Kent Academic Repository

Jarrett, Kendall (2020) *Maintaining the connection: story sharing as a function of home institution support for study abroad students.* **Journal of University Teaching and Learning Practice, 17 (3).**

Downloaded from

The version of record is available from

https://ro.uow.edu.au/jutlp/

This document version

Author's Accepted Manuscript

DOI for this version

Licence for this version

UNSPECIFIED

Additional information

Versions of research works

Versions of Record

Author Accepted Manuscripts

Enquiries

Maintaining the connection: story sharing as a function of home institution support for study abroad students

Kendall Jarrett

Laura Ellis

Maintaining the connection: story sharing as a function of home institution support for study abroad students

Abstract

Study abroad programmes are often reported by students to be the pinnacle of their university life experiences (Curtis & Ledgerwood, 2018). Once abroad though, the challenges of decision-making (and how a home institution can support a student's decision-making) rarely abate. This article reports on three undergraduate students' storied experiences of studying abroad. Shared stories uploaded onto a dedicated communal blog site reflected a growing desire for adventure at the expense of formal educational commitment. The challenges of decision-making for students and the use of story sharing as a means for academic staff to stay 'connected' to students are explored along with discussion of home institution support for students throughout the study abroad experience.

Keywords

Abstract

Study abroad programmes are often reported by students to be the pinnacle of their university life experiences (Curtis & Ledgerwood, 2018). Once abroad though, the challenges of decision-making (and how a home institution can support a student's decision-making) rarely abate. This article reports on three undergraduate students' storied experiences of studying abroad. Shared stories uploaded onto a dedicated communal blog site reflected a growing desire for adventure at the expense of formal educational commitment. The challenges of decision-making for students and the use of story sharing as a means for academic staff to stay 'connected' to students are explored along with discussion of home institution support for students throughout the study abroad experience.

Key words: study abroad; shared story; decision-making; home institution support; staff-student connectedness.

Studying abroad

For students willing to engage in a study abroad programme, often in remote and challenging locations, their in-country decision-making will have a significant impact upon the type of learning experience they have. Typically, it is the unknown that attracts students to study abroad programmes which brings with it opportunities for choice not previously experienced. As tertiary educators, we (the authors) see benefit in providing students with study abroad opportunities and fuelling their desire to embrace the challenges and benefits that formal learning programmes overseas can offer, but also recognise the need to support students during such times. These pastoral care responsibilities led us to review and consider the range of communication means currently utilised (by us and in the literature) to support students when abroad to determine how best we could engage with and 'stay connected' to our students whilst studying overseas. From a pastoral care perspective, we had both previously used relevant personal and professional stories within undergraduate seminars and tutorials to support

students' assimilation into higher education. By sharing our own experiences of learning and decision making as students ourselves and reflecting on those experiences as a group, we had always felt 'better connected' to our students. Thus, research into story sharing as a means to stay connected to and support students whilst they studied abroad was undertaken with McDrury and Alterio's (2002) view that story sharing can help assimilation, engagement and relationship building viewed as a key statement informing research design. With the primary rationale for this small-scale research project being to develop further insight into how to best support students on a study abroad experience, we decided to focus our study on the efficacy of story sharing to determine its effectiveness as a means to stay connected to students and support their decision-making whilst studying abroad.

Students' motivations for studying abroad

A number of studies have found that travel, adventure and new experiences are key motivators for student engagement in study abroad opportunities (King & Young, 1994; Wintre et al, 2015). Most recently, King and Sondhi (2018) found that in their study of UK and Indian students with study abroad experience, 88% of respondents rated unique adventure as important or very important in terms of their decision to engage with a study abroad programme. With a growing number of universities, study abroad guidebooks and tourism agencies using adventure lifestyle imagery to promote the study abroad experience (Doerr, 2012; King & Sondhi, 2018), the lure of adventure over formal educational commitment presents as a very real distraction for students whilst studying abroad. Furthermore, with study abroad guidebook literature (such as Loflin's *Adventures abroad: The student's guide to studying overseas)* advising students to 'take one fewer class and use the time to explore' (2007, p. 138), it could be argued that the study abroad experience places greater value on out-of-classroom learning rather than in-classroom formal education (Doerr, 2012).

There are, of course, other 'pull factors' or motivations for students to study abroad, which include personal growth, learning experience, career development and entertainment (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Anderson et al 2015; Wintre et al, 2015). Yet, with many study abroad programmes now intentionally structured around adventure-based formats (see Harper, 2018), the concept of study abroad and perception of 'student-as-adventurer' appear inextricably linked.

Students' support from home institutions

For many educational institutions, the offering of study abroad opportunities is an increasingly important source of revenue generation and student recruitment (Anderson et al 2015; Gindlesparger, 2018). Thus, support for such offerings is of paramount importance, not only for the health and wellbeing of the student studying, but also for the reputations of home and host institutions. In recent years, institutional pre-departure and in-country support for students has become more 'robust' (Brubaker, 2017), although there have been calls for an improvement in re-entry support (Savicki & Price, 2017; Brubaker, 2017). Such commitments to assist students with their pre-departure, in-country and re-entry needs are typically handled by study abroad professional staff residing in service functions separate from university academic staff. When support from academic staff and academic discipline areas is made available, it tends to be more design and/or resource based. For example: Pyper & Slagter (2015) comment on the benefits of curricula designed by academics (i.e. curricula that includes homestays and an emphasis on local connections); Kurtner (2010) reports on the tailoring and availability of discipline-specific digital library collections for students studying remotely; Folse et al (2015, p. 237) comment on use of synchronous course content delivery to home and abroad students; and Hultbrugge and Engelhard (2016) and Morse et al (2017) discuss students with international experience being assigned as mentors for first time study abroad students. In view of the range of support mechanisms offered to students studying abroad, one aspect of this study was to explore the use of story sharing to help maintain connectedness (and support) between study abroad students and home institution academic staff. This more formative approach to engagement, outside the more typically rigid structures of engagement and support available to students when studying a module within a home institution, is akin to the type of support and learning now commonly practiced in HE (Gramatakos, & Lavau, 2019).

The purpose of story and its sharing

Over the past 20 years, the use of story has become a more prominent feature of qualitative research in education. Throughout this time a range of definitions have been used to define

story, from Fulford's (1999) belief that a story should have shape, outlines and limits to Gabriel's (2000) consideration that stories have conflicts and predicaments requiring decisions and actions. Some authors, however, are more reluctant than others to commit to a single definition of story (see McDrury & Alterio, 2001). Thus, in relation to the focus of this study we believe discussion around the purpose of story is more appropriate.

For Moon (2010) the purpose of story relates to 'facilitating learning from experience' (p. 17). Stories can be starting points for discussion and information sharing and can help to create 'a sense of commonality and comfort amongst a group of people who are facing a common experience or adversity' (Moon, 2010, p. 19). The purpose of story also relates to the act of storytelling itself with McDrury & Alterio (2002) insisting that engagement in storytelling can help turn raw events into a way *to* knowing. Furthermore, it has been suggested that the living, telling, retelling and reliving of stories that relate to a specific theme helps to develop empathy and understanding amongst a group of people with the sharing of personal story considered a key factor in the reflection process and the construction of personal identity (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Moon, 2010). With reflection emerging as a 'key component of student development in study abroad' (Sivicki & Price, 2017, p. 51) the sharing of stories can be used deliberately and strategically by researchers as a reflective tool (Hayman et al, 2011). Stories that are carefully chosen and shared by researchers can help participants 'feel a legitimate sense of safety and promote the telling of deeper, more detailed experiences' (Hayman et al, 2015, p. 286). Thus, the communal sharing of stories in this study was designed to act as a tool for both reflection and support for students during their study abroad experience.

Use of blogs to enhance learning and learner connectedness

Over the past decade there has been a significant increase in the use of social media, in particular the use of blogging, as an everyday tool for knowledge management, communication, and the sharing of personal stories. The popularity of social media use for younger generations has also meant its acceptance within learning and teaching practices in HE (Garcia, 2017), and with good reason. Lee & Bonk's (2016) study exploring the social networks formed amongst graduate learners using blogs found they positively contributed to overall student learning by way of; 1) enhancing students' emotional connectedness with peers; 2) heightening students' sense of learning community involvement; and 3) improving overall

engagement with learning. In a study of foreign language students' use of blogs whilst studying abroad, it was reported that blog use encouraged self-reflection and intercultural learning (Lee, 2012). In addition, the flexible nature of blogs, in terms of how they might be structured, accessed and evolve into an interactive environment for students to share and exchange ideas, appear well suited to the task of maintaining connection between tutor and learner when engaged in a study abroad learning experience (Garcia, 2017; Lee, 2012).

Methodology

Participants

Criterion sampling was used in this study. Three participants (aged 18-25 and all in their second year of a three-year education undergraduate degree) were approached directly by the research team as they were the only students from that year's cohort (N=121) who had decided to commit to a semester-long (January to July) study abroad opportunity. Participants knew each other prior to selecting a study abroad experience, although this was not a determining factor in them all deciding to attend the same tertiary institution in Australia; it was more so the institution's geographic location (e.g. proximity to coastal recreation opportunities and sub-tropical climate), home-and-host course similarities and administrative convenience of having an existing inter-institutional study abroad partnership. Each participant articulated a range of reasons for wanting to engage in a study abroad experience with a desire for adventure and personal growth common to all. All participants were enrolled in four modules/units of study at the host institution, with grades attained during their study abroad experience not used in calculations for their final degree classification back at their home institution (e.g. 2:2, 2:1, First). Participants' names used in this article are pseudonyms chosen to protect their anonymity. Both researchers were personal academic tutors on participants' home institution degree programme and continued to fulfil their pastoral care responsibilities (in tandem) throughout participants' study abroad semester, albeit virtually. The study gained ethical approval from the home institution.

Procedure

Prior to departure all participants, by their own admissions already well-conditioned to everyday use of social media and blogging, were collectively inducted into using a password protected blog site specifically tailored for (written, visual and/or audio) story sharing between and amongst participants and researchers (e.g. academic staff). The induction included the sharing of information on the purpose of story and storytelling as a means for learning, but no prescriptive detail was given to participants about how to write a story owing to both: 1) the contested view of what a story requires; and 2) the authors' desire to explore how the blog would be used by participants. The site contained two separate blog pages offering students a choice of audience. The first was a 'communal' site allowing all students and researchers access to view each other's uploaded communications. The second was a 'confidential' site whereby individual participants' communications were only available to the researchers (submissions to this site were for pastoral care purposes and not used in this study). Whilst abroad, participants had unlimited access to each site with access granted two weeks prior to each individual's scheduled departure date. One of the researchers was a foreign national with previous experience of working and studying abroad. Thus, to facilitate an 'exchange' of stories (based on a similar context of experience) the researcher's own storied experiences of working and studying abroad were uploaded to stimulate empathy amongst participants and engagement in story sharing. In addition to the posting of stories the researchers engaged in general comment making and question asking to both individuals and the group in response to uploaded participant stories.

Stories

For the purposes of this study, a story was defined as any response that held some aspect of personal conflict and evidence of decision-making being undertaken. These criteria were chosen by the authors to enable the locating of stories within the blogs specifically related to two prominent areas of in-country challenge experienced by study abroad students (Petersdotter, Niehoff, & Freund, 2016; Bodycott, 2015). For example, the following student

response was deemed a story due to the presence of both conflict (see *italicised* type) and decision making (see bold type):

> Today has been another fantastic day full of surprises, blue sky, swimming with 'sharks,' surfing 6-8ft waves, and to the delight of Barry getting his surfboard trapped in the lift and breaking it (very amusing)... *but I then return to find myself trudging up to campus.* **I also feel as though I now use this 'reflective tool'** [story sharing] **as a mode of release from University life**.

Analysis

Webster & Mertova (2007) believe that 'narrative inquiry is ideally suited to address issues of complexity and subtlety in human experience' (p. X) yet 'does not strive to produce any conclusions of certainty' (p. 4). With this in mind the analysis of stories shared by participating study abroad students was thematically based. The analysis involved a three phase coding process whereby each story was read and assigned a sub-theme (phase 1); followed by story re-reading, confirmation of sub-themes (e.g. cultural assimilation, the impact of personality on study abroad experience, decision-making) and their amalgamation to form broader themes (phase 2); and finally the selection of an overriding theme prevalent within and across numerous shared stories (phase 3). The coding of stories was done independently by each researcher during phase 1 with phases 2 and 3 completed collaboratively.

Throughout the coding and analysis process researchers were aware of the need to bracket out and subdue internal preconceptions about the study abroad experience as well as external suppositions relating to communal story sharing (Gearing, 2004). This was, in part, achieved by utilising both independent and collaborative coding and analysis processes that acted as a checking measure. The researchers recognise, however, that the research design itself (i.e. that required researchers to articulate their views on study abroad as well as play a central role in the story sharing process) meant only a more porous bracketing position could be adopted.

To support the trustworthiness and credibility of stories shared, stories from all participants were included in the write up of this study and in their entirety (Moss, 2004). Along with the systematic coding of stories, this helped to preserve what Blumenfeld-Jones (1995) state as 'the worth and dignity of the teller' (p. 27). Furthermore, the researchers support Moss' (2004) view that trustworthiness 'goes beyond the study itself and includes the publication of the critical stories' (p. 371). Thus, by providing participants the opportunity to change, add to, and confirm their shared stories during and post study abroad experience, the credibility of stories, both at the time of writing and as an analysed element of research, was consistently sort.

Limitations

Hayward et al (2011) highlight some of the challenges faced by researchers when using shared story as a data generation method. 'First, the researcher is put at risk of exposure by sharing stories that the participants are not obliged to keep confidential. Secondly, because the researcher has some understanding of the phenomenon owing to their insider status, they need to be cautious about making assumptions based on their own experiences' (p. 286). For both researchers, the sharing of personal and professional stories that relate to and enhance the student learning experience are common within their practice. For this study (and on all previous occasions when personal/professional stories are shared) careful consideration was given to which stories would be shared. It is also important to acknowledge the position of support that both researchers had for the study abroad experience in general and that assumptions made by the researchers relate to the many personal and professional benefits of engagement in such an experience. It is important to recognise also that the sharing of story in written format may not be the preferred method of story sharing for participants, although the blog site used in this study was capable of capturing stories told through other media (e.g. video). Thus, the researchers recognise that what has been shared by participants in their stories may only be fragments of a story.

Shared stories

The following section of this article details the shared stories allocated to the overriding theme; that being the challenge of decision-making for study abroad students. The point of story presentation is that it serves to extract and highlight those events, outcomes and conclusions which the presenter and observer find 'interesting' (Tomai & Forbus, 2007). With this in mind, the stories shared have been presented in a 'series of temporally ordered events' (Mishler, 1995, p. 90) as shared by the researchers and participants. Each individual story (e.g. shared blog response) is retold in its entirety and presented as a series of connecting stories to be read as both a 'grand' story (Grbich, 1999) as well as 'stories within a story'. This form of presentation was also done to limit criticisms relating to narrative smoothing (Kim, 2016), although the researchers do recognise that the practice of culling stories not deemed to be linked to the overriding theme may in itself be considered a limitation.

The Grand Story

(Temporal ordering of 11 shared stories detailing challenges of student decision-making during their study abroad experience)

Researcher: People have very different reasons for studying abroad. My reasons for chasing a learning opportunity overseas were based around a desire to escape, to be unique and forge my own path, to be independent. So, for you is it more educational venture or adventure? (Story 1)

> Harry: I believe one of the main reasons that made me carry out the study abroad program AND travel was to make me a more mature and independent person; it has definitely done this and I have not even commenced the semester yet. Things such as [on my journey to Australia] running out of money because there are no banks for hundreds of miles, getting on a plane by yourself and sleeping on the floor of a bamboo shack with only chickens and pigs for neighbours are experiences I would not get back [in England] and have definitely helped develop me as an individual. I feel it is more of an adventure challenging myself to do new things, in new places with new people, rather

than sitting in my comfortable little bubble in England. Real life/university commences this weekend. (Story 2)

Barbara: My motivation (to study abroad) was to gain a form of escape, to forget worries within my family life, to have a period of time exclusively for me to understand exactly what I was searching for in life. This may have set out consciously to be a venture, a tool for professional and resume growth, and it still is, but subconsciously has been a catalyst for me to understand what drives me, what is important to me and what I want my life to look like in 10 years time. It has also been an adventure. I have learned so much about my character, about my strengths and what I can give to others, my ability to motivate, drive, lead and not shirk responsibility or be afraid of situations that may be dangerous or uncomfortable... (Story 3)

Tom: Before I arrived in Australia I don't think I was searching for anything in particular, however, [since arriving] I have found many more relevant career paths. So, career wise I am highly focused and I am working 25-30 hours a week, and I love it. However, I feel that this has had a detrimental effect on my educational studies and I am finding it difficult to focus. I wanted to experience a different way of studying from a different culture, however, I haven't really embraced this aspect as much as I would have liked and frequently I find myself not paying attention in lectures. One of the biggest changes is not having a strict routine. I seem to have no idea what is going on around the world... I feel like I am in my own bubble. I have had so much time to ponder, wonder and dream... I have used my time to pull things together in my own mind as to what it is I'm looking for in life. It has been so valuable. (Story 4)

Researcher: One of my most powerful learning experiences when studying overseas was my decision to stop attending a class in favour of taking on more hours in local employment. Why was this experience so powerful? I had decided to go against the advice of my family and invest in learning opportunities outside the classroom, outside a key focus of why I was overseas. Making this decision meant I began to see myself as something

other than a study abroad student. How do you see yourselves now that you've been there for a while? (Story 5)

> Harry: Since arriving in Australia I have found it extremely difficult to settle into a regime of actually getting into the library and doing work! It takes nearly all of my motivation to get up to University and attend the lectures. In a way it still feels like a holiday and for that reason I feel less motivated to achieve academically. On the flip side, I have been able to embrace the Aussie lifestyle i.e. learn to surf, go for a swim or a run down the beach in the morning. After reading back over my last comment my academic focus seems to have plateaued, but my personal skills seem to have absolutely rocketed! (Story 6)

Barbara: The academic journey so far... it has been a shock to be honest. At times I have wondered what the hell I'm doing at Uni, I could earn a lot of money if working full time and have found it hard to bring my mind back to the benefits of getting a degree and why I am even here in the first place. So far the journey has been memorable, challenging, fun, dangerous but above all life changing. (Story 7)

> Harry: So here we go the 2nd half of the Semester begins. To be honest I am not looking forward to it one bit. I have just had a week off where I met and saw some amazing sights and people. I felt like I was an Aussie, but now I'm back at Uni mixing with other international students. I feel like in a way I am being very selfish for saying I am not enjoying the study abroad experience. I enjoy the travelling side but the University side is a drag. It feels like I am here to tick the box of saying I have studied abroad. (Story 8)

Harry: At the moment I am midway through my assessments. I am finding them relatively easy to complete and I am not aiming high as the grades will have no effect on my degree classification so long as I pass. I should be using my free time to coach and further myself as an individual and professional, but the travelling has exceeded my expectations. The academic work has been difficult and de-motivating. (Story 9)

Tom: Basically, I am trying to enjoy Australia as much as possible before I return to England. I may be depressed for a while. (Story 10)

Harry: I am now looking forward to the future, will there be any jobs in the UK, will my old jobs be there to go back to and how the hell will I settle back into "normal life" back in the UK and at University? (Story 11)

Discussion

Each of the shared stories above were deemed to highlight the challenges of decision-making for students whilst studying abroad. Our analysis also revealed a common story focus, that being the decision-making challenges surrounding the pursuit of adventure versus formal educational commitment. Thus, the following analysis and discussion of these shared stories is presented in two parts: 1) the challenge of decision-making (adventure vs. formal educational commitment); and 2) story sharing as a form of home institution support.

Challenges of decision-making (adventure vs. formal educational commitment)

Etherington (n.d., slide 6) suggests that the shape and/or focus of a story 'helps organise information about how people have interpreted events; the values, beliefs and experiences that guide those interpretations; and their hopes, intentions and plans for the future'. An analysis of the shape and focus of stories shared in this study reveals an initial keenness from students to reflect on (at length when compared to latter stories) feelings of excitement and trepidation in relation to the pursuit of personal and career development goals. For example, a desire for the study abroad experience to 'make me a more mature and independent person' (Harry: Story 2), to offer 'a different way of studying from a different culture' (Tom: Story 4), and to be 'a form of escape' (Barbara: Story 3) were shared, yet each story also holds within it a sense of trepidation with regards to the setting and achievement of future goals. This sense of trepidation grows throughout the remaining stories shared with stories becoming shorter and more focused on personal loss of academic appetite. For example, Harry (Story 6) felt 'less motivated to

achieve academically', Barbara (Story 7) shared that 'at times I have wondered what the hell I'm doing at Uni', and Tom (Story 10) revealed that 'I find myself not paying attention in lectures'. This change in the focus and shape of stories was also evident in Savicki & Price's (2017) article on study abroad students' blog recordings which revealed that 'students were intensely outwardly focused upon arrival and spent much of their blog posts recording events in their new, host culture... [yet] prior to returning back home they were less outwardly focused' (p. 59). Similarly, the more inwardly focused stories shared by Tom, Barbara and Harry at the later stages of their study abroad experiences coincided with the growing prevalence of decision-making conflict centred around the search for adventure over formal academic commitment.

As highlighted within the stories shared, decision-making around the pursuit of adventure at the behest of formal educational commitment was a challenging part of the study abroad experience. Arguably though, with each student initially articulating a desire for adventure and personal growth as a main reason for their decision to study abroad, the sharing of stories that detail decision making challenges is somewhat expected. What is significant, though, is the level of internal conflict (as manifested within shared stories) that these decision-making challenges create and their effect on motivation to study. Contained in Harry's stories are statements such as 'not aiming high', academic work being 'difficult and de-motivating' (Story 9), and 'not looking forward to [studying] one bit' (Story 8). Barbara also shares the view that '[I've] found it hard to bring my mind back to the benefits of getting a degree and why I am even here in the first place' (Story 7) with Tom 'finding it difficult to focus [on his educational studies]' (Story 4). This lack of motivation to engage in formal educational studies appears to then contribute to feelings of insecurity highlighted by Harry's feelings of selfishness 'for saying I am not enjoying the study abroad experience' (Story 8) and Tom's statement revealing 'I may be depressed for a while [upon returning home]' (Story 10).

Therefore, each students' consideration of the opportunity cost of seeking adventure over formal educational commitment reveals itself within each story as an internal conflict not easily solved. It was often then the case that after sharing these stories students and researchers utilised the confidential site to continue discussions in a pastoral care capacity. And although the recording of these 'confidential' communications was not a formal part of this study, students' consistent use of the site (e.g. each participant averaged two communal site posts a month over a 6 month study abroad period) suggests its effectiveness in terms of 1) accessibility

whilst abroad, and 2) promotion and maintenance of student-to-academic links whilst studying abroad.

The sharing of stories as a form of home institution support

Several articles relating to the benefits of engagement in a study abroad scheme devote considerable attention to the provision of opportunities for critical reflection (see Savicki & Price, 2017; Vandermaas-Peeler et al, 2018). By providing students with both communal and confidential story sharing opportunities, the researchers not only perceived the maintenance of 'connectedness' with students whilst they were aboard (compared to a lack of connectedness when reflecting on previous students' study abroad experiences), but also that their involvement in story sharing helped to stimulate and encourage a certain depth of reflection. This is evidenced by stories that revealed within them a change in perception of self e.g. 'I feel like I am in a bubble' (Tom: Story 4) and 'I felt like I was an Aussie' (Harry: Story 8).

As Brubaker (2017, p. 110) suggests today's study abroad students 'rely on multiple forms of technology to remain connected to friends and family at home'. For many students use of communication technologies is an everyday practice regardless of proximity to friends and family, thus use of an electronic blog site as a tool for academics to maintain connection with their students studying abroad appears both practical and beneficial as a mechanism for pastoral support. Studies by Kartoshkina (2015), Brubaker (2017) and Morse et al. (2017) have highlighted the bittersweet and conflicting emotions felt by students both in-country and upon re-entry after a study abroad experience. By providing students with access to story sharing whilst abroad, specific student challenges associated with in-country decision making as well as re-entry into home country can be identified at an earlier stage and the appropriate support can be offered in a more timely and precise manner. For example, Barbara writes '…I could earn a lot of money if working full time and have found it hard to bring my mind back to the benefits of getting a degree' (Story 7). Having access to such feelings of conflict mid-study aboard experience can promote empathy amongst other story readers and trigger the sharing of similar stories that may then offer insight into possible solutions or simply provide benefits associated with externalisation of feelings (e.g. an awareness that 'I am not alone in having these feelings'). In another story Harry writes '…will my old jobs be there to go back to and how the hell will I settle back into normal life back in the UK?' (Story 11). Having access to

such stories prior to re-entry allows for the tailoring of a pastoral care plan (in this instance, for example, career guidance) so that the configuration of students' re-entry support is adequately considered.

The completion of pre-departure health questionnaires (Morse et al 2017), the assessment of a student's motivations for wanting to study abroad (Hultbrugge & Engelhard, 2016), travel experiences embedded in the study abroad programme itself (Vandermass-Peeler et al, 2018) and the reframing of re-entry as personal development (Brubaker, 2017) are just some of the most recent suggestions that have been made in the literature to help support study abroad students. The use of a story sharing initiative by students and academics offers yet another means through which home institutions can support their students whilst studying abroad and, more specifically, offer more targeted counselling when students are faced with decisions pertaining to the pursuit of adventure over formal educational commitment. Furthermore, by providing aspiring study abroad students with access to the shared stories of study abroad predecessors, there is the potential for semester abroad expectations to be better managed with the outcome being a better all-round study abroad experience for all involved.

Conclusion

The focus of this study was on the sharing of stories between study abroad students and home institution academic staff and whether or not this activity was an effective means through which to support student decision-making whilst abroad. Support for story sharing as an effective means for home institution academics to maintain their connectedness with students studying abroad was found. Through the analysis of shared stories relating to participants' pursuit of adventure over formal academic commitment, it was also suggested that shared stories could benefit those students contemplating studying abroad. Further research exploring alternative decision-making support mechanisms for study abroad students (e.g. considerations of gender in study abroad pastoral care arrangements) is warranted to compliment and extend findings discussed in this article.

References

Anderson. P., Hubbard, A. & Lawton, L. (2015). Student motivation to study abroad and their intercultural development. *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad*, *XXVI*, 39-52.

Blumenfeld-Jones, D. (1995). Fidelity as a criterion for practicing and evaluating narrative inquiry. *Qualitative Studies in Education, 8*(1), 25-35.

Bodycott, P. (2015). Intragroup Conflict During Study Abroad. *Journal of International Students, 5*(3), 244-259.

Brubaker, C. (2017). Re-thinking Re-entry: new approaches to supporting students after study abroad. *Journal of the American Association of Teachers of German*, *50*(2), 109-119.

Clandinin, D. & Connelly, F. (2000) *Narrative Inquiry: Experience and Story in Qualitative Research*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Curtis, T. & Ledgerwood, J. (2018). Students' motivations, perceived benefits and constraints towards study abroad and other international education opportunities. *Journal of International Education in Business*, *11*(1), 63-78.

Etherington, K. (N.D.) *Narrative approaches to case studies*. Presentation PowerPoint available at: https://www.keele.ac.uk/media/keeleuniversity/facnatsci/schpsych/documents/counselling/conference/5thannual/NarrativeApproachestoCaseStudies.pdf

Folse, V., Jarvis, C., Swanlund, S. & Timan, M. (2015). The creation of a synchronous learning environment to support a study abroad program for nursing majors at a traditional liberal arts university. *Journal of Professional Nursing*, *31*(3), 233–241.

Fulford, R. (1999). *The Triumph of Narrative: Storytelling in the Age of Mass Culture*. Toronto: House of Anansi Press.

Gabriel, Y. (2000). *Storytelling in organisations*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Garcia, E. (2017). *The Use of Blogs for Teaching and Learning in UK and US Higher Education*. PhD thesis. University of Plymouth. Available at: https://pearl.plymouth.ac.uk/bitstream/handle/10026.1/9296/2017Garcia702005phd_full.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

Gearing (2004). Barcketing in research: A typology. *Qualitative Health Research, 14*(10), 1429-1452.

Gindlesparger, K. J. (2018). "Share your awesome time with others": Interrogating Privilege and Identification in the Study-Abroad Blog. *College English, 81,*(1), 7-26.

Gramatakos, A. & Lavau, S. (2019). Informal learning for sustainability in higher education institutions. *International Journal of Sustainability in Higher Education*, *20*(2), 378-392.

Grbich, C. (1999). *Qualitative research in health: an introduction*. St Leonards: Allen and Unwin.

Harper, N. (2018). Locating self in place during a study abroad experience: emerging adults, global awareness, and the Andes. *Journal of Experiential Education*, *41*(3), 295 –311.

Hayman, B., Wilkes, L., Jackson, D. & Halcomb, E. (2011). Story-sharing as a method of data collection in qualitative research. *Journal of Clinical Nursing, 21*, 285–287.

Hultbrugge, D. & Engelhard, F. (2016). Study Abroad Programs: individual motivations, cultural intelligence, and the mediating role of cultural boundary spanning. *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, *15*(3), 435–455.

Jang, D. & Kim, D. (2010). The influence of host cultures on the role of personality in the acculturation of exchange students. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 34*, 363-367.

Kartoshkina, Y. (2015). Bitter-sweet reentry after studying abroad. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 44*, 35-45.

Kim, J-H. (2016). *Understanding narrative inquiry: the crafting and analysis of stories as research*. Sage: Los Angeles.

King, L. J. & Young, J. (1994). Study abroad: Education for the 21st century. *Die Unterrichtspraxis/ Teaching German*, *27*, 77–87.

King, R. & Sondhi. G. (2018). International student migration: a comparison of UK and Indian students' motivations for studying abroad. *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, *16*(2), 176-191.

Kurtner, L. (2010). Study-abroad programs as information producers: an expanding role for support of our students studying abroad. *Journal of Library Administration*, *50*(7-8), 767-778.

Labov, W. (1972). The transformation of experience in narrative syntax. In W. Labov (Ed) *Language in the inner city: studies in black English vernacular* (pp. 354-396). Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Lee, L. (2012). Engaging Study Abroad Students in Intercultural Learning Through Blogging and Ethnographic Interviews. *Foreign Language Annals*, 45(1), 7-21.

Lee, J. & Bonk, C. (2016). Social Network Analysis of Peer Relationships and Online Interactions in a Blended Class Using Blogs, *Internet & Higher Education, 28*, 35-44.

Mazzarol, T. & Soutar, G. (2002). ''Push-pull'' factor influencing international student destination choice. *International Journal of Educational Management*, *16*, 82–90.

McDrury, J. & Alterio, M. (2001). Achieving reflective learning using storytelling pathways. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International, 38*(1), 63-73.

McDrury, J. & Alterio, M. (2002) *Learning through Storytelling: using reflection and experience in higher education contexts.* Palmerston North: Dunmore Press.

Mishler, E. (1995). Models of narrative analysis: a typology. *Journal of Narrative and Life History, 5*(2), 87-123.

Morse, C., Spoltore. J. & Galvinhill, P. (2017). College/University counseling centers supporting study away: challenges and opportunities. *Journal of College Student Psychotherapy*, *31*(4), 325-335.

Moss, G. (2004). Provisions of trustworthiness in critical narrative research: bridging intersubjectivity and fidelity. *The Qualitative Report, 9*(2), 359-374.

Petersdotter, L., Niehoff, E. & Freund, P. (2016). International experience makes a difference: Effects of studying abroad on students' self-efficacy. *Personality and Individual Differences, 107*, 174-178.

Pyper, M. & Slagter, C. (2015). Competing priorities: Student perceptions of helps and hindrances to language acquisition during study abroad. *The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad, XXVI*, 83-106.

Savicki, V. & Price, M. (2017). Components of Reflection: a longitudinal analysis of study abroad student blog posts. *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad*, *XXIX*(2), 51-62.

Tomai, E. & Forbus, K. (2007). Narrative Presentation and Meaning. In *Proceedings of the 2007 AAAI Fall Symposium on Intelligent Narrative Technologies*. Arlington, VA. http://www.aaai.org/Papers/Symposia/Fall/2007/FS-07-05/FS07-05-027.pdf

Vandermaas-Peeler, M., Duncan-Bendix, J. & Biehl, M. S. (2018). "I have a better sense of how interconnected the world is": student perceptions of learning and global engagement during study abroad. *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad*, XXX(2), 117-135.

Webster, L. & Mertova, P. (2007) *Using narrative inquiry*. London: Routledge.

Wintre, M., Kandasamy, A., Chavoshi, S. & Wright, L. (2015). Are international undergraduate students emerging adults? Motivations for studying abroad. *Emerging Adulthood*, *3*(4) 255-264.