

Interim report for IATL

January 2012

Project reference: 11-12/ST/Polezzi

Project Title: Intercultural Capabilities and Study Abroad: Student Perceptions and Experiences. A Comparative Project in Collaboration with Monash University

Grant recipient: Loredana Polezzi

Introduction

This project focuses on the experiences of students participating in the Erasmus Year Abroad program run by Italian Studies and the term-length programs run by History and History of Art at Warwick Venice in 2011. It builds upon and contributes to a similar study currently being conducted at the Monash University Prato Centre on Australian student experience in Italy. This IATL project also incorporates an online reflexive journaling component (Italian only) and a research practicum for which students participating in the three programs listed above were invited to volunteer.

The research team consists of the Warwick coordinators - Loredana Polezzi and Jenny Burns, the Monash coordinators – Loretta Baldassar and Rita Wilson and the research associate, Jane Mulcock. Stages 1 and 2 of the project are now complete, with some minor adaptations from the original grant application as necessary, and Stage 3 is underway. Polezzi, Baldassar and Mulcock are maintaining regular contact as the project progresses.

Stage 1: September 2011

Three online surveys have been developed for Italian Studies, History of Art and History. These have been adapted from the Monash Prato online pre-departure survey in consultation with relevant Warwick staff from each department. The adaptation of the Italian Studies survey was also informed by a focus group discussion conducted by Mulcock at Warwick University in June with students who had already completed their Year Abroad. These surveys ask respondents to reflect on their expectations of their study abroad experience, and their preparations for their time in Italy.

Fifteen respondents completed the Italian Studies survey, 19 respondents completed the History survey and 29 respondents completed the History of Art survey. The resulting data will be described and discussed in the final report for this project.

Stage 2: October – November 2011: Warwick Venice

Research and Student Practica

Mulcock spent four weeks in Venice in October and November working with staff and students from the History and History of Art programs. Three students from the Department of Italian, based at different Italian partner universities through the Erasmus scheme, also visited the Venice Centre for a week (see below). During her

time in Venice, Mulcock undertook participant observation (by attending seminars, lectures, site visits and other events at Palazzo Pesaro Papafava) and conducted a total of 19 interviews with students and staff on-site (18 recorded).¹ Seven of these were with History of Art Students (undergrad and postgrad), three were with History students and three were with Italian Studies students. All undergraduate students in the History and History of Art programs were invited several times, by email and in class, to participate in interviews but only two students responded to these invitations. Three postgraduate students from History of Art also agreed to be interviewed in response to direct invitations. The remaining eight student interviews were conducted with individuals who volunteered to participate in the practicums described below.

Three 20 hour qualitative research practica were developed in consultation with teaching staff and offered to students as part of the IATL project (see Appendix 1). These were adapted from the original model proposed in the grant application to better accommodate the academic requirements of the core courses. The student researchers have collected additional data from their peers in the History of Art and Italian Studies programs using interviews, participant observation, autoethnographic reflections and a focus group.² This data was submitted in mid-January and will be used to develop online surveys for the alumni of the two programs. The three Italian Studies students travelled to Venice for five days specifically to participate in this component of the project. They will meet again in Venice in March with Polezzi (Mulcock is unable to attend this meeting). An additional February meeting in Prato may be organized if logistical and financial constraints allow it.

Italian Studies Online Journal

During this stage of the project Polezzi and Mulcock also set up the reflexive online journal project for Italian Studies Year Abroad students. The Moodle learning environment has been established with technical assistance from other Warwick colleagues, and introductory resources and activities focused on intercultural capability have been developed (see Appendix 2). Again, the model proposed in the application was adapted to fit with preexisting academic course requirements. At this stage, given the experimental nature of the project, the online journal is not part of the formal course assessment but is being trialed by four student volunteers over the full course of the year.³ Given the small size of the group, Polezzi and Mulcock will be able to provide written feedback to the four students on each journal reflection submitted rather than attempting to facilitate an online discussion group as originally proposed.

Stage 3: December 2011 – January 2012

The trial Moodle self-reflexive multimedia journal project is ongoing. Mulcock and Polezzi will continue to work with the four volunteer student participants throughout

¹ Due to budget limitations interviews will not be transcribed as proposed; the possibility of providing transcription had been left open in the proposal, but finding additional funds has not been possible. Recordings will, nevertheless, remain available at the end of the study.

² The History practicum did not proceed to completion because the student volunteers had other time commitments and were unable to attend briefing meetings.

³ Three of these volunteers also participated in the Italian Studies research practicum.

the 2011/2012 Year Abroad. Feedback has been provided on submissions for Activity 1, Activity 2 has been released to the students and Activity 3 has been prepared. Drafts will be also be prepared for Activities 4-8.

Projected activities for February – August 2012

Polezzi and Mulcock will prepare an extended report for IATL detailing the outcomes of Moodle online journaling exercise, the research practica, and the results of the comparative research. They will also contribute to the preparation of one or more jointly authored publications, possibly with the three Italian Studies students who participated in the research practicum, for the Warwick/Monash online education journal.

If finances and time allow it, the three Italian students who took part in the Venice visit and practicum will be invited for a further (additional) workshop at the Monash Centre in Prato. Activities would focus on planning eventual joint publications, possibly also in collaboration with Monash students.

Summary Report Against Projected Outcomes and Plans for Dissemination:

- Online pre-departure survey for students (which could be used with future cohorts) – *Completed*
- Online Survey of Venice alumni (e.g. focus on career-related outcomes) – *Under development for History of Art and Italian Studies.*
- Participant observation of History and Art History programs in Venice – *Completed.*
- Facilitation of regular discussions /reflexive practice for Warwick students in Italy using the Moodle online environment. – *Project underway in the form of monthly online activities and feedback.*
- Reports on pre-departure, in-country and post-program student experience and recommendations for additional programming and support. – *Reports on pre-departure and in-country experience underway. Data on post-program experience is not yet available. An additional online survey may be developed for Italian Studies students to complete at the end of their Year Abroad.*
- Recommendations for orientation program for study abroad courses to provide students with conceptual tools and practical understandings intended to enhance their ability to effectively manage positive and negative intercultural encounters to feed into follow up projects. – *Development of recommendations underway – these will include reference to comparative data from Monash University Prato Centre.*
- Co-authored conference papers/academic publications – *Publications and conference papers jointly authored by the research co-ordinators, the research associate and the student participants in the Italian Studies practicum are under discussion.*

- Beyond the life of this project, we envisage the possibility of follow up collaborative projects with Monash. Some insights gained from the study may be suitable for inclusion in a UG cultural literacy unit open to Monash and Warwick students. Elements of the program (e.g. on line journaling) will serve as a model for Italian Department year abroad activities (preparation, assessment, feedback). The implementation of an alumni survey will be considered by Italian, History and History of Art. Dissemination of results will also involve collaboration with International Office (internally) and conference papers/publications.

APPENDIX 1 : Research Practicum Handouts

University of Warwick
Warwick Venice Research Skills Practicum
October – January 2011

PURPOSE:

- To gain experience and understanding of qualitative research methodologies.
- To collect qualitative data on student/alumni experience and outcomes of studying in Venice/Italy and on student/alumni perceptions of shifts in their own intercultural competency.

OUTCOMES:

Research skills:

- Introduction to qualitative research methods and survey development through participation in a guided practicum; this has the potential to be included in a professional *curriculum vitae*. [For tips on how you might present this as a form of work experience see <http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/careers/applications/cv>]

Data collection:

- Development of two online surveys for circulation to Warwick Venice alumni from History and History of Art programs based on qualitative research data from interviews and/or focus groups, participant observation and discussion/reflection (survey will include a focus on career development and other long term impacts of the Warwick Venice experience).

SUBMISSION OF DRAFT SURVEY QUESTIONS AND RESEARCH MATERIALS: All material must be submitted by email to jane.mulcock@monash.it by **Friday 13th January 2011**.

ACTIVITIES TO COMPLETE IN VENICE (Approx. 10 hours)

- Briefing meeting (Week 4)
- Introductory Group Discussion (Week 5 for History of Art, Week 6 for History)
- Interview with researcher (Week 5 for History of Art, Week 6 for History)
- Participant observation of student activities (Week 5-7)
- Group Discussion (Week 7)
- Interviews with staff and students (and/or student focus group)

ACTIVITIES TO COMPLETE AND SUBMIT BY JANUARY 13th (Approx. 10 hours)

- Typed summary of interview and/or focus group plus recording
- Typed summary of observations plus photos/textual documentation
- Typed personal reflection on the research experience (1-2 pages)
- Draft survey questions with brief notes/ rationale (group submission)

Warwick Venice Research Practicum

October – January 2011

What sort of information are we collecting?

- Qualitative data about the **whole** of the student experience of studying abroad in the Warwick Venice Programs. This includes positive and negative feelings, thoughts, observations, fears and expectations related to:
 - day to day experiences of living in Italy;
 - speaking and not speaking Italian;
 - managing shared accommodation;
 - attending and participating in classes and site visits;
 - completing assignments;
 - socialising with friends from Warwick and from Venice;
 - homesickness;
 - travelling in Italy;
 - anything else that you think is interesting or important about being a Warwick student in Venice.

KEY TERMS, PHRASES AND CONCEPTS:

Spend some time familiarising yourself with the following terms. These have particular meanings in contemporary university discourse and provide the theoretical context or framework for the bigger project that you are contributing to.

- **Study Abroad:** Have look at your university website to see what Warwick says about the value of studying abroad. Compare this with the websites of some other universities. Do you think the claims that universities make about the benefits of studying abroad are valid? Can you think of examples from your own experience or the experiences of others that provide evidence to support or challenge these claims?
- **Informal curriculum:** the learning experiences that the program provides outside of the formal course content (e.g. negotiating with a landlord in an unfamiliar country or language). Try looking up the work of Professor Elspeth Jones from Leeds Metropolitan University for a quick overview of how this concept related to the Study Abroad experience. Her work will also give you some insight into the equally important concepts of
 - **Intercultural competency**
 - **Global citizenship**
 - **Internationalisation in higher education**

We will discuss these issues briefly when we next meet, so make sure you spend an hour or so getting to know the jargon! This is part of your research brief. Your

understanding of these ideas will help to focus your research activities and define the outcomes of your work.

Why do we want this information?

- To help us identify what questions might be important and useful to ask Warwick alumni about the experiences that they had when studying in Venice and the long terms impacts of those experiences in their personal and professional lives.
- To better understand, evaluate and report on the variety of informal learning outcomes for students participating in Warwick Venice programs.

KEY TERMS, PHRASES, CONCEPTS AND TOOLS:

- **Qualitative and Quantitative Survey questions:** The online surveys we develop will collect some quantitative data, but as you might remember from the survey you were asked to fill in, there will also be opportunities for respondents to contribute qualitative data in the form of extended comments.

Here is a link to an interesting reflection on the qualitative vs quantitative research methods. This author raises some helpful points about the strengths and weaknesses of each approach and the relationships between them.

<http://www.socialresearchmethods.net/kb/qualdeb.php>

- **Mixed methodologies:** Have a quick look at the article I sent you about mixed methodologies. This explores some of the rationales for combining qualitative and quantitative approaches. The section on **triangulation** (p 3-4) is especially useful background. The quote in the methods section on page 4 about 'one night stands' could be useful to discuss in the context of the current short project. There are also some useful references listed in this paper if you want more information about a particular topic.

Bazeley, P. 2002 Issues in Mixing Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches to Research
Presented at: 1st International Conference - Qualitative Research in Marketing and Management University of Economics and Business Administration, Vienna
10th April, 2002 (Published in: R. Buber, J. Gadner, & L. Richards (eds) (2004) *Applying qualitative methods to marketing management research*. UK: Palgrave Macmillan, pp141-156.)

- **'Survey Monkey'** : Sign up to the free version (basic plan) of the online survey tool we are using so that you can get a feeling for how it works. You can put in a few sample questions and test it out on each other (you can select the language by scrolling to the bottom of the home page). We can look at this together when we meet.

<http://www.surveymonkey.com/>

How will we collect the information?

We will use a combination of participant observation, interviewing and/or focus groups and textual analysis to develop an online survey for Warwick Venice alumni (ideally, this preliminary research would be done with a selection of alumni - the target audience, but for practical reasons you will be working with current Warwick Venice students instead).

Take some time to familiarise yourself with our methodologies. I have included some resources here to get you started but you can find other useful material online.

Forum: Qualitative Social Research, is a useful online journal with free access that you might want to explore.

<http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/index>

You may also find that this site on the foundations of social research provides a helpful overview: <http://www.socialresearchmethods.net/kb/intres.php>

KEY TERMS, PHRASES AND CONCEPTS:

- **Participant Observation:** The article I have attached by Barbara Kawulich is a great introduction to participant observation as a research methodology. It includes practical suggestions about what to observe, how to keep fieldnotes, and managing ethical issues amongst other things. Have a quick skim through and pick out the bits that seem most important to you for the task ahead. Think about how your experience might differ as an 'insider' or 'native' participant observer.

Kawulich, B. B. 2005. Participant Observation as a Data Collection Method. *Forum: Qualitative Social Research*. 6 (2): Art. 43. <http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/466/996>

- **Focus groups:** You have the option of running a focus group with your peers as part of this practicum. This is good experience and can provide valuable research data. Read the article I have attached about focus groups as a methodology in health-related research. Think about how you might apply these techniques to a group of your classmates.

Kitzinger, J. 1994 The methodology of focus groups: the importance of interaction between research participants. *Sociology of Health & Illness* 16(1):103-121.

- **Interviewing** (open-ended, semi-structured, structured): Different types of interview techniques can be used to collect different types of data. An excellent source on qualitative interviewing is Steiner Kvale's book entitled *InterViews: An introduction to qualitative research interviewing*. (1996, Thousand Oaks, CA:

Sage). You can access parts of this book online through Google Books (or via Amazon.com). I have also attached the introduction to a special issue of *FQS* on interviews which raises some interesting issues - the authors provide some insight into the process of planning, undertaking and analyzing interviews.

Cisneros-Puebla, C.A., Faux, R. & Mey, G. 2004 Qualitative Researchers—Stories Told, Stories Shared: The Storied Nature of Qualitative Research. An Introduction to the Special Issue: *FQS* Interviews I. *Forum: Qualitative Social Research*. 5 (3): Art. 37

- **Textual analysis:** This is a research method that you will probably be very familiar with from History and Art History. It is frequently used in contemporary social research because it is important for researchers to understand the texts that research participants read and produce as part of the social context (e.g. facebook exchanges, blogs, advertisements).
- **Reflexivity:** A reflexive approach to research involves being aware of one's own positioning and biases as an individual and as a researcher. Have a look at the article I have sent you about my first experience of doing fieldwork. This is an example of reflexive writing. The detail of the case study is not important – think instead about the thoughts and feelings and conflicts associated with the research process and how these were negotiated and incorporated as a part of the overall project.

Mulcock, J. 2001 Ethnography in Awkward spaces: An Anthropology of Cultural Borrowing. *Practicing Anthropology* 23(1): 38-42. (re-published in In W. Haviland, R. Gordon & L. Vivanco (eds) 2005 *Talking About People: Readings in Cultural Anthropology*, 4th Edition, McGraw-Hill, Illinois, Ch 8.)

There are many good reflexive accounts of conducting social research available. You may be able to find some that relate to topics you are particularly interested in by searching on Google Scholar or through your library databases.

You should also do a quick online search on the following concepts if you are not already familiar with them. These ideas are important for thinking about the qualitative research you are about to undertake.

- **Insider Ethnography:** You are an 'insider' or 'native' ethnographer because you are collecting information about a group that you are part of. You already have an 'emic' perspective on the study abroad experience. Your challenge is to step back a bit from your group, to achieve a 'critical distance' so that you can also understand the experience from a more 'etic' perspective.
- **Emic and etic perspectives:** the terms emic and etic come from linguistics (phonemics and phonetics). An emic perspective can only be achieved by being on the inside of the social experience while an etic perspective is achieved by being on the outside and looking in. Participant observation involves a combination of these perspectives depending on the researcher's personal social

position in the research setting, past experiences and relationships with the research participants.

- **Autoethnography:** Have a look online for the work of anthropologists Kirin Narayan and Ruth Behar and sociologists Carolyn Ellis and Arthur Bochner. These and many other authors experiment with ways of presenting personal experience as research data. They are 'insiders' in their research settings.

The following philosophical perspectives relate to the construction of knowledge. You have probably encountered all of these in other contexts over the course of your degree. It is very helpful to have some basic understanding of these ideas as a foundation for understanding the value of critical reflexivity in your research practice.

- **Objectivity, empiricism, and positivism,**
- **Subjectivity and phenomenology**
- **Ontology and epistemology**

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Here are some links to freely available online dictionaries and glossaries of terms commonly used in anthropology and other social sciences. They vary in quality and detail so you may want to try a few different sources or do some Google searching yourself for specific terms.

- <http://www.anthrobase.com/Dic/eng/>
- <http://bitbucket.icaap.org/dict.pl>
- <http://www.glossarist.com/glossaries/humanities-social-sciences/anthropology.asp>
- http://www.alphadictionary.com/directory/Specialty_Dictionaries/Anthropology/

For more background and extra resources you might also like to have a look at these websites. Similar sites can be found for Sociology. Education is a key theme in both disciplines.

- [International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences](#)
- [Anthropology.net](#)
- [Public Anthropology](#)
- [Society for Applied Anthropology](#)
- [World Council of Anthropological Associations](#)
- [Annual Review of Anthropology](#)
- [Virtual Library of Anthropological References](#)
- [BUBL LINK Catalogue of Internet Resources](#)
- [Indian Anthropological Association](#)
- [American Anthropological Association](#)
- [Australian Anthropological Society](#)

APPENDIX 2: Moodle Online Journal Resources and Activities

Department of Italian Studies, University of Warwick
Year Abroad 2011
IATL Multimedia Journaling Project

INTRODUCTION

Why keep a reflective journal?

A lot of research has been done on the benefits of reflective journaling as a way of enhancing experiential education – and studying abroad is perhaps one of the most intense versions of learning through experience that you are likely to undertake during your formal education. It may also be one of the most intense personal challenges you have undertaken.

Being immersed in a new cultural context where you are also required to speak a language that you are not yet confident with can obviously be extremely difficult. It is highly likely, that at some point, you will have experiences which, whether positive or negative in themselves, are also emotionally, psychologically and intellectually confronting. You may have already had experiences like this during your first weeks in Italy. To some extent this is the very purpose of studying abroad (apart from improving your technical language skills). Growth in personal confidence and independence typically emerges out of the ability to negotiate and move beyond such unsettling encounters. When you chose a course that required you to complete a year abroad, you were probably expecting to discover new things about how flexible and adaptable and patient and persistent you are able to be. However, expectation, of course, does not necessarily preclude surprise. And even pleasant surprises can be unsettling, for instance by making you question and rethink your own cultural expectations and assumptions. Until you are immersed in the experience you can't really predict how it will feel and what the personal costs and benefits will be. Achieving a position of comfort can require a lot of painful stretching - perhaps like working with a very unforgiving yoga master for the first time.

Deliberate reflection on what you have learned and how you have learned it when you are immersed in an unfamiliar cultural context can sometimes make such experiences easier to process and manage. It can also make you more aware of your achievements and your overall progression towards that position of relative comfort. Sometimes it can even function as a kind of shortcut to the self-knowledge that comes from experience. By actively reflecting on a particular event soon after it happens you might notice things you can respond to or integrate immediately – rather than waiting for similar scenarios to occur over and over until an obvious pattern emerges. This ability might give you a greater sense of mastery over your own situation.

‘Active reflection’ in this context means writing or adding images or other digital material to your multimedia journal, which you will be able to upload into a private area on the Warwick Italian Studies Year Abroad Moodle site.

How to keep a reflective journal

Reflection is not something that comes easily or naturally to everyone. For some people it is automatic, almost like breathing. For others it is a process that needs to be learned, or a habit that needs to be actively developed. Here, we are asking you to take part in a guided activity that is very clearly targeted at the experience of studying abroad. It is not the same as writing a personal journal for yourself or maintaining a blog to keep your friends and family informed of your activities – although the skills are very transferrable!

Description vs critical analysis

Your reflective journal for this project should include a combination of *descriptive writing* (describing events and experiences and your responses to them, including photos and other digital material) and *critical analysis* (exploring the reasons for your responses to particular experiences). Sometimes your events and analysis may relate specifically to points of language learning. At other times they might relate to interpersonal encounters – misunderstandings or examples of successful communication and connection with others, for example. You might also choose to reflect on bigger socio-political issues and try to connect them in an analytical way to your day-to-day experience.

A critical analysis is, ideally, a *balanced* analysis. This requires that you acknowledge the things you have said or done well and then to identify and articulate the factors that led to your success. It also requires you to consider, in a balanced way, the things you have said or done that have not resulted in the outcome you hoped for. It is usually better to focus on specific events when attempting this kind of analysis, so that you can continually return to the *evidence* in front of you, rather than falling into the trap of over-generalisation. In this sense, you need to use the same skills that you apply to writing a research essay – but your data is your own experience. This approach can allow you to temporarily take a step away from the experience itself and consider it from a slightly more objective point of view – as if you were an outsider looking in. This might lead you to gather additional data from other sources to test your interpretations and perceptions. In this way you can consciously situate your personal experience in the wider context of what you know. For example, a tense interaction with a shopkeeper or an employee in a public office might make more sense if you have some understanding of the current socioeconomic pressures in the local environment.

In an educational context it can be useful to provide some structure or starting points for formal reflection – even though the process and outcomes are intrinsically personal. This is why we have designed monthly activities for you to work through.

Monthly activities

Carefully selected topics will provide a new starting point for your reflections each month. These will be broad enough to allow you to incorporate discussion of whatever issues are most important to you in the moment – but they may also require you to think more broadly. The modules will include one or two resources and some guiding questions. Each written reflection should be 1-2 pages (longer if you wish) and written in English. Because this is an online multimedia journal you can also incorporate other relevant digital material such as photographs, sound recordings or weblinks that interest you or aid your reflective process.

There are four important issues to consider as a background to all your journal reflections.

1. How are your experiences of studying in Italy in 2011 and 2012 informed by your interactions with the specific location where you are based, in all its aspects? Consider, for example, the physical environment, patterns of social interaction, your accommodation arrangements, local dialects or accents, religious practices, historical, political and economic factors. All of these can contribute significantly to the short and long term impacts of your Year Abroad.
2. What cultural and personal preferences, values and preconceptions do you carry with you? Is it easy to differentiate between these things? How do they impact on your day to day experience of being a student in Italy?
3. One of the benefits of keeping a reflective journal over an extended period of time is that it allows you document your progression throughout the year. It can be very valuable to re-read your earlier impressions and interpretations so that you can monitor transformations in personal and linguistic confidence that occur gradually and can sometimes go unnoticed. You may also identify patterns and strategies for doing things differently. Beware that this can be both rewarding and confronting.
4. It is essential to be as honest as you can be when you write your reflections, because this process is really a dialogue with yourself. There is no judgement or assessment associated with the project, but there may still be reflections you would rather to keep to yourself. We recommend that you include these in your initial text, but edit them out of the version that you post online. This way you maximise the personal benefits of participating in the exercise but also maintain your privacy where necessary.

Resources

Although a range of resources will be referred to, most of the modules will draw some material (usually quotations and reflections from other students studying abroad) from the following text:

Murphy – Lejeune, Elizabeth 2002 *Student mobility and narrative in Europe: the new strangers*. London: Routledge. (2003, Taylor & Francis e-Library)

This book is available for online rental (it is quite expensive to purchase) through the Amazon Kindle store. I will reference it as 'SME' with the chapter and the 'location' number for the kindle version. Here is an overview of the text.

Student Mobility and Narrative in Europe

Bringing together case studies and theory, this book is the first in-depth qualitative study of student migration within Europe. The author examines the experience of students who spend a year abroad in a European country, examining the social status of the traveller and exploring the student experience of mobility.

The empirical data have been obtained from interviews with students representing three types of study abroad programmes: Erasmus, assistantships and a European business school programme.

These interviews have produced rich narratives, bringing to light the constituents of the students' formative experiences: their mobility capital, their motivations, the arrival as a rite of passage, their definitions of culture shock, the discovery of new spatial conditions, the participation in a new social scene, the creation of a social fabric and the process of adaptation. By examining these, the author is able to demonstrate how the experience of mobility alters the concepts of 'space' and 'home', indicating that they are no longer perceived as being tied to specific geographical environments, but rather part of a mobile and changing life space.

[SME, *Frontispeice*, location 15]

You may also like to have a look at a few of the references on the following page to get a sense of some of the things that other researchers have had to say about the study abroad experience and the value of reflective journaling. Please note that you are not required to read all this material. We have included these to provide some context for the journaling project, and as a starting point, should you want to explore further. All of these are available in electronic format and can be emailed to you if you are not able to access them through your library catalogue.

Research on Studying Abroad

These articles offer an introduction to some of the approaches used to document study abroad experiences and the results collected from studies undertaken. The Coleman paper provides an overview of the ERASMUS program. You might also like to look at the Nash paper, published in 1974, to compare some of opinions, experiences and approaches with more recent research. Back issues of *Frontiers* are freely available at <http://www.frontiersjournal.com/backissues.htm>

- Coleman, J. A 1998 Language Learning and Study Abroad: the European Perspective *Frontiers : The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad*. 4: 167-203.
- Kline, R.R. 1998 Literacy and Language Learning in a Study Abroad Context. *Frontiers : The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad*. 4:139-165.
- Nash, D. 1976 The Personal Consequences of a Year of Study Abroad. *The Journal of Higher Education* 47(2):191-203.
- Stephenson, S. 1999 Study Abroad As a Transformational Experience and Its Effect upon Study Abroad Students and Host Nationals in Santiago, Chile. *Frontiers : The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad*. 5: 1-38.
- Rundstrom Williams, T. 2005. Exploring the Impact of Study Abroad on Students' Intercultural Communication Skills: Adaptability and Sensitivity. *Journal of Studies in International Education* 9: 356-371.

Research on Reflective Practice

These articles offer some useful insights drawn from other research contexts. You will need to apply these to your own experiences as a student learning about language and culture abroad.

- Boud, D. 2001 Using Journal Writing to Enhance Reflective Practice. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education* 90: 9-17
- Hubbs, D.L. & C.F. Brand 2005 The Paper Mirror: Understanding Reflective Journaling. *The Journal of Experiential Education* 28 (1): 60 – 71.
- Loughran, J.L 2002 Effective Reflective Practice: In Search of Meaning in Learning about Teaching. *Journal of Teacher Education* 53 (1):33-43.
- Spalding, E. & A. Wilson 2002 Demystifying Reflection: A Study of Pedagogical Strategies That Encourage Reflective Journal Writing. *Teachers College Record* 104(7): 1393–1421.

ACTIVITY 1: Expectations, first impressions, being immersed.

1. Below is a reflection from an Irish student arriving in Italy in October. After reading this text, describe your experience of arriving in Italy and travelling to your accommodation for the first time. How did you feel when you first saw the town you would be staying in? How did you feel when you entered your apartment? What did you do or say to display or hide your feelings? Did these feelings and actions match your expectations of your first day?

Well, the first month was pretty much dreadful... As I said to you earlier on, arriving at the airport, when I arrived, it was about 37–38° outside, roasting! I mean it was October! How can you reach those temperatures in October?... Ten minutes in the car, my landlady collected me from the airport, I was sweating... and to see these palm trees which you don't see in Ireland on the sides of the road, and the scorched earth, everything was brown where I'm used to seeing green. And this lady besides me in the car, where the heat didn't seem to bother her, the windows are up and I'm trying to open up every window I can reach and speaking a language which... apart from 'I am' and 'Yes, please', the only words I could understand... My mind just went blank... an accent... the accent was something I had to deal with because the only Italian I'd heard was from my teacher in school and the accent of my teacher – she was Irish... So it was quite a daunting experience... And then arriving in my apartment, hum, was again not very nice as it was an apartment with... there was an *autostrada* literally right below our window... again it seemed so foreign! They had these big steel girders and they close them during the day. So, I remember arriving and the apartment was very dark and dingy and the people I was living with were very, very different... but it was just so alien! And I knew I was the only Irish person there...

Reference: SME: Chapter five, Location 3087

2. Now expand on your description by exploring some related thoughts and experiences from the last six weeks that stand out in your memory. Use the Guiding Questions below as a starting point - but please note, that these are *guides* only - you may choose to address all, or some, or none of them in your personal reflection. Include photos and/or other digital material in your reflection.

Guiding Questions

- What did you find most enjoyable about the experience of arriving in Italy? What was most confronting or difficult for you?
- How have your personal stereotypes of Italians and Italian culture been challenged since you have arrived? Have you encountered stereotypes about ERASMUS students or about people from your cultural background amongst the Italians you have met so far?
- What were your priorities when you first arrived? Were you able to fulfil these easily? What are your daily priorities now?

ACTIVITY 2: “Culture shock” and transition: being home and away

1. Culture shock? : being away

Culture shock might result from a mismatch of expectations and experience, or from continued exposure to an unfamiliar set of values and practices that require an individual to question and adapt their own beliefs, behaviours and assumptions about others. Do you think you have experienced culture shock during your time in Italy? Are there better ways to describe your experiences?

Here are a selection of words that your peers used in the online survey to describe their perceptions of Italian culture before they left Warwick:

Relaxed; enthusiastic; welcoming; warm; proud; disorganised; fashion conscious; friendly; open; artistic; not always punctual; easy going; family focussed; quite monolingual; flamboyant; sociable; spontaneous; less respectful of women.

Do these descriptions of Italian culture match your experience of living in Italy so far? What cultural characteristics have you observed? Are these characteristics that you enjoy or that you sometimes find difficult to accommodate?

2. Christmas Break: being home

Below are some reflections on the experience of going home for Christmas in the middle of the study abroad period.

However, going home operates in two ways. It means relaxation and shelter after a difficult period. But, returning home also produces uneasiness because the stream of experience is interrupted and discontinued.

This is why returning home for Christmas is laden with ambivalence. John remembers 'dying to go back home at Christmas in the comfort of the house' and at the same time feeling at odds with those who had stayed behind. Amin and Hugo felt like strangers at home where nothing had changed, while things had changed for them. Régine said that 'one felt like a tourist at home'. Sylvie found that 'you feel that you have missed a lot at home, the trip is short-lived, and as you cannot see everybody, you feel torn between opposites'. As Elena summed up, the traveller must re-adapt to life back home. Nevertheless, Christmas is a physical and psychological break necessary for recharging one's batteries in the warmth of the past before going back refreshed into the world of adventure. Maria explained the process.

By Christmas, I was definitely well integrated, I mean, 'well integrated' came after Christmas, but feeling very secure with my friends and then just wait for it to become better [...] I was anxious to get back and to see how everyone was and what they were doing and tell them all about how my first half of the year had been. So Christmas was kind of like a necessary break for round 1. I called it 'recharging my batteries' and I went back, I found my batteries had been completely recharged and I was dying to get into the second term... I was looking forward to the going back with a new... I knew where I was going, I had friends, I was bringing them back little things from Ireland, you know, Christmas pudding, this kind of stuff, Irish sausages, Irish tea, I mean the fact that I even had people to bring things back to, I was really happy about that you know [...]. So I was more comfortable then the second time.

Feelings of uneasiness and ambivalence can often arise for people when moving between cultural contexts – in one location, or in both. Do any of the reflections above reflect your experience? Did you expect to have any difficulty re-adapting to your home environment after your time in Italy?

Guiding questions:

- Describe some of the major differences that you have observed between ways of living and studying in Italy and at Warwick and/or in your home town. Would you describe any of these as 'cultural' differences?
- Are teaching and learning practices and expectations in Italy very different to your experience in the UK? Do you have any clear preferences for one way of doing things over the other? If so, why?
- Being exposed to the ways that other people do things can sometimes make us more conscious of our own habits and taken-for-granted values. Have you noticed anything new about your own habits and values during your first 2-3 months in Italy?
- What were you most looking forward to and what are you most enjoying about your visit home? Have you found it easy or difficult to fit back in?
- Have you noticed anything different about your home town and how you interact with people in your community after your time in Italy? Do you feel as though you have developed a 'new lens' through which to view your familiar surroundings?
- If you visited the University of Warwick during your Christmas break did you perceive the campus environment differently as a result of your time in Italy?
- What are you looking forward to, or not looking forward to, about your return to Italy?
- Are you planning to continue working on your Italian language skills while you are at home (e.g. reading) or do you feel that you need a complete break from Italian Studies?