What does study abroad mean to our students—and why should it matter?

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Narrative 1 Learning: 
Direct experience of the world

“Classical science is based on the belief that there exists a real 
external world whose properties are definite and 
independent of the observer who perceives them.”

(S. Hawking & L. Mladinow, 2012)
Narrative 1 learning across cultures: The world is organized hierarchically
Narrative 1: Those special places. . . .
Story 1: The process of learning across cultures

1. Acquire knowledge about a special place & people

2. Directly experience the special place

3. Learn from, and emulate the behavior of, the cultivated and sophisticated people there

4. Return home more “cultured”—more knowledgeable and worldly

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Narrative 2: We are the world. Learning is still from the outside in—but there’s a new take on difference.
A new meme in narrative 2: Egalitarianism, “essential humanity,” supplants hierarchy

“The things we have in common far outnumber and outweigh those that divide us.” Walt Disney
Narrative 2 meeting the challenge of difference: Inoculating learners against culture shock

Teach various sorts of contrasting differences ("contrast-culture" training):

- Non-verbal communication
- Communication styles
- Learning styles
- Cognitive styles
- Cultural value contrasts
Story 2 meeting the challenge of difference: “Immersing” learners in the new culture
Narrative 2: The process of learning cross-culturally, described

1. Learners need to know about cultural differences ("Contrast culture learning")

2. We need to inoculate earners against “culture shock” by teaching U- or W-curve models

3. We need to take steps to be sure that learners are *immersed* in the new environment

4. Learners return home more culturally aware, sensitive
Narrative 3: Learning “from the inside out.”
The narrative that focuses on the creating of narratives
“There is no way to remove the observer—us—from our perception of the world. . . . Our perception is shaped by a kind of lens, the interpretive structure of our human brains. . . . Our brains interpret the input from our sensory organs by making a model of the world.”

* Hawking, S. & Mladenov, L. (2012). *The grand design*
Story 3: Humans co-create meaning.

*The Social construction of reality*

* We and the other members of our cultural groups construct the world we perceive and act in—and we then forget that we’re the authors of that world: Berger & Luckmann (1966)
Sensory experience + Brain functioning = Learning

*Our brains create models of our world and of ourselves, and they continuously run simulations of that model into the future.

*Our brains run largely unconnected conscious & unconscious systems—and as much as 95% of brain activity occurs in the latter.

*Commonsense experience tells each of us that the way we experience the world is the right way, the only way, it can be experienced.
Current research: Innate human capacities provide the basis for intercultural learning

- Our capacity to create models of the world—consciously and unconsciously
- Our capacity to know our own mind(s)
- Our capacity to make meaning differently in different contexts
- Our capacity to automatically infer others’ mental states—to understand & sense what other people think and feel
- Our capacity to access and override part of our unconscious, automatic response to stimuli
Building on our inborn capacities:
A transformative process for learning interculturally

Step 1: Increase awareness of our own characteristic ways of making meaning and acting in familiar and unfamiliar cultural contexts

Step 2: Increase awareness of others’ ways of making meaning and acting in familiar and unfamiliar cultural contexts

Step 3: Manage our emotions and thoughts in contexts that disorient and challenge us

Step 4: Bridge cultural gaps in those contexts—shift perspective, attune emotions and adapt our behavior in effective and appropriate ways

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Brain science and empathy: Human & dog eye-gazing

We don’t see things as they are, we see things as we are*

*Anaïs Nin
An awareness test

https://vimeo.com/148247749

https://vimeo.com/23776727
What’s the first thing you see?

*M.C. Escher drawing

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“We do not see that we do not see.”*


What the human eye in fact sees
Vision is a construction, not a movie camera*:

“Brains reach out into the world to extract what they need.”

Prompt: “Give the ages of the people”
Prompt: “Remember the clothes worn by the people”
What do you see?*

*Ahissar & Hochstein, 2004*
The brain learns in order to see—and the brain can learn to see with tactile input

• Eric Weihenmayer, extreme rock climber, using “BrainPort” to see:


https://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=eric+weihenmayer+brain+port&&view=detail&mid=786E5DBC30A02C2DC518786E5DBC30A02C2DC518&FORM=VRDGAR
Observation test

How many triangles are there??

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PxS4yjP3zHY
How many triangles do you see?
What do you see?
A simulation game:
Awareness of assumptions

Draw **four** straight lines connecting all nine dots, without retracing any line or lifting your pen from the page
“Ask yourself:
What assumption am I making,
That I’m not aware I’m making,
That gives me what I see?

And when you answer that, ask yourself:
What might I now invent,
That I haven’t yet invented,
That would give me other choices?”

Becoming aware of the out-of-awareness assumptions behind our frames. More practice!

Draw three straight lines connecting all nine dots, without retracing any line, or lifting your pen from the page.
Describe the man’s face here

Now describe what the man and woman are doing

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What have we started to help learners experience with these activities and games?

• **We make the meaning** that we perceive in the world—and we can make meaning differently from others, even if we’re all from the same national culture.

• Through reflecting, we can “catch” how we’re making meaning—that is, how we’re “framing” some event.

• **We can learn to shift our frame** to other’s meaning-making.

• **Other people can help us experience other ways of framing.**

• When we can accept that there are always different ways of framing an event, we understand that we have choices about how we experience the world.

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Responding to the challenge: Bridging the cultural gap between ourselves and our students

Some things to think about in teaching the four-step ICLT framework

1. Engage learners in intercultural content that’s essential for learning—and interesting!
2. Provide learners with opportunities to experience their own meaning-making
3. Challenge as well as support learners: bridging gaps of difference is to varying degrees uncomfortable
4. Introduce easily recalled learning and mnemonic processes in training sessions
5. Ask learners to practice these processes outside the training sessions
Other intercultural teaching and learning resources

• WISE Conference (February)
• Summer Institute for Intercultural Communication (SIIC, July)
• Winter Institute for Intercultural Communication (WIIC, March)

• Personal Leadership
• Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR)
• http://www.freemindfulness.org/download
• http://nancyhathaway.com/links/


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Thank You!
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