

Lessons Learned: A Critical Inquiry of Study Abroad

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Personal Introductions

- **Colleagues present**
 - Dr. Marga Madhuri—Educator for 30 years; Professor of Teacher Education
 - Dr. Amber Bechard--
 - Dr. Justi Saldaña--Educator for 34 years; Associate Professor of Teacher Education.
- **Colleagues absent:**
 - Dr. Bruce Walton—Dr. Walton is an Adjunct Professor of Ethics and Organizational Psychology for ULV, and a Research Psychologist for the American Institute of Behavioral Research and Technology.



“What can you do in a month? A month, you can make lots and lots of intimate friends, a month you can try lots and lots of first time, a month you can touch lots and lots of new things, a month...”

- Student Reflective Journal, Summer 2018





Learning Objectives for Presentation:

- Participants will:
 - critically examine preparations for study abroad programs.
 - develop a plan for supporting students' abilities to critically evaluate their experiences.
 - create an outline with considerations for planning their own study abroad programs (or how to modify programs already in place).

Overview & Background (What We've Done)

- 4 Study Abroad Trips-Undergrad/Graduate level college students
 - 2 groups of American students (including ethnically & racially diverse, varying ages) traveling to different regions in Spain
 - 1 group of Chinese students traveling to Malaysia (culturally & racially homogenous group of traditional undergraduate students at the end of freshmen year)
 - 1 planned trip of American students to South Africa



Lit Review Regarding Study Abroad

Alexander (2001) education has been influenced from international perspectives. Ideas, perspectives, and approaches to schooling don't stop at a country's border.

Little (2000) Globalization is happening in the context of unequal relations of power.

Jones (2001) Differentiates between knowledge of a culture and acceptance of a culture.

Hayward (2000) states that most American college students have a limited understanding of issues outside the United States regarding the world's cultures, histories, economies, and political relationships.

Trilokekar & Kukar (2011) Applying critical thought to discomfort experienced by students facilitates a transformational experience.

What Can We Learn from Student Reflections?

Activity



Examine the excerpts from students' reflective journals



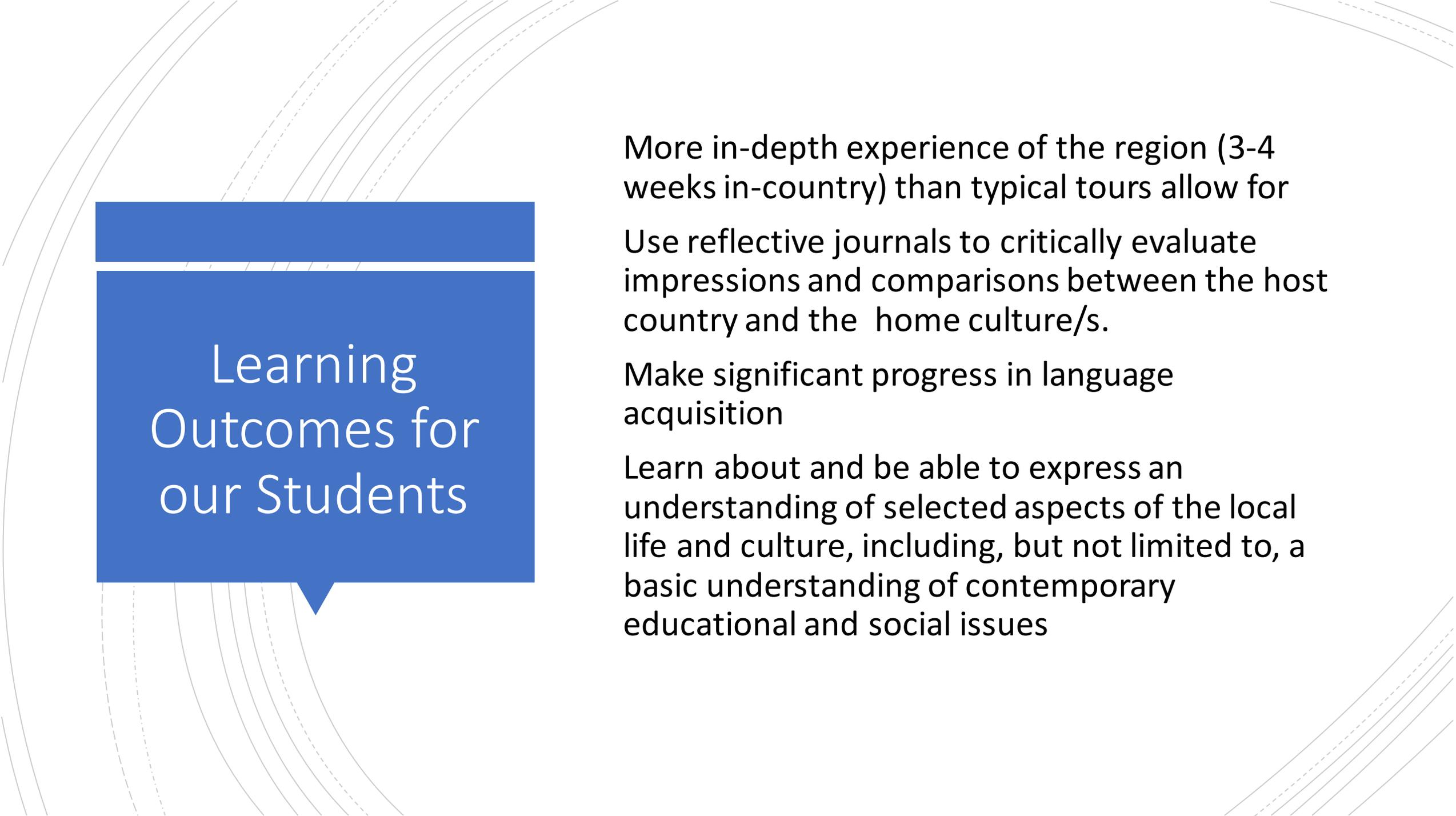
Sort excerpts into themes that would inform the design of a responsive study abroad program.



Post excerpts to the relevant chart **OR** create a new theme category that emerges from the quotes.



KEY QUESTION: How can this feedback inform programming design?



Learning Outcomes for our Students

More in-depth experience of the region (3-4 weeks in-country) than typical tours allow for

Use reflective journals to critically evaluate impressions and comparisons between the host country and the home culture/s.

Make significant progress in language acquisition

Learn about and be able to express an understanding of selected aspects of the local life and culture, including, but not limited to, a basic understanding of contemporary educational and social issues

Pedagogy

PRE-TRAVEL WORKSHOPS

- Background on target country/culture/history
- Overview of the itinerary and housing (homestay for Spain; dorms for Malaysia)

REFLECTIVE JOURNALS

Pretravel/in-country/post-travel

PERSONAL PROJECT

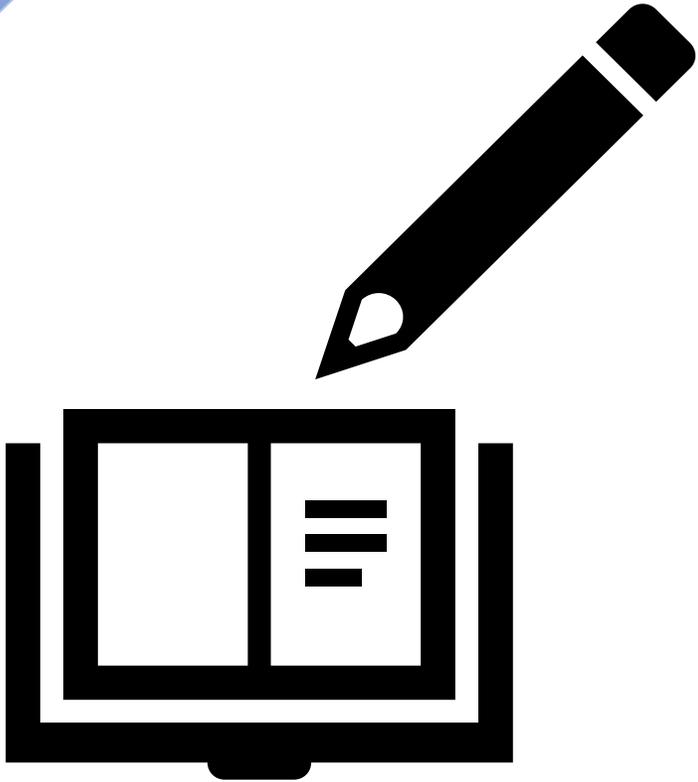
Select a target area for personal study (e.g. education)

POST-TRAVEL

Present on personal study/project

Debrief

Celebrate



Pedagogy (Cont.)

- Pre-travel

We wanted our traveling students to understand their own social dynamics: the notions of difference, power and subjectivity so they can understand the implications of entering another/different set of dynamics.

- In-country

We wanted our students to be participant observers not just about the setting, but also about their role in it.

- Post-travel

We wanted our students to reflect on their experience, as well as on the impact they had on their hosts.

Target Questions/Considerations

- **Who are the students?** Cultural, racial, ethnic backgrounds? How will that inform their travel?
- **What is the culture of the target country?** Who are the people you will be interacting with, and what are the histories?
- **What interactions** can you design into your program (e.g. homestay, dorms, etc.)?
- **What is the impact** of the travelers on the local people? How do we minimize the perpetuation of cultural oppression by a dominant culture?
- **How do we minimize** the sense of cultural superiority?

Themes from Reflective Journals



Culture as a growth catalyst



Academic growth



Awareness of Time and Stress at Home



Importance of local informants



Language support



Building respect for cultural differences



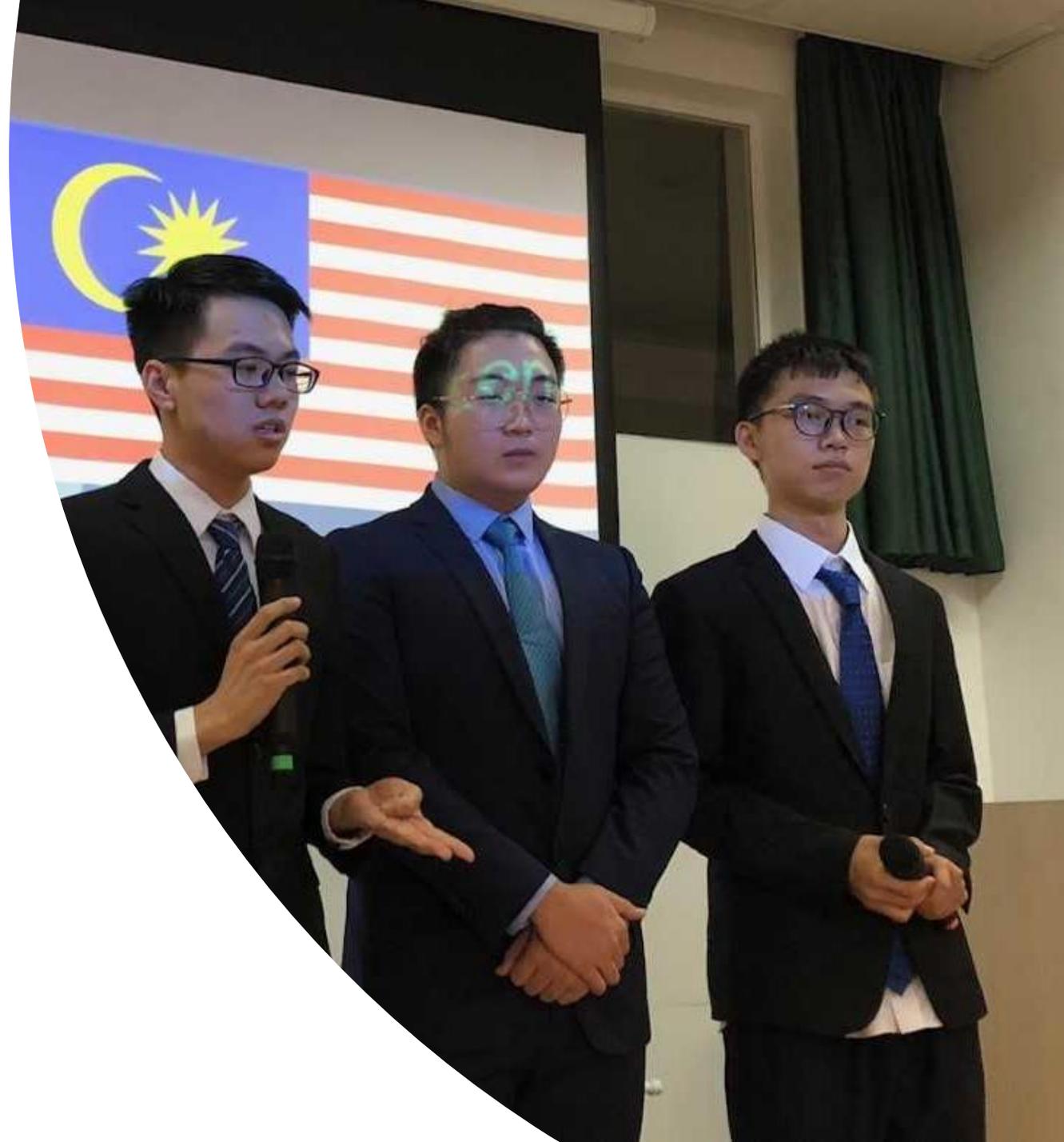
Perpetuating cultural superiority

Culture as a Growth Catalyst

- "Learning how they spoke and acted in the classroom was one thing, but going to the actual places and being involved with the locals, changed what I thought about their culture." American student in Spain
- "In the end, we are all human and it is just as much of an equal struggle in the United States. We are not alone. People across the world struggle the same battles. Education is the key to everyone's future and it does not take much to spread education." American student in Spain

Academic Growth

- "Emotionally, I feel grateful and lucky to have had such an experience. Intellectually, I feel much more aware of major events in history within Spain, and how it relates to the United States." American student in Spain
- "I think when I wrote this diary, I suddenly got a little bit open." Chinese student in Malaysia





Not Enough Time

- "I discovered that hard work and diligence has become a habit. I can't enjoy the long-term smoothness of the years." Chinese student in Malaysia
- "My understanding of the world has changed. . . . I want to be able to live a less stressful lifestyle. Here, everyone is relaxed and everything is done in leisure. It makes me think about what is important in life and that you can let money cause all the stressors in your life." American student in Spain

Local Informants

- "As I read over my journals I see that I have learned a lot about another country in a way that I probably will never get to again. Staying with a family and actually playing the role of a local helped me grasp the full experience of Spain." American student in Spain
- "They treated me like I was one of their own and every morning my house mother would hug me and give me kisses before I went to school. It wasn't what I expected at all. I thought I would be awkward at first and that they would be rude but it was the total opposite and I loved the family I was with." American student in Spain
- "I enjoyed living with the family and as a local, it really made me appreciate the culture so much more. I also appreciate the fact that they take their time when they are out socializing and they enjoy spending time with their family and friends." American student in Spain





Language Support

- “Communication may seem simple, but there are many barriers, such as language, culture and even thinking.” Chinese student in Malaysia
- "I feel that my language skills proved to be both helpers and hinderers on this trip. . . . I am confident that my ability to understand and crudely respond back will alleviate (not eliminate) some of those feelings of being a 'foreigner' or a 'tourist.'" However, because my Spanish has much room for improvement, I know that it will also present itself as a hindrance at one point in time or another." American student in Spain

Building respect for cultural differences

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- "I like this kind of life. I'm interested in new things. Different cultures are full of attraction in my mind." Chinese student in Malaysia
 - "Yes, my understanding of the world has changed, and my vision is no longer so narrow, because the platforms used to be too small for us to know." Chinese student in Malaysia
 - "My whole purpose for joining the program was to learn and gain a better perspective of the world. . . . At the end of the trip, I have realized that my view of the world has been transformed."
American student in Spain
 - "What I will take back with me and never forget is: Family isn't what blood type you share, it's the warmth in your heart that people bring to you that makes them family." American student in Spain





The danger of perpetuating cultural superiority

- "After the orientation and seminars, I learned that people from Spain are usually rude through American's eyes. It is not that they are being rude or being mean on purpose. It's part of their cultural behavior. It made me realize that America isn't so bad." American student in Spain
- "The impression of China changes after comparing with Malaysia. I feel the opening and the strong of China and the important role of Chinese in Southeast Asia." Chinese student in Malaysia
- "Because of the advantages of its natural environment, Malaysians can live a comfortable and leisure life, so they are more lazy which is a comparison to the Chinese." Chinese student in Malaysia

The danger of perpetuating cultural superiority

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- "I think it is important to have cultural confidence, especially the delicious food in China, which is obvious and should not be blinded by other's opinions." Chinese student in Malaysia
 - "China is a free religious country based on peace and home. . . . Belt and Road is a country that helps other countries to carry out infrastructure construction so as to achieve economic and trade exchanges. I dare not say how great our country is." Chinese student in Malaysia



Considerations for designing study abroad programs

- Talk with a colleague and make notes:
 - What are the take-aways from listening to student voices?
 - How can student voices impact study abroad design programs?
 - What are some of the key processes for supporting student reflection and interrogating their lenses?





Takeaways
Post your comments to the Padlet
<https://padlet.com/mmadhuri/thoughts>

(Re)Designing Your Own Program



Take a moment to begin mapping out your own program



Consider these three components for planning your own program

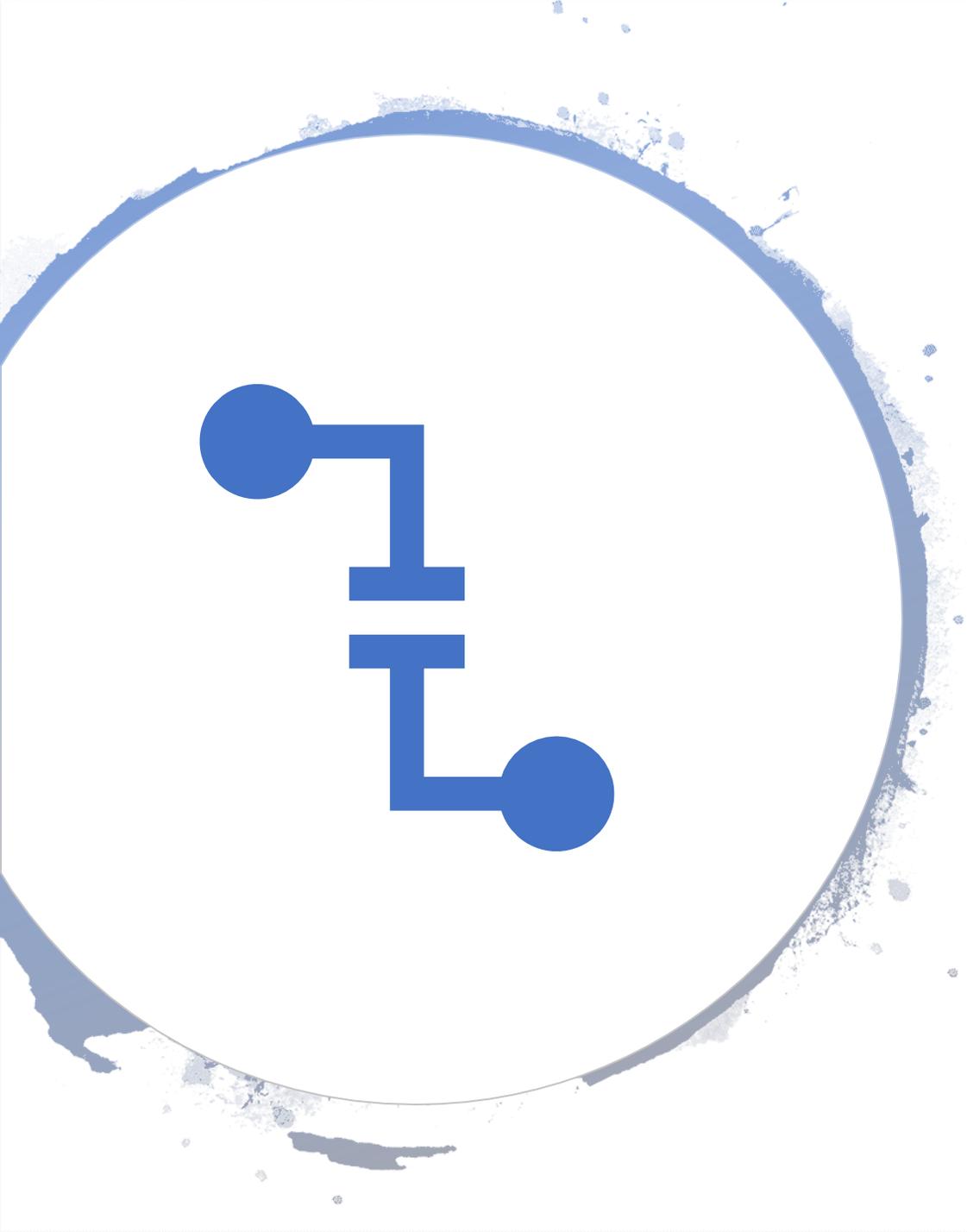
Pre-Travel
In-Country
Post-Travel



Design two activities and/or strategies you would use to begin preparing your group for going abroad

Findings

- American Students in Spain:
- had a good understanding of the history, culture and politics of the United States (Grant & Lei, 2001).
- had an understanding that was specific enough to enable them to make connections between what happens in the classroom with the local and national political context, and how they are influenced by the history and culture of the specific location (Alexander, 2000).
- experienced positive effects in terms of growth in both personal and professional dimensions. (Baker, 1985; Mahan & Stachowski, 1985; Vail & Tennison, 1991).
- used self-examination and critical inquiry to examine expected and experienced outcomes. (Reed & Black, 2006).



Findings (Cont.)

Chinese students in Malaysia

- Equal mix of male & female, from homogenous society
- For most students, this trip brought them into contact with non-Chinese people for the first time
- Did not have developed notions of difference, power and subjectivity

Discussion

American Students in Spain:

- Primarily women of color from homes where English was not the primary language
- Based on pre-travel study and journal reflections, these students were made more aware of notions of difference, power and subjectivity, having experienced subordination (as females in their families, or in society as minority females)
- Reflecting on these notions set them to be open to differences while abroad

Discussion

- In comparing the two groups, work needs to be more focused with exploring multiculturalism in relationship to difference, power and subjectivity for students who come from homogenous cultures

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- We'd love your feedback.
- Please take a moment to post some feedback on this presentation:
- <https://padlet.com/mmadhuri/Feedback>

