hard to reconnect with old friends. She added: “It’s difficult because the time away is now a massive part of who you are... and you want to share that with people. But often people aren't that interested, even people close to you.” Finally, Olivia had a particularly difficult transition back to life at home, noting: “I was stressed like I have never been before.” She said that: “It was hard to relate back to people who I was once close with, and I missed my new friends terribly.” She also commented: “I had new ideas and dreams about what I wanted to do but not how to get there.” Nonetheless, things got better for her with time, as would be expected, although one student had the opposite experience. Luke was looking forward to going home and said that he was initially fine, but he wrote in the follow-up survey that he was starting to miss his host city a lot, “especially because I know that that experience can never be replicated, no matter how much I tried.”

This supports the idea of a W-Curve, although as with the U-curve, this is not universally experienced and the process of re-adjustment does not follow a single pattern. Still, there is clearly value in offering some kind of re-entry programme for returned exchange students and a number of the students involved in my study felt that universities should do more to support students upon their return home. For example, Olivia made the following comment: “All I received afterwards was a myriad of emails about speaking at the next round of promotions and that I had to do so otherwise I would be charged for the small grant which I received to go”, adding that “I found this belittling and felt that surely this department is best equipped to understand what returned exchangees were going through and yet I felt they reduced my experience to a matter of box ticking.”
The benefit of offering a re-entry programme is that not only can these function to ease possible re-entry shock, but they also provides a way to embed student learning. As Vande Berg and Paige (2012, p. 53) note, these programmes “support study abroad, reinforce earlier learning, and help students make sense of their experiences, particularly with respect to their educational and occupational futures.” This is something that is looked at more in Chapter Eight.

**Re-visiting Eva**

Despite the vast majority of students noting in their interview that they had found one or more aspects of their experience hard, frustrating, challenging or otherwise problematic, my analysis revealed that for most, the problems they experienced did not last long, their effect was not that severe, or they coped well enough so as not to cause concern. However, there was one notable exception.

The interview started in much the same way as every other interview before and after it, with a broad question about how the experience had been so far. Eva replied: “I think it’s been a pretty tough experience.” She then went on to describe an experience defined by almost overwhelming feelings of homesickness. Eva was crying or on the verge of tears for the entirety of our interview. Witnessing this was difficult; a reminder of the human aspect that is lost when we concern ourselves only with statistics and not the individuals behind them. The 20 year old had been overseas before. Indeed, she had visited nine countries previously, including France. Nonetheless, she had not lived away from the family home before, let alone in another country. She noted that the homesickness struck before she had even arrived at her host city. She stayed with a family friend in England on her way and commented that she felt a little bit homesick when she left there; it then really set in when she subsequently went to Lille and had to spend her birthday there alone. It got even worse when she arrived at her final destination which was elsewhere in France. Eva was one of the students mentioned above who experienced problems upon arrival at their accommodation. She said: “I tried moving into my residence and they told me that they didn’t have me on the file so I had to argue with them for literally two and a half hours before they would give me a house... that was a low point.” This is when her negative perception of the host population began to develop,
although things then got better for a brief period. She noted: “I met up with my friend from New Zealand and she introduced me to her friend and that was good.” The start of classes also allowed her to meet more people, although things soon got worse again. There was no single source of difficulty for Eva, rather there were a combination of factors at play. She found it hard living away from her family for the first time; she also missed her boyfriend and friends. She did maintain contact with the person she knew from New Zealand, but she grew apart from most of the people she met early on. Overall, she found it hard to make friends and loneliness was an ongoing problem for her. Moreover, she had problems with her enrolment and as it was her first time living away from her family she also had to get used to looking after herself. She also didn’t feel safe at her destination, struggled with the prevalence of people who smoked there and experienced language-related issues, as was discussed in the previous chapter.

It is important to reiterate that Eva was an outlier in the group. Even Josh seemed to cope well enough. Josh was the only other student to report experiencing anything akin to culture shock. His experience was certainly challenging, but he was not overwhelmed like Eva. Josh displayed a different perspective than Eva. He was obviously frustrated, but he was also philosophical. For example, when asked if knowing what he knew now, he would still choose to go to Poland, he responded: “Absolutely! How could I tell if it would be any better anywhere else?” He also added: “I think for me at the end of it, maybe this is just my perspective, I go at least from that I learnt something and maybe I learnt more here… maybe if I went to France I wouldn't learn so much.” This attitude is something that Josh attributed to his previous experience living abroad and the fact that he ran training sessions in New Zealand for students going overseas, as well as for incoming international students, meaning he could understand what he was going through.

Despite her experience being exceptional, it is important to pay close attention to Eva’s case because of the effect her distress appeared to have in terms of the image she developed of her host society, one characterised by sweeping generalisations. She variously described her host population as standoffish, arrogant, inconsiderate and unhelpful. There were specific circumstances and a number of incidents starting with her arrival at her accommodation that led Eva
to develop this image. However, the effect of these was magnified by her overall emotional state, which was the product of a cocktail of factors, including wider issues such as loneliness. Meanwhile, these circumstances and each such incident magnified her overall malaise, meaning a vicious cycle was in play. Ahmed’s (2010a) idea of happiness gaps also seems relevant here. My conclusion is that because study abroad did not live up to its promise of happiness, Eva’s resulting disappointment provoked a narrative of rage that was directed towards her host society and its people, a subject that is discussed further below.

This chapter now looks at four significant variables identified that help to explain Eva’s case in more detail, beginning by elaborating on the role of unmet expectations. Nonetheless, it is necessary to first note that while Eva was an outlier in the group, difficulties experienced by other students still led to generalisations and the reproduction of certain stereotypes, something that is taken into consideration in Chapter Eight when the pedagogical implications of this study are discussed. For example, difficulties enrolling and getting set-up led students to characterise French society and its people as disorganised, unhelpful and overly bureaucratic. Meanwhile, Josh also developed an image of his host society and its population characterised by sweeping generalisations, such as his view that they were not a very open or helpful people, something that appeared to be similarly influenced by the distress he experienced, even if this was seemingly less severe than Eva’s. Specifically, Josh was having problems with his girlfriend at home and despite the overall effect not being as severe as in Eva’s case, the resulting distress similarly magnified the effect of circumstances and incidents that might otherwise have easily been brushed off. For example, while this was not deemed a major issue by other students who went to the same country, Josh felt ostracised because of the language difference that existed and incidents arising from this, like not being able to communicate with checkout staff at supermarkets or certain staff at his accommodation. Josh acknowledged this effect when he noted that he had never experienced culture shock before, but in this case “there was a weird situation between me and my girlfriend slash not girlfriend at the time,” adding that when “the things that you’ve got at home, you kind of feel like there’s some issues or you’re not sure what’s going on, like it’s
really asking for something, it’s just what happens you know, you need something to be confident about...” Meanwhile the frustration that he experienced as a result of the aforementioned circumstances and incidents likewise heightened the effect of the relationship issues he was going through with his partner who was back at home. On this topic, Josh noted: “I think if everything here was going really well, it wouldn't be such a problem because I could think about how much fun it is here”

Four key variables

Unmet expectations

Previous research shows that students often embark on a study abroad experience with unrealistically high expectations and that this can be problematic (Beaven, 2012; Pitts, 2009). Unmet expectations have been found to be a significant source of stress for international sojourners, including study abroad students (Pitts, 2009; Ward et al., 2001). Indeed, Pitts (2009, p. 453) concluded that the results of her study, which documented the experiences of a group of students from the United States who studied abroad in Paris, “indicate that students experience a broad spectrum of expectation gaps and that those gaps have an immediate, stress-evoking impact.” For example, students may find that their host destination is very different to the romantic image that they had in their mind prior to departure. This was certainly a problem for Eva, as mentioned above. Not only did this exacerbate her feelings of homesickness, but she also projected her almost inevitable disappointment on to the host population, contributing to her development of an overwhelmingly negative opinion of all things French. Tourism imaginaries have a lot to answer for in this sense (Forsey & Low, 2014). As Eva noted, “France is almost mythologised as being stylish, having good food, the ideal lifestyle.” It may not be possible to change students’ perceptions before they leave. Nonetheless, the prospect that they will arrive at their host destination with unrealistic expectations about it, certainly warrants intervention both before they leave and after they arrive with a view to minimising the negative effect that this can have, but also as a means to cultivate growth. For example, this is one way by which students can learn the folly of generalisations. Moreover, it provides a starting point for “pushing students beyond stereotypes and fantasies of place and people towards experiencing and
comprehending the day-to-day realities” (Forsey & Low, 2014, p. 168). This in turn provides an opportunity for students to develop an appreciation of their host society on its own terms and in doing so, to learn the value of reserving judgement. It also opens up a space for them to reflect on other things, including the phenomenon of globalisation and “how this actually functions (Forsey & Low, 2014, p. 168). This is because as already quoted, in contrast to the relevant tourism imaginaries, “any walk through London or Florence, for instance, shows that these cities are as littered with chain stores as any American city,” while “it is not as if the ‘locals’ are any less interested in Hip-Hop, Facebook, and the Gap than American students” (Lewin, 2009, p. xvii). This example is from the United States context, but it equally applies to the Australian and New Zealand contexts.

Another key form of expectation gap that study abroad students can experience, occurs when students have particularly high expectations regarding the level of cultural immersion that they will achieve while abroad. It is difficult to define exactly what cultural immersion involves, but local friendships are clearly an important component. Unmet expectations of this kind did not seem to be as much of a problem for the students involved in my research as they were for the students involved in the study by Pitts (2009). This may be because as discussed in Chapter Two less pressure is placed on Australian and New Zealand students to immerse themselves in the local culture than students from the United States.

Understandably, this requires further examination. Regardless, the case of Eva shows that unmet expectations of this kind can still be a problem for students from Australia and New Zealand. Like the student involved in the Pitts (2009) study who was quoted above, Eva also indicated that she felt like she was failing study abroad, although she did not use these words directly. This was not only linked to her inability to make local friends, but also her general unhappiness. Eva experienced what Ahmed (2010a) terms a happiness gap. She attributed this to the picture painted before and during her exchange by external sources, as illustrated by the following comment: “I think there’s kind of an expectation of what you’re going to do and how much you’re going to enjoy yourself on exchange… I get the impression that I’m meant to be absorbing myself into the culture all the time, and going out, and making the most of it.” Eva said that this impression was
the product of discussions with people she knew or met who had been on exchange previously. Materials used by institutions to promote study abroad also must take some responsibility for this, a problem discussed in Chapter Four. It was also the image that friends and acquaintances on exchange at the same time as her projected via social media, something that is discussed in more detail below. This was an additional source of anxiety for Eva, further contributing to her feelings of homesickness. Moreover, frustration resulting from her inability to form local friendships and her general disillusionment with the experience were further things to project on to the host population. Eva may have been an outlier in my study, but her experience supports Pitts (2009, p. 461) conclusion that institutions need to help students develop “reasonable and realistic expectations for the short-term sojourn,” in addition to providing “information on how to recognize and manage… external expectations.” Promotional materials may not be the place to do this as their purpose is to sell study abroad and they inevitably focus on the benefits that this can lead to, but as discussed in Chapter Four it is important to engage students in activities before departure that get them to think critically about their motivations, as well as the promises associated with studying abroad.

The role of the internet

The rise of the internet has had significant implications for the phenomenon of study abroad (Beaven, 2012; Coleman & Chafer, 2010; Mikal & Grace, 2012). On the one hand, it provides a cost-effective way for students to maintain regular contact with family and friends at home, thus potentially making the transition smoother. Indeed, it was mentioned above that some students noted that internet-based technology such as Skype made being away from family and friends easier than it might otherwise have been. Eva also noted that it was helpful to be able to talk to her family and boyfriend back home regularly. On the other hand, social networking sites such as Facebook provide an avenue for students to compare their own exchange experience with those of other people who are undertaking an exchange at the same time and this can exacerbate things when a student is having a difficult time. This is something that Eva brought up. She observed that unlike her, everyone else seemed to be making the most of the experience and having a fantastic time, which made her feel even worse
about her own experience. This is closely related to the issue of expectations, which we have just discussed. Not only did Eva’s experience fail to live up to her own expectations, but her Facebook feed constantly reinforced this narrative of failure. Eva realised that the picture painted by others on Facebook was not necessarily the reality. She noted: “They might be telling their completely honest account of the good times, but they just skip over the time that they sat in their room.” She also said: “It’s the same thing if you look at mine. It will look like I spend my entire time frolicking in the snow or whatever.” However, she commented: “It’s hard to remember that when you’re looking at other people’s.” This is a valuable point and something that might be taken into account in attempts to intervene in the study abroad process. Would the opportunity to have heard about or to have engaged with students going through the same thing have helped? Could this be part of a wider attempt to readjust student expectations?

Before moving on, it is important to mention one other way in which the rise of the internet has had implications for study abroad. Constant internet use is seen as an impediment to the task of getting to know the host society. Chang and Gomes (2017, p. 350) refer to “the dual experience of being physically in a foreign country but digitally connected to home country,” a phenomenon that Martin and Rizvi (2014) term translocal. It seems that the accessibility of internet-based communication technology is one of several factors that contribute to the situation mentioned above whereby even students who experience significant problems do not necessarily need to learn new cultural elements in order to maintain their psychological health while abroad. The other factors include the short duration of a study abroad experience and the availability of social support through other international students. It is not just “verbally and visually communicating with family and friends in real time through platforms such as Skype” that may inadvertently lead “to a fractured and somewhat different engagement in their host city” (Chang & Gomes, 2017, p. 351) In addition, Chang and Gomes (2017, p. 355) note that “when international students move across national borders for a period of time, they do not automatically make the digital move to new sources of information” Instead, they continue to rely on a digital bundle of information sources “that are limited to websites and apps based on their home country” (Chang & Gomes, 2017, p. 355). However, it seems a stretch to say that “the
internet screwed up study abroad” as Roberts (2010) conjectures, or to attribute too much blame to this for students not acquiring what could be considered a deep understanding of their host society and its people. Indeed, while there are examples in the literature of students who spend a substantial amount of their time while abroad virtually connected to friends and family at home, this was not the case for the students involved in my research. Moreover, even when this does occur, as Beaven (2012, p. 291) notes, internet-based communication technology “may not always be the cause, but rather the symptom of the student’s inability or unwillingness to engage with the local environment.” This is a more significant barrier to understanding, one that can be overcome by facilitating engagement aimed at understanding through academic intervention as discussed in the previous chapter and elaborated on in the following chapters. Moreover, the state of translocality does not necessarily need to be “seen as a deficit” in designing a curriculum with this purpose in mind, because it presents valuable “opportunities for cross-cultural comparison and negotiation” (Chang & Gomes, 2017, p. 351).

**Previous experience**

Previous experience in a similar situation of any kind limits the likelihood that students will experience problems while abroad, or rather it a limits the likelihood that they will experience significant stress. Indeed, stress arises when someone appraises a situation as taxing or exceeding his or her resources (Lazarus, 1999; Lazarus & DeLongis, 1983; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Previous experience means that one person may appraise the same situation very differently to another. It can also help them better cope with stress. It is not surprising that Eva had never really lived away from home before, let alone in another country. By contrast, a number of the other students involved were attending university in a different city to the one they grew up in; leaving behind people and starting fresh somewhere new was something they had been through before, meaning it was a less threatening prospect. The same was true for those who had lived abroad before, although simply having travelled overseas was not seen as being much help. For example, we have noted that Eva had travelled quite widely prior to her exchange, but she commented that living somewhere brings more challenges. She also noted: “When travelling, I find it much easier to deal with problems, because I know that they’re temporary and just part of the experience.” Natalie
was another student to comment that living somewhere abroad is quite different from travelling: “When you’re travelling, you don’t have to figure out things… you stay for a couple of nights, you see the touristy things, you don’t have to figure out how to live there so much.” She also said that travel is exciting and involves constant movement: “Whereas living here… you realise this is where you are, this is where you’re staying, there’s nothing to keep you from missing home.”

Molly was one student who had lived abroad previously. Her case was mentioned above. She had been on a high school exchange and had found it very difficult being away from her family during that experience, but she felt that she had developed some kind of immunity from it. The case of Bella was also mentioned above. Bella had a particularly problematic arrival, but this did not seem to cause her significant stress. She had been through the process of moving to another country on her own before, which gave her a sense of perspective that many of those who had not previously gone through this process lacked. Meanwhile, Georgia was another student to have been on a high school exchange. She noted that it was very different experience. This time she travelled on her own and had no one to meet her upon arrival, whereas last time she travelled with a group of other exchange students from New Zealand and they were met at the airport by a group of exchange volunteers. She commented: “We got taken directly from there to the orientation camp, we had three days there with other exchange students, then our families met us, picked us up, took us home and then they looked after us.” Nonetheless, her previous experience was still difficult. She noted that it was especially hard being away from her family: “I was sick when I first got there and I was like, ‘I just want Mum to walk into my room and give me a soup and a water bottle’ and I couldn't have that.” She compared her previous experience to a ride on a roller coaster with lots of ups and downs. She said that there were still ups and downs this time, but that she was better prepared for this, adding: “I feel like they’re smaller bumps this time.” Max had also been on a high school exchange, as well as living abroad on two separate occasions since high school. He noted that this did not prevent him from experiencing problems, including loneliness. However, he felt that he was better able to deal with these because of it: “Yeah, past experience helps me deal with those things and then pull out the positives of it, rather than get down in the dumps on the negatives.
and I think it would be very difficult having not been anywhere before.” He also noted that he still experienced problems related to unfamiliarity, but he was less impacted by these: “I guess this time I’m considering problems that I have and things that I don’t understand, I’m considering it more, well how would I approach that in Australia, rather than it’s completely weird… blah, blah, blah.” Finally, Olivia had spent three months living in a developing country since high school, where she worked as a volunteer. She commented that this previous experience had been a much more trying and that her exchange seemed easy in comparison.

This discussion shows that some students already have a degree of what Murphy-Lejeune (2002) terms mobility capital prior to studying abroad, something that has been cultivated through previous experience. Does this also mean that they have less to learn from the experience? The answer to this question in most cases will be yes, but this does not mean that these students have nothing to learn. It seems a truism to say that all students have something to learn by spending a study period abroad. On this note, we must remember that there is a difference between being resilient and being open-minded or possessing other attributes associated with study abroad, not that resilience is a fixed attribute that cannot grow further. Students with relevant previous experience may have been better prepared than others, but they can also be just as prone to judge their host society based on minimal meaningful engagement as is discussed further in the next chapter. The upshot is that even the most experienced travellers can benefit from study abroad, although as with any student it cannot be assumed they will.

Social support

Social relationships have been shown to contribute to psychological well-being in two important ways (Cohen & Wills, 1985; Rook, 1987). First, they may directly satisfy the emotional need for affiliation (Cohen & Wills, 1985; Rook, 1987; Ying, 1996). Second, they can serve as a means to a specific end: mediating stress (Cohen & Wills, 1985; Dunkel-Schetter, Folkman, & Lazarus, 1987; House, 1985; Rook, 1987). They can mediate stress in three ways. First, the enjoyment they provide can offset the effects of stress (Rook, 1987); they can act as uplifts (Kanner, Coyne, Schaefer, & Lazarus, 1981; Lazarus & DeLongis, 1983). Second, they can help people cope with stress, by providing support (Cohen &
Wills, 1985; Dunkel-Schetter et al., 1987; House, 1985; Rook, 1987). House (1985) argued that there are four basic types of social support: emotional support (listening; showing concern, empathy and trust; conveying esteem), appraisal support (giving feedback relevant to someone’s initial appraisal of a situation), informational support (offering advice, suggestions or information that facilitate problem solving), and instrumental support (providing tangible assistance, such as money, labour or a modifying environment). Third, the mere perception that others can and will offer support may prevent a particular situation from being appraised as stressful in the first place (Cohen & Wills, 1985). Many of the students involved in my research experienced at least a period of social isolation, as discussed above. This was often only a brief period, but it was at the start of the experience when it is argued that support is most needed (Sawir et al., 2008). This was certainly the most challenging period for the students in my research.

It was mentioned above that some students knew other students from their university going to the same location. Often they had met these people at events organised by the university before their departure. This is one way that a university may attempt to reduce the number of outgoing exchange students that experience even a brief period of social isolation, although caution should be exercised, as one student noted. Rebecca knew no one going to the same destination as her, but she felt that this was ultimately beneficial: “I’ve seen too many examples of really organised programmes… where the exchange students are forced to bond so much before they arrive in the foreign country that they end up being an autonomous unit and not meeting any locals.” This is a good point and it is important to emphasise that most of the students made friends at their destination without too much difficulty, although many noted it was difficult to form close relationships with locals, as was mentioned in the previous chapter. It is easy to blame existing co-national connections for a lack of host national contact. However, students who know no-one going to their host destination still find it hard to form friendships with host nationals, indicating that this is not the problem that it is made out to be. Pitts (2009, p. 460) even argues that existing co-national networks can play a positive role in this sense: “Early co-national support can help students buffer emotional distress accompanying the sojourn, such as
anxiety and depression, which might otherwise limit vitality and social activity abroad.” Nonetheless, this still does not guarantee host national friendships.

Regardless of their origin, the students involved in my research spoke fondly about the role of friendships in terms of the help they provided. For example, James was the only student to have never been overseas before, while he also still lived with his family at home. He was arguably the most vulnerable of all the students involved in my research and he did comment during our interview that his experience to that point had not all been smooth sailing. Nevertheless, he was coping well enough overall, noting that it was especially helpful having his best friend from home on exchange with him at the same destination. James also spoke positively about the support offered by other friends he had met on exchange. Kate was another student to have never lived away from home before, let alone in another country. Yet she had a relatively unproblematic experience, apart from her first day. She attributed this to having made some really good friends, commenting that she had become particularly close to the people she lived with: “They’re just really nice people… we do a lot of things together, sometimes we cook together or go grocery shopping together… and we talk a lot… I think that’s helped a lot. If you were alone… it would be harder.” However, while most of the students were able to make friends without too much difficulty, Eva was a notable exception to this rule, as mentioned above. It is not that she didn’t make any friends, but it took her a long time. She noted: “I think I’ve made some very good friends, but I did spend a lot of time on my own.” This meant that not only was loneliness an ongoing problem for her, she was also unable to gain the wider benefits of social relationships. Eva did note that it was helpful to be able to talk to her family and boyfriend back home regularly, but she clearly would have benefited from having a better support network at her destination. Indeed, at the time of our interview, which was near the end of her exchange, Eva had just established a weekly pizza get together with the one person that she knew from New Zealand and she commented that this was already proving helpful.

Many students noted that the first week or so of their exchange was the most important period in terms of making friends. For this reason, one student gave the following advice to those about to go on an exchange: “Don't hide in a hole
for the first few weeks.” Eva did meet people during this initial period, but she did not form any lasting friendships. Eva felt that it was difficult to form lasting friendships because she was not a big drinker and she did not like going out to pubs or clubs at night, especially because she was an asthmatic living in a society where smoking in pubs and clubs was allowed. As noted, she also had safety concerns about going out at night. Drinking has been shown to play an important role in fostering friendships and facilitating bonding amongst first year university students in the United States (Borsari & Carey, 1999; Borsari, Murphy, & Barnett, 2007); my research indicates that this is also the case for Australian and New Zealand exchange students in Europe. For example, Bella said that on her second night at her destination she was feeling upset that she hadn’t made any friends when her flatmate knocked on her bedroom door: “He said we’re having drinks in the kitchen, we’re going out tonight and you’re coming, so I walked into the kitchen and straight away I had to scull something as like my initiation to the floor.” She added: “That night we just all got drunk, it’s the best way to meet people.” There were a number of other students who made similar comments.

Living in a student residence was also reported to be a good way to build relationships, although not necessarily with host nationals, because many were international student-only residences, or they were residences in which international students were segregated from host nationals. For example, Natalie lived in a residence with 10 floors; eight were for host nationals; the other two were for international students. Eva also lived in a student residence, but she noted that there were very few people in her residence who spoke English well and only a couple who were native French speakers. The rest did speak French, but because it was not their or her first language (even though she considered herself to be at an advanced level) she described talking to them as tiring, commenting: “It’s kind of a battle through two different language barriers.” This meant that she didn’t really make any friends at her residence. Nonetheless, even if these circumstances were different, it is possible that Eva would still have found it difficult to establish meaningful relationships through her accommodation because of her reluctance to drink and to go out to pubs and clubs at night. Gregariousness and sociability are clearly vital attributes for success, but even they do not guarantee that friendships will extend beyond international students.
There were a number of students who noted that social events and excursions aimed at international students were also a good way to build relationships. Many commented positively about such events and excursions. For example, Rebecca noted that she met her best friend on a university organised excursion to a neighbouring city. Organising events and excursions for international students is one way a university may attempt to help them meet people, although many students felt that these events should also be targeted at host nationals in order to foster relationships between international students and host nationals. Either way, it is still up to students to make the most of these opportunities and many advised those about to go on exchange to participate in as many events or excursions as possible, although it is also important that there are a wide range of events and excursions. Eva noted that she didn’t participate in many of the social events at her university because they were mostly nights out at a bar, although there were presumably some clubs or events suited to her preferences, where she could meet like-minded people; it was more a matter of finding these.

Finally, it was mentioned above that friendships with locals serve a particular function (Bochner, McLeod, & Lin, 1977; Furnham & Alibhai, 1985; Ward et al., 2001; Ward & Kennedy, 1993). They can help people to navigate the new environment and overcome problems caused by unfamiliarity. Some students did say that their local connections were helpful in this sense. For example, Chris noted: “It’s just the little things… advice about where to buy things that are good quality and cheap, how to get around using public transport, recommendations for places to go… advice on the Swedish culture and that sort of thing.” Sarah made a similar comment: “Like silly questions about customs and different words and different slang they had, if I was a bit unsure… I could go to my housemates. And they could tell me with things like where a certain shop is.” However, many of the students struggled to make friends with host nationals, as discussed more extensively in the next chapter. They often commented that they wished they could have had more contact with locals, but overall this did not appear to be a major problem primarily because unfamiliarity was not a major issue. If they had gone to more culturally distant destinations this may have been different. As it was, it seemed most important that the students had friends at their destination; the nationality of these friends was almost irrelevant, although some did note that
it was especially comforting to socialise with others from the same country as them, or to talk to other international students going through the same process.

Nonetheless, local friendships are important not just as a source of cultural information, but because they offer the opportunity to develop a deeper understanding of the host society and to grow from this (Beaven, 2012). Other friendships are often seen as detrimental to this, although this is not necessarily the case as mentioned above. Pitts (2009, p. 460) even argues that co-national friendships can be beneficial at the start of a study abroad experience by buffering emotional that “might otherwise limit vitality and social activity.” However, this does not minimise the importance of host national friendships and while academic intervention cannot manufacture these, it can foster meaningful contact aimed at cultivating understanding, a central tenet of my model presented in Chapter Eight.

**Geographic distance**

This chapter concludes by briefly looking at the effect of geographic distance, a variable that was identified in Chapter Two as potentially differentiating the experiences of Australian and New Zealand students who go to Europe from those of other study abroad students. This is because research suggests that the effect of being away from home is likely to be less severe if the destination is geographically close to home (Fisher, 1988, 1989, 1990; Fisher et al., 1985) and geographically there is no greater distance that one can travel than from Australia or New Zealand to Europe. Some students did talk about how different their experience was from other exchange students because of this distance, specifically those that came from elsewhere in Europe. Georgia was one such student. She commented: “I know someone who goes home pretty much every weekend, visits his friends, brings food back, it's a crazy idea.” This may have eased the transition and reduced the challenges experienced, but these students all felt that ultimately it was beneficial that they could not easily go home like some of the people they knew as doing so would have lessened the experience and what they gained from it. For example, Georgia felt that she was getting more out of the experience because of this: “I feel like I am on exchange, I feel like they're just having a little break.” She also added that despite the distance, she could still talk to her family easily via Skype: “I can't imagine doing this in like the early
1900s, it took three months to post a letter... Technology makes it so much easier." Other students also made similar observations, as was mentioned above.

**Summary**

It would be all too easy ignore the case of Eva, dismissing it as an exception and focusing instead on the vast majority of students who had relatively smooth experiences. However, her experience demonstrates the powerful role that emotions can play in determining how we relate to others. It also shows the importance of understanding and addressing the various challenges that students may face abroad. There was no single source of difficulty for Eva, rather there were a multiple factors at play with the combined effect being that she developed a very negative image of her host society and its people, one characterised by sweeping generalisations and popular stereotypes. Moreover, my analysis revealed many examples of other students resorting to generalisations and stereotypes to make sense of the challenges discussed in this chapter, contrary to the idea of deep understanding. This is examined further in the next chapter.
CHAPTER SEVEN
THE OUTCOMES OF STUDY ABROAD

This thesis now examines in more detail the effect that the experience had on the students involved. The chapter begins by examining data related to whether the students enjoyed the experience, before reporting key findings related to learning and growth. It examines what they considered to be the most important things that they learned, focussing on five themes: personal development; subject-specific knowledge; language competence; critical reflectiveness; and deep understanding and relating to difference. The data utilised derives mainly from questions asked in the follow-up questionnaire, including one about the most important things that the students learned from their experience abroad and another one that asks whether they gained much of an insight into the society where they were based. Nonetheless, their responses to questions asked in the pre-departure questionnaire and data stemming from the in-country interviews are also drawn on to add context and to help explain the findings in more detail. The findings presented here largely corroborate those of previous research, that students who spend a study period abroad generally enjoy their experience overall (Daly, 2007; Forsey et al., 2012) and find it transformative in some way, but the benefits associated with study abroad cannot be expected to accrue automatically and academic intervention linked to desired learning outcomes is important if learning is to be maximised (Engle, 2013; Lutterman-Aguilar & Gingerich, 2002; Vande Berg et al., 2009; Vande Berg & Paige, 2012). My analysis extends what is known in this sense by focussing on the insights that students acquire with regards to their host society, a topic that has received insufficient attention in earlier research as discussed in Chapter Two. It does so using the idea of deep understanding developed for this study, finding that many of the students involved fell short of this ideal, regularly describing their host societies and various observed practises or peculiarities in terms of sweeping
generalisations and stereotypes, as well as displaying little understanding of the values, beliefs and circumstances underpinning these practises or peculiarities.

Enjoyment

Enjoyment is arguably the most simplistic measure of a successful study abroad experience. Nonetheless, the students involved in my research were asked in the follow-up questionnaire if they had enjoyed their experience abroad; all 21 answered in the affirmative to this question, although Hannah added that while the experience had been enjoyable overall, there were aspects of it that she did not enjoy, specifically the academic side of it and her living situation. It is somewhat surprising that no students answered in the negative to this question, especially given Eva’s well documented experience. It seems that a prediction Eva made in her interview while she was still on exchange proved accurate. I asked her if she regretted her decision to go on an exchange given the problems that she had experienced. She responded that her feelings fluctuate, before adding: “But I think at the end, it is going to be one of those things where while you’re there you don’t enjoy it and then you leave and you miss it.” It is also notable that when asked to describe the most enjoyable aspects of her experience, Eva mentioned only one thing: travel. Despite her exchange being difficult, the enjoyment that Eva derived from travel undertaken during and following it, meant that she ended up looking back on the experience positively.

That all of the students involved in my research answered in the affirmative to this question corroborates the findings of previous research which suggest that students who spend a study period abroad generally enjoy their experience overall (Daly, 2007; Forsey et al., 2012). My analysis reveals that there were three main experiences that contributed to the enjoyment of the students involved in my study: travel; experiencing life somewhere novel; and meeting new people. Other factors cited include speaking another language, overcoming challenges; having a different university experience; and living away from the family home.

Travel was cited by 14 students as either the most enjoyable aspect, or at least one of the most enjoyable aspects of their experience. Those that elaborated mentioned that they particularly enjoyed travelling to other countries and the ease
of doing this in Europe. The students travelled widely during their time abroad. They wanted to make the most of the opportunity to do this while they were in Europe, not knowing when they would be back again. However, this also limited the time that they had to get to know their host society, with much of their spare time being spent visiting sights on the European tourist trail, something that is touched on further later in this chapter.

The same number of students mentioned *living somewhere different* or something to this effect. That is to say, they noted that they enjoyed being somewhere new and different; exploring it; seeing new things; trying different food; doing new things; or doing things that aren’t new, but which aren’t so easy to do at home. Thirteen of these students used the word culture. More specifically, they said that they enjoyed being exposed to; experiencing; immersing themselves in; or learning about a new and different culture. This is striking because my analysis suggests that many students did not develop a deep understanding of their host society as conceptualised here, a finding elaborated on later in this chapter. Curiosity was an important motivation for going on an exchange and many students enjoyed being surrounded by difference, but this does not imply comprehension, something academic intervention must address.

Fourteen students also mentioned *meeting people and making new friends*. Some of these students said that they particularly enjoyed meeting and making friends with people from other parts of the world. Four students cited being surrounded by and *speaking another language*. For example, Georgia who went to France (before spending another semester in Italy) referred to “the thrill of waking up every day and knowing you will speak in French all day.” Three students mentioned *overcoming challenges* and learning about themselves. For example, Josh wrote: “It may seem a bit backwards, but for every problem you face, you have to overcome it and that really makes you feel great after completing something, knowing that no matter how hard things are, you can find a way to deal with it.” The same number of students listed their *university experience*. Two of these students elaborated, explaining that they enjoyed being able to do courses not available at home. For example, Olivia noted: “I wouldn’t have been able to take an Arctic biology paper in NZ! Nor one on Danish culture.”
Finally, two students for whom the exchange was their first real experience living away from the family home said that they enjoyed their newfound independence.

Learning and growth

It might be encouraging that students who spend a study period abroad generally seem to enjoy their experience. Nevertheless, there is increasing recognition that in assessing the value of study abroad, researchers, universities, policy makers and anyone else with an interest in it, must not be content with the hyperbolic response that the experience was great (Engle, 2013). Student enjoyment is important, but study abroad is offered and justified by institutions as an educative experience, above all, and it is on this basis that its value should be evaluated. The findings presented in this thesis so far illustrate that learning in the way that the stress-adaptation-growth model predicts is not inevitable as part of a study abroad experience, nor does it even appear to be likely given the short duration. However, this does not mean that the experience was not transformative for the students involved in this study, although the data presented so far contains a number of examples of students describing their host society and its population in terms generalisations and stereotypes, which is not consistent with the idea of deep understanding, nor movement to a more open-minded, less judgemental stance towards difference. This is returned to later in this chapter. Here, it is important to note that all of the students involved answered in the affirmative when asked in the follow-up questionnaire if they had learned from the experience of being abroad. Nonetheless, when asked about the most important things that they had learned in a subsequent question, it was striking that many of the outcomes cited are unlikely to be judged part of the core mission of study abroad. This chapter now documents three such categories of outcomes that appeared frequently in my data, which have been grouped under the theme Personal Development: miscellaneous life lessons, increased self-sufficiency, and improved resilience. It then looks at learning in three other areas: subject-specific knowledge, host language proficiency and critical reflectiveness. It concludes by analysing the insights that the students involved reported acquiring vis-a-vis their host society and the impact this had on the way they relate to cultural difference.
**Personal Development**

Nine students cited various *miscellaneous life lessons*. For example, Chris noted that he had learned the value of showing initiative. He said: “Being proactive is a great way to generate opportunities for yourself.” Meanwhile, Luke noted: “I learnt to take time to do the things that I enjoy.” He also commented that he had become more aware of where he wanted to live, noting: “I learned that you can make a home anywhere with any circumstances, but that for me, Adelaide is where I belong.” Georgia made the following comment: “I learnt that I can do anything. That the world is so big and so full of options, there are an endless number of people out there, of places, of jobs, of hobbies, so many different things to do or visit or experience.” Hannah said that she had learned the value of being more easy-going, although not unconditionally so. She added the following disclaimer: “Keep track of your teachers and assessments as they may forget about you or become slack.” Olivia noted that she had learned “what is important in my day to day life and this is now much more of a factor in my decisions of for example the type of city I want to be in.” She added that she had also learned the value of being brave and putting herself out there. Rhys answered that he had learned how much there is to know and how much he doesn’t know. He also commented that he had gained the following insight: “Wherever you go in the world you are likely to find some like-minded people.” Max said that the experience had reinforced his understanding that life has its up and downs. Charlotte mentioned that she had learned the value of being flexible and trying new things. Finally, Matilda noted that she had learned that it is important to take breaks every now and again, commenting that “my whole life I have always had academic and career aspirations and have worked hard striving towards these goals and my exchange taught me that it’s ok to take a break and have some side expeditions.”

Eight students listed an *improved sense of self-sufficiency* or something to this effect. For example, Rhys commented that he had learnt “that I can make it on my own in a foreign country.” The act of studying abroad brought with it a greater level of autonomy than most of the students involved in my study had experienced previously. This made the experience more challenging than it might otherwise have been, but it also provided what Bandura (1997) terms a mastery experience. Specifically, it provided an opportunity for these students to appreciate that they
could function more independently, both in an instrumental and emotional sense. This is a distinction made by Chickering and Reisser (1993) who contend that learning to function with relative self-sufficiency is an important developmental step, which requires the achievement of both instrumental and emotional independence. They describe instrumental independence as the ability to organise activities, solve problems and fulfil personal needs and desires unaided. By contrast, they describe emotional independence as “freedom from continual and pressing needs for reassurance, affection, or approval,” noting that this “begins with separation from parents and proceeds through reliance on peers, nonparental adults, and occupational or institutional reference groups”, culminating in a diminishing need for support (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 47).

Those who have the most to gain from spending a study period abroad in this sense are clearly those who have not lived away from the family home before, or at least not for an extended period of time and not in a similarly supportive environment. Four out of the eight students that listed this as one of the most important things that they had learned were in this category, including Eva who noted that she learned “to live independently and look after myself.” However, the other four students had lived away from home previously, illustrating that growth of this kind is not restricted to students for whom it is their first experience of not living under parental control (Brown, 2009b). For example, Rhys had moved away from his family home to attend university, but he had not lived overseas before, meaning the experience offered a new test of his ability to function independently.

*Improved resilience*, or what Laubscher (1994) terms tolerance for difficult or ambiguous situations was another common theme. Five students listed this or something similar as one of the most important things that they had learned from their experience. For example, Josh said that you learn “no matter how hard things are, you can find a way to deal with it.” Alicia commented that she had learned “how to live immersed in another culture, which while not entirely different to the Kiwi culture, was different enough to require some adaptations.” Eva similarly noted that she had learned how to get by living in an unfamiliar environment where she did not know anyone. Meanwhile, Charlotte said that spending a study period abroad had made her more adaptable and flexible. Here,
we see evidence for Kim’s (2001) stress-adaptation-growth model in its broadest sense: the resolution of internal stress over the course of the experience, led these students to develop increased confidence in their capacity to cope with future challenges. This is another example of study abroad serving as a mastery experience (Bandura, 1997). However, the opportunity to grow in this sense was not provided by the environmental challenges that are the focus of Kim’s (2001) work, or at least not for most and not in full. Rather, other challenges such as separation from family and friends had a far more important role to play. The implication is that while study abroad students will not necessarily be compelled to learn new cultural elements, this does not mean that their experience will be stress-free. Moreover, the resolution of stress can still act as a source of growth.

The answers of nine students fell exclusively into one or more of the three categories outlined above. There are two things that stand out in particular about this. The first is that a number of these outcomes are linked to challenges experienced abroad, such as becoming more independent or resilient. Sanford (1966, p. 44) argues that “people do not change unless they encounter a situation to which they cannot adapt with the use of devices already present. They have to innovate, to generate some new response to meet the new situation offered them.” This is the principle of challenge and response. Sanford (1966, p. 44) notes that “children develop in this way from infancy. The reason they develop so quickly is that they are constantly confronted with new situations.” However, he holds that “while children are challenged amply—perhaps too much—college students are often not challenged enough,” adding that “by and large, those who have no basic neurotic difficulties find quite comfortable ruts on our college campuses. They are usually upset for about two weeks after they arrive; then they settle in” (Sanford, 1966, p. 44). For this reason, Sanford (1966) argues that institutions should find ways to challenge their students. Study abroad provides one such way to do this. Yet it is also crucial to recognise that as “important as the challenge-response process is to positive development, it also carries a potential for trouble” (Sanford, 1966, p. 45). The previous chapter highlights this with regards to study abroad, demonstrating that it is important for institutions to be aware that spending a study period abroad can be difficult and to put measures in place that address this. Nonetheless, they should not seek to
eliminate all challenges. Even Eva reported growing from the challenges she experienced. She was one of five students to report developing increased confidence in their capacity to cope with future challenges of a similar kind. Sanford (1966, p. 45) argues that institutions should attempt to appraise their students’ ability to cope with the challenges they face and offer support when these become overwhelming, but “a college which tried to insulate its students from all stimuli which might threaten mental health would also be depriving them of many of the challenges which help them to develop.”¹⁸ He reasons that institutions “must take a calculated risk similar to that taken by a democracy, which offers all its citizens freedom even though this may result in mental ill health for some who are not prepared for such independence”, adding that “overconcern about mental health may lead us to mistake a temporary crisis to which a student is responding for a serious neurotic situation. We may treat as a neurosis what in fact is growing pains” (Sanford, 1966, pp. 45, 46). This is worth remembering when considering the analysis in the previous chapter, something that is taken into account in the model for academic intervention presented in the next chapter.

The second thing that stands out is a question about whether these outcomes should be part of the core mission of study abroad. My intention is not to demean what these students learned, but to question whether these outcomes on their own are enough to justify the practise of study abroad? This question is returned to at the end of this chapter, but next we look at the effect that the experience had in other ways, including discussing the insights that the students involved gained with regards to their host society and the impact that this had on their attitudes towards difference. However, first we look at three other areas of learning: subject-specific knowledge, host language proficiency and critical reflectiveness.

Subject-specific knowledge

Responding to the question about the most important things that they had learned, two students made special reference to subject-specific knowledge that they had acquired. Georgia said that she had learned about French and Italian

¹⁸ Sanford is referring to an institution’s students more generally, not study abroad students. However, this logic can also be applied to study abroad students.
law, while Andrew said that he had learned a different approach to design. It is notable that only two students listed subject-specific knowledge because the opportunity to take courses not available at home or to learn about a subject from a different perspective is an important part of the added value of study abroad. Nine Australian and New Zealand universities list the opportunity to take courses not available at home as a reason why students should spend a study period abroad on their study abroad webpages, or brochures available to download from these, while four cite the opportunity to learn about a subject from a different perspective. Moreover, the fact that students take courses while abroad is one of the only things that distinguishes study abroad from backpacking or other forms of tourism. There were other students who spoke fondly about at least some of their courses in their interview or elsewhere in the follow-up questionnaire and who clearly gained some kind of added value from these. For example, Olivia said that she “adored” her anthropology classes: “The material was so fascinating and I simply would not have tackled it, or certainly not in the same manner back home.” She explained that these classes involved three hours of discussion facilitated by the lecturers: “We all were from different parts of the world and had very different knowledge of the material we were discussing. My notebook is amongst some of my most valued possessions.” Nonetheless, it became apparent during the interview phase of my research that despite six students noting in the pre-departure questionnaire that academic reasons played a part in their decision to go on an exchange, what happened inside the classroom was very much of secondary importance to most of the students. This was summed up by Rebecca who did list academic reasons before going on the exchange: “I am doing nothing really academically I should say. So it’s certainly not an academic experience, but that’s what you want for six months exchange. You don’t want to be sitting reading books the whole time.” This is mainly an issue of motivation, but it can also partly be attributed to the situation whereby students generally only receive a pass or fail grade for the courses that they complete while abroad. This lessens the academic difficulties experienced, but it also disincentivises engagement. Does this indicate that institutions should consider moving away from the pass-fail system? My data suggests that this model is still preferable because there are added academic challenges that study abroad students face and some students may otherwise suffer academically or even be
put off participating in the first place. However, not all students liked this system. Josh wanted his grades to be recognised on his final transcript, commenting that “from my perspective it’s quite frustrating because… I’m a good student, I can pass quite well.” However, it is usually still possible for students to get a transcript from their host university that shows their exchange grades if they wish. Either way, this is certainly a subject that warrants further investigation and discussion.

**Language competence**

Twombly, Salisbury, Tumanut, and Klute (2012) note that “improving foreign language proficiency has long been a major goal of study abroad.” This is also an important motivation for spending a study period abroad. Seven students noted that a desire to improve their foreign language skills played a part in their decision to go on an exchange, while one other student said that the fact the language used at her destination is not English played a part in her decision to go there, indicating a desire to learn another language. In total, 17 of the students went to places where English is not the main language. Nonetheless, only three students listed improving their proficiency in a new language as one of the most important things that they learned from the experience, while one of these students noted during his interview that his proficiency had not improved as much as he would have liked due to the prevalence of people at his destination who spoke English. These three students all went to France. Georgia and Rhys were already proficient in or had some knowledge of the French language, while Lauren did not speak any French before her exchange. Georgia also spent a semester in Italy, a place where she did not have any prior knowledge of the language. She noted that she moved from having no knowledge of Italian to the point where she could function in the language at a reasonable level by the end.

That only three out of the 17 students who went to places where English is not the main language, listed improving their proficiency in a foreign language as one of the most important things they learned from the experience, does not mean that more did not improve their proficiency. Indeed, other students said in their interviews that their language skills were improving. Eva was one such student, noting: “It’s kind of weird. You kind of don’t feel like you’re improving and then suddenly you say something and realise that you wouldn’t have been able to say
that three weeks ago so you still feel lost but you’re improving and you don’t notice it.” Max was another, commenting that he had just written an essay in German that he could not have written before his exchange, while Alicia noted that her proficiency in French had improved, although like Rhys, she felt that it had not improved to the extent that she would have liked, because she was associating with lots of people that only spoke English. These three students were already proficient in the host language before their arrival. Other students who went to countries where they did not already speak the language also noted in their interviews that they had acquired some knowledge of the language, but only that they had picked up a few words, or something to this effect. For example, Olivia said that she had learned the word for peanut because she is allergic to peanuts, as well as words such as those for entrance, exit and out of order. Meanwhile, Charlotte made the following comment: “I can kind of read signs and I can read stuff in supermarkets, but Swedish is so ridiculously difficult that I just don’t really try in public, especially when everyone speaks as good English as I do.” Overall, the gains made by students in this category appeared to be minimal. It was easy enough for them to get by without speaking the host language due to the prevalence of people at their destination who spoke English. This is further evidence of Kim’s stress-adaptation-growth model not being applicable to the experiences of the students involved in my research. As Natalie noted, “it’s fine to get by without learning the language, which is kind of sad in a way; that I haven’t been pushed to learn more.” However, the experience of Georgia shows that students taking courses in the host language may be compelled to improve their proficiency in order to keep up with classes, as discussed in Chapter Five. This is not relevant to those students who do not already have some knowledge of the host language though as they are unlikely to take courses in it and beyond this, there is no real need for them to learn the host language. Thus, due to its perceived difficulty, the short duration of the stay and their limited contact with host nationals, these students do not go out of their way to learn it.

Critical reflectiveness

Spending a study period abroad also has the potential to challenge people to think critically about things within their own society, which can be a transformative experience (Dimen-Schein, 1977; Eriksen, 1995; Hannerz, 1992; Marcus &
Fischer, 1986, 1999; Mezirow, 1978, 1981, 1997; Nussbaum, 1997; Popper, 1996). Two students cited developing a deeper understanding of their own society as one of the most important things that they had learned from their experience abroad. However, the students were also asked directly if the experience had challenged them to think about anything back home that they had previously taken for granted or accepted without question, whether a law, norm, practice or any other aspect of the society they come from or way they live. Seventeen students answered in the affirmative in response to this question. Nevertheless, when asked to elaborate on this, nine described how in one way or another, it had made them appreciate more the society from which they came.

This was not the only response. Rhys who went to France made the following comment: “I observed the relatively strong level of engagement in politics and in the arts, and it forced me to wonder whether in Australia we place too much importance on sporting achievement, where that focus might be better placed elsewhere.” Meanwhile, Matilda noted that her time in the Netherlands had made her think about the standard of living in New Zealand: “In particular the standard of flatting, the fact that we allow people to live in cold, damp flats with no heating or double glazing for the same price as a warm, dry flat overseas.” She also said that it had made her question the public transport system in New Zealand, as well as the legalisation of marijuana and what she termed “the culture of racism.” Georgia commented that she had come to question business trading hours in New Zealand having lived in France where she observed that many businesses close for lunch and “supermarkets close at 1pm on Sundays, every Sunday.” Finally, Olivia who went to Denmark said that she had come to realise that urban planning priorities are “different and in the wrong place in New Zealand.” The experience was an enlightening one for these students; first-hand exposure to different ways of being had the effect of exposing previously overlooked weaknesses at home.

Nonetheless, that it had made them appreciate more the society that they came from was the dominant response. Kate noted that she came to appreciate how safe New Zealand is: “There are hardly any incidents of pick-pocketing back home but we have to be very cautious overseas.” Meanwhile, Natalie
commented: “I realised that we are pretty lucky to be living in a country such as Australia, where the economy is so good, so we are able to travel easily and freely.” It also made her appreciate the friendliness of checkout people in Australia. However, it did not have a critical effect as conceptualised here. When asked if there was anything she had learned from her host society, Natalie responded: “I might cook a few different things that I’ve learnt here but apart from that probably not.” Natalie was also one of several students who noted that she had come to better appreciate the facilities and support available at their home university. She commented: “I’m sure the university library system is confusing even for Polish students.” Luke was another one of these students. He stated: “In Italy there is little support, and few people who actually know enough to even help you.” These responses suggest that for a large proportion of the students, their experience abroad did not have a critical effect. Rather, it actually made them view their own society more positively. This is not a problem per se, except that many of these observations might not have survived deeper investigation, scrutiny and reflection. For example, are Polish checkout staff really less friendly than their Australian counterparts, or was this an issue of language? How friendly would Australian checkout staff appear to an international student who spoke no English? Do Polish exchange students find it easy to navigate Australian libraries? Moreover, what about the positive features that these students encountered? Were there none? It seems that an important learning opportunity is being lost and that there is a need to engage students in a deeper level of reflection with regards to their own society based on their experience abroad, although first it is necessary to foster within students a deeper understanding of their host society from which they can reflect. This chapter now discusses the insights that the students gained in this sense in more detail, guided by the idea of deep understanding and the notion of students developing “a more open-minded, less judgemental stance towards difference” (Martin & Griffiths, 2014).

**Deep understanding and relating to difference**

Seven students listed learning about other societies, cultures or certain aspects of them as one of the most important things that they had learned from the experience. However, four of these students did not mention their host society or culture specifically. For example, Molly noted: “I learned about the way different
cultures live.” Meanwhile, Kate commented: “I developed a deeper understanding of the history and culture of other countries and it made me more aware of the various issues facing these countries.” This does not mean that these students did not learn much about their host society. Rather, it suggests that by spending a study period abroad, there is the potential for students to not only learn about the society where they are based, but also to learn about other societies through supplementary travel and the friendships that they form as part of the experience, something that is discussed further later in this section. Nonetheless, the wider data collected as part of my research suggests that many students returned home from their exchange having acquired only a passing insight into their host society and not the deep understanding that is the focus of this analysis. My analysis found that the main barrier was a lack of meaningful contact with host nationals.

The students were asked directly if they had gained much of an insight in the follow-up questionnaire. Seventeen answered in the affirmative to this question, leaving four who thought that they did not gain much of an insight. However, another student subsequently qualified her answer with the disclaimer that she had only really learned “a little.” Natalie attributed this to her lack of contact with host nationals: “Because I lived in a student dorm on a floor with nearly all exchange students there was not much time spent interacting with Polish students.” She added: “I learned a bit about the Polish culture through the Polish language course that I undertook, and the thing that stood out the most was probably the religion that is present in the country - 99% are Catholic.” The other thing that stood out was that “students generally don’t have part-time jobs to help support them - they either need a scholarship or parents who can afford university. The notion of part-time work doesn't seem to be very big in Poland - poor economy?” Putting aside any questions over their veracity, these insights are most striking for their simplicity. Statistics or observations like these are a starting point; they invite further investigation. The question mark at the end of her second statement shows that Natalie had thought about the bigger picture, but her theory remained untested. How could we encourage students like Natalie to dig a little deeper and to gain more of an understanding of the complex reality?
This question is explored in the next chapter. Here, it is important to add that when asked to explain what they had learned, it was clear that the insights acquired by a number of the other students who answered in the affirmative to this question were also strikingly superficial or simplistic. For example, Luke made the following observation: “Italians my age have an incredibly backward mentality in terms of work. They don’t seem to respect working and studying at the same time. This is obviously unthinkable for me being the grandson of Italian migrants who did nothing but work hard.” Meanwhile, Olivia said: “Danes are a lovely bunch, but strange; in ways that I wouldn’t have anticipated. Speaking to people on public transport is considered most unusual and even rude behaviour.” These answers are striking because they both involve mass generalisations and display little understanding of the values, beliefs and circumstances that underpin the peculiarities cited, contrary to two of the central elements underpinning my idea of deep understanding. Moreover, these are associated with backwardness and strangeness respectively, hardly suggesting movement to “a more open-minded, non-judgemental stance towards difference” (Martin & Griffiths, 2014, p. 943). This is a common theme. Eva confided that she felt that she had actually regressed when asked during her interview if it was too early to gauge the effect of the experience in this sense, resorting to further generalisations about her host society in her response. She answered that “it’s not too early, but you might get an unpleasant answer. I think I’ve become less tolerant... particularly of the French... because I find them set in their ways and generally quite inconsiderate.”

These are just three example of students resorting to generalisations to describe the host population. Other instances were presented earlier in the thesis. For example, members of the host society were categorised by different students as cold, reserved, abrupt, standoffish, arrogant, disorganised, bureaucratic, inconsiderate and unhelpful. These are relatively harmless observations, but study abroad provides an opportunity to develop a level of understanding that transcends generalisations like these. It provides an opportunity to learn about rationales, internal differences and the inevitably complex reality, and in doing so, to develop an appreciation of the limits of generalisations more generally, which in turn affords a good foundation from which to teach the value of reserving
judgement, as mentioned in Chapter Two. However, this requires a level of inquiry, contact and reflection that my data shows does not occur automatically.

Two students did cite improved tolerance or something indicative of this as one of the most important things that they had learned. We see evidence of one of these students burgeoning tolerance in the following statement. Alicia noted in her interview: “I thought coming from New Zealand… France would be quite advanced organisation wise; it's fine but it's just different.” For example, she noted that she did not find out when her classes were scheduled to start until she was already at her destination, adding that “for the French people it's not weird at all that they don't know when they start.” Nonetheless, tolerance does not necessarily imply understanding, as De Nooy and Hanna (2003, p. 65) found in their study. They report observing “tolerance – resigned, bemused or indulgent – of the operation of French bureaucracy, but no comprehension of those operations as a system.” Comprehension requires engagement with the host society, but tolerance can exist despite meaningful engagement and actually often hides misunderstanding.

Four students also listed improved interpersonal skills, including three who mentioned things related to interacting with people from different cultures, but for two of these students, the lessons that they cited were mechanisms for surviving abroad. For example, Josh commented that he had learned the following lesson: “To sometimes keep opinions about countries to myself, in that even if the country is very much frustrating you at the time, people from that country don’t usually want to hear it.” This seems a startlingly obvious observation and does not in itself imply understanding, nor progress to an open-minded, non-judgemental stance.

There was one student who did cite open-mindedness as one of the most important things that she had learned from her exchange, while others referred to the importance of reserving judgement in their interview. Josh was one of these students, noting that when in another society “you need to be like, look shit is different, big deal! Why is it different? Why is it a problem for you? Because I think that it's a problem? Saying its worse is not productive.” He then went on to make the following observation: “Overall, it teaches you to judge information carefully, and that information can be from what you see around you, from what people tell
you, from what you understand, from what you read in a newspaper. I think it teaches you to be like this is what you’ve been told, how does it differ and why does it differ?” The other students to refer to the importance of reserving judgement in their interviews were Max, Molly and Lauren. Max noted: “If I go in and I’m exposed to another culture and actually living in that culture you discover all these little nuances that you wouldn’t have understood otherwise and that has the eternal benefit of how you relate to people, how you think about issues, and how you consider that I might not always actually be right.” Molly made the following comment: “I think I have come quite strongly over my experiences being overseas and by studying ethnocentrism to learn that different is not inferior.” Meanwhile, Lauren, who spent two semesters in Europe having already been on an earlier exchange, said specifically that she had become more open-minded, explaining: “Sometimes… if I look at something and think I don’t understand that… I think well, maybe they just see it a different way.” She then added that “I think maybe my exchanges have made me think like that; not to just immediately judge something and think that something’s wrong because I don’t understand it and maybe I should think for a while and examine it before I say that it is wrong.”

However, these statements were the exceptions. Moreover, Josh, Molly and Max spoke of this open-minded, non-judgemental attitude as something that they carried with them; it was part of their baggage (Green et al., 2014) or mobility capital (Murphy-Lejeune, 2002). Indeed, it is notable that these students had each lived abroad previously, while Molly was an anthropology major who was familiar with concepts like ethnocentrism prior to her exchange. Josh and Max also had a solid theoretical grounding, which they had acquired by working in the study abroad industry. At home, Josh worked running training sessions for students from New Zealand going overseas and international students coming to New Zealand, while Max worked with high school exchange students. Despite this, there was still clearly room for further growth. Josh in particular displayed a level of self-confidence that was contradicted by a number of the statements that he made. For example, his comments about the importance of reserving judgement were immediately preceded by the following comment in response to a question as to whether not speaking the language and not making many friends with host nationals had made it hard to get much of an insight into Polish society: “I mean
you see the way people act on a regular basis, you see the way that the university is so disorganised with everything, and you can kind of assume things about the culture, I think in general it's not hard to judge based on people.” Despite claims to the contrary, Josh was as quick to judge his host society and as prone to using generalisations to describe them as any other student involved in this research.

Contact with locals

The main problem cited by each of the five students who said that they had not gained much of an insight while abroad was a lack of meaningful contact with the host population. For example, Matilda noted: “My experience was largely flavoured by my international student status. I lived in an international student house, made international student friends, went on international student excursions and drunk in international student bars.” This was the case for more than just these five students. The students involved were all asked in the follow-up questionnaire if they had much interaction with local people as part of their experience; only five students answered in the negative to this question. However, an additional three students added the proviso that they did not have much meaningful contact, or something to this effect. Natalie was one of these students, commenting that while she did make some local friends through one of her classes, these friendships did not extend beyond the classroom. They were what one international student involved in another study dubbed “hi-bye friends” (Sovic, 2009, p. 758). There were also an additional five students who noted in their interview that they had not had much to do with host nationals. This means that 13 out of the 21 students involved answered in the follow-up questionnaire that they had not had much interaction with local people as part of the experience, or they commented elsewhere that they had not had much meaningful contact.

This finding is supported in the study abroad literature. Research suggests that international students often find themselves confined in some kind of international student bubble (Brown, 2009a; Dall'Alba & Sidhu, 2013; Daly, 2007; Forsey et al., 2012; Green, 2013; Ogden, 2007; Otten, 2003; Sovic, 2009). Daly (2007) noted that half of the students interviewed as part of her research indicated that they socialised only with other exchange students. Dall'Alba and Sidhu (2013) wrote that just under half (46%) of the students involved in their study mainly
interacted socially with other international students, while Green (2013) commented that most of the students involved in her study forged friendships mostly with other international students and did not have meaningful contact with host nationals. This is significant because contact with host nationals is an important component of my conception of deep understanding. As anthropologists tell us, if we are to have any hope of really understanding an alien society, it is necessary to not only go there, but to establish close contact with the people who inhabit that society.

Many of the students involved in my research noted that it was difficult simply to meet host nationals, specifically because of their living situation or the composition of their classes. Indeed, a number of the students stayed in student residences, but as mentioned in the previous chapter, many of these were international student-only residences, or they were residences in which international students were segregated from locals. Moreover, most or all of the courses that many took comprised only or primarily other international students. This was a factor in the decisions of many students who didn’t go to English speaking countries. They wanted to go somewhere linguistically different and culturally distant, but they needed to be able to study in English. This is made possible by the proliferation of English language programmes in non-English speaking countries in recent times, but the downside is that these programme inadvertently separate international students from their local peers. Nonetheless, they also open up greater opportunities in terms of possible destinations. Moreover, it can be difficult to meet host nationals even when one speaks the host language and takes classes with local students. For example, Georgia made the following observation: “The classes were big, people already knew each other, and there was little time to talk during the classes.” The challenge is to encourage engagement with local populations regardless of the medium of instruction, acknowledging that there will be fewer obvious opportunities for those undertaking an English-language programme in a non-English speaking country.

Other students commented that they did meet locals, but that they didn’t make many close local friends. Natalie was one of these students, as mentioned above. However, she was not the only one. For example, Matilda noted: “Even though I
studied in classes with Dutch students, I had only a handful of Dutch friends and I didn't get a great insight into their lives." Some students blamed their inability to establish meaningful contact on the attitude of locals. For example, Eva felt that most of the French people that she came into contact with were standoffish. This is a common complaint of international students (Brown, 2009a; Green, 2013; Sovic, 2009). Indeed, "the image of an alienating and indifferent host" is a recurring theme across a number of separate studies (Brown, 2009a, p. 444). However, there were also students who looked at this situation more philosophically. For example, Josh noted: "I get this because it's the same thing that New Zealand students do, you're only here for six months, why would I try to talk to you and make the effort?" He added that "it's up to exchange students to make more effort and how much effort you make is up to you." Georgia made a similar point: "It sounds mean, but everyone there was doing fine before you arrived. They have friends and hobbies and a place to stay; they don't need to be social like you do. Make an effort and you will make friends." Josh and Georgia both stress that forming friendships with host nationals typically takes effort and time; they will materialise neither automatically or easily.

It is also apparent that language was an added barrier for those students who had limited or no knowledge of the host language prior to their arrival. For example, Molly said: "I mean most people probably speak enough English to talk to me but if they're hanging out with their friends, they're not all going to switch to English so I can hang out with them." Josh made a similar observation. He commented that "if people speak really good English you could be friends with them, but some of their friends might not speak English and when you go out to do things they can't understand you, so it's kind of like you cause a problem." The prevalence of English language speakers at their destinations allowed these students and others like them to function effectively in their new environments, even though they did not speak the host language, but this did cause problems when it came to forming relationships with host nationals. This does not mean that students should be advised against going to places where they do not speak the host language. It is still possible for students in this situation to acquire valuable insights through contact with host nationals, but this requires motivation
and intent, something that my model for intervention presented in the next chapter addresses.

Most of the students involved in my research also travelled extensively during their time abroad, both within their host country and beyond its borders. The opportunity to travel was cited as playing a part in the decisions of five students either to go abroad in the first place or to go to their chosen destination. Moreover, it was mentioned earlier in this chapter that travel was cited by 14 students as the most enjoyable aspect, or at least one of the most enjoyable aspects of their experience. This can be explained by what Jacobsen (1996, p. 41) describes as “the ephemeral tourist sensation of place.” He notes that “the charm of novelty and the great joy of the first encounter with a place one has looked forward to seeing or is amazed to «discover»… could to a certain extent be compared to «love at first sight»” (Jacobsen, 1996, p. 41). The problem is that “brief encounters do not have the depth requisite to procuring a proper sense of place” (Jacobsen, 1996, p. 40). Meanwhile, the travel that the students undertook meant that they spent a lot of their spare time away from their host destination where they did have the opportunity to gain a better sense of place. One of the students who said that she had not gained much of an insight into her host society mentioned this specifically, blaming her failure to establish close contact with locals on the amount of time she spent travelling. Lauren may have been the only student to mention this directly, but it was clearly another major barrier in terms of forming relationships with host nationals and the idea of deep understanding. My intention is not to criticise these students for travelling widely while abroad or to advise against this. They understandably want to make the most of their time in another part of the world and to visit as many places as possible. However, this shows the value of academic intervention in the study abroad process so to maximise what students get from the time they do spend at their host destination.

Another kind of contact

Despite many of the students not having much meaningful contact with local people as part of their experience, most did form close friendships and spend a lot of time with people from other countries. This in itself provides an opportunity for students to learn something about societies other than their own. Indeed, the
students were asked if they had gained much of an insight into other foreign societies; nineteen students answered in the affirmative to this question and 15 of these students said that it was necessary or at least helpful to have been in another country to get this insight. However, it was clear from their answers when asked to elaborate that these 15 students considered it helpful, but not necessary.

One student (Molly) noted that she could have surrounded herself with international students at home and learned about the places they came from, but that it was easier overseas. Other students made similar comments. Some of these students noted that their living situations on exchange put them in direct contact with more international students than they would have the chance to meet at home. Chris was one of these students. He commented that there were 2000 students living in his residence, most of whom were exchange students from all around the world. Meanwhile, others commented that at home they wouldn’t have taken the time to make friends with international students. For example, Natalie noted: “In a country other than my own I was forced to make friends with people from different cultures. Here in Australia I have the safety net of Australians and existing friends that don't push me out of my comfort zone to make new friends.”

Green (2013) similarly found that despite many of the students involved in her study struggling to form friendship with locals, most formed friendships with other international students. She notes that these friendships proved to be transformative, concluding that “this finding calls into question the strong focus on promoting host-national friendships in the current research” (Green, 2013, p. 222). It certainly seems that this is one often overlooked advantage of spending a study period abroad. Nonetheless, it is important to recognise that contact in itself does not automatically lead to understanding or intellectual movement. Moreover, just because students seem to form friendships with students from other countries, this does not mean that we should not encourage host national friendships, or more meaningful contact with host nationals. Indeed, there are limits to what we can learn about another society from afar, even if we are being taught by people from that society. The picture that is painted will inevitably be partial and may even be quite misleading; there is the potential to develop a more comprehensive understanding by spending time in a place. This is not to say that
friendships with other international students are not rewarding or beneficial; they clearly can be, but this does not lessen the importance of contact with residents.

**Summary**

The findings presented above suggest that spending a study period abroad is likely to be transformative in some way, even if this simply means becoming more self-sufficient. For this reason, it seemingly supports the argument that there is no such thing as a bad study abroad experience (Engle, 2013). However, four out of the eight students who listed an improved sense of self-sufficiency had never really lived away from the family home before and it is highly questionable as to whether these students even needed to go abroad for this growth to occur. It seems that simply moving out of the family home would have had the same effect, without the need to go to another country. Some of these students thought differently. James noted that it was essential he was in another country: “I was in a completely different culture on the other side of the world. I no longer had my family and friends around me and I was forced to become completely independent.” Eva was of a similar opinion. She felt that even moving to a different city in the same country might not have had the same effect, especially for someone from a country as small as New Zealand: “Anywhere I went in New Zealand there would still be people I knew and friends of friends.” These are valid points and it is possible that being in another country is advantageous in this sense, providing an opportunity for accelerated growth. Nonetheless, despite improved self-sufficiency featuring prominently amongst the benefits propagated by home institutions in material designed to sell the experience to prospective participants, it is important to ask whether this is the reason that study abroad exists? The same goes for improved resilience and the miscellaneous life lessons cited by the students involved in my research. These outcomes alone seem insufficient to justify the significant resources required to maintain the phenomenon of study abroad. Yet, the answers of almost half of the students involved in my research fell exclusively into one or more of these three categories.

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19 Ten Australian and New Zealand universities list this as a reason why students should spend a study period abroad on their outbound study abroad webpages or brochures available to download from these. As mentioned in Chapter Four, this data derives from only 32 universities as some institutions did not include this information on their webpages.
This does not mean that students did not experience growth in other ways, but the benefits associated with study abroad clearly cannot be expected to accrue automatically. More specifically, my analysis revealed that students will not inevitably acquire a deep understanding of their host society as conceptualised here. The idea of deep understanding provides a yardstick against which to examine student learning in this sense and the data collected shows how many students fell short of this ideal. They regularly described their host societies and various observed practises or peculiarities in terms of sweeping generalisations and stereotypes, as well as displaying little understanding of the values, beliefs and circumstances underpinning these practises or peculiarities. My analysis also suggests that studying abroad does not guarantee growth towards “a more open-minded, non-judgemental stance towards difference” (Martin & Griffiths, 2014, p. 943) and that the experience will not always have a critical effect, two further analytic interests. The implication is not that institutions and governments should walk away from study abroad. Rather, my research corroborates the growing body of literature that argues for the importance of academic intervention in the study abroad process (Engle, 2013; Lutterman-Aguilar & Gingerich, 2002; Vande Berg et al., 2009; Vande Berg & Paige, 2012). Alongside the fact that students take classes at their destination, this is the key feature that differentiates study abroad from backpacking or other forms of tourism; the opportunity to scaffold the experience. The next chapter discusses the various pedagogical implications of my study further and presents a model for academic intervention drawing on these findings.
CHAPTER EIGHT
A MODEL FOR ACADEMIC INTERVENTION

This chapter presents a model for academic intervention designed drawing on insights revealed by my analysis and relevant education research, especially the idea of constructive alignment. It begins by summarising the idea of constructive alignment and its relevance to study abroad in light of the findings presented in this thesis. It then presents the model for academic intervention developed as a result of my analysis, before concluding by considering three possible criticisms or questions arising from the discussion contained in this chapter: Is Europe too similar to Australia and New Zealand as a study abroad destination to facilitate the type of learning that is the focus of this study? Do students need to go abroad to learn in this way? And, do they want to engage with difference while abroad?

Constructive alignment and study abroad

Education research tells us that what students learn from a course is the result of what they do in that course (Biggs, 1999). The same logic applies to study abroad. What students learn abroad is the result of what they do abroad and this varies depending on the student, just as it varies in the classroom. Biggs (1999, p. 57) uses the example of a student called Susan attending a lecture to demonstrate this: “She comes to the lecture with relevant background knowledge and a question she wants answered,” while “in the lecture, she finds an answer to that question; it forms the keystone for a particular arch of knowledge she is constructing. She reflects on the personal significance of what she is learning.” Biggs (1999) argues that students like Susan basically teach themselves. However, for every Susan, there is a Robert. Biggs (1999, pp. 57-58) describes Robert as a student that is at university “not out of a driving curiosity about a particular subject, or a burning ambition to excel in a particular profession, but to obtain a qualification for a job.” He notes that “Robert hears the lecturer say the
same words as Susan heard, but he doesn't see a keystone, just another brick to be recorded in his lecture notes,” adding “he believes that if he can record enough of these bricks, and can remember them on cue, he'll keep out of trouble come exam time” (Biggs, 1999, p. 58). The point of this example is not that Robert is a bad student. Rather, he is simply not responding to a particular learning activity. Biggs (1999) argues that the challenge is to select activities that help Robert learn more in the manner of Susan. He reasons that problem-based activities would be more appropriate, because they would require Robert “to question, to speculate, to generate solutions, to use the higher order cognitive activities that Susan uses spontaneously” (Biggs, 1999, p. 58). The implication for study abroad is that it is important to engage students in activities that are most likely to result in them achieving the desired outcomes, because left alone this will not occur inevitably.

To illustrate this, let’s consider the experiences of two students involved in my study who early on in their exchange go to get supplies from the supermarket on a Sunday afternoon, only to discover that it is closed. Georgia and Josh both walk away frustrated; this seems incredibly backward to them. Nonetheless, they take note of it and subsequently adjust their behaviour accordingly. However, Georgia wants to know more. She talks to her friends about this. They are mostly fellow international students, but she finds it useful to discuss what things are like in their country, “or just discussing the differences we were both noticing in the host country.” She also does some research online and discovers an article which argues that New Zealanders are losing their weekends. This research prompts a change of viewpoint. This and the related practise of businesses closing over lunch “went from seeming strange and being an inconvenience, to being something I liked and respected about French culture.” On the other hand, Josh does not think about this practise further, except to bemoan what a hassle it is. His opinion does not change. Rather, this makes him appreciate more the New Zealand way. It also becomes an anecdote of the differences that one must adjust to when living abroad. He looks back on it as a challenge that he had to overcome, helping him to become more resilient. To paraphrase Martin and Griffiths (2014), we see transformation of self, but not transformation of self in relation to other.
There is much more to this issue. France has since loosened its Sunday trading laws with a major argument for doing so an economic one; it was to a large degree a job-generating measure. However, this move was met with deep opposition from various sections of French society, including small, family businesses who feared that they would no longer be able to compete with large corporations. Georgia would clearly have benefitted from talking to more host nationals about this subject. This would have allowed her to learn more about what Abu-Lughod (1991, p. 153) terms the “contradictions, conflicts of interest, and doubts and arguments, not to mention changing motivations and circumstances.” Still, she examined, questioned and reflected in a way that Josh did not, illustrating the divergent results that can arise when students are left to their own devices, as well as the importance of academic intervention that engages all students in activities linked to the desired outcomes. To achieve optimum results, this would ideally be done as part of a credit-bearing course so to incentivise student engagement because they will want to do well in the course, or at least to pass.

This course could be offered by either host institutions or sending institutions, although it seems most appropriate for sending institutions to take the initiative in this respect, thus ensuring that all of their outbound study abroad students can reap the benefits. After all, it would be almost impossible to ensure that all of an institution’s exchange partners offer appropriate intervention. Moreover, sending institutions are in the best position to offer a curriculum that begins before students leave and continues once they return home, especially with the technology of today making it easy to stay in touch while students are overseas. This is important because research suggests that programmes that span the three stages of the study abroad cycle are most effective (Vande Berg & Paige, 2012).

For such a course to work though, it is crucial that appropriate assessment tasks are also selected because as Boud, Cohen, and Sampson (1999, p. 413) state, “assessment is the single most powerful influence on learning in formal courses and, if not designed well, can easily undermine the positive features of an important strategy in the repertoire of teaching and learning approaches.” It is the single most important influence precisely because students want to get high
grades, or at least to pass the courses that they enrol in. Therefore, as Ramsden (1992, p. 187) notes: “From our students' point of view, the assessment always defines the actual curriculum.” Biggs (2003, p. 140) makes a similar point: “Students learn what they think they will be tested on. This is backwash, when the assessment determines what and how students learn more than the curriculum does.” However, this need not be a problem, as Biggs (2003, p. 210) argues: “You can't beat backwash, so join it. Students will always second-guess the assessment task and then learn what they think will meet those requirements. But if those assessment requirements mirror the curriculum, there is no problem.”

Constructive alignment is the idea formulated by Biggs (1999, 2003) that, because what students learn from a course is the result of what they do in that course, a teacher’s main task is to decide what he or she wants his or her students to learn and then to get them “to engage in learning activities that are likely to result in their achieving those outcomes” (Biggs, 1999, p. 63). It follows that the first step when designing a course is to decide on the desired learning outcomes. The next step is to choose learning activities and assessment tasks that are likely to result in students achieving those outcomes. There are parallels here with Bloom’s (1956) Taxonomy of Educational Objectives, later revised as A Taxonomy for Teaching, Learning and Assessing (L. W. Anderson & Bloom, 2001), which similarly emphasises the importance of aligning learning objectives, types of teaching activities and assessment that reflect different levels of learning and understanding. This chapter now outlines the model for academic intervention developed from my analysis, focussing on the three elements central to the idea of constructive alignment, namely learning outcomes, learning activities and assessment tasks. This model is a starting point, which complements and adds to the work of others, especially the important work of Gothard, Downey, and Gray (2012a), since extended by two follow-up projects (Gray et al., 2016; Green, Gallagher, Gothard, & Andrews, n.d.). The model presented here constitutes a set of principles and ideas informed by the findings of my research, but it should not be considered final or complete. Curriculum development done well is an iterative process, therefore the next step is to test and refine it through criticism and further (action) research. It is also important to acknowledge that “the ways in which different groups and individuals interpret
and respond to the contradictions of global mobilities are locally specific. Thus, totalizing universal educational solutions to this challenge are neither desirable nor possible" (Rizvi & Beech, 2017, p. 126). As Rizvi and Beech (2017, p. 126) contend, the most optimistic scenario that “we might aspire to is a series of context-specific and particular pedagogic practices.”

Figure 3 – Bigg’s Model of Constructive Alignment

![Bigg's Model of Constructive Alignment](source)

Outlining the model

**Learning outcomes**

Deciding on the desired learning outcomes is an important first step when designing a course, as Biggs (1999, p. 64) notes: “The curriculum objectives are at the centre. Decisions as to how they are to be taught, and how they may be assessed, follow.” Toohey (1999) makes a similar point: “Useful learning objectives assist course designers in deciding what needs to be learned and assessed.” Deciding on the desired learning outcomes for a course may seem like an easy task, simply requiring us to think about what we want our students to learn, or in other words what we want them to take away from the course. For example: we may want them to improve their understanding of a particular concept. However, the challenge is to not settle for such a generic learning objective; but instead, to think about what we actually mean when we use a term such as understanding. As Biggs (1999, p. 66) notes: “While most teachers would agree they teach for understanding, that word has many values… In making our
Objectives clear it is essential that we unpack and make explicit the meanings we want our students to address… The initial task in teaching any unit is therefore to clarify the kind of understanding that is wanted.” Consequently, the idea of constructive alignment holds that learning outcomes should be built around verbs that describe the level of understanding that it is expected students will achieve, such as describe, explain, compare, relate, apply, reflect, generate and theorise.

Biggs and Tang (2007) distinguish between two main categories of understanding: declarative and functioning knowledge. The former involves knowing about things, such as “knowing what Freud said, knowing what the terms of an equation refer to, knowing what kinds of cloud formation can be distinguished, knowing what were the important events in Shakespeare’s life” (Biggs & Tang, 2007, p. 72). On the other hand, the latter level of understanding is linked to how students act. Biggs and Tang (2007, p. 72) note that “this knowledge is within the experience of the learner, who can now put declarative knowledge to work by solving problems, designing buildings, planning teaching or performing surgery.” This is what they term “performances of understanding,” adding that this requires a solid foundation of declarative knowledge (Biggs & Tang, 2007, p. 74). However, “unfortunately, often it is only the foundation declarative knowledge that is taught, leaving it to the students when they graduate to put it to work” (Biggs & Tang, 2007, p. 72). This is something to consider when deciding on learning outcomes and the verbs that underpin them.

The intended learning outcomes at the centre of my model are the following.

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

1. Explain and discuss relevant concepts and theories;
2. Examine cultural differences using ethnographic research principles;
3. Reflect on encounters with cultural differences using relevant concepts;
4. Examine their own society based on engagement with cultural differences.
Learning activities

Stage one

The model presented here is intended to span the three stages of the study abroad process: pre-departure, in-country and return. The first stage comprises a series of activities, focussing especially on the first learning outcome, which holds that by the end of the course students will be able to explain and discuss relevant concepts and theories. This outcome refers to declarative knowledge, while the other three refer to functioning knowledge. It is important to introduce students to appropriate concepts before they leave. Indeed, this is a key theme in current study abroad literature. As Engle (2013, p. 5) argues, intervention should be geared towards facilitating engaged interaction with the host society and its people, but it is also necessary to provide them “with the vocabulary and concepts to make sense of what they encounter, thanks to that engagement.”

The pre-departure component of a study abroad programme is often very procedural or it may be specific to a particular location, introducing students to certain aspects of their destination in an attempt to reduce problems caused by unfamiliarity. However, research suggests that this is not an effective way to enable intercultural learning. As Ward et al. (2001, p. 257) point out, “the facts are often too general to have any clear, specific application in particular circumstances,” while they also “tend to emphasise the exotic, such as what to do in a Buddhist temple, but ignore mundane but more commonly occurring events, such as how to hail a taxi.” Moreover, “such programmes give the false impression that a culture can be learned in a few easy lessons, whereas all that they mostly convey is a superficial, incoherent and often misleading picture… and even if the facts are retained (itself a doubtful proposition), they do not necessarily lead to action, or to the correct action.” Introducing key concepts that subsequently guide student inquiry and reflection offers far more potential. There are still limitations to pre-departure education of this kind. As Vande Berg and Paige (2012, p. 54) note, “many students simply lack sufficient experience with diversity to make sense of these concepts until they are actually in-country.” One student in my study (Josh) even went so far as to label all pre-departure programmes a waste of time, arguing that in his experience much of what people are taught in these programmes will not stick. However, there is a need to start
somewhere. Students may not fully grasp these concepts before they leave, but subsequent in-country activities will “bring them to light” (Vande Berg & Paige, 2012, p. 54). Much also depends on the methods that are employed. As Ward et al. (2001) contend, to be effective, pre-departure education should involve more than the standard lectures, panel discussions and question and answer sessions.

The problem with these activities in a situation like this where students are expected to be able to explain and discuss certain concepts and theories is that students do not necessarily get the opportunity to actually explain and discuss the concepts in question. Instead, the focus is on “receiving the content, listening, taking notes, perhaps asking a question” (Biggs & Tang, 2007, p. 106). Subsequently, “there’s a distinct lack of alignment between the ILO [intended learning outcome] and the students' learning-related activities” (Biggs & Tang, 2007, p. 106). Lectures still have a role to play in the model presented here as a way to introduce students to the central concepts, especially recent research and debates. However, as Gibbs (2013, para. 13) notes, “not all ‘lectures’ involve 50 minutes of uninterrupted presentation.” For example, “lectures can also be used to brief and debrief active learning that takes place out of class, rather than assuming that such study will happen automatically as the consequence of the presentations” (Gibbs, 2013, para. 14). This is exactly the function that lectures serve in the pre-departure component of this course; students will be briefed on various concepts and theories in a lecture setting, after which they will be required to produce a summary of each based on their own research, including key debates. They will then be split up into groups at the next class to discuss their understanding of each, before reporting back to the wider group, highlighting any areas of disagreement within the group. They will then produce updated summaries, an activity that will be repeated at the end of the course, based on further online discussion with the teacher and incorporating reflections from their experience. The completion of these summaries will also form part of the assessment for the course, ensuring that there is full curriculum alignment in terms of this outcome. One other possibility is to also ask students to practice exploring their immediate cultural context at home, using this as an opportunity to apply, analyse and evaluate relevant concepts before they leave, although
current university practice suggests that this might be asking too much of students in the busy lead-up to their departure.

The pre-departure phase will also be used to get students to think critically about their motivations and the promises associated with studying abroad. These provide important topics of reflection linked to the learning outcomes and provide a valuable opportunity to begin the learning process. For example, institutions frequently promote study abroad as an opportunity to experience or learn about another culture and this is also a common motivation for studying abroad, but what are the implications associated with the term culture and what is the difference between seeing or experiencing cultural differences and comprehending these? These are just some of the questions that students can be asked to think about.

Before moving on to discuss the activities that students will undertake during the in-country phase of the course, the relevant concepts and theories that students should be able to explain and discuss upon its completion are outlined here. These are divided into six clusters: the stress-adaptation-growth model and happiness gaps; generalisations, culture and stereotypes; ethnocentrism and cultural relativism; critical reflectiveness; intercultural competence; and cosmopolitanism. Each is considered important in light of the findings of my study, either because they will help students to navigate the experience, they will guide their engagement with the host society, or they will allow them to make sense of the experience in terms of lessons that they can take with them as they move forward.

The stress-adaptation-growth model and happiness gaps

These concepts are considered important in terms of helping students navigate the study abroad experience and the pitfalls associated with this. My data indicated that the stress-adaptation-growth model is not applicable to the study abroad context in terms of explaining how students learn abroad because even those students involved in my research who experienced significant difficulties due to unfamiliarity were not compelled to learn in the way anticipated. Nonetheless, it is still a relevant concept because it provides a framework for
negotiating difficulties caused by perceived differences encountered abroad. The resulting stress may not compel cultural learning, but this does not lessen the value of doing so as a strategy for dealing with any such difficulties that arise, nor the opportunity for personal development this presents. This is especially important because my analysis revealed various examples of students resorting to generalisations and stereotypes to make sense of difficulties they experienced.

Meanwhile, the concept of happiness gaps posited by Ahmed (2010b) provides a valuable way of understanding why students may resort to generalisations and stereotypes to make sense of difficulties experienced abroad. It stresses the potential for unhappiness even in spaces like study abroad where happiness is expected, as well as the possibility of living with this constructively. It provides a useful concept for reflecting on the motivations and promises associated with study abroad, especially the expectations that underpin these. It emphasises the importance of developing realistic expectations because unrealistic expectations can lead to disappointment if the experience does not live up to them, disappointment that may be projected on to the host population and encumber cultural understanding.

**Generalisations, culture and stereotypes**

These concepts are deemed necessary in terms of guiding student engagement with their host society, which is the main aim of the second stage of this model. It is important for students to think about the habit of generalising from observations or conversations with specific people in the study abroad context because while this can serve a purpose, it can also lead to the development of a simplistic image of the host population whereby internal differences are minimised or even completely absent (Abu-Lughod, 1991). It is also useful to get them to think about the concept of culture and the rich debates that exist with regards to its use because study abroad is often presented and imagined as an opportunity to explore another culture, but this term can imply homogeneity and boundedness within a group, even if this is not the intention of its use. Moreover, as Breidenbach and Nyíri (2009, p. 24) note, while “in some situations cultural claims do have explanatory power and must be taken into account; in others, however, they mislead.” Indeed, “in a world where ‘culture matters,’ decision
makers, from public hospitals to antiterrorism operations, must be knowledgeable about and sensitive to cultural differences; but rather than an atlas of folk customs, they need tools to critically evaluate the claims they encounter” and make (Breidenbach & Nyiri, 2009, p. 24). On this note, stereotypes are another important topic because while it is commonly posited that contact with other groups can function to counteract persistent stereotypes (Allport, 1954), my research and previous studies suggest that this is not necessarily the case and it can even reinforce these (Beaven, 2012; De Nooy & Hanna, 2003). My analysis highlighted numerous examples of students resorting to stereotypes and mass generalisations to describe their host society.

**Ethnocentrism and cultural relativism**

These concepts are similarly included to guide engagement, but students will also be encouraged to reflect on them in terms of lessons that they can take with them beyond their exchange. Ethnocentrism is "the point of view that one's own way of life is to be preferred to all others" (Herskovits, 1966, p. 68). This is not a problem in itself. Indeed, Herskovits (1966, p. 68) comments that it characterizes the way most individuals feel "about their own culture, whether they verbalize it or not." This is a phenomenon that Herodotus (2003, p. 187) recognised more than 2500 years ago when he noted: "If anyone, no matter who, were given the opportunity of choosing from amongst all the nations in the world the set of beliefs which he thought best, he would inevitably—after careful considerations of their relative merits—choose that of his own country." However, ethnocentrism can be problematic when one’s own group becomes “the center of everything, and all others are scaled and rated with reference to it” (Sumner, 1906, p. 13). As such, it is necessary to include this concept and the related one of cultural relativism.

Cultural relativism is a controversial concept, but it is a useful one for students to reflect on while abroad with a view to evaluating the way that they relate to difference and developing their own personal orientation in this sense because it accounts for ethnocentrism. As Marcus and Fischer (1999, p. 32) note “relativism has all too often been portrayed as a doctrine rather than a method and reflection on the process of interpretation itself. This has made it especially vulnerable to critics who charge that relativism asserts the equal validity of all value systems,
thus making moral judgements impossible." However, as Herskovits (1973, p. 94) argues, cultural relativism “does not imply unilateral tolerance of ideas other than one’s own.” Rather, it is a principle of inquiry based on an awareness that judgments are based on experience, and experience is interpreted by each individual in terms of his own enculturation (Herskovits, 1973, p. 15). Therefore, it follows that “cross-cultural understanding, like social understanding, is but an approximation, variably achieved through dialogue, that is, a mutual correction of understanding by each party in conversation to a level of agreement adequate for any particular interaction” (Marcus & Fischer, 1999, p. 29). This requires the kind of open-minded, non-judgemental attitude towards difference that has been referred to frequently in these pages. It is about getting people to investigate their initial interpretations, such as the view that it is backward for supermarkets to close on Sundays. The idea of cultural relativism is distinct from the idea of moral relativism. It does not hold that we should never judge the habits or products of another society. Rather, it tells us that while there is clearly much that we should not tolerate, we should always attempt to understand things first before judging them (Gothard et al., 2012b). As Rosaldo (2015, para. 23) notes, “to understand is not to forgive. Just because you come to terms with how something works in another culture doesn't mean you have to agree with it; it means you have to engage it.” Nonetheless, by doing so, one may just come to question his or her initial views. Indeed, Rosaldo (2015) argues that this possibility makes engagement especially important. He reasons that “I want to be challenged by what other people are doing, saying, thinking—by their ethical systems” (Rosaldo, 2015, para. 24).

Critical reflectiveness

This concept will guide student reflection in stage three of this course with a view to maximise what students learn from their experience. The idea of being challenged by cultural differences is central to the idea of critical reflectiveness, which is used here to describe the intellectual habit of examining one’s own society through engagement with other ways of life. This is what Marcus and Fischer (1999, p. 1) consider one of the main promises of anthropology: “In using portraits of other cultural patterns to reflect self-critically on our own ways,
anthropology disrupts common sense and makes us re-examine our taken-for-granted assumptions.” This is an important benefit of engaging with cultural differences and studying abroad provides the opportunity to cultivate this habit, but as my analysis revealed, this cannot be expected to happen automatically.

**Intercultural Competence**

Intercultural competence is the learning outcome perhaps most commonly associated with study abroad, although Deardorff (2004) notes that the term is frequently used by educational institutions without being given any further meaning, a trend that prompted her to undertake a project aimed at developing a clearer definition. She did this drawing on the thoughts of a group of United States institutional administrators and an international group of intercultural relations scholars. The administrators completed a survey, while data was collected from the intercultural scholars using the Delphi technique, something Deardorff (2006, pp. 243-244) describes as “a process for structuring anonymous communication within a larger group of individuals in an effort to achieve consensus among group members.” She concluded that intercultural competence is “behaving and communicating appropriately and effectively in intercultural situations” (Deardorff, 2006, p. 255). The Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS), subsequently revised as the Intercultural Development Continuum (IDC), conceptualises this as possessing a sensitivity towards cultural differences and a willingness to modify one’s behaviour accordingly (Hammer, 2012, 2015). This outcome was not the focus of my study, but it is important in the increasingly interconnected world within which we live. This includes being aware that social groups are not homogenous entities and as such, that it is important to be open to a range of possibilities and flexible enough to adjust one’s behaviour in various, often unforeseen directions. This is an attitude that is easily and often overlooked in descriptions of what constitutes intercultural competence, but it is an important aspect for students to reflect on. Study abroad provides an opportunity to cultivate intercultural competence, but as with other outcomes this is not inevitable (Medina-Lopez-Portillo, 2004; Vande Berg et al., 2009; Williams, 2005). My model requires students to engage with members of their host society while abroad in an attempt to better understand it. Understanding the concept of
intercultural competence will help them do this effectively, as well as helping them to reflect on the experience in terms of life lessons that they can acquire from it.

**Cosmopolitanism**

Requiring students to engage with the concept of intercultural competence provides a valuable opportunity to get them to also consider the following question, “intercultural competence towards what end?” (Gordon, 2014, p. 62). As Gordon (2014, p. 62) notes, the interculturally competent person “is not necessarily a moral person.” Indeed, he points out that the knowledge, skills and attitudes associated with intercultural competence “can be essential tools of the terrorist or sweat shop operator as well as the diplomat or aid worker.” For this reason, my course also incorporates the idea of cosmopolitanism or world citizenship. The idea of cosmopolitanism conceived by Diogenes of Sinope in the fourth century BC, cultivated by the Greek and Roman Stoics and revived by Kant in the 18th century as a framework for perpetual peace, is often assumed to be a mere synonym for the idea of a single world state. Understood in this way, there are notable criticisms of the concept. The possible implications of the establishment of a world state are summarised succinctly by Arendt (1970, p. 81) drawing on the thoughts of Karl Jaspers. She argues that whatever form it might assume, the very notion of a world state, within which centralised power can be assumed, “unchecked and uncontrolled by other sovereign powers, is not only a forbidding nightmare of tyranny, it would be the end of political life as we know it.” According to Arendt (1970, p. 81), “a citizen is by definition a citizen among citizens of a country among countries.” It might be overly simplistic to argue that the notion of citizenship by its very definition cannot be extended to a polity larger than a nation-state, even one encompassing the entire globe. However, the point appears to be rather that politics as we know it, understood as the activity by which the citizens of a polity take collectively binding decisions for the survival and well-being of the community as a whole (Crick, 2000), works best on a smaller, more local scale. Nonetheless, the idea of world citizenship constitutes much more than just a synonym for the idea of a single world state. The establishment of a world state would presuppose the existence of world citizens, but to be a citizen of the world does not presume the existence of a world state.
The idea of cosmopolitanism at its simplest, “is the idea that we have obligations to others, obligations that stretch beyond those to whom we are related by the ties of kith and kind, or even the more formal ties of shared citizenship” (Appiah, 2007, p. xiii). The degree of these obligations remains contestable, beyond our special obligations to those with whom we are related by the ties of kith, kind, or citizenship. For example, Kant noted that the interest one takes in another’s well-being at distance may only be slight, so long as we are never indifferent to a fellow human being (Muthu, 2000). Irrespective, the concept of world citizenship is not without criticism, even when understood in this way. Black (2009, p. 269) notes that connections of concern which exist on a transnational scale are often viewed as “inevitably arid and artificial, especially when compared to the emotionally enduring bonds of nationality or ethnicity.” This criticism reflects the views of Richard Rorty and Benedict Anderson, whom Robbins (1998, p. 4) notes “have each represented the absence of genuine feeling or acting on a transnational scale as the absence of anything outside the nation that is worth dying for.” Robbins (1998) argues that it is not helpful in response to simply assert to the contrary, that human beings do inherently possess such powerful feelings for their fellow human beings, whoever they are and wherever they may come from. Instead, it must be recognised that genuine feelings of identification with and concern for the good of all, simply because they are our fellow human beings, are not universal and where these feelings do not exist, they must be developed.

This is possible. After all, as Habermas (2001) reminds us, nation-states themselves are recent inventions and solidarity of the kind that exists in them today was not present in most prior to their creation. It developed or was manufactured, often from nothing, and yet in a relatively short time the situation identified by B. Anderson (2006) emerged whereby people are prepared to make significant sacrifices for their fellow-members despite never having met or even heard of most of them. Habermas (2001) argues that if this can occur at the level of the nation-state, there is no reason it can’t beyond. Appiah (2007, pp. xvi-xviii) agrees, arguing that “cosmopolitanism shouldn’t be seen as some exalted attainment: it begins with the simple idea that in human community, as in national communities, we need to develop habits of coexistence: conversation in its older meaning, of living together, association.” This means talking to each other:
“conversation in its modern sense” (Appiah, 2007, p. xvii). This is necessitated by globalisation, or what Delanty (2009, p. 1) terms “the overwhelming interconnectivity of the world.” However, conversations across difference are also important because of the critical effect that they can have. The course proposed here will introduce students to the different strands of cosmopolitanism and the key debates surrounding the concept, but it will primarily focus on this interpretation, utilising it as a framework for students to consider why the capacity to live with difference is so important and what this involves, including the importance of learning about other ways of life; the purpose of intercultural competence; the danger of ethnocentrism, generalisations, stereotypes and projection; and the value of cultural relativism, as well as critical reflectiveness. It is this idea that underpins the current study and it similarly underpins this course.

Stage two

Having outlined the concepts that students will be introduced to during stage one of my proposed course, this section focuses on the second stage, which spans the period when students are in-country. This is built around one central learning activity, which also doubles as the primary assessment task. Students will be required to undertake an ethnographic research project while abroad, investigating a specific area of observed difference that interests them. They will submit progress reports at different stages of this process and receive electronic feedback in response. They will then submit a final report before they return home. The most immediate benefit of engaging students in such a project is that it provides an avenue for them to acquire a deep understanding of at least one area of difference that they encounter. That is, a level of understanding that avoids or transcends stereotypes and mass generalisations, and (2) that is more than the mere observation of certain practices or peculiarities, but also involves understanding the values, beliefs and assumptions that underpin these, (3) based on wide and meaningful engagement with members of the host society. Nonetheless, the main reason behind this activity is the process itself of examining an area of cultural difference using ethnographic research principles. This is directly linked to learning outcome two, which holds that by the end of the course students will be able to examine cultural differences using ethnographic research principles. Biggs and Tang (2007, p. 59) contend that “learning activities
should be designed to generate or elicit” the desired verbs contained in the intended learning outcomes of the course. Here, the learning activity directly mirrors the learning outcome and because this also doubles as an assessment task, there exists a powerful incentive for students to engage in this. The idea behind this outcome is to give students the tools to engage with cultural differences in a more open-minded, less judgemental way. This includes “being able to navigate the dilemma highlighted by Breidenbach and Nyíri (2009, p. 29) of retaining sensitivity to cultural differences and their impacts, “without falling into the trap of determinism, essentialization, and misrepresentation.” For example, as Breidenbach and Nyíri (2009) discuss, they may discover that a peasant from the Bavarian mountains has more in common with a Portuguese peasant, than a teenage hip-hopper from Berlin. This is all part of cultivating the capacity to live with difference (S. Hall, 1993).

The ethnographic research project that students undertake will be structured by the DIVE (Describe–Interpret–Verify–Explain) model for understanding cultural differences (Brewer & Cunningham, 2009). This requires students to first describe a particular practice or thing that they encounter abroad. Gothard et al. (2012b, p. 9) note that the very act of describing can encourage students to look at things with a more measured eye “so that they can get the details correct.” The second phase of the DIVE model requires students to interpret the practice or thing, to think about the possible rationales behind it. This is not just a matter of expressing the first thing that comes to one’s mind. Rather, students are “encouraged to think about multiple possible interpretations rather than settling on their most immediate reaction as a final verdict” (Gothard et al., 2012b, p. 9).

The next step is arguably the most important one. Students are asked to verify or validate their preliminary interpretations. As Gothard et al. (2012b, p. 9) note: “Snap judgment sometimes does not stand up to verification, but many travelers never test their initial impressions.” For example, Josh did not test his view about supermarkets closing on Sunday afternoons, neither did Luke investigate his views regarding Italian work ethics. This is where contact with host nationals becomes crucial. Again, as Gothard et al. (2012b, p. 9) note: “Students who are in-country together sometimes ‘verify’ only by consulting with fellow students from
their own home country,” adding that “this narrow validation (a potentially very biased one) poses significant dangers, as homogeneous groups can simply confirm each other’s pre-existing prejudices, ethnocentric judgments and stereotypes.” It is also important that students are encouraged to engage with a range of different people at this stage. Indeed, one student involved in my study made an interesting point in this respect, commenting: “I was ultimately struck by how similar my friends in Paris were to my friends at home; I guess like at home, in Paris I gravitated towards people with similar interests.” This tendency in globally mobile people has been observed elsewhere, limiting the insights to be gained (for example: Franklin, 2003). For this reason, biography is incorporated into the assessment task. As part of their assessment, students are required to compose mini-biographies of their local informants with a condition that the informants represent diversity in one or more ways related to the project.

Nonetheless, it is important to note that there will be limitations in this sense. Linguistic capability is one. For example, 12 out of the 21 students in my sample went somewhere where they had no prior knowledge of the host language. This immediately limits the range of locals that they have access to, despite English being widely spoken in Europe. Indeed, a 2012 survey found that just over half of citizens from the then 27 European Union Member States (54%) were able to hold a conversation in at least one additional language with English being the most widely spoken foreign language at 34% (European Commission, 2012). However, this still leaves a significant number of people who are unable to communicate in English, although this figure reduces in many of the countries where my students were based as Table 7 shows. Study abroad students also primarily exist in the relatively privileged, rarefied university world while abroad, which also limits access and makes it harder to grasp the full range of internal differences. However, this does not constitute a reason not to engage students in this task. It is still possible for them to get an idea of the complex reality despite these limitations, but it is important that these are addressed and reflected upon.
Table 7 – Percentage of citizens able to hold a conversation in English

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: European Commission (2012)

Finally, the explanation phase asks students to reflect on their validated interpretations and the process by which they reached them in light of broader concepts and theories (Brewer & Cunningham, 2009, p. 14). There is increasing recognition in the academic literature of the importance of promoting reflection amongst study abroad students (Beaven, 2012; Lutterman-Aguilar & Gingerich, 2002; Vande Berg & Paige, 2012). This activity is important because as Dewey (1998, p. 110) reasoned: “To reflect is to look back over what has been done so as to extract the net meanings which are the capital stock for intelligent dealing with further experiences.” Indeed, as he also argued: “Activity that is not checked by observation of what follows from it may be temporarily enjoyed. But intellectually it leads nowhere,” elaborating that “it does not provide knowledge about the situations in which action occurs nor does it lead to clarification and expansion of ideas” (Dewey, 1998, p. 110). Yet, as Beaven (2012) observes, even “the awareness that individual members of a cultural group may not share all the defining values, behaviours and attitudes of that group seems to require a level of reflection which does not always take place.” Facilitating and guiding student reflection is a crucial rationale for academic intervention in study abroad.

Stage three

The reflection phase of this activity is directly linked to learning outcome three, which holds that by the end of the course students will be able to reflect on encounters with cultural differences using relevant concepts. This is important to ensure continued growth and to avoid the development of lazy habits in the way
they relate to cultural differences. Reflective exercises that double as assessment tasks will be incorporated at different stages of the process, culminating in a final piece to be submitted once the students have returned home. This gives students a period of separation from the experience in order to fully reflect on what they have learned in light of the concepts used. It also means returning students are not suddenly cut-off from the experience, a common complaint of many involved in my study, as discussed in Chapter Six. They expressed a desire for more meaningful follow-up contact on returning home, something this would address.

Students will also be required to reflect on the way things are at home in light of their ethnographic research project. This is linked to learning outcome four, which holds that by the end of the course students will be able to examine their own society based on engagement with cultural differences. As was mentioned in the previous chapter, an important learning opportunity is currently being lost in this sense and there is a need to engage students in a deeper level of reflection with regards to their own society based on the alien phenomena that they encounter abroad. This will be achieved by requiring students to submit a series of reflections at different stages of the ethnographic project. They will receive feedback in response and submit a comparative essay as part of the final report.

Assessment tasks

The most important phase of the curriculum development process is selecting appropriate assessment tasks because “what and how students learn depends to a major extent on how they think they will be assessed” (Biggs & Tang, 2007, p. 163). This means that if the intended learning outcomes of a course are not reflected in the assessment tasks, these can be undermined, regardless of the learning activities employed. The assessment tasks proposed here mirror the learning activities and are directly linked the intended learning outcomes as outlined above. There is also a combination of formative and summative assessment tasks. Biggs and Tang (2007, p. 97) note that “formative assessment is provided during learning, telling students how well they are doing and what might need improving,” while summative assessment is provided “after the learning, informing how well students have learned what they were supposed to have learned.” Summative assessment tasks can act as effective learning
activities if they are linked to the intended learning outcomes of a course, but the downside is that “students rarely pay attention to comments given at the end of a course” (Biggs & Tang, 2007, p. 97). For this reason, there is value in including tasks during a course that allow teachers to give feedback, which can then be incorporated into future summative tasks. For example, the course presented here requires students to produce a summary of the key concepts and theories underpinning the course. This is intended to be a summative task so to incentivise engagement, but there are many opportunities for formative feedback before the final summaries are submitted; students will be split into groups during a class before they leave to discuss their initial interpretations of each concept or theory, while there will also be further online discussion with the teacher once they are in-country and have had time to reflect on them based on their experience abroad. The ethnographic research project is also a summative assessment task, but students will submit progress reports at different stages of this process and receive electronic feedback in response that they can incorporate in the final report. The assessment task requiring students to reflect on the validated interpretations that they reach through the ethnographic research project and the process by which they reached them in light of broader concepts and theories is also an iterative process incorporating both formative and summative elements, as is the task requiring students to reflect on the way things are at home. For both, reflective exercises will be incorporated throughout the experience, culminating in a final report at the end. The purpose of the formative feedback is not to tell students what they should do, but to raise questions and prompt inquiry.

The point of difference

The main aspect that distinguishes the model presented here from other forms of study abroad curriculum intervention is the central ethnographic research project (Bathurst & La Brack, 2012; Engle & Engle, 2012; Gothard et al., 2012a; Hemming Lou & Weber Bosley, 2012; Medina-Lopez-Portillo & Salonen, 2012; Paige et al., 2012; Vande Berg, Quinn, et al., 2012). There is a tendency in other models to focus on reflection based on an individual’s experience abroad, but not the actual engagement that underpins this. There is a leap from observation to reflection with little emphasis on the process by which deeper understanding is acquired. My model represents a modified version of that proposed by Gothard
et al. (2012a) who developed a curriculum that Australian universities could offer to their outbound exchange students in full or in part, with a view to enhancing what they learn from their experience abroad. The curriculum proposed by Gothard et al. (2012a) comprises a series of 10 separate modules covering a range of different themes. It represents a major step forward, providing institutions with a valuable resource. However, these modules are designed to guide and supplement an individual’s experience abroad, introducing students to certain concepts before they leave and encouraging them to reflect and think about certain things while they are in-country and when they return home, including the differences that they encounter. By contrast, the model proposed here would actively shape an individual’s experience, requiring students to step outside of the international student bubble that they often seem to find themselves confined within and to investigate a particular area of difference in detail. One of Gothard et al. (2012b) modules does utilise the DIVE model, but while this is something that they recommend students are introduced to and encouraged to follow, students are required to follow it under my model, submitting work along the way on which they will be assessed. There are parallels here with a model recently put forward by Giovanangeli and Oguro (2016), albeit directed towards different learning outcomes. Their model similarly requires students to complete a series of activities through their home university, including a “research project exploring an aspect of the host society chosen for investigation by the students” (Giovanangeli & Oguro, 2016, p. 74). This is because they also identify engagement as being an “integral part of the intercultural experience” and they contend that the type of engagement fostered by the research projects that their students undertake allows them to reflect “in ways that are perhaps not achieved through tourist experiences” (Giovanangeli & Oguro, 2016, pp. 78, 76).

My model adheres with Biggs’ (1999) idea of constructive alignment whereby students are engaged in and assessed on activities that are likely to lead to the desired learning outcomes. The ethnographic research project is not only directly linked to learning outcome two, giving students the tools to engage with cultural differences in a more open-minded, less judgemental way; it also ensures that they have the basis for a more nuanced comparison with home that is more likely to have a critical effect in line with learning outcome four. Moreover, it gives them
a better foundation to reflect on the concepts linked to learning outcomes one and three. For example, they may also realise that their initial interpretations were superficial or simplistic, teaching them the value of cultural relativism, the focus of one of the modules developed by Gothard et al. (2012b). As discussed, the idea of cultural relativism is distinct from the idea of moral relativism. It does not hold that we should never judge the products of another culture. Rather, it suggests that we should attempt to understand things first before judging them (Gothard et al., 2012b). It is a key component of the open-minded, non-judgemental attitude that has been referred to frequently in these pages. The development of a willingness to reserve judgement is something that has been observed amongst study abroad students from Earlham College in the United States, where ethnographic field components were incorporated into the study abroad programme (Jurasek, Lamson, & O'Maley, 1996). This is an important educational objective because we live in a world within which cross-cultural contact has become common and it is only likely to increase in its frequency. This has the potential to be the source of great conflict or great richness; much will depend on the attitudes of those at university today.

**Is this practicable?**

The idea that simply being abroad is not enough in itself has become an important theme in the study abroad literature, although insufficient attention has been paid to how alternative models will work in practise. It is easy to criticise the status quo, but much harder to develop a workable solution. Part of the problem is a lack of resources. As Gothard et al. (2012a, p. 40) lament, most international offices “simply do not have the resources to offer, at best, more than a pre-departure workshop focusing on features such as health and safety, risk management and insurance, and possibly a de-briefing on re-entry.” They also point out that “a further issue is that, with students having limited pre-departure time especially, other concerns simply squeeze out time for intellectual or academic discussion, and turn-over of IO staff can make creating continuity difficult” (Gothard et al., 2012a, p. 40). As someone who currently works in an international office, this certainly resonates with me. For the model proposed here to work, universities would need to redirect existing staff or hire new staff with relevant research experience to implement and run it, either centrally or within a
relevant academic department. However, are universities prepared to commit the resources required to develop strong, focused, engaging and penetrating units of study that will add significant value to student exchange as a learning experience? Is this economically viable? It is economically viable if students are required to enrol in it just like any other course. In this way, it would be financially self-sustaining, assuming there is sufficient student interest. The course would be appealing to students with general credits left to complete, while it could also be linked to a relevant minor or major. It could also be attached to a form of international leadership certificate or to funding, opening it up to even those who do not need the credit. The course could also be used to frame short international study experiences or offered to students who wish to do an independent project in the local community or abroad. A similar course has been introduced at my current university to frame internship experiences. It may be possible to offer such a course so that study abroad students do it instead of one of the courses that they would otherwise do through their host institution, although this will disrupt the balance in terms of credits completed by incoming and outgoing students, a requirement of student exchange programmes. The easier option is to offer it as an additional course. The problem with this is that it may place too much of a burden on students while abroad. However, the workload can be spread evenly throughout the three stages of the exchange so as to ensure that this is not the case and that students will have the time to fully commit to it. The activities will also be linked to their interests and daily pursuits making this less burdensome. The bottom line is that offering such a course is certainly possible and that this need not be a drain on already limited resources; the bigger question is whether institutions are prepared to do it? This would require a major paradigm shift in many cases, but there is a strong argument to be made for this in terms of maximising student learning, as this study has shown. Nonetheless, if this argument is not sufficient, a case could also be made on the grounds that it would constitute a point of difference in the competitive world of modern higher education. If institutions are not prepared to do something in response to the growing body of evidence that points to a need for academic intervention in the study abroad process, this would constitute a strong indictment on the sincerity of their commitment to develop knowledgeable and capable global citizens, and
claims of this kind should be challenged where they are found. This chapter now finishes by looking at three other possible criticisms arising from this discussion.

Is Europe too similar?

It might be argued that Europe is not the best place for students from Australia and New Zealand to go on exchange because it is too similar. For example, it could be argued that it is not sufficiently different to challenge people to think critically about things within their own society. However, it is critically important to stress that we cannot regard Europe as a single, homogenous entity, meaning it is somewhat simplistic to say that Europe as a whole is similar to Australia and New Zealand. Moreover, it is inevitable that wherever one goes abroad, there will at least be a small degree of difference, whether in terms of certain values, attitudes, ideas, opinions, beliefs, laws, customs, practices, styles or systems. Indeed, it was mentioned in Chapter Five that every student involved in my research observed at least one difference each between their new environment and home. Meanwhile, only a small degree of difference is necessary. It was mentioned above that Georgia came to question business trading hours in New Zealand having lived in France where unlike New Zealand she found that many businesses close for lunch and supermarkets often close during weekends. This is a relatively minor difference, but anything like this that makes an individual question something they previously took for granted has the potential to be transformative. Moreover, the point was made by one student (Max) that it was actually beneficial to be in a place where the differences were not so significant or noticable: “I would argue that the smaller the change, the more opportunity there is for this process to occur. There is more opportunity to find some sort of access point to the people and their culture because of the superficial similarities.”

There is more than one way to skin this cat

It must be acknowledged that it is possible to learn about another society without actually going there. As Bauman (2000, p. 13) notes, “in the world we inhabit, distance does not matter much; it exists as if solely to be canceled—it offers a constant invitation to traverse. It has stopped being an obstacle; one needs but a split second to conquer it.” Nonetheless, there are obvious advantages
connected with physically going to a place compared with simply reading or hearing about it from afar. For example, what one reads or is told about another way of life may not in fact be a realistic depiction. Moreover, Georgia whose case was just discussed, made the point that while it is possible to learn about another culture from afar, this is less likely to have a critical effect. Georgia initially found the practice of businesses closing over lunch to be inconvenient and annoying. However, she undertook to understand the meaning behind it and as she learned more, it became something that she liked and respected about French culture, leading her to question the practice of businesses staying open for lunch in New Zealand. She noted that she came to think that the French had a much better work–life balance because they took time out to eat lunch properly. Georgia commented that “if you read somewhere the timetable of French businesses, without any further knowledge or experience of the matter, you might just consider it strange, a nuisance, and not get to the point of understanding why it might be good, or indeed have any way of getting to that point.” To go to France provided an opportunity for Georgia to develop a more empathetic understanding of this practice, although it is important to acknowledge that this is not an inevitable result; ethnocentrism is an ever-present threat that must be countered, an important justification for academic intervention in the study abroad process.

The role of motivation

Research tells us that to understand tourist behaviour we must look at the reasons tourists travel in the first place (Crompton, 1979). The same logic can be applied to study abroad and with this in mind, it must be acknowledged that not all students who spend a study period abroad will be driven by a desire to learn about the society where they are based. Indeed, Hannerz (1992) argues that people travel for different reasons, but these reasons often have little to do with “curiosity about alien systems of meaning.” However, thirteen of the students involved in my research noted that curiosity played a part in their decision to go on an exchange, making it the most cited reason. That is to say, they cited one or more of the following reasons: that they wanted to see what life is like somewhere else; to experience life somewhere different; to explore a new place; to immerse themselves in a new environment; to try or experience new things; and to learn about another country, culture or way of life. There was also another
student (Andrew) who did not mention one of the above motives directly, but who did note in response to the question about his motives that he believed experiencing “many different cultures as a student… is necessary to a complete education.” Moreover, three further students also made comments indicating curiosity. Matilda noted that she chose her destination because it offered her a culture change, while Hannah said that she chose her destination because of a desire to learn about it and Olivia commented that she was excited to explore the city where she would be based. This means that the vast majority of students involved in my research were driven by a sense of curiosity. However, it would be naïve to think that every student is motivated in this way. Moreover, curiosity of the kind articulated by these students does not necessarily mean that they want to invest time in trying to understand the alien phenomena that they encounter. This desire to see and experience new things does not imply a desire to understand. There is a difference between consumption and comprehension.

The reality is that some students will be motivated by a desire to understand the alien phenomena that they encounter abroad, but many will not. There are parallels here with the Susan-Robert distinction articulated by Biggs (1999). Susan and Robert arrive at their lecture with very different motivations. Yet, one of the main implications of this example is that “‘motivation’ is a product of good teaching, not its prerequisite.” It may refer to a classroom setting (Biggs, 1999), but this idea equally applies to study abroad; if we engage students in activities that are most likely to result in them achieving the desired outcomes of study abroad, differences in prior motivation become a much less significant variable.

Summary

Education research tells us that what students learn from a course is the result of what they do in that course (Biggs, 1999). The same logic applies to study abroad. What students learn abroad is the result of what they do abroad and what some students do abroad is not enough to gain much of an insight. The major problem here appears to be a situation identified in previous research whereby students often find themselves confined in some kind of international student bubble. Contact with the host population is an important variable when it comes to learning about another society because as anthropologists tell us, if we are to
have any hope of understanding an alien society, it is necessary not only to go there, but to establish close contact with the natives themselves. There are a number of ways by which institutions can attempt to facilitate greater contact between domestic and international students. However, doing this is not enough in itself. The challenge is to promote contact that is a means of inquiry, not just contact for contact's sake (Cousin, 2012). One possible way forward in this sense is to offer a course to study abroad students that engages them in an ethnographic research project while they are overseas as this chapter discussed.
This chapter begins by considering the limitations of the study presented here, before revisiting its original contribution to knowledge and why this matters. It then concludes by discussing ideas for extending this through further research. Every research undertaking has its limitations and the project reported here is no exception. This study focussed on the experiences of a small number of students from Australia and New Zealand who went on exchange to various European destinations. This means that the findings cannot be generalised to other settings. However, the intent of qualitative research is very rarely to generalise and it was certainly not the aim of this study (Creswell, 2013). Rather, my aim was to raise questions about the phenomenon of study abroad by looking at a small number of cases in detail; questions that might open new possibilities for both research and practise. This meant that collecting a large amount of data from a small number of students was prioritised above collecting a small amount of data from a large number of students, even if this limited my ability to generalise. Moreover, my findings and conclusions have been documented herein with a view to enabling readers to judge and test whether these are applicable in other contexts.

The phenomenon of student mobility from Australia and New Zealand to other parts of the world is one area where there is a need to extend this research, especially Asia. Given the focus at the governmental level in both countries on increasing the number of students that spend a study period in Asia specifically, there is clearly a need to conduct further research so to better understand the experiences of students travelling there. Nonetheless, extending the breadth of this study would have compromised its depth. The trade-off would have been a greatly reduced capacity to collect and analyse detailed qualitative information. My decision to focus on the experiences of students who went to Europe reflects
the fact that Australia and New Zealand have deep historical roots in this region and it remains a popular destination for students. This study provides a basis for future research to look at the experiences of students who go to other parts of the world, as well as via other channels, such as short courses or experiences.

The final limitation that I want to acknowledge here is one that is common to all qualitative research. This study produced a significant body of data, not all of which could be included in this thesis. It does not document and explain the experiences of the students involved in all their diversity and complexity. This would require too many words and the resulting document would be almost as impractical as a map of a country on the scale of a mile to a mile. Rather, it documents key aspects of the data relevant to my analytic interests or deemed important through my analysis, discusses these in-depth and presents conclusions drawn from them, paying special attention to individual differences.

**Revisiting my original contribution to knowledge**

This study makes an original contribution to knowledge by addressing two key gaps in the existing literature: (1) there is a lack of research that has examined the insights that study abroad students acquire with regards to their host society; (2) there are few studies to have employed conceptual frameworks that account for the processes by which learning occurs, including testing the applicability of the stress-adaptation-model in the study abroad context and examining the difficulties associated with study abroad in terms of their pedagogical implications more generally.

This study has cast doubt on the applicability of the stress-adaptation-growth model to the study abroad context. The resolution of internal stress over the course of the experience did lead some students to develop increased confidence

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20 This is a reference to the following passage in Lewis Carroll's *Sylvie and Bruno Concluded*: ‘What a useful thing a pocket-map is!’ I remarked. ‘That’s another thing we’ve learned from your Nation,’ said Mein Herr, ‘mapmaking. But we’ve carried it much further than you. What do you consider the largest map that would be really useful?’ ‘About six inches to the mile.’ ‘Only six inches!’ exclaimed Mein Herr. ‘We very soon got to six yards to the mile. Then we tried a hundred yards to the mile. And then came the grandest idea of all! We actually made a map of the country, on the scale of a mile to a mile! ’ ‘Have you used it much?’ I enquired. ‘It has never been spread out, yet’ said Mein Herr: ‘the farmers objected: they said it would cover the whole country, and shut out the sunlight! So we now use the country itself, as its own map, and I assure you it does nearly as well....’ (Carroll, 1994, pp. 608-609).
in their capacity to cope with future challenges, providing support for this model in its broadest sense. Nonetheless, the data provided only one concrete example whereby the stress resulting from problems caused by environmental differences compelled cultural learning in the way anticipated by the stress-adaptation-growth model. Specifically, Georgia was pushed to do extra work to improve her proficiency in the host language in order to be able to keep up with her classes. Beyond this, the students either did not experience sufficient difficulties due to unfamiliarity, or they were not compelled to acculturate, something that is attributed to the short duration of a study abroad experience. Meanwhile, the case of Eva shows that students who have a difficult experience can develop a negative image of the host society and its population, illustrating how the experience can actually have a regressive effect. This is explained in part here using Ahmed's (2010a) idea of happiness gaps. Unhappiness is not inevitable when someone embarks on a study abroad experience, but it is always possible. For this reason, it is important that happiness does not become an expectation and that institutions build awareness around the possibility of unhappiness. This means building awareness around the challenges that students may face and the effect that these can have, something that Eva felt her home institution did not do sufficiently. The challenge is to empower students to better live with unhappiness if it arises, reducing the likelihood that those who have difficult experiences like Eva will attribute this to the host population, while opening up a more constructive space from which to engage with difference. There is also a need to help students better manage external expectations, including those generated via social media.

This study has also documented in detail the various difficulties experienced by the students involved and a number of related variables. This is something that is often skipped over. However, it is important to pay close attention to the challenges associated with study abroad because while none of the other students were affected in the same way as Eva, her case shows that this is a possibility. Eva’s experience may have been the exception, but it is important that universities consider experiences such as her one in designing their exchange programmes. Eva’s malaise was not necessarily a concern in itself. Looking back, she said that she would still recommend the experience of spending a study period abroad to other students, although she did note that if she could have her
time again she would choose to go to a different destination. Eva still enjoyed aspects of the experience, especially the travel that she undertook while abroad. She also felt that she had grown from the experience, becoming more self-sufficient and resilient. It is a concern because of the influence this appeared to have on the image that she developed concerning her host society and its people.

This study has also shown that spending a study period abroad is likely to be transformative in some way, even if this means becoming more self-sufficient or resilient. However, it raises questions about the level of insight that students acquire with regards to their host society and the extent to which they grow in ways linked to this, including critical reflectiveness and open-mindedness. This requires a level of inquiry, contact and reflection that my research shows does not occur automatically. My study adds support to the growing call for academic intervention in the study abroad process and puts forward a possible model of intervention; a course that spans the three stages of the study abroad process and that centres around an ethnographic research project that students must complete while abroad with a view to fostering more meaningful engagement.

There are a number of key principles that underpin this model, including: (1) the idea that experiences on their own will not necessarily be education—they can equally be non-educative or mis-educative (Dewey, 1998; Lutterman-Aguilar & Gingerich, 2002); (2) the idea that to maximise student learning it is important to engage students in activities that are likely to lead to the desired learning outcomes (Biggs, 1999); (3) the idea that in the context of learning about difference, it is important to get students to go beyond their initial interpretations through host national contact and that this requires promoting contact that is a means of inquiry, not just contact for contact’s sake (Brewer & Cunningham, 2009; Cousin, 2012; Gothard et al., 2012b); and (4) the idea that it is important to introduce students to appropriate concepts before they leave so that they can make sense of the things they encounter and to encourage reflection along the way aimed at facilitating growth (Beaven, 2012; Brewer & Cunningham, 2009; Dewey, 1998; Engle, 2013; Lutterman-Aguilar & Gingerich, 2002; Vande Berg & Paige, 2012).
These findings matter because of the substantial and still growing level of importance that is attached to the practise of study abroad. This is not without merit. The communities within which we live are increasingly diverse and the world is increasingly interconnected. Cross-cultural contact has become common and it is only likely to increase in its frequency. There is a need to cultivate populations that are open-minded, less judgemental and critically reflective if this is to be the source of richness, not conflict. Study abroad certainly has a powerful role to play in this mission. However, this study joins a growing body of literature which shows that sending more students overseas is not enough in itself. There is a need to focus on quality, not just quantity. Otherwise, there is value in asking whether this practise warrants the significant resources required to maintain it. Nonetheless, refocussing in this way would constitute a substantial readjustment of political and institutional policies and priorities, especially in Australia and New Zealand. Understandably, this would require strong evidence of the failings of laissez faire study abroad and knowledge about where improvements can be made. My study provides a timely and valuable contribution on both counts. It helps us to better understand the processes by which students learn abroad, or perhaps more accurately the processes by which they do not learn and by which they mislearn, showing that the challenges associated with study abroad are not necessarily a source of growth, but that they can have a regressive effect. It also helps us to better understand where and why students are falling short, focussing especially on the insights that they acquire with regards to their host society. Moreover, it provides substantial material that can be used to enhance the study abroad experience and ideas as to how this might be done, information that has been incorporated into my model, constructed to provide an alternative template.

Future research

The study reported here constitutes a start, but there is much more work to be done. Firstly, we need to know more about study abroad in the New Zealand context. For example, how many students go abroad each year, where do they go and by which means? The only data that exists is limited and irregular. This data is collected for internal benchmarking, but it is not published. There is the need for a similar project to that conducted by Olsen (2008a, 2008b, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014), which published this kind of information in the
Australian context on an annual basis, although this is project is now led by i-Graduate and not published either. Secondly, there is a need for further research guided by the same analytic interests that investigates the experiences of study abroad students more widely, especially in the Australian and New Zealand contexts, including those that go to a variety of different regions and by a variety of different means, such as through short term programmes. There would be value in including a bigger, more representative sample for part of this study. The object would be to compile a statistically significant database in relation to certain key variables that could be read alongside qualitative data acquired from a smaller sample. Given the nature of such a study it would be better suited to a team. It is my recommendation that data be collected in a similar fashion to the study reported here, although I think it would be valuable to get the students involved to complete a regular questionnaire while they are abroad which tracks things such as virtual contact with home, who they are associating with and the nature of these associations, the problems that they are experiencing, what they are doing and what they feel that they are learning. Modern technology presents numerous possibilities to help facilitate this. This would be supplemented with an interview or interviews with the smaller cohort aimed at clarifying things that come up in the questionnaire and digging deeper. The objective would be to further develop our understanding of the lived realities of study abroad students and whether or how these vary in different contexts. This will enable further examination of themes raised in this thesis, including some deserving of more thorough engagement in future research, such as the idea of happiness gaps and the impact of easily accessible virtual access to family and home while away. It will also provide insights that can inform academic intervention. Finally, this thesis makes the case for offering a course that engages students in an ethnographic research project while they are abroad. A proposed model is outlined above, but this is just a starting point. It now needs to be tested, including examining the challenges and barriers to implementing such a curriculum. It has been known for some time how important academic intervention is, so why is this not widely embedded in practice? A project that examines this and further develops the model, as well as implementing, trialling and refining it is necessary. This should include a selection of university staff so to get input on the question of practicality.
A final reflection

I wish to conclude this thesis by returning to the idea underpinning it, that the capacity to live with difference is essential in the modern world. To quote Appiah (2007, p. xix), “conversations across difference can be delightful, or just vexing: what they mainly are, though, is inevitable.” Study abroad can play an important role in cultivating this capacity, but my thesis shows that it is not currently fulfilling its potential in this sense. It raises many important questions and presents a way forward. I now look forward to furthering my contribution through future research, applying the many lessons that I have learned over the course of this study.


Gibbs, G. (2013, 21 November 2013). Lectures don’t work, but we keep using them: Can a demonstrably ineffective pedagogic form still be put to good use? [Blog post]. Retrieved from


Joyce, S. (2013). PM’s Scholarships for Asia announced.


Mikal, J. P., & Grace, K. (2012). Against Abstinence-Only Education Abroad: Viewing Internet Use During Study Abroad as a Possible Experience


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Richardson, R. (2013). International Student Mobility Programs and Effects on Student Teachers’ Perceptions and Beliefs about Education and Their Role as Future Educators. *Universal Journal of Educational Research, 1*(3), 240-246.


What our students are learning, what they’re not, and what we can do about it (pp. 383-407). Stirling, VA: Stylus Publishing.


APPENDIX ONE
THE STUDENTS IN PROFILE

The following pages contain an individual profile for each student involved in my research, including information about their home country, age, gender, host country and proficiency in the host language, as well as the number of overseas countries they had previously visited, whether this was their first real experience living away from the family home and whether they had lived abroad before.21

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name: Rebecca</th>
<th>Sex: Female</th>
<th>Age at time of arrival: 17 years old</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Destination:</td>
<td></td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country of</td>
<td>Born in this country: Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>residence:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length of</td>
<td></td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>residence:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Host language:</td>
<td></td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First language:</td>
<td></td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second language:</td>
<td></td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level: N/A</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third language:</td>
<td></td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level: N/A</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fourth language:</td>
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<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level: N/A</td>
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<td></td>
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</table>

Previous countries visited: Seven
First real experience living away from the family home: No
First time living abroad: No
Previous experience living abroad:
Lived with relatives based in another country for a period while at school.

21 It will be noticeable that some of the students who are listed as having never really lived away from the family home before, had lived abroad before, meaning this was not in fact their first time living away from the family home. However, this was their first time doing so for any significant period of time, or in circumstances where they had to look after themselves. For example, Luke had lived abroad twice previously, but staying with relatives in a similarly supportive environment.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name: Chris</th>
<th>Sex: Male</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Destination: Sweden</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country of Residence: Australia</td>
<td>Born in this country: Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length of residence (if country of residence is not country of birth): N/A</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Host language: Swedish</td>
<td>First language: English</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second language: None</td>
<td>Level: N/A</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third language: None</td>
<td>Level: N/A</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fourth language: None</td>
<td>Level: N/A</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First real experience living away from the family home: No</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Had lived abroad for a period since leaving high school.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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...
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</tr>
</thead>
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<td>Destination</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country of residence</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>Born in this country: Yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length of residence (if country of residence is not country of birth):</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>English</td>
<td>First language: English</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second language</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>Level: Fluent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third language</td>
<td>Italian</td>
<td>Level: Intermediate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fourth language</td>
<td>Russian</td>
<td>Level: Basic</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Previous experience living abroad:</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school exchange, but only for one month.</td>
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<table>
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<td>Born in this country: Yes</td>
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<td>Italian</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Third language</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>Level: Intermediate</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lived with relatives based in another country on two previous occasions; once while still at school and once since finishing school.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>Age at time of arrival</td>
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<tr>
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<td>-----------</td>
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<th>Length of residence</th>
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<table>
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<td>English</td>
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<table>
<thead>
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<th>Second language</th>
<th>Level</th>
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<table>
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<th>Level</th>
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<td>N/A</td>
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</tbody>
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<th>First time living abroad</th>
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<thead>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High school exchange.</td>
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</tbody>
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<table>
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</thead>
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<td>Josh</td>
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<table>
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<th>Born in this country</th>
<th>Length of residence</th>
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</thead>
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<table>
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<tbody>
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<td>Polish</td>
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<table>
<thead>
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<th>Second language</th>
<th>Level</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>French</td>
<td>Advanced</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Third language</th>
<th>Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>German</td>
<td>Intermediate</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fourth language</th>
<th>Level</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dutch</td>
<td>Basic</td>
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<table>
<thead>
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<th>First time living abroad</th>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Previous experience living abroad</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High school exchange. Had also lived abroad for a period since high school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natalie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country of residence</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fourth language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previous countries visited:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First real experience living away from the family home:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First time living abroad:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previous experience living abroad:</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Sex</th>
<th>Age at time of arrival</th>
<th>Destination</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Molly</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>22 years old</td>
<td>Germany</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country of residence</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>Born in this country: Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length of residence (if country of residence is not country of birth):</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>German</td>
<td>First language</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second language</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>Level:</td>
<td>Fluent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third language</td>
<td>Portuguese</td>
<td>Level:</td>
<td>Intermediate</td>
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<td>Fourth language</td>
<td>Indonesian</td>
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<td>Intermediate</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First time living abroad:</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Previous experience living abroad:</td>
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</table>

High school exchange. Had also been on a previous university exchange.
<table>
<thead>
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<th>Sex</th>
<th>Age at time of arrival</th>
<th>Gender: Female</th>
<th>Age at time of arrival: 21 years old</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country of residence</td>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>Born in this country: No</td>
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<td>Length of residence (if country of residence is not country of birth):</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>English</td>
<td>First language: English</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second language:</td>
<td>Cantonese</td>
<td>Level: Fluent</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Mandarin</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Level: N/A</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First real experience living away from the family home:</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First time living abroad:</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previous experience living abroad:</td>
<td>N/A</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Bella

**Name**: Bella  
**Sex**: Female  
**Age at time of arrival**: 23 years old  
**Destination**: United Kingdom  
**Country of residence**: New Zealand  
**Born in this country**: Yes  
**Length of residence** (if country of residence is not country of birth): N/A  
**Host language**: English  
**First language**: English  
**Second language**: None  
**Level**: N/A  
**Third language**: None  
**Level**: N/A  
**Fourth language**: None  
**Level**: N/A  
**Previous countries visited**: Four  
**First real experience living away from the family home**: No  
**First time living abroad**: No  
**Previous experience living abroad**: Had lived abroad for a period since leaving high school.

---

### Hannah

**Name**: Hannah  
**Sex**: Female  
**Age at time of arrival**: 20 years old  
**Destination**: Denmark  
**Country of residence**: Australia  
**Born in this country**: Yes  
**Length of residence** (if country of residence is not country of birth): N/A  
**Host language**: Danish  
**First language**: English  
**Second language**: None  
**Level**: N/A  
**Third language**: None  
**Level**: N/A  
**Fourth language**: None  
**Level**: N/A  
**Previous countries visited**: Four  
**First real experience living away from the family home**: Yes  
**First time living abroad**: Yes  
**Previous experience living abroad**: N/A
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age at time of arrival</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eva</td>
<td>20 years old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrew</td>
<td>21 years old</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Destination</th>
<th>Country of residence</th>
<th>Born in this country</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<table>
<thead>
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<th>Level</th>
<th>Fourth language</th>
<th>Level</th>
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<td>Spanish</td>
<td>Intermediate</td>
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<table>
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<th>First time living abroad</th>
<th>Previous experience living abroad</th>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thirteen</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>N/A</td>
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</table>
### Alicia

**Name:** Alicia  
**Sex:** Female  
**Age at time of arrival:** 20 years old  

**Destination:** France  
**Country of residence:** New Zealand  
**Born in this country:** Yes  
**Length of residence** (if country of residence is not country of birth): N/A  

**Host language:** French  
**First language:** English  
**Second language:** French  
**Level:** Intermediate  
**Third language:** None  
**Level:** N/A  
**Fourth language:** None  
**Level:** N/A  

**Previous countries visited:** Two  
**First real experience living away from the family home:** Yes  
**First time living abroad:** Yes  
**Previous experience living abroad:** N/A

---

### Olivia

**Name:** Olivia  
**Sex:** Female  
**Age at time of arrival:** 21 years old  

**Destination:** Denmark  
**Country of residence:** New Zealand  
**Born in this country:** Yes  
**Length of residence** (if country of residence is not country of birth): N/A  

**Host language:** Danish  
**First language:** English  
**Second language:** French  
**Level:** Intermediate  
**Third language:** Hindi  
**Level:** Intermediate  
**Fourth language:** Punjabi  
**Level:** Intermediate  

**Previous countries visited:** Nine  
**First real experience living away from the family home:** No  
**First time living abroad:** No  
**Previous experience living abroad:**  
Had lived abroad for a period since leaving high school.
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APPENDIX TWO
THE SEVENTEEN MOST RELEVANT STUDIES

This section complements Chapter Two, providing an overview of the 17 studies dealing with the phenomenon of outbound study abroad in Australia and New Zealand identified in a review of available literature, which went the furthest, asking mobile students themselves about their experience abroad.

Study One (Clyne & Rizvi, 1998; Clyne & Wooock, 1998): This study surveyed students from four universities in Australia who in the preceding three years had spent at least a semester on exchange. In total, 200 surveys were distributed and 80 of these were returned. The survey gathered background information about the participating students, including their gender, discipline and the country where their exchange took place. It also asked them about their motivations and expectations, as well as their actual experience abroad and its impact on them, including whether it had lived up to their expectations, what they felt that they had gained from the experience, whether they felt that it had made them more culturally sensitive, and what kind of friendships they established while abroad.

Study Two (De Nooy & Hanna, 2003): This study interviewed 38 Australian students who had recently completed a period of undergraduate or postgraduate study in France. The interview questions encouraged the students “to tell stories of intercultural incidents, asked them to reflect on strategies adopted to deal with difficulties, and elicited advice they had received or wished to pass on to others” (De Nooy & Hanna, 2003, p. 66). One of the main themes identified in the resulting data was that many students reported experiencing difficulties accessing important information in France, something that was frequently blamed
on French disorganisation and inefficiency, leading to the production or fortification of “a persistent negative stereotype” (De Nooy & Hanna, 2003, p. 75).

Study Three (Bull, 2004, 2007): This study investigated the outcomes of a programme involving design schools from three countries: Australia, France and Thailand. Over a period of three consecutive years, each participating institution hosted a workshop to which each contributed an approximately equal number of students. In total, 30 students participated in each workshop. These students were divided into teams that worked on specific projects. Each team comprised an approximately equal mix of students in terms of both discipline (landscape architecture, urban design and architecture) and home institution. The objectives of these workshops were that the participating students develop: skills (and confidence) in understanding and navigating other cultures; awareness of the ways in which other cultures (and their disciplines within those cultures) address environmental and social issues (thereby increasing the stock of models available to students); respect for other places, cultures and practices; awareness of the value of culture shock in stimulating creative thinking and problem solving; awareness of the commonalities of many phenomena internationally (tourism, post-industrialization, post-colonialism and so on) as well as local particularities; capacities in reflective and critical thinking, particularly in applying work practices and theory to unfamiliar environments and culture; and enriched personal and professional networks. The study investigated specifically whether and to what degree participation in the programme helped the participating students achieve these objectives. It did so by surveying each cohort after the completion of their workshop. The students were asked about each of the aforementioned objectives, specifically about whether and to what degree participation in the programme had helped them achieve each one. They were also asked whether and to what degree the programme fulfilled their expectations and whether and to what degree its objectives matched their own personal objectives. Moreover, they were asked whether and to what degree certain specified factors (including language differences and their accommodation situation) had inhibited them from or helped them in achieving the programme objectives and fulfilling their expectations, or whether and to what degree any other factors had played a role.
Study Four (Daly, 2005, 2007, 2011; Daly & Barker, 2005; Daly et al., 2004): This study examined the phenomenon of study abroad in both Australia and New Zealand. It comprised four parts. The first involved asking all Australian and New Zealand universities to complete a survey aimed at determining the number of students who had gone on an exchange from the two countries between 1996 and 2005. Five out of eight New Zealand universities and 35 out of 38 Australian universities completed the survey. The strategic plans of these institutions were also analysed to see if a focus on student mobility influenced participation. The second part sought to compare the personal characteristics of students who had chosen to go on an exchange with those who had not or were not planning to go abroad. It also examined motivations for and barriers to studying abroad. Four hundred questionnaires were distributed to students about to go on an exchange from nine Australian and two New Zealand universities with 257 of these being returned. Meanwhile, 440 questionnaires were distributed to students not going on an exchange from one New Zealand and four Australian universities with 234 valid responses being received. The third part involved interviewing a small selection of the students (16 undergraduate and one postgraduate) surveyed in part two who were at that stage on exchange in Canada about their experiences abroad. The final part involved surveying a group of the recently returned exchange students who had completed the initial survey. The main aim of this exercise was to explore changes in their intercultural competencies and to look at how their actual experiences compared with their pre-departure expectations. Eighty-two of the students who completed the pre-departure survey agreed to participate in the remainder of the study and 71 of these students completed this survey on their return home.

Study Five (Penman & Ellis, 2004): This is not so much a study. Rather, it is a report that outlines and discusses an initiative trialled at one Australian university, whereby two of its nursing and midwifery students undertook a 12 week academic experience in the Philippines. The experience ended up only lasting for less than two of the planned 12 weeks due to one of the students choosing to return home for personal reasons. The report includes a discussion of feedback volunteered by one of the two participating students about the experience.
Study Six (Dolby, 2005, 2008): This study examined the experiences of 46 students (26 from the United States of America and 20 from Australia) who spent a study period abroad in 2001. It was interested specifically in the effect that the experience had on their sense of national and global identity. The students were interviewed before and after their experience. They were also asked for comment by email while they were abroad. Twenty-two of the original 26 Americans and 15 of the original 20 Australians participated in all three stages of this project.

Study Seven (Parry, 2005, 2006): This study examined the experiences of two cohorts of six students studying Japanese at one Australian university who participated in a five-week intensive programme in Japan at two different times (one in 2003-2004; the other in 2004-2005). It looked specifically at the benefits these students gained from the experience and the difficulties that they encountered while abroad. It utilised student diaries and post-trip reflective reports, as well as a survey and semi-structured follow-up group interviews.

Study Eight (Nunan, 2006): This study surveyed former students from one Australian university who had been on an overseas exchange at any time between 1990 and 2000. It sought to understand the effect that this experience had on their subsequent academic choices and career development, as well as their social and personal growth. The survey also asked them looking back about the least satisfactory and most beneficial aspects of their exchange. The survey was sent to 818 students and 233 of these students subsequently completed it.

Study Nine (Freestone & Geldens, 2008): This study employed interviews to collect data about the motives and experiences of seven Australian undergraduate students who went on an exchange during 2005 and 2006. The students involved each went to one of six countries spread over three continents: the Netherlands, Germany, Denmark, Mexico, the United States and Japan.

Study Ten (Forsey et al., 2012): This project comprised two parts. The first involved surveying 219 students from one Australian university about why they might consider studying abroad, where they would choose to go, their reasons for this choice, why they might be reluctant to go abroad, and their perception of the value and difficulties of studying abroad. The second part involved
interviewing 14 students from the same university who had returned from spending a study period abroad. These interviews focused on what the students had learned from the experience, including what they had learned about the society where they were based.

Study Eleven (Gothard et al., 2012a): The aim of this study was to develop a curriculum designed to enhance what Australian students learn from spending a study period abroad. This was done using insights gained from a number of students from three Australian universities. Outbound exchange students from these institutions were asked to participate in series of pre-departure and re-entry workshops. They were also invited to post written or photographic reflections on a weblog while on exchange, and they were asked to complete two different surveys that gathered data about their profile and attitudes, in part to help better understand the weblog posts and workshop outcomes. In total, 413 students participated in the workshops, 500 blog entries were received, 114 students completed the first survey and 72 completed the second survey.

Study Twelve (Dall'Alba & Sidhu, 2013): This study asked 525 undergraduate students from one university in Australia who had recently spent one or two semesters studying abroad to complete a survey. The survey asked about their motivations and expectations, as well as their actual experience, including its challenges and benefits. It also collected basic demographic information about the students. In total, 116 completed the survey. A focus group involving five of these students was also conducted, which further explored the survey responses.

Study Thirteen (Green, 2013): This study constituted an attempt to understand the experiences of ten students from one Australian university who spent a semester studying abroad in one of five countries (the United States, Canada, the Czech Republic, Ireland and Denmark). Data was collected through two interviews: one held prior to departure and the other on return. The students were also encouraged to email freely from abroad about any aspect of their experience.

Study Fourteen (Richardson, 2013): This study gathered information about the experiences of nine Australian early childhood education students who undertook an exchange in one of three European countries (Denmark, Sweden and the
It looked specifically at the effect the experience had on them. Each student participated in an interview before, during and after their exchange.

Study Fifteen (Venables, Tan, & Miliszewska, 2013): This study examined the written reflections of a group of Information Technology (IT) students from one Australian university and one Chinese university who participated in a joint study programme in China. This programme required the students to work in teams comprised of a mixture of Australian and Chinese students on a number of real-life IT scenarios. The reflections were used to gauge the effect of the experience.

Study Sixteen (Potts, 2015): This study investigated the links between studying abroad and early career benefits, including future career prospects and motivation and passion for one’s chosen career. It did this utilising a survey of 226 recent graduates from 11 Australian universities. The typical respondent was 26 years of age and had been working for three years since graduating.

Study Seventeen (Giovanangeli & Oguro, 2016): The study analysed the experiences and perceptions of 15 undergraduate students from one Australian university after a year on exchange in France or Switzerland. This was done using questionnaire, focus group and interview data collected three months after the students had returned home. The data was analysed using the cultural responsiveness framework, which was developed to overcome issues determining the criteria for assessing intercultural competence. It has three central aspects: awareness, engagement, and bringing knowledge home.
### APPENDIX THREE

**PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM**

| 1. | I, ........................................................................ (please print name) consent to take part in the research project entitled: *Becoming World Citizens?* |
| 2. | I acknowledge that I have received an information sheet explaining this research project. |
| 3. | I have had the project, so far as it affects me, fully explained to my satisfaction by the researcher. My consent is given freely. |
| 4. | I understand that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time. |
| 5. | I understand that the interviews I participate in as part of this project will be recorded and that I may access and amend the transcript of the recorded interview. |
| 6. | I have been informed that while information gained during the study may be published or otherwise used to report the findings of the project, I will not be directly identified, nor will my personal results be divulged in a way that might indirectly identify me. |
| 7. | I agree to participate on the condition that I will be involved in deciding on possible pseudonyms for work published. |
| 8. | I understand that any information that I provide will be kept confidential to the extent that the law allows. |
| 9. | I am aware that I should retain a copy of the information sheet and this Consent Form, when completed. |

........................................................................................................... (signature)  .................................................... (date)
APPENDIX FOUR

PRE-DEPARTURE QUESTIONNAIRE

Questions marked * are mandatory.

Section One

Q1.* What is your gender?
• Female  • Male

Q2.* What is your date of birth?

Q3.* What is your country of birth?
• Australia
• Bangladesh
• Canada
• China, People's Republic
• Germany
• Hong Kong
• India
• Indonesia
• Japan
• Malaysia
• New Zealand
• Papua New Guinea
• Philippines
• Republic of Korea (South)
• Singapore
• Taiwan
• Thailand
• United Kingdom
• United States of America
• Vietnam
• Other (please specify)

if Other -

Q4. Are you of New Zealand Maori, Australian Aboriginal and / or Torres Strait Islander descent?
• New Zealand Maori • Australian Aboriginal • Torres Strait Islander

Q5.* What is the name of the university where you are currently studying?

Q6.* What degree / major are you currently enrolled in?

Q7.* What year of this degree are you currently in?
• First • Second • Third • Fourth • Other (please specify)

Section Two

If you were born in a country different to the one where you are currently studying, please answer the questions in this section. If not, please go to the next section.

Q8. For how long have you lived in the country where you are currently studying?

Q9. Are you a citizen of this country?
• Yes • No

Q10. Are you a permanent resident of this country?
• Yes • No

Section Three

If you lived in the country where you are currently studying at any stage prior to starting university, please answer the questions in this section that are applicable to you. If not, please go to the next section.

Q11. What is your home state and / or city?

Q12. What secondary school did you attend? (If you attended more than one secondary school this question refers to the one that you attended for the most time)

Q13. What was the postcode of the suburb where you lived during the majority of your secondary education?

Section Four

Q14.* What is your first language/s?

Q15.* Do you speak any other languages?
• Yes  • No

Q16. If you do speak any other languages, please list these and the level of fluency that is most applicable to you for each: fluent, intermediate or basic.

Q17.* Is another language spoken in your home?
• Yes  • No

Q18. If another language is spoken in your home, what is it?

Section Five

Q19.* Have you been overseas previously?
• Yes  • No

If yes:

Q20. Please list the countries that you have been to (not including the country where you were born, if you were born overseas), along with your reasons for going to each country (e.g. to study, work, holiday, visit friends/relatives or other), the year that you went and the duration of your stay.

Section Six

Q21.* Were there any specific factors that impacted upon and / or motivated your decision to undertake an exchange?
• Yes  • No

Q22. If there were any specific factors that impacted upon and / or motivated your decision to undertake an exchange, please explain what these were.

Q23.* In which country will you undertake your exchange?

Q24.* At which institution will you undertake your exchange?

Q25.* Please describe your reasons for undertaking an exchange both generally and in this country specifically?

Section Seven

If you are willing to be involved in the interview phase of this research project please answer the questions in this section. If not, you may now submit the
Answering the questions in this section does not commit you to be involved in the project further. You may still choose to withdraw.

**Q26.** What is your name?

**Q27.** What is your email address?
APPENDIX FIVE
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

The questions listed here were guiding questions only. As mentioned in Chapter Three, the interviews were semi-structured, meaning the actual questions asked varied from student to student and additional questions were incorporated into an interview where deemed necessary or worthwhile.

1. Tell me about your experience so far. How has it been?
2. What have been the most difficult aspects of your experience so far, if any?
3. Did you initially and do you now feel comfortable with your decision to spend a study period abroad generally and in this place in particular? If not, why not?
4. What so far do you consider the most important things that prepared you for this experience? For example, language knowledge or training, previous travel or other experience, home or host university organised preparation or orientation. How did this help?
5. Knowing what you know now, would you do anything differently?
6. What did your home and host universities do to prepare and orientate you, if anything? Do you believe this was sufficient? What could be improved?
7. What has been your greatest source of support so far?
8. Have you received much support from your home and host universities? What has this involved? Has this been sufficient? What could be improved?
9. What have been the most enjoyable and rewarding aspects of the experience so far?
10. What are the most important things that you have learned so far?
11. What are the main differences that you have noticed between here and home, if any? Did you expect such a degree of difference or similarity? What was
your initial reaction to the degree of difference you encountered or noticed? What are your thoughts now?

12. Have you come to learn much about the society where you are based and if so, are there any examples that stand out in terms of what you have learned?

13. Based on your experience so far, is there much that you or the place that you call home can learn from this society and if so, what are some examples?
APPENDIX SIX
FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONNAIRE

Questions marked * are mandatory.

Section One

Q1.* Name

Q2.* Home University

Q3.* Was the experience of spending a study period abroad enjoyable?

Q4. If yes, what were the most enjoyable aspects of the experience?

Q5. If no, why was it not enjoyable?

Q6.* Was the experience of spending a study period abroad beneficial?
  • Yes    • No

Q7. If yes, in what way was it a beneficial experience?

Q8.* Did you learn from the experience?
  • Yes    • No

Q9. If yes, what were the most important things that you learned?

Q10. If yes, was it necessary or helpful to be in another country to learn these things or could you have just as easily learned them at home?

Q11. Could you please explain why you do or don't think that being in another country was necessary or helpful to learn these things?

Q12. What were the most valuable aspects of the experience in terms of your learning, i.e. attending classes, talking to certain people, going to museums, etc?

Q13. Why were these aspects valuable and others not so?
Section Two

Q14. Did the experience of living and studying in another country challenge you to think about anything back home that you had previously taken for granted or accepted without question, whether a law, norm, practise or any other aspect of the society you come from or way you live?

• Yes  • No

Q15. If yes, could you please give some examples of the things that it challenged you to think about?

Q16. If yes, could you please explain why it challenged you to think about these things?

Q17. If yes, did your opinion change with regards to any of these things?

• Yes  • No

Q18. If your opinion did change with regards to any of these things, could you please explain with regards to what and how it changed your opinion?

Q19. Whether your opinion changed or not, if the experience challenged you to think about anything back home that you had previously taken for granted or accepted without question, have you learned anything from this?

• Yes  • No

Q20. If yes, could you please explain what you have learned?

Q21. If yes, was it necessary or helpful to be in another country to learn these things or could you have just as easily learned them at home?

• Yes  • No

Q22. Could you please explain why you do or don't think that it was necessary or helpful to be in another country to learn these things?

Q23. What were the most valuable aspects of the experience in terms of this learning, i.e. attending classes, meeting people, going to museums, etc?

Q24. Why were these aspects valuable and others not so?

Section Three

Q25. Did you gain much of an insight in terms of the place or the people of the
Q25. place where you were based?

• Yes    • No

Q26. If yes, please explain any particular things that stand out in terms of what you learned about the place or its people, i.e. laws, norms, practises or anything else?

Q27. If yes, please explain the most important ways that you learned about this place and its people? For example, through observation, conversation, lectures, museums, reading or any other means?

Q28. If yes, was it necessary or helpful to be in another country to get this insight or could you have just as easily got it at home?

Q29. Could you please explain why you do or don't think that it was necessary or helpful to be in another country to get this insight?

Q30. If you did not gain much of an insight in terms of the place or the people of the place where you were based, please explain why you think you did not gain much of an insight? Was this never your intention or were there barriers preventing this? If there were barriers, what were these?

Q31.* Whether you did or did not gain much of an insight, did you gain any insights in terms of other places or the people of other places, i.e. by talking to other international students?

• Yes    • No

Q32. If yes, please explain any particular things that stand out in terms of what you learned about other places and their people, i.e. laws, norms, practises or anything else?

Q33. If yes, please explain the most important ways that you learned about these places and their people? For example, through observation, conversation, lectures, museums, reading or any other means?

Q34. If yes, was it necessary or helpful to be in another country to get this insight or could you have just as easily got it at home?

• Yes    • No

Q35. Could you please explain why you do or don't think that it was necessary or helpful to be in another country to get this insight?

Section Four

Q36.* Did you have much interaction with local people as part of the experience?
• Yes  • No

Q37. If yes, please explain how you met these people?

Q38.* Did you have much interaction with people who were not local, but who came from different places to you or who were different to the people that you normally associate with at home?

• Yes  • No

Q39. If yes, please give some examples of where these people came from or how they were different to the people that you normally associate with at home?

Q40. If yes, please explain how you met these people?

Q41.* What was your living situation, i.e. student residence, shared house, private apartment, etc?

Q42.* Did you live with other people?

• Yes  • No

Q43. If yes, please explain where the people you lived with came from?

Q44.* Could you please describe the composition of the classes you attended, i.e. were they made up of all or mostly local students, all or mostly fellow international students or were they a mixture?

Section Five

Q45.* Are there things about the experience that were disappointing or that didn’t meet your expectations?

• Yes  • No

Q46. If yes, please explain what these were and why they were disappointing or didn't meet your expectations?

Q47.* If you could do it again, would you do anything differently?

• Yes  • No

Q48. If yes, could you please explain what you would do differently and why?

Q49.* What advice would you give to other students about to go on exchange?
Q50. If you are now back home, how has the transition to life and study back home been?

Q51. If it has been difficult, could you please explain how and why?

Q52.* What are the best things that your home university did or offered before, during and after the exchange to enhance your experience and learning?

Q53.* What are the most important things that your home university could do or offer before, during and after an exchange to improve the experiences and learning of outgoing students?

Q54.* What are the best things that your host university did or offered to enhance your experience and learning?

Q55.* What are the most important things that your host university could do to improve the experiences and learning of incoming exchange students?

Q56.* Would you recommend the experience of spending a study period abroad to other students?

• Yes  • No

Q57.* What are the main reasons for why you would or wouldn’t recommend the experience?

Q58.* What were the best parts of the experience?

Q59.* What do you think are the greatest benefits of spending a study period abroad?

Q60.* What do you think are the hardest parts of spending a study period abroad?

Q61. If there is anything else that you would like to say about your experience and the lessons that could be taken from it, could you please write this here?