

Post Post-Trip Follow-Up With Postsecondary Students After Short-Term Study Abroad:
Transformational Learning and International Experiential Education

Devin Bright

Department of Graduate and Undergraduate
Studies in Education

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Faculty of Education, Brock University
St. Catharines, Ontario

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Abstract

Postsecondary students are increasingly participating in short-term study-abroad experiences organized by educational institutions in Canada. There are relatively fewer long-term studies of participants from a variety of international contexts after they have returned home for a year or more. From the view of transformative learning theory, this study investigated if/how the passage of time allows people to reflect on the personal impact of these experiences and if/how other factors that require more time (e.g., subsequent experiences, further education) influence such change. Drawing from one-on-one interviews with 8 participants, this study found that a short-term experience abroad can be the necessarily disorienting experience needed to initiate a transformative trajectory. Experiences during and post-travel that provide evidence of transformative learning are discussed. This research is intended to serve as a guide for those interested in social justice oriented outcomes for their students through international experiential education.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

This study is an investigation of Canadians who participated in short-term study abroad programs as postsecondary students at least 1 year prior to their involvement in my research, which took the form of a personal semi-structured interview. The potentially transformational nature of these experiences, particularly related to global citizenship and social justice education, is explored to better understand how students change over time after participating in a range of short-term study abroad experiences (typically 6 weeks or less). The gap in time between the students' travel and participation in this study is intended to address the relatively limited research on how students experience transformational learning over time. The study investigates two overall areas about change over time:

1. If/how the passage of time allows people to reflect on the personal impact of these experiences.
2. If/how other factors which require more time (e.g., subsequent experiences, further education) influence that change.

In February 2011, I joined the ranks of hundreds of postsecondary students who travelled for a week from Canada to the Global South. As a 2nd-year undergraduate student in arts education, I travelled to a small community on the northern shore of the Dominican Republic. I left hoping to “figure myself out,” test out the idea of teaching English, and to set myself apart from other soon-to-be teachers in a highly competitive job market. Steeped in the notion of helping those in need, despite not having any experience teaching or learning a second language, I was tasked with teaching English with limited materials and preparation, to a group of Spanish-speaking youth with a team

of about a dozen others. My week included time spent in the classroom, touring the community, meeting local people, and playing with children.

I remember stepping off the bus for the first time, exhausted after hours of travel, and being greeted by local kids who were absolutely ecstatic to meet me. The beginning of the week was pure excitement for everyone, but the reality of having to leave only days after we arrived set in with the kids before it set in with me: ¿Cuándo te vas? (When do you leave?). I watched as heartbroken local youth said farewell to an international volunteer who had been at the site for 6 months, and shortly after, my group and I departed as well. I left that experience with a sense that our teaching efforts were futile, in isolation of an overall plan, and that the constant making and breaking of relationships was potentially destructive to students. Nonetheless, I felt that my brief encounters with local people had given me some insight into what it was like to live in a rural community and I learned more about the unresolved challenges on Hispaniola island due to the ongoing conflict between the Dominican Republic and neighbouring Haiti.

Daily personal and group reflection sessions were built into the schedule of my trip, and we collectively looked forward to our discussions. Many of the others with whom I had travelled described their experience in vague yet affirmative terms throughout and shortly after their trip: magical, life changing, amazing. At the time, I didn't know how to place the skepticism I felt toward the experience; I wasn't sure we were doing any of the good we had travelled to do, nor was I sure about what I was learning for myself.

In the years that followed, I slowly began to think that I had bought into the illusion of having done service to others for a week, and that the commoditization of that

neatly packaged service experience was what truly supported the development activities of the NGO in the host country. In 2014, having completed B.Ed. and B.A. programs, I co-lead a group of postsecondary students on a week-long home-building project in El Salvador. This time I was convinced I could get it right: I would guide students through learning about El Salvadorian culture, history, and use the home-building project as a platform for students to begin asking questions about why someone in El Salvador would need support to build a home and why inexperienced Canadians have the luxury to travel abroad to build a home for complete strangers. The labour we performed (tamping dirt) could certainly have been accomplished in a shorter time, with a smaller team, and with the introduction of simple machinery (dirt compactor). From that experience, the group of students left with similar sentiments as many of my peers in 2011: they were generally happy to have made a positive contribution to the lives of others, with their perception of a job well done, and to be reminded of how lucky they were to be Canadian.

Background of the Problem

At the time of writing, high-school and postsecondary educators from Canada, the U.S., and the U.K. have a wide variety of opportunities from which to choose to organize a short-term study abroad experience. For the purpose of this study, short-term study abroad may include any organized group travel program where education is a focus. Generally, the travel is less than 6 weeks and may be extracurricular or fulfil a portion of an academic credit. Trip operators and NGOs provide neatly packaged 1 and 2-week experiences of cultural exchange, ecotourism, and/or humanitarian tourism (e.g., building homes or teaching English) across countries in the Global South. Students typically travel with a group of their peers, led by one or more adults associated with an educational or

community institution. The organization offering the experience typically provides various in-country arrangements such as transportation, food, accommodation, activities, and liaisons. Volunteering is a common theme for short-term study abroad experiences, often referred to as international service learning (ISL), however cultural encounters do occur without a service component. Although reliable statistics of the number of sojourners are not readily available, evidence that the demand and popularity of the trips is high among students can be estimated based on the number of opportunities, breadth of activities, and range of destinations. A University of London review counted over 800 organizations offering these types of experiences in the U.K. alone (Vrasti, 2013), with the numbers of student travellers in the tens of thousands annually. Vrasti (2013) argues that this form of travel, which utilizes a “make a difference” (p. 2) rhetoric, appeals to young people seeking the social capital associated with helping others, and for those seeking career or personal development in an increasingly global, competitive job market.

Educators and their institutions are also interested in international experiences for their students; their motivations are generally rooted in some form of global literacy. For some, the perceived benefit of these short-term study abroad experiences for students is based in the belief that exposure to other cultures is likely to help them work and compete in a global economy. At the postsecondary level, the perceived value-add that a trip abroad may provide for students’ career success or for their ranking of the institution is motivation to allocate resources to the organization and promotion of experiences.

Educators who are interested in instilling cosmopolitan values in their students, widening their global perspective and engagement in social justice issues, and preparing them to contribute to an increasingly global world are at the centre of many successful

experiences abroad for students. However, those who organize groups of people on trips vary in their motivations for doing so, and in their ability or interest in critical thinking or global citizenship education (GCE); they may be religious leaders, medical professionals, educators, builders, or simply have a desire to participate in a different form of travel.

Tiessen's (2012) study of 68 young adults who travelled on a short-term experience abroad found that their strongest motivations for doing so were personal development, a desire to help others and gain cross-cultural understanding, skills development, and testing an academic background or career choice. These findings confirm the impression that I formed during my own travel experiences as a student. However, this desire to help others abroad can seem at odds with the benefits travellers hope to gain. While other scholars have more closely considered the ethical considerations of short-term travel and its impact on host communities (e.g., Heron, 2011; O'Sullivan & Smaller, 2015; Simpson, 2004) this study focuses on how students' motivations for personal, skill, and/or career development are realized over time after they return home.

Students often return from their trip abroad declaring that their time was amazing, life-changing, or transformational, but struggle to articulate in meaningful ways to friends and families what they learned and how it made them feel, or to consider the impact of their time abroad to their Canadian lives (Kiely, 2004). Few studies have detailed the impact of students' experiences after the *magic* of the trip has worn off. The follow-up studies of past short-term travel abroad participants conducted by Kiely (2004), Gough (2013), Kornelsen (2014), and Bamber (2015), discussed in chapter 2, each offer a window into participants' perspective months or years after returning to Canada. Whereas

the latter authors returned to one or more cohorts of students who participated in the same trip context, this study draws from several different trip destinations. Each author notes the potential value these experiences have in making or initiating long-term impact in students' lives, and draws from Mezirow's various works on transformative learning.

Purpose of the Study

This study seeks to understand if short-term travel abroad programs for postsecondary students live up to all that is promised explicitly by a particular sending organization or implicitly by the discourse associated with overseas learning experiences and to determine if students' personal and career development motivations for travelling align with what actually happens to those who travel. This study also investigates the kind of events, activities, or learning opportunities that take place before, during, and after an ISL trip, which appear to contribute to a lasting impact on students. The results of this study are likely to help trip practitioners make decisions about how they structure their trip, particularly with respect to their long-term goals for their students, as they come to better understand what can make a trip transformational for students.

Scope, Limitation, and Critical Assumptions

This study is limited to cases of group travel by secondary or postsecondary students for less than 6 weeks in duration where the trip occurred at least 12 months prior to the interview. Details of selection criteria can be found in chapter 3. Any type of short-term study abroad program was accepted for this study, however in practical terms, this is most frequently a 1-week service-learning trip to the Global South. Long-term study abroad or exchange programs are likely to be a more individual experience, may not include significant cultural encounters (e.g., Canadians travelling to the U.K. or U.S.),

often longer than 6 weeks, and complicated by students' academic experiences abroad. For these reasons, long-term programs were excluded from the scope of the research.

The essential inquiry in this study is the transformational aspect of experiences of students who travelled abroad. This assumes that it is possible for students to describe feelings of change over time. The time between the students' travel and participation in an interview creates an opportunity both for new experiences and insights, as well as for memories to become more vague or difficult to recall, and how definitively individuals may attribute a change in worldview, values, or beliefs, to a particular experience. More details on data collection and assumptions also are presented in chapter 3.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter provides a review of key literature relevant to an interpretive study of the long-term transformative impact of international experiential education (IEE) for Western postsecondary students. The principal themes in this review include IEE, global citizenship for social justice, and transformative learning through experiential education. This review begins by introducing IEE and its contested role in education and proceeds with an overview of various contributions to the field of transformative learning. This chapter concludes with the principal focus of this research, namely the potential that short-term IEE holds for transformative learning in GCE for social justice. This discussion includes factors which mediate learning, including time, motivation, learner positionality, and experiential learning processes.

International Experiential Education (IEE)

Western secondary and postsecondary institutions are internationalizing their curricula through increasingly accessible international experiences (Heron, 2011). Trips to distant locales, often described by promoters as exotic adventures to distant places, and extending for only a few weeks or less, are common manifestations of this trend. The potential for transformative learning within relatively short experiences is the subject of this research. IEE trips may include community service projects (i.e., international service learning, or ISL), cultural education, language instruction, touristic activities, pre- and post-trip information sessions, ongoing reflective activities, and course-based assignments. Destinations are often in developing countries where health care, education, water, and housing infrastructure or other needs are prevalent. Study abroad is typically a for-credit program at a postsecondary institution, spanning from several weeks to

multiple academic terms; study abroad is a related topic (see Lewin, 2009), but is not the focus of this research. The rise in popularity of international opportunities among Western education institutions can be attributed to the belief that these kinds of experiences add value to students' abilities to compete in an increasingly globalized job market (Tiessen, 2012). This represents a neoliberal approach toward international experience, and challenges social justice oriented educators, who stress the potential of such experiences to be transformational (Chaput & O'Sullivan, 2013; Mezirow, 1995), to question the values inherent in IEE practices on both the host communities/countries and on the students themselves. Moving toward a justice approach to IEE, "there is an urgent need to become more attuned to the ethical and relational aspects of such community-based learning experiences" (Bamber, 2015, p. 28). Consistent with this observation, I offer an analysis of GCE, which constitutes one of several educational expressions of IEE.

Global Citizenship Education (GCE)

Many institutions and their educators state that their primary intention is to develop so-called global citizens through their IEE programs. The English Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO, 2010) published *Educating for Global Citizenship—An ETFO Curriculum Development Inquiry Initiative*; the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2014) published *Global Citizenship Education, Preparing Learners for the Challenges of the 21st Century*; and the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada's (AUCC, 2014) *Canada's Universities in the World: AUCC Internationalization Survey* found that developing global citizens was the top reason for the increased internationalization of education. This

list far from exhausts the multitude of curricular guides directing educators on how to infuse GCE into their programs; references to global citizenship appear in many guides and postsecondary mandates, including Brock University. The term global citizen is both an everyday term among educators and a contested topic among academics. As Cameron (2013) notes, the concept lacks clarity, and competing, sometimes contradictory, usages have emerged. It is, Cameron suggests, perhaps due to this conceptual vagueness that the term has gained popularity and versatility. The pressing concern for educators is that “initiatives to promote global citizenship need to engage with ... an ethical framework before choosing or designing experiences aimed at helping students to better understand and respond to contemporary global problems” (Cameron, 2013, p. 27), yet educators may be ill-equipped to engage in significant critical discussions with their peers, students, and their families (Merryfield, 2000).

Further complicating the concept, two competing logics for GCE must be addressed. First, the commodification of education which views internationalization of campuses, programs, and student learning as an employability advantage in a neoliberal market is often described as superficial, unclear, and exploitive of the host community/institution. Second, IEE in its various forms is rooted in the hope that intercultural experiences will foster peace, intercultural understanding, and a sense of global citizenship (Epprecht, 2004). The issue of the potential of IEE to foster global citizenship, grounded in social justice, through a transformative learning experience, is the focus of this research. However, these “global” outcomes are not uniformly defined or taken-up by practitioners. Generally learning outcomes for IEE are unclear for both orientations toward GCE, and particularly so as they relate to students’ ongoing

understating of themselves in relation to their developing understanding of the world (i.e., *cosmopolitan literacy*; Tarc, 2013). Short-term outcomes to ensure the success of IEE (i.e., those designed for the trip itself) are relatively better understood (e.g., Abedini, Gruppen, Kolars, & Kumagai, 2012; Amerson, 2010; Dean & Jendzurski, 2013; Dekaney, 2008), while research investigating lasting impacts of IEE is underdeveloped (Bamber, 2015; Gough, 2013; Kiely, 2004). Researchers also cite numerous pedagogical challenges for fostering lasting, profound change among students (Andreotti, 2016; Crabtree, 2008). This is discussed further below. The focus of this research is the transformative potential of GCE for social justice in international experiential contexts (Kolb, 1984; O'Sullivan & Smaller, 2013).

Some authors explicitly reject superficial understandings of global citizenship. For Cameron (2013), global citizenship must return to its roots in *cosmopolitanism*. Cameron defines cosmopolitanism by articulating four key principles:

1. a universal obligation of all humans to all others;
2. a personal obligation for the consequences of one's actions/inactions;
3. a consideration for structural inequalities (e.g., don't just feed the child, question why is the child starving); and finally,
4. a moral obligation to do no harm to others, to do good, and to not benefit from the harm of others.

This is referred to as a *thick* framework of global citizenship. This approach provides conceptual clarity for educators aiming to equip students with the experience, knowledge, and dispositions necessary for a social justice perspective through international contexts, thus providing a possible ethical framework for IEE practitioners.

Considering these core principles, Cameron (2013) stipulates that some expressions of global citizenship, such as voluntaristic charity work or activities for resume building, necessarily be termed *thin* (p. 30). Andreotti (2006) provides a similar critique of *soft* versus *critical* global citizenship by contrasting opposing ideological stances on dimensions of global citizenship. For example: is the problem that needs to be addressed by IEE one of the presumed helplessness and poverty of global southerners (i.e., soft global citizenship) or one of structurally generated inequality and the need for social justice and solidarity (i.e., critical global citizenship)? Is the basis for caring about other people one of charity and helping or of responsibility and accountability? For educators, is raising awareness about socioeconomic issues enough? Should educators promote engagement with complex global issues, differing perspectives, and power relationships? Despite seemingly positive intentions, the tensions between perspectives described by Andreotti remind us that simply meaning well is not enough, or can even cause harm (Desrosiers & Thomson, 2013; Epprecht, 2004). Such unintended harm may include the use of Northern volunteers in the Global South whose presence replaces paid local work, or the dangers inherent in the use of unskilled labour in construction or healthcare projects.

The lens through which educators and students view GCE ultimately influences the kinds of activities in which they engage, knowledge they share or to which they are open, and the decisions they make toward a more favourable future. Myers's (2010) study of 77 adolescents found that students construct their own global citizenship identity primarily as a moral commitment to humanity and in relation to processes of globalization; their answers, however, lacked the explicit depth that thick or critical

global citizenship requires. Tiessen's (2012) study of 100 youth (ages 18 to 30) found participants' most common motivation for developing cross-cultural understanding through international experience was connected to career development or testing. While expectations for adolescents and young adults may differ, there is a need for educators to deepen their conceptual understanding of global citizenship, in the ethical sense, to more effectively guide students of IEE.

Other authors such as Wood (2008) reject global citizenship entirely; Wood's highly critical account of global citizenship takes a pragmatic lens to contest the language of human rights as "rhetoric [that] can be very effective as affect, but substantively, it is more an abstract distraction or a decorative mask than a tool in the actual battle for rights" (p. 33). Wood recognizes the individual powers and barriers nation-states present and, even as in the definitions of thick or critical global citizenship noted above, contends that "the state is not benevolent" (p. 33); for Wood, even global organizations cannot overpower state-level politics in realistic circumstances, and a global-scale state-apparatus is impossible. Wood further criticizes the common justification for GCE—globalization—in the sense of increased global infrastructure (e.g., movement of people, capital, and knowledge) by reminding readers that this phenomenon is not uniform and largely flows outward from the West. Thus, if global citizenship exists merely as an ethic of being, the extent to which it is a useful or valid construct is an important consideration. Highly critical accounts such as those from Wood are useful in the sense that they challenge educators to move beyond rhetoric or superficial understandings of global citizenship as simply a product of globalization and toward the difficult work of having responsibilities for others and for one's own inactions. Jefferess (2008) holds a somewhat

more optimistic view and articulates this global ethic as “[providing] the conceptual framework for transcending the nation or the barriers of ethnic, religious, or racial difference to include all within a global community” (p. 29) yet he acknowledges that the construct “serves to mask the structural violence of contemporary global relations” (p. 32). Tarc (2013) synthesizes many of the parallel concepts among authors who advocate for a meaningful, socially just conception of global citizenship. He expresses these ideas with the term *cosmopolitan literacy* (my emphasis), defining it as “one’s never fully developed capacity to engage difference and be changed by it” (p. 107). For this author, productive intercultural learning (and any potential for transformation therein) is the intersection of new knowledge and perspectives as a result of intercultural encounters with one’s existing worldview and experience. Cosmopolitans are not blank slates. Every encounter is shaped by personal assumptions and positionality (Hall, 2002). This is a constructivist view of knowledge which holds that an understanding of the world is shaped by the person trying to understand it. Cosmopolitans are therefore neither resigned to finding cultural universals nor are they unquestioningly accepting of cultural relativities. Developing cosmopolitan literacies encompasses knowing how individuals’ positionality shapes their personal perspective, a willingness to reflect and evolve this perspective, and an openness to the broad modes of information which may develop this perspective further (i.e., literacies). Self-awareness and the ability to reflect is therefore an essential component of GCE.

While the optimism authors exhibit about global citizenship may fall along a continuum, one prevailing theme for those advocating for more effective GCE is the consideration for one’s “causal responsibility” (Dobson, 2006, p. 172) in economic and

social structures that benefit some, at the expense of others. This ideological stance is key in differentiating critical conceptions of global citizenship with superficial understandings (Jefferess, 2008).

As described above, global citizenship is a contested theoretical construct. These issues are intertwined with practical applications of global pedagogy, particularly in experiential international contexts. If one accepts that a social justice orientation to global citizenship is indeed relevant to contemporary IEE, as critical scholars have argued, educators must also engage with ethical issues endemic to learning across cultural and geographical difference.

Cultural Relativism Versus Universalism

For Cameron (2013), thick global citizenship may exist between two seemingly opposing views:

1. issues and solutions are culturally relative, situated in historical, political, and religious contexts, or
2. some things should apply to all people across all contexts.

Helping students negotiate this ethical framework so that their experience is balanced between critical thought, which takes into consideration the complexities of the particular context, and yet is constructive, such that students don't dismiss people as poor-but-happy or become accepting of problematic practices abroad, is a challenging goal for practitioners. Epprecht (2004) illustrates this point outright—"some countries have bad laws" (p. 696)—and asserts that participants and practitioners must navigate ethical terrain when choosing to resist, adopt, or influence local practices. Contemporary practices are often a product of myriad political, cultural, and other historical factors. The

complex tension between cultural relativism and universalism is terrain for cosmopolitans—for those engaged in global justice in the critical sense.

Impact on Host Communities

Relatively less research exists for the long-term impact of IEE programs on the host communities in which they take place in comparison to Northern-focused research. O’Sullivan and Smaller (2015) found that Nicaraguan host families, when asked if they would simply prefer a monetary donation equal to the airfare to travel to Nicaragua, rather than receive short-term ISL volunteers, respondents were nearly unanimous in their preference to continue participating in the program because they enjoyed hosting the visiting young people. Despite this apparently positive attitude towards the visitors, O’Sullivan and Smaller’s study also raised concerns over the unequal distribution of resources to host families as well as important methodological limitations for assessing the impact of international service on host communities. Epprecht (2004) also informs this issue by adding that service in host communities may take away paying jobs from locals, disrupt local economies, pose additional strain on host communities (including “community burnout” from emotionally exhausting volunteer-turnover), and the resource-intensive act of travelling/tourism. Even sojourners with positive intentions become actors in complex ethical tensions.

Westernization and Colonialism in GCE

Substantial consideration for the ways in which IEE serves a neocolonial agenda has been undertaken (e.g., Perold et al., 2013; Pluim & Jorgenson, 2012; Thomas & Chandrasekera, 2013). Despite ongoing research striving to push forward a more just framework for international experience, service-abroad remains entangled with

Westernized notions of development (Simpson, 2004). Since the typical demographic of Western sojourners are White, young adult females from relatively privileged circumstances, they may “excite envious or admiring attention from the hosts and stimulate a naive desire for Western values” (Epprecht, 2004, p. 699). In the South African context, this phenomenon is part of a colonial legacy where the mere involvement of White people adds credibility to an organization (Perold et al., 2013). Tiessen (2012) found that some sojourners’ motivations were dangerously colonial: “some participants expressed their desire to serve as role models for youth in the global south, yet the Canadian participants did not reflect on their own positionality and privilege in relation to race, class and gendered relations of power” (p. 2). Not all group leaders, program facilitators, and educators engage with issues of dependency and colonialism. One service-learning delegation leader for a Nicaraguan NGO explained his perspective during an interview when asked about neocolonialism:

There are all these notions of internalized oppressions [among community members]. Seeing themselves as like “yeah you are the peasant.” And trying to confront that as a facilitator of the delegation is hard because I come into the space and the work of colonialism is already there and people already have those concepts. ... [They] raise [visiting] students on a pedestal. [They] say, oh poor kids, we should baby them, we should caress them, look how white skinned they are. Oh man I wish I had white skin like you, look at my brown skin. I can’t myself as a coordinator say, okay, this is neocolonialism, this is it! ... Instead I change the way I do a workshop, or inserting certain pedagogical tools throughout my workshops, or throughout the week. (Transcript of an anonymous ISL facilitator provided by O’Sullivan & Smaller, 2016)

For this leader, while the prospect of neocolonialism among delegations in Nicaraguan communities is real, he works toward pedagogies which raise the critical consciousness of both community members and Northern visitors.

Problematic Student Motivations

If global citizenship is to reach the status of an ethical framework as described above, and in the thick/critical sense, students' motivations for learning through international experience must be considered. Students' motivations for travelling abroad influences the lens through which they engage with their experiences. Prevailing reasons for experiential education abroad include: personal/skill development, resumé building, cultural immersion/intercultural learning, helping others, and a desire for adventure (the exotic Other; Grimm & Needham, 2011; Tiessen, 2012). Volunteer organizations capitalize on this demand by using imagery which typifies the White female amidst a group of ethnic children in a rural and exotic setting (Clost, 2013).

Tiessen (2012), among other authors, acknowledges the potential future impact an experience abroad may have on students' lives, however she critiques the personal human capital building motivation in the same sense that thin/soft global citizenship is described; there lacks a genuine ethic for others which obliges IEE participants to consider their complicity in global inequalities. Another key motivation participants bring to their international experience is a seemingly altruistic desire to help others. While outwardly positive, many authors caution that the charity model of IEE, found in some ISL experiences and coined the "helping imperative" (Heron, 2007, p. 6), is about capitalizing on the act of serving the Other while engaging in self-fulfilment, self-discovery, or personal growth. This model is described as furthering dependencies and neocolonial relationships (Thomas & Chandrasekera, 2013). Sojourners' motivations for personal

development align with the often-cited criticism of service abroad programs: the flow of benefits (even where service to others is an explicit component) is frequently more substantial for the participants than the host community. This kind of global citizenship, which is rooted in resumé building and personal development, is distinct from the kind of experience and pedagogy that seeks to engage with complex political and systemic structures in order to alleviate suffering. The ongoing challenge, as stated above, is that the term global citizenship carries with it vague meanings among educators and those participating in IEE. This results in educators and participants being naive to the disconnect between their intentions to serve others and their actions.

Pedagogical Challenges for IEE

If inculcating the values of global citizenship in the thick/critical sense is to be considered a valid construct for educators, the efficacy of its pedagogy must be considered. Many postsecondary institutions offer international experiential learning programs with the aim of developing global citizens, yet specific learning outcomes of that goal are unclear (Cameron, 2013). Despite this lack of clarity, experiential learning practices seem well positioned to help participants and educators elicit learning from students' international experiences (Langdon & Agyeyomah, 2013). Kolb's (1984) widely adopted experiential learning cycle consists of four stages:

1. having a concrete experience;
2. reflecting on that experience to identify key ideas;
3. consolidating those key ideas into learning outcomes that can be applied across contexts (abstraction); and
4. actively applying ideas to future concrete experiences.

Typically, with IEE models, students' concrete experiences occur during their trip; reflection occurs during the trip and/or during post-trip session(s), and abstracting ideas occurs during post-trip sessions(s). This is not always an entirely straightforward process, and is complicated by contextual factors like time, learner positionality, and trip facilitation. Importantly, when reflection on experience is weak, student learning tends to be "haphazard, accidental, and superficial" (Desrosiers & Thomson, 2013, p. 143), and so facilitators must have the capacity and resources to explicitly engage students in this process. Authors frequently call for pre-trip, during trip, and post-trip follow-up sessions to facilitate students' learning. There is need for ongoing reflection throughout an experience abroad (Fowler, 2008), yet participants and organizers struggle to find the time and space for this to occur (Travers, 2013). Advocates for strong pre-trip sessions (e.g., Drolet, 2013) also tend to agree that post-trip sessions are essential to facilitate learning (e.g., Travers, 2013). However, experienced trip leaders note that pre-trip information and reflection tends to lack connection to students' personal experience and is therefore limited in its effectiveness. Post-trip learning opportunities can now draw on students' personal experience; however, researchers and practitioners often note logistical and motivational barriers to facilitating learning once students return home (Fizzel & Epprecht, 2013). Perhaps more importantly, organizers avoid, ignore, or are ill-equipped to engage in critical understandings of global inequalities (Fizzel & Epprecht, 2013).

Overall the extent to which pre-trip sessions can sufficiently prepare students for their experience as it relates to their GCE appears limited or undecided among the literature; greater consideration for what the basic requirements for sufficient preparation should exactly be is needed, beyond logistical and safety requirements. One student

remarked that her/his pre-trip session “did a good job preparing me for what I saw of South Africa from the windows of the bus, but nothing short of being there, prepared me for meeting people at eye level” (Dean & Jendzurski, 2013, p. 109). This quote echoes the voices of many participants, which may affirm that experience is the essential pedagogical tool necessary to expand students’ conceptual framework over time. Desrosiers and Thomson (2013) caution that students may become hyper sensitive to political issues if too much attention is given pre-trip to certain issues, while Drolet (2013) views reflection on positionality and language acquisition as ethical imperatives for trip preparation. In Dekaney’s (2008) study of a cultural experience to Brazil, she concluded that “pre-departure on-campus lectures and meetings in preparation for the short-term program helped participants anticipate and understand certain social, cultural, and artistic characteristics of the host country prior to departure” (p. 28).

Politically correct discourses and cultures of status-quo can also interfere with students’ ability to critically engage in global issues, as Chaput and O’Sullivan (2013) describe in their reflections on a learning experience in Cuba with postsecondary students. For these authors, such liberal practices include group consensus seeking, avoidance of issues, neoliberal views of governance and economics, and the dismissive view that Cubans are poor but happy.

Educators facilitating post-trip reflective sessions also experience barriers in trying to teach global citizenship. Students often need more contextual information to help process their experience. Desrosiers and Thomson’s (2013) analysis of a trip to post-genocide Rwanda found that the way students constructed personal meaning from their experience was different than their intended outcomes. Some students held

misinterpretations of their experiences, some returned home with a sense of moral superiority about their experience, or some reflected superficially or cynically on their experience. Epprecht (2004) asserts that post-trip sessions tend to be more celebratory rather than critical—a finding which is recounted in Fizzel and Epprecht's (2013) survey of trip organizers. It is important to note that these findings remain consistent with students' motivations for participating in IEE. The same authors also note that ultimately some educators, in their case secondary teachers, have limited experience in critical pedagogy and development studies. Yet, even experienced educators (e.g., Chaput & O'Sullivan) face challenges in fostering a culture of critical engagement among student participants. Finally, Simpson (2004) notes that re-entry work needs to help students avoid the common conceptualization that their privilege is a result of good fortune for simply being born in a particular setting, and how misfortunate life can be for others. This "lotto logic" (Quinby, 2002, p. 236) is dismissive of the kinds of ideologies, substantial structural inequalities, and global relationships which result in power imbalances and unequal distribution of resources. How educators and participants engage with, talk about, and make sense of their experience once they return home is a principal concern for this research as these activities have possible implications for transformative learning over time.

Transformative Learning Through IEE

What exactly constitutes transformation for students is of central importance to this study, as it is the enduring impact that an international experience has on a person which determines its value once students return home. Transformative learning is "a deep, structural shift in basic premises of thought, feelings, and actions" (Transformative Learning Centre, n.d., para. 3). Initial definitions of transformative learning frequently

define it as being not only, or greater than, instrumental ways of learning—for example, Freire’s (1968/2000) banking model of education. Kiely (2004) describes transformative learning by its perceived opposite: “unlike instrumental forms of knowledge that don’t change the frame of reference from which the learner is positioned” (p. 6). Although this is an important distinction for Kiely and other authors, the importance of knowing political, geographical, historical, and cultural landscapes appears relatively devalued among transformative theorists, who tend to favour perspective-shifting experiences. More research is needed to understand this (false) dichotomy and the role instrumental knowledge plays in laying the foundation for, or even being the catalyst for, perspective transformation.

Jack Mezirow (1978) began describing significant and personally impactful learning events as transformative learning while studying women who returned to higher education as adults. Importantly, his initial study incorporated the conscientization of women through critical pedagogy. Mezirow’s theory is principally concerned with how individuals experience perspective transformation through critical reflection on their making meaning of new knowledge, encounters, and experience. The experience of perspective transformation rests fundamentally on one’s ontological view of reality, known as a meaning perspective or frame of reference. Comprised of meaning schemes, Mezirow (1991) outlines three categories: psychological (or cognitive), sociocultural, and epistemic. Psychological schemes are concerned with how we perceive ourselves, our abilities, and place in the world. Sociocultural schemes are concerned with how social actors interact with each other. Finally, epistemic schemes are concerned with our systems and beliefs about knowledge. Meaning schemes are the fundamental principals

through which we interact with and make sense of our world. Mezirow (2000) states that learning occurs in four areas:

1. new knowledge and experience that is readily consistent with our existing meaning schemes;
2. new knowledge and experience that extends or generates new meaning schemes;
3. new knowledge and experience that is incompatible with our existing meaning perspective due to our habits of mind; and
4. new knowledge and experience that is incompatible with our meaning perspective due to our point of view.

Our frame of reference is composed of two dimensions as seen in the third and fourth area of learning: habits of mind and a point of view. “Habits of mind are broad, abstract, orienting, habitual ways of thinking, feeling, and acting influenced by assumptions that constitute a set of cultural, political, social educational, and economic codes” (Mezirow 1997, pp. 5-6). The habits of mind are expressed in a particular point of view: “the constellation of belief, value judgment, attitude, and feeling that shapes a particular interpretation” (Mezirow 1997, p. 6). Learning in the third and fourth area is what Mezirow refers to as a disorienting dilemma, and is key to perspective transformation. Finally, Mezirow (1995) developed a model to address how types of reflection can interact with meaning schemes. Content reflection involves learning within existing meaning schemes, process reflection involves learning and expanding meaning schemes, and premise reflection is the critical self-reflection necessary for navigating disorienting dilemmas in order to expand personal meaning perspectives. Table 1 provides a comparison for Mezirow’s four types of learning and three types of reflection.

Table 1

Mezirow's Types of Learning and Reflecting

	Types of learning (2000)	Types of reflecting (1995)
	New knowledge and experience is readily consistent with our existing meaning schemes.	Content reflection involves learning within existing meaning schemes.
	New knowledge and experience extends or generates new meaning schemes.	Process reflection involves learning new meaning schemes
Transformative learning	<p>Meaning scheme transformation: New knowledge and experience is incompatible with our existing meaning perspective and we must reflect on and adapt our habits of mind.</p> <p>Perspective transformation: New knowledge and experience is incompatible with our existing meaning perspective and we must reflect on and adapt our point of view</p>	Premise reflection is the critical self-reflection necessary for navigating disorienting dilemmas in order to expand personal meaning perspectives (see Mezirow 1997 for further elaborations on critical reflection).

Although considered the founder of transformative learning theory, Mezirow's contributions over the past 30 years have not been without criticism. Transformative learning as Mezirow characterizes it is essentially a rational and metacognitive process where learners reassess the validity of their meaning perspectives through instrumental knowledge and communicative discourse (Mezirow, 2008). Some concerns surrounding the cognitive limitations of critical self-reflection, adults' ability to understand their own thinking, to rationalize their experiences, and to move through stages of transformation are provided by Boyd (1991), Grabove (1997), and Robertson (1997). Hart (1990) cautions that if learners are to challenge their own perspectives through communicating with others, one must consider power imbalances among people. Learner resistance to difficult knowledge—that which doesn't readily fit into a meaning perspective—is a critique addressed by Mezirow (1978) himself: “by avoiding transformation of perspectives, we may feel safe and secure; whereas shifting our underlying assumptions can make us feel insecure and unsure” (p. 101).

Other authors argue that Mezirow's emphasis on rational thought is lacking the importance of emotional dimensions learning: Baumgartner (2001) argues that “transformational learning is a complex process involving thoughts and feelings” (p. 18), while Dirkx, Mezirow, and Cranton's (2006) similar emphasis is on transformation which involves subconscious emotional processes that are not constrained by rational and cognitive learning stages. Travers's (2013) study of a postsecondary travel abroad program adds that engagement with positive and negative emotions during and after experiences leads to more connected learning. Boyd (1991) also criticizes Mezirow's emphasis on rational thought, in favour of emotional processes, and asserts that the

desired outcome for transformative learning is compassionate relationships with other people rather than autonomy. Grabove (1997) further emphasizes the potential for nonrational dimensions of transformative learning; she suggests the transformative learner “moves in and out of the cognitive and the intuitive, of the rational and the imaginative, of the subjective and the objective, of the personal and the social” (Grabove, 1997, p. 95).

Students returning home from a short-term experience abroad commonly report that their experience was eye-opening or life-changing. The problematic assumption beneath this seemingly exciting finding is perhaps best described by Fizzel and Epprecht (2013): “it seemed to be assumed that to witness poverty was automatically a perception-shifting or transformational learning experience” (p. 118). Chaput and O’Sullivan (2013) and O’Sullivan and Smaller (2013) found that teenage students returning from Cuba and Nicaragua leveraged superficial or helping discourse when articulating their reflections, despite having been steeped in a solidarity perspective. These authors speculate that participants may lack fluency with the necessary vocabulary or conceptual knowledge to engage with complex global issues. Thus, their reflections took place within a more familiar paradigm of charity, or content reflection in Mezirow’s view. Merryfield (2000), in her study of teacher educators’ preparedness to teach multicultural or global education, agrees with Fizzel and Epprecht in that learning does take place directly via experience; she describes her participants as having made profound “retroactive meaning making” (p. 431) after their international experiences.

Students with a strong desire to act on what they have witnessed often lack a framework to express their own learning (Kiely, 2004) or their contribution to host

communities overseas (Birdwell, 2011). Tarc (2013) cautions that merely labeling an experience as transformative is a “cop out of intellectual thought” (p. 41). Despite frequent reports from students having transformative experiences, findings from two large short-term studies—Eyler and Giles (1999) and Rhoads (1997)—indicate that participants don’t experience substantive perspective transformation frequently. Long-term studies of perspective transformation from international experiences are limited. Kiely (2004) categorized students’ perspective changes year(s) after their experience in six areas (political, moral, intellectual, cultural, personal, and spiritual) and found that all participants in the study described learning that fit within one or more of each category. Gough (2013), despite having set out to work inductively, concluded that his participants, years after returning home, experienced some perspective change among the categories that Kiely (2004) identified. Both studies focused largely on the content of the perspective change (transformation) and relatively less on the process(es) and experiences which lead to change.

Bamber (2015) interviewed 27 students that participated in ISL programs in past years and offers a brief analysis of the processes of perspective change (see Table 2); for Bamber, cosmopolitan transformation is a process of becoming. Overall, where studies attempt to describe transformative learning in international settings, common constraints limit empirical evidence: the length of time participants are involved in the research, the participant’s ability to evaluate personal transformation, participants’ resistance to change, or to identify connections between transformation and a particular experience, all limit ways of knowing about transformative learning (Mezirow & Taylor, 2011).

Table 2

Bamber's (2015) Cosmopolitan Transformation as a Process of Becoming

Processes	Dispositions	Conditions
Critical reflection alongside immersion	Acknowledging incompleteness	Openness with the Other
Participatory problem solving	Questioning hegemony	Capacity to critically reflect
Connecting with the Other	Validating other ways of knowing	Connectivity with the Other
	Connecting with place	
	Tackling injustices	

Transformative learning, GCE for social justice, and international experiential learning are fundamental themes to this research. While these themes exist independently, their intersection requires investigating how the mechanisms of perspective change for social justice in international contexts unfolds over time; this is the central issue to this research. Mezirow's lifelong work on perspective change suggests that an experience which does not fit into one's existing paradigm necessitates a cognitive change. Bamber's (2015) processes, dispositions, and conditions provide a possible framework for the change to occur in international contexts. Andreotti (2016) also provides a framework through which perspective transformation may occur in global contexts. This model is a pedagogical tool designed to help students make sense of historical patterns of engagement and representation: hegemony, ethnocentrism, ahistoricism, depoliticization, self-congratulatory attitudes, uncomplicated solutions, and paternalism. Dubbed the HEADSUP tool, its central concepts parallel some of those offered by Bamber (2015).

If the ideas offered by Bamber (2015) and Andreotti (2016) describe the paths to Mezirow's (2000) perspective change in global contexts, it is Kolb's (1984) model of experiential learning that provides the basis for which learners may cognitively engage with these processes. Reflection, in personal or social settings, guided or self-motivated, is an essential process for students to move from experiencing to learning (Desrosiers & Thomson, 2013). Yet, both the ways in which learners engage in experiential learning (i.e., reflection or applying new knowledge to future situations) or in the dimensions offered by Bamber and Andreotti, are highly constrained in short-term IEE trips for reasons described previously in this chapter. Therefore, this research clarifies the possible impact of IEE by investigating the processes and elements of perspective change over time.

One central assumption to this research is that transformative learning is both possible and desirable for GCE and IEE. Andreotti (2016) states that the greatest challenge for her as an educator for global citizenship was one of *intelligibility*. For her, this concept refers to her audience's ability to engage with GCE based on their own positionality; what is "legible within an audience's normalized worldview, especially if this worldview sees itself as neutral, universal, benevolent and unlimited in its capacity to apprehend reality" (Andreotti 2016, p. 7). She addresses her audience's position through four general orientations:

1. seeking simple awareness of surface level issues;
2. seeking issues as problems to be solved through simple solutions for personal affirmation;
3. seeking critical engagement with issues while still centralizing existing systems of power; and
4. being open to new ontological and epistemic understandings and exploring possibilities beyond modern institutions (e.g., nation-states, capitalism).

These audience-orientations are one example of how learners may not yet be ready to engage with global issues with increasing degrees of criticality. Maldonado-Torres (2004) uses the term *epistemic blindness* to describe not what those do not yet understand, but what they cannot yet understand. International experience may provide an opportunity to disrupt students' everyday patterns of thinking. It is therefore the process of perspective change through experiential GCE which prepares people to imagine different possibilities for the world.

Conclusion

IEE is an increasingly popular method of GCE for secondary and postsecondary institutions. Two common aims of this activity—the desire to better oneself through IEE and the desire to work toward a more socially just world—at times are at odds. Education for global citizenship generally falls on a continuum ranging from superficial understanding of difference, to critically engaging in shared global challenges, power relationships, and inequalities. This research is concerned with GCE for social justice. A cosmopolitan disposition calls for moving beyond doing no harm in the world (Cameron, 2013); this position considers how one can be a complicit benefactor of the harm of others and demands an appreciation for many interconnected, contextual, and complex factors. The task of becoming more critically minded toward global injustices is not an easy one.

One gap in current literature is the way in which learners' perspectives change over time due to participating in IEE. Immediate reactions to experiences abroad are often short-lived and underdeveloped. Perspective transformation is relevant to researchers and facilitators of IEE who are concerned with the lasting impacts of a socially just form of global citizenship experience (cosmopolitan literacies). Perspective transformation occurs when individuals change their point of view or habit of mind to accommodate for new knowledge and experiences, and empowers people to view global processes and injustices in greater detail. This research seeks to clarify how past participants of IEE experience perspective change by investigating significant moments from their experience abroad and the processes which may ultimately influence change.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN

The aim of this study is to understand how past participants of IEE experience learning transformation over time. By illuminating individual characteristics of perspective transformation in IEE contexts, it may be possible to support the development of more effective pedagogical programs. In this chapter, I detail why and how I chose an interpretative phenomenological approach (IPA) to guide the design of the study. I delineate IPA into its three fundamental principles: phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). I enumerate the specific data collection methods, participant selection, data analysis (termed *explicitation*), and comment on the credibility and limitations of the inquiry.

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

I selected the interpretative phenomenological approach for this study because it is an in-depth inquiry into each respondent's individual case (*idiographic* method) of lived experience (*phenomenon*) which acknowledges the importance of *interpreting* experience to make meaning. According to Larkin and Thompson (2011), "in IPA we are interested in identifying what *matters* to participants, and then exploring what these things *mean* to participants" [emphasis in original] (p. 105). This methodology enables me to make explicit the insights that arise from individuals' unique international contexts and post-travel experiences.

Phenomenology

Phenomenologists are concerned with "how individuals make sense of their experiences" (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). At the root of phenomenology, "the intent is to understand the phenomena in [its] own terms—to provide a description of human

experience as it is experienced by the person herself” (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998, p. 96) and allowing the *essence* to emerge (Cameron, Schaffer, & Park, 2001). Phenomenology is “the study of essences” (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. vii). The term essence refers to the basic meanings of a phenomenon (van Manen, 1990). Heidegger (1977) describes the essence of a phenomenon as “the way in which it remains through time as what it is” (p. 3). van Manen (1990) suggests that:

A good [phenomenological] description that constitutes the essence of something is construed so that the structure of a lived experience is revealed to us in such a fashion that we are now able to grasp the nature and significance of this experience in a hitherto unseen way. (p. 39)

This practice requires the researcher see through their own pre-understandings and biases, while acknowledging the limitations of their interpretations, to reveal the essential components of phenomena (Regan, 2012).

The intent of this approach is not to produce a generalizable theory (e.g., grounded theory); rather, it aims to reach rich understanding of lived experience which may or may not be generalizable. The epistemological assumption in this study is that the phenomena themselves, the lived experiences of past IEE participants, form the basis for data and new knowledge. Husserl, a European philosopher in the early 20th century, is credited with applying phenomenology to reconcile conflicts between positivist and subjective ideologies by asserting that subjective experience can be used to understand objective phenomena; an attempt to return “back to the things themselves” (as cited in Eagleton, 1983, p. 56). Some researchers who have conducted similar studies have also taken explicitly phenomenological approaches to guide their inquiries of transformative

learning in international contexts (Bamber, 2015; Kiely, 2004). Thus, phenomenology is an appropriate basis for exploring how people make sense of their international experiences. From this process of meaning making it may be possible to identify aspects of transformative learning among participants.

Hermeneutic Phenomenology

Evolving from the interpretation of theological texts (*exegesis*), generally, the study of hermeneutics is the study of interpretation (Kafle, 2013). Heidegger's (1927/2003) view on hermeneutics is ontological and is concerned with what it fundamentally means to be *being-in-the-world*. He refers to humanity's very nature of being-in-the-world as *Dasein*. *Dasein* is to be living always within a particular place, time, context and history, and to be shaped by this world. *Dasein* is inherently fluid, and thus interpretation, mediated by *Dasein*, is dynamic and unique to everyone (Regan 2012). For Heidegger, *Dasein* is an essential component to understanding the world; we must approach hermeneutics from the standpoint of this essential question of what it means to be in the world. Hans-Georg Gadamer (2004), a 20th-century German philosopher who was influenced by Heidegger, extends hermeneutics as a theory of understanding which is mediated by dialogic language and situated in *Dasein*. For Gadamerian hermeneutics, truth is realized by the interpreter as they engage with a text through language. Gadamer suggests that hermeneutics is not a method but a guiding set of principals through which interpreters synthesize their own being-in-the-world (i.e., prejudices, biases, cultural influences) with that of the research participants (Regan 2012). Gadamer's notion of *horizon* describes that which a person understands, including their point of reference as influenced by their being-in-the-world. The interpreters also

intersect with the horizon of their text (e.g., research participant), and are said to be *fusing horizons*, reaching an agreement which is always imperfect between two horizons. The hermeneutic circle is the process of fusing horizons where the interpreters are going between considering the specific meaning of the text while considering their own being-in-the-world (i.e., their own pre-understanding and bias) as well as those of the subject (Regan, 2012).

Hermeneutics in phenomenology acknowledges that we come to understand an experience through the stories people tell about it (Langdrige, 2007). The constructivist theory of knowledge states that people come to know something through interpreting it (Hinchey, 2010). Hermeneutics acknowledges that to know about a phenomenon is to interpret it (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; van Manen, 1990). There are three layers of interpretation, or horizons, taking place in this study. First, the ways in which participants make sense of their lived experiences (personal horizon). Second, the ways in which the researcher interprets the participants' data (fusing of horizons). Finally, the reader brings his/her own horizon to this text and further interprets the research. This study assumes that to know something, or to derive meaning from something, that new understanding takes place within the self; knowledge is always subjective. Constructivist theories of knowledge remind us that these processes are on-going and imperfect, mitigated by previous knowledge and one's beliefs about the world. Phenomenologists, in contrast to positivists, believe that researchers cannot be detached from their own presuppositions and that researchers should maintain awareness of their process of understanding (Hammersley, 2000). It is the goal for the researcher of an interpretative phenomenological analysis to make sense of the data without imposing her/his own

meaning (Finlay, 2012). This is known as bracketing. This task is inherently paradoxical; the act of making meaning in a constructivist paradigm automatically invokes one's personal mechanism of understanding and the extent to which the researcher can truly bracket their presuppositions is difficult to know. Thus, member checking, asking for detailed descriptions of experiences, and asking multiple questions on the same topic were included in this research design.

Idiography

Phenomenologists investigate lived experiences. Some researchers try to understand the essence of common experiences to develop generalizable insights (e.g., the way people experience being anxious, feeling pain, or having a chronic disease). In its broadest sense, this is the investigation of a shared human experience or *lifeworld* (Finlay, 2012). A more practical lens focuses primarily on how people make meaning in more specific lived experiences, such as the way young people experience the transition from high school to college (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). In this paradigm, comparisons among experiences clarify the essence of the experience. This approach is often applied in health and psychological research where the meaning people make of common experiences may add valuable insight (Starks & Trinidad, 2007).

Kiely (2004), Gough (2013), Bamber (2015), and Kornelsen (2014) conducted relatively long-term investigations into past IEE participants of the same international experience (often over multiple years or cohorts). Their approach to phenomenological understanding was to investigate how individuals made meaning within a common experience and concluded with general insights about a single case (e.g., a service-learning trip to Nicaragua). Studies involving participants who shared common

international experiences appear well suited for the task of identifying the essential components of transformative learning. However, it is possible that the narrow focus of a single international context in a study investigating transformative learning may be constrained by unpredictable factors that limit participants' experience. In other words, the central question of the investigation may be limited by a homogenous experience. The overall trip framework, including pre-and post-trip sessions, may not include self-reflection or dialogue, the dynamics of the group or events that take place may not have been well suited for learning, or the trip leader may be unprepared for, or uninterested in critically engaging with the experience.

In contrast, other studies of lived experience may simply not produce common themes. Although it may be tempting for qualitative researchers to search for broad meaning across individual subjects, it is not required. At first this premise may seem unusual for qualitative researchers with experience in general qualitative methods, discourse analysis, narrative inquiry, or grounded theory (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). An idiographic approach is an in-depth investigation of subjects' lived experiences where the primary intent is to understand individual cases as wholly as possible. This approach assumes that there is inherent valuable knowledge in an individual's experience. The intent of the study dictates whether an idiographic or generalizable approach should be used (Finlay, 2012). IPA is an idiographic approach. Knowing that my research sample would constitute participants from different international experiential contexts, I chose not to explicitly pursue common elements from the data and instead favoured insights from individual nuances for each case. This methodology does not deny commonalities among experience; rather, it prioritizes investigating individual cases as richly as possible.

Limitations

One essential limitation of this study is the way in which data was collected. Participants were asked to recall significant, complicated experiences that were often associated with strong emotions. For some, this was the first time they put words to describe certain moments in their experience. The experiences took place between 12 months and 6 years prior to being interviewed. The degree to which participants have reflected on their experience, consolidated their thoughts, and are able to clearly articulate their thinking varies widely. Some had more opportunity to reflect on their experience post-trip than others, by more time having passed or through subsequent formal education. It was also clear that the act of reflecting during the interview developed new understanding for the participant, as van Manen (1990) suggests. The very act of remembering something is to change it slightly (Bridge & Voss, 2015). Overall recollections may have been incomplete, inaccurate, or self-censored.

Assumptions

This study asked participants to describe significant moments from their international experience and/or ways in which they were impacted by the experience. Ultimately this study is investigating how participants experience transformative learning. As described in chapter 2, this phenomenon is about an actual change in how one understands the world—deeper than the colloquial expression “this experience has changed my life.” This research investigates some of the connections participants make between their previous knowledge, experience abroad, and subsequent experience, however the exact causative relationship between experience and transformation is often unclear. This research assumes that data participants offer about their understanding is

representative of the major contributing components of the change they experienced. It is possible that other important contributing factors influenced participants thinking over time. It is due to this assumption that an idiographic approach is appropriate, where the goal of the data analysis is to best understand individual cases rather than to generalize across unique different contexts.

Selection of Participants

This study used purposeful sampling to identify eight people to participate in semi-structured interviews. Three experienced international trip leaders were asked to share a letter of invitation to their database of contacts. A total of 11 people expressed interest in participating in the study. All research candidates who fit the three requirements were invited for a personal interview. Selection criteria required:

1. having participated in at least one international experience as a student of a secondary or postsecondary institution with a group of other students;
2. the experience was between 1 and 6 weeks in duration; and
3. the experience was at least 12 months ago.

The first and second criteria were to establish some homogeneity among the data, as recommended by Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014). Unlike other similar studies, it was not required that participants have experienced the same locale or host organization to increase the potential of finding significant examples of learning. The lag period away from the most recent trip experience was required so the study could investigate those who have had time to reflect on their experience and potentially have encountered significant post-trip moments or new understanding. This post-trip inquiry also addresses a current gap in related literature as relatively few studies have connected with a diverse

group of participants well after an international experience. Those who did were follow-up studies of a cohort of participants connected by shared experiences. Participants of this study were selected from a variety of international contexts to increase the potential for discovering significant moments or key elements of learning. Sample sizes in IPA studies are often small, and in many cases, less than nine, to focus closely on individual cases (Pietkiewicz & Smith 2014). A relatively short experience was required to participate in this study as this is a very common model of international experience for young adults. This requirement purposefully excludes study abroad or exchange experiences from the scope of the research. While these experiences are rich and potentially valuable for the overall topic of this study, it is impractical to undertake their analysis alongside short-term experiences.

Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were used to investigate participants lived experiences. This is an appropriate method in IPA so that the lifeworld can be revealed in the greatest detail possible to the researcher (Pietkiewicz & Smith 2014). Five interviews were conducted via Skype and three were conducted in-person between December 2016 and January 2017. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. Field notes were also taken during interviews. As is characteristic of an IPA study, interview questions were designed to inquire broadly about an experience without expressing a prior hypothesis. Example questions of other IPA studies are similarly open-ended and relate to how a person understands their experience of a phenomenon. Probing questions were added as needed to further explore a concept. Table 3 details the instrumentation and provides a brief rationale for each question.

Table 3

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

Interview question	Rationale
Tell me about the international experiences you've had?	To understand how people are making meaning from their experience, it is necessary to contextualize their experience (e.g. country, time, purpose) and learn about the general circumstance (e.g., reason for travel) (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014).
Tell me about the pre-trip activities or learning you engaged in?	Identify significant international or learning experiences that contributed to a change in the participant's understanding over time. Prior foundational knowledge, disorienting moments during the trip, and reflection were of specific interest.
Tell me about the post-trip activities or learning you engaged in?	
What significant moments did you experience?	
How have these experiences impacted you overall?	Identify ways the participant feels impacted by their experience.
Has the way you think about your experience(s) changed over time?	Identify factors which influence the development of understanding of these kinds of experiences and well as another way to inquire about how the participant feels impacted.
Do you feel the experience was beneficial to you?	Another way to identify ways the participant feels impacted by their experience, as this is a difficult question to answer.
What do you hope for others embarking on a similar experience?	
Would you recommend a similar experience as yours to others?	

Data Explication

A phenomenological inquiry aims to identify essential components of an experience while keeping in consideration the entire context. The term analysis is purposefully avoided here, as Hycner (1985) suggests, “the term usually means a “breaking into parts” and therefore often means a loss of the whole phenomenon” (p. 300). Explication is used to imply the description parts of the phenomenon while maintaining the whole (Groenewald, 2004). Researchers forgo prior categorical analytical structures and personal systems of understanding to identify the personal world of the subject. This process is known as “bracketing” (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). Bentz and Shapiro (1998) and Kensit (2000) caution that the researcher must allow the data to emerge: “doing phenomenology” means capturing “rich descriptions of phenomena and their settings” (p. 104). This approach is consistent with Gadamer’s (2003) circular view of hermeneutics; one inherently brings their own understanding to a text, but at the same time, must go between an objective meaning of the text and the meaning one brings to the text via interpretation.

Two similar studies investigating transformative learning, Bamber (2008) and Gough (2013) drew upon Kiely’s (2004) six *transformative forms*. In this study, I approached the data purely inductively, which is closer to the root intent of the methodological tradition; in Groenewald’s (2004) words, “the operative word in phenomenological research is ‘describe.’ The aim of the researcher is to describe as accurately as possible the phenomenon, refraining from any pre-given framework, but remaining true to the facts” (p. 5). Following Larkin and Thompson’s (2011) framework for conducting IPA, I first applied *free codes* to all transcripts, labeling possible units of

meaning as they occurred to understand the overall nature of the phenomenon. After this process, I returned a copy of the transcripts and focused on finding the components of the experience that were significant to participants (*objects of concern*) and what it meant to them (*experiential claims*).

Credibility

Driven by an IPA methodology, the investigator is concerned with rich details of individuals' experiences. Participants were often asked multiple questions within the same theme (e.g., recalling significant moments during their trip) to create as many opportunities to express themselves as possible. Researchers in IPA are also tasked with achieving a shared understanding of what the participant means when they share how they think, feel, or experienced a phenomenon. Participants were given the opportunity to review their transcripts to ensure their meaning was represented.

Ethical Considerations

Care was taken to ensure participants did not feel coerced toward sharing information that made them feel uncomfortable. The interview transcripts were reviewed for identifiable clues (e.g., name of organizations, description of activities or locations) and where a participant's identity could be revealed (or significantly narrowed to a small group of people), the clues were generalized. Brock University's Research Ethics Board approved this study (file #115-224).

Restatement of the Area of Study

This study uses an interpretative phenomenological analysis methodology to investigate how past participants of IEE experience transformative learning as described by Mezirow. IPA methodology is characterized by three essential approaches:

1. a phenomenological focus values the lived experiences of research participants;
2. a hermeneutic focus acknowledges the interpretative nature of a personal experience and the sharing of that experience; and
3. an idiographic focus investigates rich detail within individual cases rather than commonalities among cases.

Chapter 4 describes significant findings from the eight research participants.

CHAPTER FOUR: PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

In this study, I conducted one-on-one semi-structured interviews of eight past-participants of short-term international experiences. Respondents reflected on travel that took place between 1 and 8 years prior to their interview, in one or more destinations per person, including: the United States, El Salvador, Dominican Republic, Jamaica, Peru, Brazil, Ecuador, and Botswana. These trips all included some aspect of service (e.g., teaching English, building a house), cultural immersion or exchange (e.g., visiting a church or community centre), and touristic activity (e.g., going on a safari or going to the local beach). In this chapter, I first describe the participants and their travel context. The purpose of this chapter is to articulate various examples of participants' experiences of transformation. I note the most essential, memorable, or significant themes the individual cases reveal, and each section with evidence which may indicate perspective transformation. Finally, I present themes common to two or more of the eight cases.

Participants

All participants travelled as postsecondary students with a group of other students. Three of the participants later returned to destinations as group leaders with the organization with which they had previously traveled. The provided names are pseudonyms.

Denver

In 2012, as a 3rd-year education student, Denver travelled to Peru with several other students to teach English for 2 weeks with a campus-based solidarity service organization. This was not a credit-bearing experience. In 2013, he returned to the same trip in Peru as a student leader and then travelled to Ecuador where he spent an additional

2 weeks leading health promotion activities. Denver's trip preparation included some formal meetings and pre-trip activity planning. On both occasions, returning home, Denver found that there were limited opportunities to reunite with fellow trip participants to discuss their shared experience. Since these two experiences abroad, Denver completed a Master of Arts in geography, and credits his formal critical education, particularly his graduate courses, with helping him appreciate the significance of his experiences abroad:

Different courses that I took [in postsecondary] touched on some of these issues around volunteering abroad, cultural imperialism, post colonialism, colonization.

... Having had critical education about things in the past, that let me be critical of these things. ... So those things all shaped how I understand the trips now.

For Denver, both the passage of time and the opportunity to learn about social justice issues through formal education impacted the meaning his experiences have for him presently. During the interview, he provided multiple examples of how "Western expectations," as he understands them, for economically depressed communities in the Global South (i.e., "the poor") are not consistent with his observations: "A notable experience was really experiencing the resilience of a shanty town ... and that was shocking to a lot of people." Denver also shared a vivid experience while in Peru which contrasted with his Canadian milieu; for the first time in his life he experienced not feeling safe to go out into a community alone or at night. He lamented the unequal power imbalance between the new communities, to which he felt connected, and his own positionality, which enabled him to travel to a far-away destination for a short period of time. Finally, he shared what that feeling of connectedness meant to him:

Those specific moments of me learning about one human being, and another human being learning about me, despite all of these barriers, developed a definite new understanding, human connection, and there is a desire to be together and to know one another and share and exist together.

In reflecting on his change over time, Denver commented on the challenge of returning to a previous mindset: “I do find it hard to get back into the mindset of where you were then” due to the overlapping impact of subsequent travel experiences, education, and time to reflect. His experience of feeling unsafe and of working alongside material-poor community members seemed to expand his original view of what daily life can look like. Learning is an ongoing process for Denver, he is a reflective person, and he articulated that his experiences were points along his trajectory.

Quinn

I travelled with Quinn and several others in 2011 to the Dominican Republic to teach English for 1 week in a small village through a non-credit service organization. Quinn travelled as an undergraduate student in recreation and leisure studies, and later finished his degree in media communications. Quinn was initially very reluctant to travel and was convinced by his parents to go. Describing play as “very simple,” he vividly recalled the way sport helped him connect with youth in the host community. Witnessing the way people were marginalized in this community raised profound questions for Quinn:

Who is to stay these kids aren't meant to give something special to the world.

Aren't meant to do something great? Bring something to their community? And

because of the environment they are growing up in they aren't going to have the opportunity to do so?

This experience called Quinn to action: "I came back from that trip wanting to make a difference, a change." Not quite ready to do something after returning home, months later he travelled to Trinidad and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines to train intensely to qualify as a player in a national team in the FIFA World Cup. Through this challenging experience, he said:

I realized how important sport was in my life, how much it has given me, off the field more than on the field. ... I think a lot of kids miss out on that ... so that is how my [soccer] charity started—to use soccer as a platform to teach children important skills that they need to succeed in life.

Quinn attributes the combination of these experiences as being his inspiration to take action. In 2014, 3 years after his initial trip to the Dominican Republic, he founded a service organization that uses soccer as a platform to help youth develop leadership and life skills. At the time of writing, he has organized two trips to the same community we visited together in 2011 with plans underway for a trip in 2018.

Quinn credits his opportunities to reflect with his peers during the trip with making a lasting impact on him: "I was able to expand my view of the world and see the struggle these people go through every day. So in the long term it made me appreciate everything that I have here in Canada." His experience of reflecting with his peers also added value to his learning, widening his view of social learning: "Everyone is so different and has a different mindset, and a different background, and can have a different view on the same thing. That's what helps people grow the most in my opinion."

Kira

As an undergraduate student in dramatic arts, Kira travelled in 2008 to a rural community in Jamaica for a 3-week period as part of a credit course at her postsecondary institution. Like Quinn, she was initially reluctant to participate in this trip, but was convinced by a friend to go. Kira travelled in the second year of a 5-year non-profit arts-based community building program to mentor Jamaican youth in arts education and leadership; the program intended to transform its Jamaican participants into future leaders of a sustainable program. She returned five times in the following 6 years for approximately 3 weeks each trip. Her role in the organization grew from being student volunteer, then a student leader, to being a member of the organization's board of directors. During this time, Kira also completed a Master of Education in her university's social-cultural program. She has had the longest relationship of all of my interviewees with the same destination abroad. The international component of this program concluded in 2014, and is now sustained locally by Jamaicans.

Through Kira's interview, it was clear that she places great value in the connectedness she feels to the Jamaican youth. The organization's program considered both Canadian volunteers and Jamaican youth to be participants of a learning program. The Canadian-as-learner was a clear perspective during the interview. Kira's repeated trips, and her increasing responsibility over time, offered evidence that she gained personal growth and insight that a single trip may not have offered: "If I had only went (sic) to Jamaica in the first year, I don't know if I'd have the same realizations that I do now."

Kira was initially reluctant to travel to Jamaica in 2008. Having grown up in a predominantly White community, as the member of a white family that did not celebrate

difference, Kira acknowledges that her upbringing greatly limited her worldview: “To see a Black person on the street your immediate thought is they are going to rob someone. That is the type of sub-conscious thoughts that would flow through the community I lived in. I am ashamed to say that would be something that I would have thought.” She attributes her travel experience and postsecondary courses to helping her confront race as a social construction and also her own White privilege:

In 4th year university, my 4th-year drama course—kind of like basic sociology—no one ever teaches you this or talks to you about this, but we talked about gender being a social construction and we talked about race and racism, and we talked about it in an academic lens. I then went to teachers’ college, and started my master’s, and I think this is when White privilege was really being talked about. I don’t think it was a light switch approach. But I had moments when I had to reconcile and say, this is true. What I am reading is true when I look at my privilege for being White.

Kira’s international and academic experiences intertwined over time and provide an excellent example of how one’s critical understanding of global citizenship may deepen through the interaction of various life experiences. During her undergraduate program, she participated in a social justice theatre project which challenged her view of sexual orientation: “That’s where I curbed a lot of issues I had about being homophobic; I grew up in community and there was one student in my high school who was gay and I was afraid of him for a year because I didn’t know how to act with someone who was not me.” Another significant experience during her graduate education helped shape her understanding of her international work and perspective on race. In completing her first

paper as a graduate student, she wrote from the perspective of being “colourblind,” which is to purposefully ignore race, culture, and ethnicity, as a dimension of others’ identity, to treat everyone equally. Her professor challenged her view by failing her paper, which was an initial point of conflict for Kira,

I was trying to defend myself, to a Black professor in academia, saying you’re wrong. And it was an hour with [the prof], and that was probably one of the most instrumental conversations, who said you can’t deny colour you have to see colour, you have to see in colour, understand perspective and difference, and history that has come along with the colour of someone’s skin.

Kira’s experiences abroad were influenced by her life back home. In her current role in student engagement at a postsecondary institution, Kira leads groups of students on short-term volunteer IEE trips.

Finlay

Travelling as an undergraduate in history in 2010, Finlay participated in a 5-week volunteer program in Brazil, Peru, and Ecuador where he contributed to general community service projects. He later traveled to the United States for a week of volunteering with a house building organization. He is thankful he travelled with an academic background in liberal arts studies, which helped him approach topics from a “different lens.” In his words, “being able to apply that critical thinking and critical reasoning on the day to day stuff we interact with is pretty cool.” Finlay further reflected on his openness to different ways of being: “Just because we experience things on a day-to-day, doesn’t mean that is the only way it gets done around the world.” He also spoke of the impact he felt when witnessing clear divisions of power among groups of people.

Referring to his time in Rio de Janeiro, he said, “from the community you could look down and see the beaches of Copacabana, but people that are in the community would never get to go down there because it is totally out of their reach but within their eyesight.” Experiencing how the redistribution of “simple things,” such as donated old laptops or constructing stairs, made an impact on the community was also important for Finlay. More so than other participants, he expressed his difficulty relating his experiences to others when he returned from his first trip:

I was trying to explain this is what we were doing on a day-to-day [basis], chatting with community members, teaching kids how to speak English, helping them create dental hygiene. And [people at home] are like oh that’s neat, but it was a little more than that. So even with some pre-warning about what that was going to be like, I found it challenging coming back trying to describe some of this. They just didn’t really comprehend.

He also values the personal impact his trips had for him, which prompted him to reconnect with an estranged family member, pursue a career in what which is “in service to others,” and “directed me on a path and continues to point out to me the spirit of community is so impactful in my life and opened the door to experiencing this world through a different lens.”

After completing his degree and later working in a student leadership role at a university campus, Finlay has found that “writing down my story and what that was like for me has helped.” He has presented his experiences to others which he says has also helped, but he is “still processing.” Experiencing a new way of living daily life, Finlay

found that “being in a different country doesn’t mean their way is wrong, it means it’s going to be different.”

Rose

In her third year of an undergraduate physical education program, Rose travelled to El Salvador for a week in 2012 as part of a credit course to lead youth in physical education and exchange ideas with local university students. In 2013, she travelled back to El Salvador with a week-long volunteer house construction program. Both trips included some touristic activities in El Salvador. Rose expressed significant empathy toward the street animals she encountered. She found the experience of seeing the animals, mostly cats and dogs, so “heartbreaking” that she arranged for two cats to be flown to Canada. For Rose, many other day-to-day aspects of El Salvador contrasted sharply with her experiences in Canada. She spoke of schools being protected by barbed wire, of armed guards present in public locations, and of not being able to eat local fruit for fear of contaminated water. Rose expressed significant aspiration to “do more” for the people of El Salvador, and felt frustrated as she was unable to do so. She told several anecdotes of the ways she had connected with El Salvadorians, especially children.

Her experiences prompted her to reflect on her own national identity: “The Canadian anthem means so much more to me now because being Canadian is such an honour.” She feels her travel influenced her perspective of life in Canada:

I don’t waste anything anymore. I do celebrate the little things in life. I donate my time, and money when I can. I look forward to going back. When I teach Phys Ed I use minimal equipment to show the kids you don’t need everything. It made me the person who I am today.

Bradley

Bradley travelled to Jamaica in 2014 during his grade 12 year for a 1-week faith-based cultural immersion program where he visited classrooms and other community destinations. In 2015, after his first year as a Bachelor of Business Administration student, he travelled to El Salvador with a 1-week non-credit house building program. He was the most concise of all the participants, but shared several core themes which were like others' responses. Bradley cherished the idea of leaving a Canadian "loonie" in the cement of the house construction project for which he volunteered: "that represented us; it was nice that they were excited by us." He was surprised to find a vibrant community and culture amidst "what you assume would just be a pile of trash." Coming to understand how other communities live their lives left Bradley with an imperative to "be more empathetic toward people ... take that second to understand where they are coming from."

Marina

Marina participated in a 3-week trip in 2012 to Jamaica for a non-credit course teaching drama at a camp for youth. Having done a 1-month exchange program to Denmark at age 12 and to Norway at age 14, she travelled to Jamaica with more previous international experiences as compared to other participants. This is the only instance where participants overlap, as Kira shared this experience with Marina. Her original expectations for the trip were similar to other people: "I'm going to go on this trip and I'm going to become an amazing human ... to have fully grown." Although she had been prepared for her encounter of material-poor communities, she noted that "the poverty level was a lot lower than what I prepped myself for. I had been prepped, been warned, but until you actually get there it is a little different until you actually experience it." She

spoke honestly about her experience, stating that it fell short of what she had heard from others, and admitted that it “was what it was.” She didn’t struggle with leaving the connections she had made in Jamaica as much as others, but today she is content with her active role in her local community. The experience of working with children in this setting was impactful for her: “No matter which country you go to see them, they deserve supportive people in their lives and you can influence change,” so much so that she considers the trip a “turning factor” for her current career in children’s mental health.

Luana

In 2010, as a 4th-year undergraduate student in child and youth studies, Luana travelled to Botswana to volunteer with general community service projects for 3 weeks in a non-credit program. The trip included 1 week of service with an animal rescue organization, a week with a girls’ youth program, and some touristic activities. Luana actively applied her academic experience to her international experience—“being from a multidisciplinary program that did explicitly teach social justice and issues related to universal truths did help going in having that lens”—and provided the opportunity for thoughtful reflections on her time in Africa. Certain differences in the status quo for Botswana stood out to Luana as different than her Canadian experience: the girls’ youth program was about developing working skills for the service industry, leaders she worked with were more authoritative than what she had expected, and peoples’ views on monogamy were more liberal than in Canada. She also reflected on what she understood as Western ideals of childhood versus what she saw in Botswana:

Those kids had access to clean drinking water, they were being fed, they had shelter, access to education. Someone without a social context might think they

need to save the child, that they are living in total poverty. So it's taking a step back, thinking no that is my own Westernized opinion, that is actually not a bad situation.

For Luana, the biggest impact was dispelling the Western perception of Africa as "Other." She spoke of seeing a modern city, and the value of understanding an African country more closely. Finally, the experience in 2010 impacted her future international interactions: "I am a better traveler in general, where I am more conscious and more aware of my impact when I go to places."

Common Themes Across Participants

While other studies of postsecondary IEE typically feature data from one context abroad, participants in this study represented eight locales. At a broad level, however, their reflections overlapped across several themes.

Culture Shock

Three participants described general feelings of culture shock, though they each experienced it differently. For Denver, he first encountered this concept during a pre-departure workshop, and later described his experience as both "eye-opening" and "shocking." Finlay described his feelings of reverse culture shock when returning home; he expressed frustrations over returning to the "same realities" back at home while feeling "emptiness" toward the experience he left. This emptiness was an unmet desire to reflect with his trip peers or to relate the experience to others. Marina used the sentiment to express her reaction to the difference between the rural Jamaican community in which she volunteered and the larger city experience of Kingston, Jamaica.

Security and Safety

Denver, Rose, Bradley, and Marina recalled their reactions to seeing heightened security or evidence of conflict in everyday places in El Salvador or Jamaica. Schools with barbed wire, barred windows and walled enclosures, armed guards in the community, and gang symbols stood out as significant moments to these participants. Denver noted that this was his first time he felt like he had to consider his own safety when going out into a community: “Growing up and living in Canada I can put my shoes on and walk or my bike or get in a car, without thinking of my well-being at all and without any fear, really. Whereas there suddenly I experienced boundaries immediately.” Marina had a similar reaction. These participants reflected on their experiences of visible security measures and feelings of being unsafe in unfamiliar contexts abroad from a relatively privileged Canadian perspective.

Poverty and Power

All participants ascribed some degree of value in their experience of witnessing what they perceived as poverty and/or an imbalance of power. Two participants recalled their observations of poverty when asked about a significant moment of their trip. Luana said, “I probably for the first time in my life saw true poverty,” and “the poverty level was a lot lower than what I prepped myself for.” Quinn reflected on the unequal distribution of power among the local people he visited. Seeing the ongoing conflict at the border of Haiti and the Dominican Republic, where Haitians risk incarceration for crossing the border to buy and sell goods, was an unsettling experience for him: “That really stuck with me.” He lamented that the kids in the village he visited could be “meant to do something great” but “aren’t going to get the opportunity to do so.” Both Denver

and Rose had the realization that it was a relatively basic matter for a Canadian to pay to travel abroad, such an experience was out of reach for those whom they visited. Finlay and Bradley felt impacted by seeing communities living on the fringes of popular tourist hotspots, knowing that their mere proximity to places like Copacabana don't afford them the same access as travelers.

When asked about surprising aspects of their experience, several participants described witnessing an unexpected capability, happiness, or resilience among poor communities. Those who were offered food, shelter, or assistance from locals spoke of feeling uncomfortable receiving generosity from those who they thought they were there to help. Finlay was greeted with a feast, and felt “torn inside” at the table: “They didn't eat any of it, and I was like ‘oh I can't possibly please have some’. They said ‘no, absolutely not, this is for you, a gift’. Our facilitator said it would actually be disrespectful if you didn't eat it.” In another example, Rose injured herself on her house construction site, and needing a change of clothes and a place to rest, found herself unexpectedly grateful to her host family; “you have nothing but you are taking care of me” was how she described her thinking in this moment to me. Bradley and Denver spoke of their surprise in finding happy people living everyday lives in a shantytown, using the words “normal” and “resilient” to describe the locals. Quinn, Luana, Bradley, Rose, and Marina found the happiness in the children they encountered to be positive, yet contrary to their expectations.

Connectedness to Others

Everyone expressed value in making personal connections with people abroad. Bradley and Kira both used the phrase “very White” to describe the communities in

which they were raised, and were thankful for the opportunity to connect with people different from themselves. Denver spoke passionately about the importance of connecting with others:

We still somehow as humans have this need, this desire, to communicate. Even though there is a complete barrier there ... we still somehow found a way through facial gestures, things you can do with your body, and your entire being, regardless of language. Those specific moments of me learning about one human being, and another human being learning about me, despite all of these barriers, developed a definite new understanding of human connection and there is a desire to be together and to know one another and share and existing together.

Kira, Rose, and Quinn struggled with the idea that their short-term visits meant leaving the connections they made so quickly, and they found leaving children to be especially hard. For Finlay, getting to know folks abroad helped him reframe his experience, “I learned about someone’s story, that these are real people, and it wasn’t just about me making a difference.” Marina provided a counter example as compared to others; for her departing was “emotional” but not a significant aspect of her experience.

Emerging Critical Perspective

Denver, Kira, Quinn, Finlay, Bradley, and Luana explicitly reflected on their own emerging critical perspective during and after their international experience. For Quinn, Denver, and Finlay, the opportunity to reflect with their peers during their trip helped significantly in their process of understanding. Kira, Denver, and Luana largely credited their exposure during their postsecondary classes to topics like colonialism, White

privilege, and social constructivism, for being able to read their experiences through an “academic lens” (Kira)—that is, through a critical lens.

Some participants used the concept of widening their perspective or worldview when describing the ways in which they felt impacted by the trip. Luana noted that “the biggest take away for me was just understanding an African country at a deeper level outside of it being just a part of Africa as a whole.” Like others, Quinn felt his view of the world was expanded by “seeing the struggle these people go through every day. So in the long term it made me appreciate everything that I have here in Canada.”

Participants often used the metaphor of a Western lens to conclude that different ways of being were just as valid as with what they are familiar. Luana’s statement summarizes this perspective: “So understanding your context isn’t the same as other contexts, and understanding your context isn’t better, or somehow better or higher up than other peoples’ lived experience.” This kind of conclusion ran paradoxically parallel to those who noted feeling appreciation for life in Canada and a desire to provide support to communities abroad. At times participants justified the differences they experienced as being relative to the destination, and other times participants held fast that their Canadian experience was preferable.

All participants felt in some way impacted by meeting children or visiting schools abroad. Kira, having returned from several trips abroad to Jamaica, noted that over time one definitive take-away from her experience was that “kids were kids.” Bradley, Marina, and Quinn similarly expressed the idea that the kids they met were essentially the same type of people they expected to meet, happy and curious, the same as the kids they knew back home. In Marina’s words, “No matter which country you go to see them. They

deserve supportive people in their lives and you can influence change and influence people in just short periods of time.” Luana had an opposite reaction, questioning the idea that the childhood she witnessed in Botswana was the same, yet justified the validity of a non-Western definition:

Understanding that differently lived experiences of childhood around the world aren't necessarily bad, but different. ... That child doesn't live in the home that I would consider fit for myself or my future family, but that doesn't mean that isn't a great situation for that child.

Here, Luana is expressing an openness to circumstances for children abroad that don't meet her “wants” for her own family, and in doing so is suggesting that her expanded understanding of a fit childhood is defined by the context in which they live.

Overall Impact

All participants expressed one or more examples in which their international experience impacted them. Some (e.g., Marina, Finlay) identified a tangible change, such as influencing a career choice or specific habit back at home (e.g., conserving water). Others associated their experience with a widening of their worldview (e.g., what childhood can look like in different contexts) or a shift in their values (e.g., desire for a large versus modest home). A person's positionality prior to their trip and the kind of experiences they had post-trip appeared to have influenced their learning to-date. The possibilities for perspective transformation, effective experiential learning, and social-justice oriented learning outcomes are explored in chapter 5.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND PERSPECTIVE TRANSFORMATION

This investigation details the experiences of eight former postsecondary sojourners. Participants' varied experiences abroad provide glimpses into their unfolding selves as global citizens, past and present. Working from a phenomenological and transformative lens, I turn now to explore the role of the experience, the learner, and the facilitator, in fostering enduring change, as informed by the respondents presented in chapter 4. I situate this study's findings in relation to other studies of transformative learning. The purpose of this chapter is to unpack aspects of the respondents' experiences which appeared to contribute to a change in the way they value or view the world.

Perspective Transformation

Transformative learning is a change in the way a person understands the world. This change in meaning perspective can include a shift in values, beliefs, actions, or new knowledge. It is important to consider that learning or experience isn't inherently transformational; learning becomes transformational when individuals attempt to reconcile new knowledge into a perspective that isn't compatible with their current worldview (disorienting dilemma) and must change the way that they think about something in order to make sense of new knowledge. In the example above, one can learn about people living fulfilling lives with fewer possessions, but not change their underlying beliefs. Therefore, this phenomenon is specific to individuals and their horizon. It should also be noted that transformative learning is a process, not a product, and it is possible for people to hold contradictory views as their worldview changes. A perspective transformation is often a widening of one's horizon; new ideas become visible as your meaning perspective changes.

GCE, in the social-justice sense, is largely about fostering cosmopolitan values: to do no harm to others and to not benefit from the harm onto others (Cameron, 2013). It is through experience that we learn how to think about the world. In Denver's words, "if you just stayed in Canada your whole life, you could hear about this, maybe see things about certain countries or areas of countries ... but never actually, tangibly, know it or be connected to it." Yet, to simply witness the everyday challenges of other people is not to adopt a specific perspective. What aspects of the respondents' experiences contributed to changes in perspective over time?

The Role of the Experience

By considering the respondents' settings abroad, and what kinds of things appeared to stand out to them, three characteristics of a transformative experience became clear:

1. The experience is new, different, surprising, shocking, or otherwise prompted people to engage emotionally and to evaluate how their assumptions fit with the reality they were experiencing (*disorienting*);
2. Students have the opportunity to create relationships with local individuals by learning from them, working with them, or sharing their home (*relationships*);
3. Issues of social justice are salient to the setting abroad (*context*).

Disorienting

Transformative learning is about pushing one's thinking beyond a familiar habit of mind. As we move through life, the path of least resistance for new information is to understand it via an existing framework. It is therefore intuitive that one catalyst for learning is an experience which may be uncomfortable, surprising, emotional, or even

contrary to presently held views. Mezirow (2000) describes the circumstance where people encounter a situation that does not readily fit into their existing meaning perspective as a disorienting dilemma. Participants in this study describe experiences that fit this definition, although they did not always recognize them as the kind of tipping point that Mezirow and other scholars in transformative learning describe.

Disorienting experiences for participants in this study helped them question their assumptions of everydayness. Some reported feeling unsafe to walk around alone or at night or witnessing heightened levels of security in everyday places (e.g., barbed wire around schools). They also had to negotiate their expectations of a place by encountering communities with significantly less access to basic services (e.g., secure homes, road, water, or education infrastructure). Some had to reconcile the idea that those who they understand as living in poverty could also experience happiness in their everyday life. Finlay and Rose unexpectedly found themselves benefiting from the generosity of the people that they thought they should be helping by receiving food or clothing, and described feeling surprised and uncomfortable having found themselves in a reciprocal relationship. This kind of unexpected experience helped them to question their assumptions about the capability of those they encountered.

These disorienting experiences appeared to be essential for the respondents' enduring change. They brought people outside of their habit of mind and challenged them to rethink their assumptions about the world. Feelings of surprise, discomfort, or confusion, remind us that the affective nature of disorienting experiences is perhaps what make them so critical; apathy does not make for enduring learning. Taylor (2007) suggests that affective ways of knowing in transformative learning are an important

dimension of a transformational process, but little is known about how to engage with this in practice.

A common critique of international learning, especially ISL, is the question of the priority given to the global versus the local. Why not help and learn about your own community? I speculate that the immersive and massively disruptive experience of travelling abroad, combined with culture shock, provide a significantly more disorienting experience than staying local. This may explain why, at the end of their experiences, some respondents contemplated their own local actions back home, and questioned why they hadn't already taken more action in their own community. They needed an experience abroad to push their thinking before they could be open to more familiar settings back home. Returning to the affective domain, respondents who mentioned wanting to do more for their local community appeared to find a new (or renewed) sense of empathy. Experiences which were disorienting, particularly those that inspired emotional responses, became stepping stones for participants to thinking more deeply about the world to which they were becoming more connected.

Relationships

Another significant aspect of the respondents' experiences was the value they found in connecting to other people. Kornelson (2014), in his follow-up study of past participants of a short-term service trip to Costa Rica, found that his participants experienced openness, empathy, and a desire for understanding of the people they met abroad. This relationship, as described by Martin Buber (1937/2010) as *i-thou*, is one of reciprocity and exchange. This, Kornelson argues, is how we find "community amidst diversity" (p. 153). In this study, people recalled feeling a deep sense of connectedness to

workers, families, or children they encountered, and shared a desire to understand and learn from those they met. When recalling their experience years later, these relationships appeared to be more enduring to them than other details like what exactly they did or where they visited. Although it may be characteristic of a privileged position to travel abroad and presume that you are making deep connections with those you encounter, O'Sullivan and Smaller's (2015) study of Nicaraguan host communities found that it is the relationships that are cherished the most by international home-stay hosts. Humans are naturally empathetic, and it is through this empathy that we can foster a desire for a more just, equitable way of being.

Context

Can all settings be transformative? Perhaps some are more disorienting than others, or evoking of empathy for the people of a particular place? Encounters with perceived poverty abroad is an often-cited characteristic of these experiences, yet we know that participants are often relatively indifferent, at least initially, to these issues in their own country. It is possible that the very notion of travel provides legitimacy to students accessing these spaces; that being a tourist, or traveling to volunteer, is a special pass. In Canada, one does not simply tour a struggling neighbourhood to reflect on their own position of privilege. All respondents travelled to locales where issues of poverty, education, infrastructure, and access to other basic services were more evident than their relatively privileged experiences in Canada.

The Role of the Facilitator

Those tasked with leading a group of students in an experience abroad have a full checklist, at times preparing young adults for their first big trip away from home and

ensuring their safety in an unfamiliar place. Trip facilitators who have social-justice oriented goals are also concerned with how best to ready their students to understand the world in a new way. Experiential learning is the principal educational paradigm invoked among short-term trips, although the degree to which it is structured varies widely. It is through dialogue—in self-reflection, talking, and writing—that we come to making personal meaning of our experiences (van Manen, 1990). In addition to language, students need the cognitive tools to personally and meaningfully engage with their experiences and what they mean. I present three requisite tools with which facilitators should equip their students:

1. familiarity with discourse (*language*);
2. ways to think about the issues they faced (*critical framework(s)*);
3. a setting in which productive dialogue can occur (*productive context*).

Language

More than a set of tools we use to communicate, language mediates our knowledge of the world and of ourselves (Gadamer, 2004). Dialogue, van Manen (1990) asserts, “teaches us what we know, and in what way we know what we know” (p. 127). In Merryfield’s (2000) study of teachers’ lived experiences and their readiness for multicultural education, she argues that meaning is made from experience, retrospectively, through language: “It is in the telling of experiences, in creating one’s narratives of experience, that who a person is and what the person experienced become one” (p. 431). In this study, some participants had not had an opportunity to put to words their experience, and in doing so during their interview, they combined their present-day selves with their experience, giving it new meaning.

Most informants in this study demonstrated difficulty communicating their experience and how it impacted them. Falling back on vague terms such as awesome or amazing, the transcripts revealed a gap in how past travellers are able to share their experience. O'Sullivan and Smaller (2015) also found that when it came to having an in-depth discussion of being immersed in a foreign setting, their participants had difficulty expressing themselves and deferred to familiar constructs of charity and appreciation for life in Canada. This gap represents a limitation beyond the ability to talk to others about their experiences. If dialogue is essential to retrospective meaning making, then people need an opportunity to develop their internal voice through reflection or to express themselves in speaking or writing. Facilitators can guide this process through reflective activities and by promoting dialogue among participants.

Critical Framework

Participants who learned about a way of thinking about their experience, either before or after, appeared to leverage that perspective in developing their understanding. Some travellers learned about a lens metaphor, using this to try to interpret what they learn through a more open perspective versus their western values. Kira, months after returning home from one of her several trips, recalled being challenged by her professor in graduate studies, to move away from her colourblind perspective to one which appreciates diversity. She applied this new understanding, which was at first difficult to learn because it contradicted her current view, to her past experiences, thus adding to their meaning. Luana leveraged social constructivism to adopt a broader view of what childhood could look like during her travel to South Africa. Learning about ways of

thinking about social justice help students make meaning from what they encounter and can extend their ability to engage with complex ideas.

Exposure to a greater variety of concepts, academic debates, and frameworks may help widen the learning students draw from their experience. For example, several informants expressed surprise and relief that the folks they encountered could be happy while living with less material goods, income, and access to services. This elicited a feeling of being lucky for having been born in Canada, and for their own relatively privileged circumstances. This poor-but-happy explanation is found by other researchers to have a diminishing effect on the way travellers feel impacted by the realities of living in poverty (Crossley, 2012; Simpson, 2004), and feeling lucky is often dismissive of the exploitive relationships between developing and developed worlds (Quinby, 2002). Most participants have not been challenged to reframe their thinking about what it means to be poor-but-happy, to be a lucky Canadian, or an unlucky citizen from a foreign country. Exposure to these debates may address epistemic blind spots in students' perspectives and influence what outcomes their experiences ultimately have for them.

Productive Context

Reflection is at the heart of experiential learning (Kolb, 1984), of critical education (Merryfield, 2000), and of transformational learning (Taylor, 2007). Yet not all reflection ought to be considered equally illuminating, and not all settings equally conducive to reflection.

Mezirow (1991) offers three dimensions of reflection: content, process, and premise (explored in chapter 2). In the case of this study, content reflection generally constitutes what participants remember encountering during their travel abroad. Process

reflection may consider some of the histories of a place and the issues people are facing. Both dimensions of reflection tend to lead to more straightforward transformations. Premise reflection, the most critical level, is also the most elusive among students and educators (Kreber, 2004; Taylor, 2007). Here, participants call into question value systems, power relationships, and taken-for-granted assumptions. For example, Denver questioned the significance that Canadians can travel abroad to developing countries, but the reverse is rarely possible. In general, informants appeared to work with the content and premise dimensions of reflection. No participants revealed a context in which they were guided toward a specific model or depth of reflection.

Returning to the argument that learning from experience is a dialogic process, students could benefit from a social setting in which premise reflection is encouraged. In Chaput and O'Sullivan's (2013) study of participants who travelled for a week to Cuba, the authors found that the postsecondary students tended to yield to cultural liberal (multicultural) modes of discourse in group reflective settings; this overarching desire for tolerance, the authors argue, "obstructs criticality, including the ability to be self-critical" (p. 356). They preferred agreement over disagreement, and expression over deliberation. Their lack of a deliberative model appeared to inhibit their ability to critically engage other perspectives. Denver's first experience abroad aligned with this desire for tolerance and content reflection; he described feeling subversive in his criticality of the structure of the trip: "I felt like a bit of an outsider in the group after having those reflections ... I didn't feel like anyone was sharing anything like that." His encounter with another person on a subsequent trip who was similarly critical provided him a space to discuss his ideas openly. Just as students benefit from learning linguistic tools and conceptual frameworks,

they need purposeful reflection which challenges them in the premise domain in a setting where they can work with others in a deliberative framework.

The Role of the Learner

This final section outlines an empathetic view of the student as a learner.

Transformative Trajectory

Participants exhibited widely varied degrees of impact among their experiences. Through interviews with participants, it became clear that identifying the specific moment in time that initiated a perspective transformation was not a fruitful approach in investigating the long-term impact of international experience. Although informants shared anecdotes, significant moments, and specific memories, they spoke more vividly about how they feel in the present day reflecting on their experience. Denver, for example, emphasized that returning to his mindset in previous years was very difficult. Taylor (2007), in a study reviewing research on transformative learning since his previous review in 1998, found that authors tended to adopt an increasingly broad definition of perspective transformation. One defining characteristic of this learning is the irreversible nature of the change (transformation). This finding seems to affirm Denver and others' difficulty in returning to their prior perspective. A wider definition of transformative learning is therefore more practical. This study found that gradual changes overtime, combined with other experiences, are more common than sudden light-switch moments. Taylor's 2007 review also found that authors' focus has been shifting toward understanding elements of transformative experiences rather than narrowing in on specific examples. What was clear from the data was that international experiences influenced, and were influenced by, participants' prior and subsequent experiences. What

became valuable was coming to know how significant moments for participants fit in relation to their other experiences. I consider the short-term international experience a point along an ongoing transformative trajectory, which encompasses, and thus becomes part of, participants' horizons, as it changes over time.

In the time after their travel, participants expanded and changed the way their experience was significant to them. This is a process of retrospective meaning making where new knowledge, reflection, and dialogue help develop our understanding. Finlay, for example, having prepared presentations about what his experiences mean to him, reported that this process has helped him continue to learn from what happened. This retrospective process is lacking recognition among the way the participants' experiences were designed; many viewed their experience as a self-contained unit rather than a jumping-off point to work with over time. By the end of the interviews, participants started generating ideas about their experiences that appeared to be new to them, evidenced by their excitement to share them.

Pedagogic Entry Points

Along students' transformative trajectory, there are opportunities where students are particularly open to thinking deeply about their experience or meaning making. Lange (2004), in his study of transformative and restorative learning in University students, refers to these moments as "pedagogical entry points" (p. 129). Similarly, Berger (2004), in a study of graduate students and transformative learning, described this phenomenon as students being on the "edge of their learning" (p. 338). These points in time are often a result of a disorienting experience, where students are at the peak of their personal and affective engagement. They are recognizable as moments where students are frustrated,

confused, or otherwise emotionally excited. If transformative learning is about a change in how you know about the world, then the importance of an emotional connection is intuitive; a significant challenge to your perspective is necessarily discomfoting. Learning which took place prior to participants' first significant experience (e.g., encounter with cultural differences abroad) tended to feel less like pedagogical entry points, based on the reported dissonance between what it felt like to simply learn about an issue, culture, or topic, and what people reported after their experience. Others felt that their preparation for the trip was insignificant compared to their actual experience. This issue is connected to Maldonado-Torres's (2004) view of epistemic blindness or Andreotti's (2016) idea of intelligibility: people may lack the necessary experience, prior knowledge, or disposition, appreciate the depth of new knowledge provided prior to their trip abroad. Those who travelled on multiple experiences or those who made strong connections to their academic studies appeared to take their experiences with them months to years after travelling and continue to make meaning from them. This finding adds meaning to both the *disorienting dilemma* and *transformative trajectory* view of change, in that learning takes place over time, in ways which are relative to the learner readiness.

Many participants felt a desire to engage in meaningful dialogue with their peer group when they returned, and found it difficult to reach a common understanding among those who had not shared similar experiences. Kiely (2004), in his study of how students experienced perspective transformation shortly after returning home, refers to this phenomenon as the chameleon complex. Students encountered difficulties negotiating their emerging global consciousness as they returned to their everyday world.

Future Research

People live complex lives, and no single transformative trajectory is the same. Even two people with identical experiences have different understandings. In the context of transformative learning, a person's trajectory, the ways in which experiences and knowledge intertwine over time, can teach us about how people can change their perspective. Future research on participants of travel abroad programs should continue to emphasize the longitudinal nature of change in order to understand the bigger picture taking place in participants' lives. There is room to further explore the kinds of events, experiences, opportunities, people, and information that contribute to lasting changes in the way people understand their world. The depth of data provided by the eight participants in this study varied greatly, as did the other kinds of experiences that influenced their thinking over time. However, a more ideal study of these same participants might have started prior to their initial travel abroad, with data collection continuing throughout their experience and beyond. Time is a necessary component in perspective transformation, as it enables, but does not guarantee, personal reflection and meaningful subsequent experiences. The very process of asking participants to put to words what they thought of their experience provided them an opportunity to better understand it for themselves. For some participants in this study, this was their first real opportunity to communicate their thinking with someone they felt could appreciate the meaning it carried for them.

Methods of collecting data about transformative learning, beyond one-on-one interviews, would likely allow for more expressive results from many participants. Stimulated recall interviews, such as providing videos, pictures, or other artefact of a

person's experience, could help mitigate the challenges of recalling specific points in time. Social settings such as group interviews may also evoke illuminating conversation and further reflection. Longitudinal approaches, where researchers check-in with participants over months and years, hold the greatest promise for illustrating change-making events in students.

Conclusion

From the perspective of an educator interested in global citizenship for social justice, who is leading students abroad for short-term experiences, this study has suggested that the experience is effective when it is disorienting. Short-term travel abroad has the potential to disrupt the everyday lives of young adult participants and to open their minds to taking on a new perspective. This is not just an openness to new information, but an epistemic openness to changing how one views the world; a transformative change. The destination context ought to be different from home, and engage students in learning about the culture, challenges, and histories of a place. Among their various activities, participants are likely to value most the relationships they build abroad. Trip leaders play essential roles in developing students' abilities to think critically about their experiences. These educators are also tasked with challenging students' initial conclusions, helping them to confront common pitfalls of such experiences (e.g., being Canadian is just being lucky). Students should be equipped with the tools they need to capitalize on what they have seen, done, and felt. This means helping develop students' vocabulary and critical frameworks, so they can express themselves and engage in dialogue. Students need an appropriate physical environment, culture of criticality, and opportunities to reflect over time, so they can learn more about

what their experiences mean to them. No single week abroad is likely to truly transform the way a person sees the world, but the emotions and memories become a point along a path where everything before it, and everything after it, ultimately influence a person's thinking. Given the right combination of leadership, characteristics of an experience abroad, and time, many students are likely to attribute their time abroad to a change in the way they see the world.

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