

ABSTRACT

Encountering Place, Pedagogy, and Culture:
Study Abroad and Experiential Learning in Morocco and Indonesia

By

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Efforts to globalize higher education have resulted in study abroad climbing to an all-time high in the United States. Amidst this growth, emergent bodies of literature have uncovered problematic trends in study abroad that reproduce hierarchies of power and colonialism, perpetuate views of an exotic cultural “other,” and privilege tourism over education. In my dissertation, I respond to these problems by exploring ways of teaching and learning in study abroad that embrace the pedagogical power of place to foster awareness of the self-in-relation to other and narrow ideas of difference. As experiential education is the philosophy behind many study abroad programs, this body of work critically explores experiential learning at the intersection of place, pedagogy, and culture within study abroad programs to Rabat, Morocco and Bali, Indonesia. In 2014, I spent seven weeks abroad with these programs as a participant-researcher, collected over 200 written narratives in the form of reflective journals with 26 students, and conducted one-year post-program interviews.

I looked to Henri Lefebvre’s (1991/1974) theory on the production of space to formulate the overarching research question that guided this dissertation: What is the role of place in the production of experiential learning space on study abroad? My conceptualization of learning space is situated within *sociocultural* (Rogoff, 2003; Vygotsky, 1962) and *socio-spatial* perspectives, which allows for exploration into the ways in which experiences in/of place are both socially produced and socially producing through engagement with surrounding

environments. Three sub-questions arose in order to explore my research question fully: How can a socio-spatial perspective of experiential learning advance place-based research? How does student engagement with place contribute to the production of experiential learning space? How might the inclusion of a place-responsive pedagogical intervention shape student experiences in/of an exoticized cultural environment? Analyses of each sub-question are presented in three interrelated chapters that act as standalone units and make up the main body of this dissertation.

Findings demonstrate the research potential and pedagogical importance of engaging students with local ways of knowing, being, and doing that are encountered within novel cultural environments. Comparative case analysis indicated experiential place-based pedagogies paired with narrative activities were powerful in producing spaces of experiential learning that dismantled discourses of difference in favor of relationality that remained a year later. Student experiences in/of place were shaped by program intentions and structure, as well as their pre-conceived notions of Morocco and Bali, all of which played a role in the production of experiential learning space. Both programs intended to foster student learning about a place in a place, through engagement with each other, locals, and the surrounding environment. This encouraged students' acknowledgment and renegotiation of representations of Moroccan-ness and Bali-ness, deconstruction of the exotic, and enhanced relationality between self and other, while simultaneously guiding students in the unpacking of their own cultural baggage.

Transcending categorical hierarchies of cultural difference requires encouraging students to embrace difference, while at the same time, to find some common ground or relationality within their experiences in/of place. To cultivate relationality and openness to alternative ways of knowing, being, and doing, I advise that study abroad educators adapt the intentions, structures, and practices of their programs to embrace the pedagogical power of place.