

Intercultural enrichment programs: A contribution to curriculum development and study abroad in transnational education

Nadine Normand-Marconnet, Samuele Grassi, Narelle McAuliffe

Monash University (<nadine.normandmarconnet@monash.edu>)

Monash University Prato Centre-Università degli Studi di Firenze
(<samuele.grassi@monash.edu>)

Monash University (<narelle.mcauliffe@monash.edu>)

Abstract

In the fast evolving context of globalised higher education, increasing academic mobility requires constant adaptation from institutions. This paper focuses on intercultural enrichment programs, often perceived as mere “add ons” to study abroad, and usually designed as optional not-for-credit extracurricular offerings. We investigate how institutions can give more value to and deepen the intercultural learning of more students in spite of constraints of time and of formal curriculum during short-term study abroad experiences. Resulting from a close collaboration between academic and administrative staff based at different campuses, this paper provides a critical analysis of the benefits and challenges involved in developing co-curricular intercultural enrichment programs that support formal curriculum during study abroad. Practical recommendations are based on a transdisciplinary program developed in Italy by an Australian university that has branch campuses in different countries. We also discuss the “digitally enhanced” aspects of the program which facilitate the in-class activities.

Keywords: *curriculum, intercultural competence, learning experience, study abroad, transnational education*

*1. Introduction*¹

With the increased globalisation of everyday life, cross-border academic mobility in the 21st century is opening new fields of investigation. Inter-

¹ This article was written collaboratively, with the following section breakdown: Nadine Normand-Marconnet (2, 1, 2.2, 3.1, 5.2); Samuele Grassi (4, 4.1, 4.2, 5.1); Narelle McAuliffe (1, 4, 6).

nationalisation in higher education is a process that can be analysed on a continuum ranging from a macro-level (i.e., with regards to institutions) to a micro-level of analysis (related to individual agency). In this context, a crucial role is being played by International Branch Campuses (IBCs) (i.e., institutions with an international network of campuses; Healey 2015), and the student experience during study abroad is increasingly becoming a priority for most countries and institutions around the world, particularly Australia (Green *et al.* 2015).

In general, intercultural learning in higher education institutions is developed either through components of formal curriculum or as ad hoc optional not-for-credit programs. In this paper, we take as a case study *Parliamo!*, a program delivered in an IBC in Italy and specifically designed to support short-term (i.e., less than a semester) study abroad students' understanding of, and adjustment to, the host culture. *Parliamo!* (from the Italian "Let's speak!" or "We speak") was introduced in mid-2014 to facilitate students' acquisition of basic communicative skills in Italian language, to help them familiarise themselves with, and adjust to, a different culture, and to provide a basic framework to develop intercultural competence, regardless of their core subject of study. We use the term "intercultural enrichment program" to distinguish this initiative from academic courses in "intercultural communication", "intercultural competence" or "interculturality", and from immersion language courses, both available in most higher education institutions. "Interculturality" emphasises the mixing of social practices and backgrounds, shedding light on the complexity of cross-border encounters. In Hua's fitting definition, interculturality is "a line of investigation that problematises cultural identities and emphasises the inter nature of interactions" (2015, 110) – and is therefore a long-term process. In contrast, we use the term "intercultural enrichment" in the setting of a study abroad program to describe a set of activities which combines the acquisition of communicative language skills and an appreciation of the socio-cultural setting in order to improve the quality of students' daily interactions beyond the limited context of their curricular activities – thus shifting the focus of practices of "interculturality" towards working to instil the desire to question one's own locatedness other than at "home".

The following research questions guided our study: Does an innovative approach to intercultural pedagogy enhance the intercultural competence of students undertaking a short-term overseas experience? How can institutions provide students with a transformative experience during short-term overseas programs and what are the pedagogical implications? To explore these questions, we propose a case study, framed by a review of literature on IBCs and on intercultural pedagogy. We look in detail at a specific intercultural enrichment program being used in an IBC as a vehicle to enhance the development of the intercultural competence of students undertaking short-term study abroad programs.

2. Literature review on transnational education and intercultural pedagogy

2.1 International Branch Campuses in transnational education

As a by-product of internationalisation in higher education, transnational education (TNE) programs have flourished since the 1990s. This phenomenon is particularly prevalent in countries such as the United States, New Zealand and Australia where commodification practices have been introduced in education, and where TNE programs are now a major export industry (McBurnie 2008). The changes in typologies and frameworks of TNE activities capture the complex and fast-evolving context of internationalisation in education. Before the 2000s, the most common form of TNE was a process by which a “parent” institution (often a famous and well-ranked university) established satellite campuses in other countries. As highlighted by Knight (2016), new types of partnerships have emerged in TNE that are currently featured in “off-shore” institutions, “twinning programs”, or IBCs. Such “exporting” institutions also face criticism for establishing mere replications of the home campus learning experience in their offshore partnerships, hence the growing literature questioning the “radical transformation” brought about by the increase in numbers (of students and programs) with regard to study abroad (Lewin 2009, xiii), and the bubble effect, which we will discuss in the following section. Recent scholarship on study abroad began investigating more thoroughly the validity of short-term mobility programs, to challenge the assumption that “longer is better” with regard to sojourns abroad” (Chieffo, Griffiths 2009, 368; see also Donnelly-Smith 2009), while not discounting the problems entailed by a “celebratory discourse” framing these experiences (Kortegast, Kupo 2017, 151). In the website of the International Education Association of Australia, Tsiligiris (2016) proposes curriculum development as a way for exporting institutions to better integrate with the local culture.

Moreover, in wealthy as well as in emerging countries, universities are urged to set up and promote overseas programs as a “highly valuable learning experience which should be open to all students” (Green *et al.* 2015, 513). In Australia, during the last few decades, successive governments have been committed to supporting study abroad, as illustrated by initiatives such as the Overseas Higher Education Loan Program (OS-HELP), or the New Colombo Plan grant scheme that funds international study programs in Asia (Potts 2016). These measures encourage students to experience different academic environments, cultures and languages which could foster intercultural competence (Deardorff 2006) and raise their international profile in the job market (Potts 2016). The contextual emerging of a market-driven conception of tertiary education is worth remembering, as well as the ways the vocabulary of “employability” has reframed “academic curricula” and “learning”.

This paradigmatic shift is exemplified as a (re)framing of education through value adding systems and metrics that were formerly exclusive priorities of the economic sector, such as emphasising one's "good investments" in education, values such as meritocracy, and the idea of educational "services" purchased as "good value for (future) money". Scholarship across disciplines has addressed this rising phenomenon, cogently questioning, from within the classroom, the "recast[ing of] the relationship between academics and students along the model of a service provider and customer" (Furedi 2011, 2). In the case of short-term study abroad experiences such as those under examination here, the risk that internationalisation brings with it commodification, resulting in "nothing more than commercial travel masquerading as academic experience" (Lewin 2009, xv), is particularly high, and in need of scrutiny. In this context of increasing globalisation and commodification of education (Fraser, Taylor 2016), institutions are compelled to train both international and domestic students to adapt successfully in multicultural and international environments (Tran 2016).

2.2 Intercultural pedagogy in short-term study abroad programs

Far from being self-explanatory, the notion of "intercultural" has long attracted transdisciplinary research in various fields such as psychology, sociology, anthropology, and language acquisition. While intercultural communication is generally defined as involving interaction between people of different cultural backgrounds, intercultural competence or competency "refers to intercultural traits, knowledge and behaviour related to one's interactions in any intercultural situation or context" (Jackson 2012, 305). Guidelines issued by international bodies such as UNESCO (2013) supplement theoretical developments provided by scholars and can be seen as attempts to operationalise the complex and multi-layered concept of intercultural competence. A large body of research has also developed around cross-cultural training for successful adjustment to a new culture (Sit, Mak, Neill 2017). As posited by Ward (2001), emotional resilience and cross-cultural self-efficacy can be enhanced when the affective, behavioural and cognitive components of a training program are combined effectively.

Deardorff (2006, 255) describes intercultural competence as a lifelong process resulting from a combination of twenty-two elements distributed among the broader characteristics of openness, respect of all cultures, curiosity, and discovery. From this perspective, intercultural competence is not likely to happen automatically after a specific experience, such as professional expatriation, study abroad or an international placement, but must be sustained by long-term processes. This poses (some) challenges for supporting the development of this competence in shorter periods of study in a host country, as is the case in the present study. It complicates the understanding of "academic sojourners" as defined by Marie-Claire Patron, who drawing

from Furnham (1988) speaks of “voluntary travellers whose objectives are specific and goal-oriented” (2012, 17). It should also be pointed out that when university students choose to undertake a period of study in another country, gaining a sense of intercultural competence may play a very small part, if any, in their figurative baggage of demands and expectations (Lewin 2009; Ramirez 2016; Kortegast, Kupo 2017).

Intercultural pedagogy is a generic term covering teaching and learning experiences grounded in cultural awareness and entailing the development of knowledge, attitudes and skills described as intercultural competence (Tran 2016). In reference to different learning theories, intercultural pedagogy can be “experiential” or “transformative”. Experiential learning refers to Kolb’s (1984) cyclical model of stages in which “concrete experience” is followed by “reflective observation”, which in turn leads to “abstract conceptualisation”, allowing “active experimentation” and yielding a new “concrete experience”. Transformative learning, on the other hand, is when intercultural pedagogy is conceived as a “process of *self-formation*”, and traveling overseas is seen as an opportunity for a “path of change” to occur (Mezirow 2000 quoted in Marginson, Sawir 2011, 137, italics in original).

While intercultural pedagogy is increasingly seen as an essential part of study abroad programs, which are no longer perceived as a mere opportunity to increase language proficiency (Jackson 2012), academics and administrators acknowledge that a lack of preparation for study abroad can result in a “mis-educative” experience and may sometimes reinforce negative stereotypes (Lutterman-Aguilar, Gingerich, 2002; Trede, Bowles, Bridges 2013). Of relevance to our case study which is situated in Italy, Anna Cento Bull has illustrated how, as a result of major efforts by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to promote and foster Italian culture abroad throughout the post-war period, in the mid-2010s, Italian was among the five most studied languages worldwide. That “[a]rt, culture, fashion, design, food, and sport have all contributed to Italy’s seductive, worldwide appeal” (2016, 118-119) inevitably affects students’ expectations when deciding to visit the country, especially for shorter periods.

The capacity of short-term sojourns to provide students with the opportunity to develop intercultural sensitivity is increasingly questioned (Martinsen 2011). Primarily defined by Bennett (1986, 179) as “the way in which learners construe cultural difference”, intercultural sensitivity has been widely recognised as a key component of intercultural competence (Bhawuk, Brislin 1992). Generally assumed to be less effective than long-term sojourns in terms of intercultural development, short-term programs are reported to be increasingly popular, especially in the United States (Institute of International Education 2012). Specific challenges inherent to short-term programs have been documented and literature has recently developed around the best ways to address the issues and enhance the student experience (Donnelly-Smith 2009).

Yet some research on study abroad demonstrates that, more than duration, learning context is a determinant variable in overseas program design. In the context of North American institutions, programs can be placed on a continuum ranging from “island” to “full immersion” context (Norris, Dwyer 2005). “Island” programs are typically those where students are exposed to a mere duplication of an American college setting within the host country, often resulting in “bubble syndrome” (TenHaken 2014). Some scholars such as Jones *et al.* (2012) have investigated whether or not short-term programs are still “meaning making” experiences. They have found that, even with limited immersion in unfamiliar contexts, students are nevertheless encouraged to develop a better understanding of other cultures, and therefore to challenge stereotypes.

3. *The case study context*

Founded in 2001, our university centre located in Prato, Tuscany hosts mostly university students who travel to Italy from their home campus, to undertake from two- to twelve-week intensive credit-bearing study programs in a variety of disciplines. The centre attracts over 600 students per year; this is a significant figure in comparison with other foreign higher education institutions in the area, including in Florence, where study abroad programs run, on average, for a full semester. As at 2012, Florence was ranked the second-most popular destination for study abroad programs, welcoming 24% of the total number of university students from North America in Italy, and cities in Tuscany were chosen by as many as 6,419 out of the 18,791 total (Prebys 2013, 38-40). These programs are run and administered either by foreign campuses and centres or by officially recognised private international institutes that hold agreements with foreign universities. Unlike these programs which typically deliver credit-bearing Italian language courses as a formal part of the curriculum, the majority of students studying at our centre are not also taking a for-credit Italian language course.

Designed to be delivered *in situ* as a short course in Italian communication skills and culture, the program described here has been developed by an Australian university operating in multiple countries including a branch campus in Malaysia, a teaching location in South Africa, and a centre in Italy. As part of a new four- to twelve-week intensive study abroad program run by the Faculty of Arts, the delivery of *Parliamo!* was restructured in September 2017 to include a total of three classes on site, and a cooking class held at a local restaurant. This new development included grammar-based language classes; a treasure hunt held after the students’ induction upon arrival at the centre; and a series of reflective sessions, where students are asked to share their observations inspired by the curricular and extra-curricular activities. This structure was also applied to cohorts from other faculties within the

same period, and it proved particularly effective in the case of Architecture and Design students, and Education students (as we will describe in the following sections).

The findings of two research projects informed the design and implementation of this intercultural enrichment program. The first one was a comparative study on intercultural capabilities among students enrolled in study abroad programs at the centre (Baldassar, Mulcock 2012; Polezzi 2012). Data collected from students and staff revealed a strong assumption among students that “being there” (i.e., in a new environment) would automatically trigger the development of intercultural competence. In addition, the “bubble” effect was identified as a potential risk of the programs, whereby students might analyse their international experience through the biased lens of familiarity (by virtue of studying at an IBC), and therefore reinforce rather than challenge stereotypes. In their recommendations, the authors of the study emphasised the importance of scaffolding international experience by embedding intercultural competence in the curriculum.

Along the same lines, a longitudinal survey was conducted among students enrolled in Inter-Campus Exchange (ICE) programs offered at the Australia, Malaysia and South Africa teaching locations of the same institution operating in Italy (Normand-Marconnet 2015). The ICE programs are an opportunity for students to spend a semester at another campus to complete a degree under the same academic conditions (i.e., similar content and assessment) as those at their home campus. The aim of the survey was to identify students’ perceptions of the benefits and challenges of this type of program. Data were collected at pre-departure and re-entry stages at students’ home campuses. The findings showed that students acknowledged their tendency to underestimate difficulties with social integration and culture shock. Students assumed that familiarity with the academic environment would correlate with their ability to adjust to their new environment. In order to avoid these kinds of misleading assumptions, the research project highlighted the need to build students’ intercultural competence.

In line with Jones *et al.* (2012), *Parliamo!* was developed from the premise that intercultural competence is an essential component of study abroad. It was also recognised that students (and visiting teaching staff) needed a basic understanding of the local language and culture as well as some kind of intercultural framework to make meaningful sense of their stay. We argue that, while IBCs can be regarded as an archetype of the “bubble” context by reproducing in host countries the same (or a similar) educational environment, institutions with an international network of campuses may also benefit from offering a unique setting to provide students with opportunities to discover a new context from within a familiar environment. Adopting Cresswell’s (2012, 465) definition of case study, in this paper we identify specific areas of concern, including students’ perceptions of cultural stereotypes while travelling

internationally, to emphasise the relevance, potentialities, and complexities of intercultural enrichment initiatives such as the one discussed here.

A key question informing our analysis and discussion is: Does the small number of classes (and hours) of the course allow for developing actual intercultural competence, and, if so, of what kind? Similarly, how can this be achieved in the face of macro- and micro-structural limits, including the constraints imposed by students' curricular (i.e., assessed) requirements and broader institutional perceptions and motivations of study abroad experiences? In the following sections, we provide a critical analysis of the practical and pedagogical implications for institutions and individuals involved in developing co-curricular programs to support formal curriculum offerings overseas.

4. Applying an anthropological approach to intercultural competence

A short not-for-credit course available to all students and visiting teaching staff who travel to Prato for intensive study programs, the *Parliamo!* program is based on what is defined by Lussier as an anthropological approach to intercultural competence. This program integrates intercultural interactions in the learning process not only to improve language competence, but also to facilitate the development of “(inter)cultural representations and transactions between individuals” (2011, 34).

4.1 Improving the program design

Given the different subject backgrounds of the students and duration of their faculty study program, which ranges from two to twelve weeks, *Parliamo!* is tailored to specific cohorts where possible, e.g., in terms of which Italian vocabulary and phrases are taught. Student feedback on the program is crucial to its development. At the end of the program, students are asked to complete an online feedback form, the findings of which for 2017 partly inform the present analysis and discussion. Students are invited to give their feedback about the quality, structure, and relevance of the program to their daily life in Prato and whether or not they would recommend it to their peers. They are also asked to contribute specific suggestions for improvement.

Changes since the first iteration have included the addition of online resources and more experiential activities such as a treasure hunt in the historic centre of Prato and workshop-style activities on the use of gestures and other body language. Several faculties have formalised the *Parliamo!* program by making it a compulsory requirement for students enrolled in study abroad courses at the centre. Yet, as it emerged from the first qualitative analysis of feedback collected from student surveys over the period from April 2014 to July 2015, those students for whom *Parliamo!* was compulsory noted that it would be particularly useful if at least one language class were delivered before

their arrival in Italy, or if classes were to commence as soon as they arrived in Prato. This is not however always feasible due to the time constraints of the students' curricular activities. The limits imposed by the short duration of most of the faculty programs have broader implications as regards the success of extra-curricular initiatives aimed at fostering "intercultural communicative competence", and we will return to them later in this paper.

Based on the feedback from 2014 to 2015, the key concerns for students to be able to make sense of the intercultural experience offered in Prato were: the timing and pace of the program; uncomfortableness when practising the language outside the context of the classroom; and a desire to integrate English language more into both the language classes and the written course materials. The cooking class was instead unanimously endorsed; at a local restaurant in Prato, students learn how to prepare traditional dishes and the lesson ends with a shared meal. Food can indeed be a powerful tool for sharing experiences and knowledge, especially in an Italian context, and a collaborative form of interacting in another language, crossing language and cultural barriers (Camporesi 1993; Counihan, Van Esterik 2008).

4.2 A blended program combining online resources and experiential learning

In the *Parliamo!* program's present structure, we have introduced some grammar-based classes in addition to the conversation-based classes, supported by an online platform. Hosted on a Googlesite, this interactive resource includes a downloadable language booklet, a series of video recordings filmed in collaboration with local businesses (to re-create typical conversation exchanges from daily life), and additional curated videos dealing with cultural stereotypes and the language of gestures. The content and structure have been carefully designed to provide access to select authentic resources seen as valuable additions to the in-class real exchanges. The shift towards the digital with regard to course materials was viewed as an attempt towards offering a more student-friendly approach, something with which they would feel comfortable and could adjust to and use easily. It allows students to practise language and culture drills throughout the duration of their stay in their own time. This shift is in line with recent research demonstrating that, as a supplement to face-to-face classes and teacher-student interactions inside the classroom, online resources allow students to become autonomous subjects-agents of their learning (van Lier 2010). For instance, students are able to complete activities at their own pace outside the classroom and to learn more about grammar and vocabulary structures during their stay, as there is not enough time during the classes to cover these topics. This is also in keeping with current academic discourse on the role of "blended learning" techniques and approaches, "when the students themselves are actively engaged in creating, understanding, and connecting to knowledge" (Marsh 2012, 8). Blended learning thus stimulates

a more active role for students (Carrier 2017; see also Carloni, Zuccala 2017), as in this case, through pre- and post-class activities online.

Moreover, in order to maximise the opportunities for students to familiarise themselves with the surroundings, the language classes are complemented by optional activities organised by the centre: Italian-English conversation exchanges are held with locals every two weeks, and meals with local Italian families are organised for students. The latter, in particular, seems to stimulate students to reflect on intercultural differences and similarities. During 2017, administrative records of the centre show that as many as 223 students (over one-third of the total number of students who study at the centre each year) chose to have a meal with a local family, an opportunity for “genuine” socio-cultural exchange. Typically, students undertaking the longer programs (at least four weeks in duration) participated in the meals. We argue that these encounters are important moments to counter assumptions about “genuine” and “local” culture(s), which are indeed contentious within the context of study abroad. As highlighted by the literature in this field, providing opportunities for interaction that move beyond those of buyer-consumer (Kinginger 2013) is crucial to avoid fetishising (local) culture. We also need to take into account the ways “global citizenship *depends upon* local thought and action” in order to shed light on the interrelations of local actions and global phenomena (Davis, Pike 2009, 68).

By contrast, observations by centre staff involved in the organisation of these activities indicate that the conversation exchanges are less popular than the family meal initiative. An analysis of the 20 conversation exchange sessions held in 2017 revealed a total of nearly 250 local participants compared to 100 visiting students (approximately one sixth of the total number of students who study at the centre each year). On average, each conversation exchange attracts five visiting students and 10-15 Italian peers. The highest participation of visiting students occurred over a two-month period, which coincided with the running of for-credit Italian language units. Factors that may contribute to the difference in uptake between the two activities include the limited time available both for the conversation exchange and for students to feel comfortable in using Italian, combined with the fact that the activity takes place at the end of an often long day of study. This highlights the difficulties in providing opportunities and spaces for cultural enrichment within short-term study abroad programs.

Feedback gathered from Arts students in December 2017 suggests that the cooking class in particular was viewed by students as a way to grow personally, in that cooking for oneself represented one’s independence and autonomy while living in another country, as opposed to living at “home”. Similarly, being hosted for a meal by members of the local community was considered the key to “escaping” – however momentarily – the comfortable, but also “closed”, community of one’s peers speaking the same language and sharing

the same culture, although the latter is far from homogeneous. Some students highlighted the fact that the conversation exchanges provided opportunities to discuss gender differences openly (an example being that an Australian student while talking about her playing soccer “startled” her Pratese interlocutor). Some students noted that the exchanges also encouraged them to communicate outside the university environment. Other students reported that the *Parliamo!* classes developed their confidence in everyday interactions, and an understanding of their own different cultural background; they also fostered knowledge and understanding of communication signs more generally, and of verbal, as opposed to non-verbal, cues in particular.

5. Pedagogical implications of developing an intercultural enrichment program

From this rich and varied student feedback, we posit that the *Parliamo!* program enables participants to make sense of their lived experience and to construct new meanings from unfamiliar situations. An intercultural enrichment program such as this one is intended to address the criticised “bubble syndrome” that can occur in offshore programs, by helping students to go beyond their comfort zone progressively through guided and scaffolded activities.

5.1 Synergies between curricular requirements and co-curricular activities

Time constraints emerge as a key challenge when designing these kinds of programs, especially with regard to providing students with opportunities to practise using Italian in authentic situations. As discussed earlier, there are limits to which language features and intercultural aspects can be covered adequately in just a few weeks, though this challenge is by no means restricted to short-term study abroad programs. Scholarship in the field of study abroad has found the actual value of short-term study abroad experiences goes beyond a mere “tourism of sorts” or a revenue source for universities in an increasingly corporatised academic environment (see, for example, Lewin 2009; Kortegast, Kupo 2017).

The optional extra-curricular activities – the conversation exchanges and the meals with local families – could be exploited further in order to link the learning of the more formal classroom environment with the “outside” realities that the students experience first-hand. In spite of the difference in participation levels between conversation exchange and the family meals, these activities are an opportunity for peer-to-peer sharing of knowledge, in addition to the teacher-student interactions in the classroom. They offer students opportunities to meet locals with different backgrounds, including Italian students studying English at university, working professionals and locals without any tertiary qualifications. Through these real and personal interactions, students are potentially able to find out more about the way of

life of the local community – and, consequently, to have a true “intercultural” encounter for which the classes attempt to provide the groundwork.

Activities such as conversation exchanges and meals with local families are usually welcomed by students. This suggests that real-life experiences may help sustain the development of intercultural skills such as openness. Some students reported that these opportunities required them to go out of their comfort zone and to find strategies to cope with unfamiliar situations. This type of feedback illustrates the current debate in literature on how programs based on intercultural pedagogy are expected to equip learners not only with basic language skills for specific purposes (such as work placements, volunteering or internships), but with cues about communication styles (verbal or non-verbal, direct or indirect, high or low context, etc.). This theoretical knowledge can be reinforced by situations simulated in class, and even more so when opportunities are provided for real-life interactions. With their multiple campuses, IBCs can therefore offer students safe settings to interact in culturally diverse environments.

Yet not all students participate in both activities. This finding leads us back to reflect on the factors which limit participation in activities that are not part of formal curricula, activities which normally take place outside class time and which are therefore often perceived to be less valuable than class attendance, or as reducing one’s free time (which can be limited during intensive, short-term study abroad programs). In fact, one of the greatest challenges for participation rates and outcomes of this type of program is adjusting it according to students’ curricular requirements in terms of content, duration and timetabling. This is especially the case for those groups which spend shorter periods of time at the centre. Tailoring the content of the program to, for instance, subject or thematically-relevant vocabulary and ready-to-use expressions, has proved a valuable strategy. For example, for Education students who undertake a professional teaching experience in local primary and secondary schools, it is important that they learn some basic Italian language in order to be able to interact confidently with students in a typical Italian school setting. They also need to be able to read emotions through interpretation of non-verbal forms of communication such as body language. These students were in fact the most critical of the lack of pre-departure language lessons before leaving Australia.

5.2 Providing room to develop in-depth understanding of culture

Generally speaking, students who undertake *Parliamo!* report being appreciative of the relaxed atmosphere of the language classes. When students are involved in “open” learning environments such as those created through collaborative and group work, those who have experience in learning a foreign language will often help their peers, for example, by choosing less confident speakers as partners in role-playing activities. It has been observed that a

positive atmosphere in these classes is also fostered through the active participation of the accompanying teaching staff from the home campus. Their presence contributes to establishing genuine forms of learning together and sharing, which can even help with overcoming any emotional blockages in communication exchanges in a foreign language.

In addition to language skills, contextually relevant, intercultural enrichment programs such as *Parliamo!* promote deeper understanding and knowledge of culture, which is seen as a pivotal component in the Pyramid Model of Intercultural Competence proposed by Deardorff (2006). In the *Parliamo!* program, role-plays in class, and authentic intercultural encounters during conversation exchange or meals with local families, are examples of experiential activities that have been found to build progressively competences related to openness and empathy. While limited in terms of duration, these meaningful encounters play a significant role in allowing learners to move from ethno-centric to more ethno-relativist perspectives (Bennett 1986).

In the current structure of the course, students are asked to share and discuss their own experience and observation of daily life in the local community and during their travel to other cities in Italy. The students reflect on the similarities and differences between Italian culture and their own cultural backgrounds and contrast these with their expectations. As such experiences are aimed towards cultural “adjustments” and intercultural sensitivity, we are reminded of the experiential nature of the program, as part of a broader institutional effort to promote a pedagogy that combines a student-centred approach with blended learning. It is expected that students will become more active participants in their progress towards the acquisition of intercultural competence, by being challenged to explore and get involved in cultural dynamics through autonomy and self-reflection (Mezirow 2000 quoted in Marginson, Sawir 2011).

6. Conclusion

Parliamo! was originally designed to counterbalance the “bubble syndrome” likely to be encountered by students from an Australian institution doing a short-term study abroad program in an International Branch Campus in Italy. It has since been developed into a hybrid course designed to foster intercultural competence by combining in-class linguistic-oriented activities and cultural activities organised outside the classroom. While still a work-in-progress and with further research needed to evaluate the intercultural competence development of students who undertake the course, this program could serve as a model to be adapted in other branch campuses.

Yet how do we situate these kinds of efforts in broader institutional frameworks within the neoliberalisation of education, “employability” trends, internationalisation and commodification? Is it conceivable to commit to intercultural skills development, while at the same time avoiding the “un-

derlying practices of consumerism, postcolonialism, cultural tourism, and the commodification of experience” which Kortegast and Kupo (2017, 150) argue are promoted in short-term study abroad experiences?

Our case study illustrates how intercultural pedagogy can be applied in the specific context of short-term mobility in IBCs. In line with Ward (2001), we posit that developing knowledge of different cultures together with self-awareness of one’s own culture helps facilitate cross-cultural adjustment. Regardless of the course duration, intercultural enrichment educators must seek to design activities that balance cognitive, affective and behavioural components. The content and activities described in this case study program are an illustration of intercultural pedagogy that draws on Kolb’s experiential and Mezirow’s transformative learning theories.

We have outlined pedagogical and structural elements that could also serve as a basis for other institutions interested in developing similar programs. We see enrichment programs in study abroad contexts as a particularly effective way to develop the skills and attitudes described in the UNESCO framework as “the minimal requirements to attain intercultural competences” including “respect, self-awareness/identity, seeing from other perspectives/worldviews, listening, adaptation, relationship building, and cultural humility” (UNESCO 2013, 11).

As graduates from universities around the world are increasingly expected to become “employable” global citizens, and self-conscious agents of their educational progress, the demands and challenges posed by intercultural experiences may well be fertile ground for a critical understanding of the economic, social, linguistic, and cultural implications of practices of learning and teaching.

References

- Australian Bureau of Statistics (2015), *3412.0-Migration, Australia, 2014-15*; online: <<http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/3412.0>> (11/2018).
- Baldassar Loretta, Mulcock Jane (2012), *Monash Prato Study Abroad Research Project*; online: <http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/cross_fac/iatl/funding/fundedprojects/strategic/polezzi/monash_prato_report.pdf> (11/2018).
- Bennett M.J. (1986), “A Developmental Approach to Training for Intercultural Sensitivity”, *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* X, 2, 179-196. doi: 10.1016/0147-1767(86)90005-2.
- Bhawuk D.P.S., Brislin Richard (1992), “The Measurement of Intercultural Sensitivity Using the Concepts of Individualism and Collectivism”, *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* XVI, 4, 413-436.
- Camporesi Piero (1993), *The Magic Harvest: Food, Folklore, and Society*, Cambridge, Polity Press.
- Carloni Giovanna, Zuccala Brian (2017), “Blending Italian at Monash University through an Italian-Australian Digital Project: An Analysis of Students’ Perceptions”, *LEA-Lingue e letteratura d’Oriente e d’Occidente* VI, 6, 115-139. doi: 10.13128/LEA-1824-484x-22333.

- Carrier Michael (2017), "Introduction to Digital Learning", in Michael Carrier, R.M. Damerow, K.M. Bailey (eds), *Digital Language Learning and Teaching: Research, Theory, and Practice*, London-New York, Routledge, 1-10.
- Cento Bull Anna (2016), *Modern Italy: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford, Oxford UP.
- Chieffo Lisa, Griffiths Lesa (2009), "Here to Stay: Increasing Acceptance of Short-Term Study Abroad Programs", in Ross Lewin (ed.), *The Handbook of Practice and Research in Study Abroad Higher Education and the Quest for Global Citizenship*, New York-Abingdon, Routledge and the Association of American Colleges and Universities, 365-380.
- Counihan Carole, Van Esterik Penny, eds (2008), *Food and Culture: A Reader*, Second Edition, New York, Routledge.
- Creswell J.W. (2012), *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research*, Boston, Pearson.
- Davies Ian, Pike Graham (2009), "Global Citizenship Education: Challenges and Possibilities", in Ross Lewin (ed.), *The Handbook of Practice and Research in Study Abroad: Higher Education and the Quest for Global Citizenship*, New York-Abingdon, Routledge and the Association of American Colleges and Universities, 61-78.
- Deardorff D.K. (2006), "Identification and Assessment of Intercultural Competence as a Student Outcome of Internationalization", *Journal of Studies in International Education* X, 3, 241-266.
- Donnelly-Smith Laura (2009), "Global Learning through Short-Term Study Abroad", *Peer Review* XI, 4, 12-15.
- Fraser Heather, Taylor Nik (2016), *Neoliberalization, Universities and the Public Intellectual: Species, Gender*, Basingstoke, Palgrave.
- Furedi Frank (2011), "Introduction to the Marketisation of Higher Education and the Student as Consumer", in Mike Molesworth, Richard Scullion, Elizabeth Nixon (eds), *The Marketisation of Higher Education and the Student as Consumer*, London-New York, Routledge, 1-7.
- Furnham Adrian, Ward C.A., Bochner Stephen (2001), *The Psychology of Culture Shock* (2nd ed.), New York, Routledge.
- Green Wendy, Gannaway Deanne, Sheppard Karyan, Jamarani Maryam (2015), "What's in Their Baggage? The Cultural and Social Capital of Australian Students Preparing to Study Abroad", *Higher Education Research & Development* XXIV, 3, 513-526, doi:10.1080/07294360.2014.973381.
- Healey Nigel (2015), "Managing International Branch Campuses: What Do We Know?", *Higher Education Quarterly* LXIX, 4, 386-409, doi:10.1111/hequ.12082.
- Hua Zhu (2015), "Interculturality: Reconceptualising Cultural Memberships and Identities through Translanguaging Practice", in Fred Dervin, Karen Risager (eds), *Researching Identity and Interculturality: Towards a More Reflexive and Critical Methodology*, London, Routledge, 109-124.
- Institute of International Education (2012), *Open doors: U.S. students studying abroad*, Washington, DC, Institute of International Education.
- Jackson Jane (2008), "Globalization, Internationalization, and Short-Term Stays Abroad", *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* XXXII, 4, 349-358, doi:10.1016/j.ijintrel.2008.04.004.

- Jackson Jane, ed. (2012), *The Routledge Handbook of Language and Intercultural Communication*, Abingdon, Routledge.
- (2014), *Introducing Language and Intercultural Communication*, Abingdon, Routledge.
- Jones S.R., Rowan-Kenyon H.T., Ireland S.M.-Y., Niehaus Elizabeth, Skendall K.C. (2012), “The Meaning Students Make as Participants in Short-Term Immersion Programs”, *Journal of College Student Development* LIII, 2, 201-220, doi:10.1353/csd.2012.0026.
- Kingingier Celeste, ed. (2013), *Social and Cultural Aspects of Language Learning in Study Abroad*, Amsterdam and Philadelphia, John Benjamins.
- Knight Jane (2016), “Transnational Education Remodeled: Toward a Common TNE Framework and Definitions”, *Journal of Studies in International Education* XX, 1, 34-47, doi:10.1177/1028315315602927.
- Kolb D.A. (1984), *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development*, Englewood Cliffs, N.J. and Upper Saddle River, N.J., Prentice-Hall.
- Kortegast Carrie, Kupo V.L. (2017), “Deconstructing Underlying Practices of Short-Term Study Abroad: Exploring Issues of Consumerism, Postcolonialism, Cultural Tourism, and Commodification of Experience”, *International Journal of Critical Pedagogy* VIII, 1, 149-172.
- Lewin Ross (2009), “Introduction: The Quest for Global Citizenship through Study Abroad”, in Id. (ed.), *The Handbook of Practice and Research in Study Abroad: Higher Education and the Quest for Global Citizenship*, New York, Routledge, xiii-xxii.
- Lussier Denise (2011), “Language, Thought and Culture: Links to Intercultural Communicative Competence”, *Canadian and International Education / Education canadienne et internationale* XL, 2, 40-60.
- Lutterman-Aguilar Ann, Gingerich Orval (2002), “Experiential Pedagogy for Study Abroad: Educating for Global Citizenship”, *Frontiers: The interdisciplinary journal of study abroad* 8, 41-82.
- Marginson Simon, Sawir Erlenawati (2011), *Ideas for intercultural education*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan.
- Marsh Debra (2012), *Blended Learning Creating Learning Opportunities for Language Learners*, New York, Cambridge UP.
- Martinsen Rob (2011), “Predicting Changes in Cultural Sensitivity among Students of Spanish during Short-term Study Abroad”, *Hispania* XCIV, 1, 121-141.
- McBurnie Grant (2008), “Quality Assurance for Transnational Education: International, National and Institutional Approaches”, in Lee Dunn, Michelle Wallace (eds), *Teaching in Transnational Education: Enhancing Learning for Offshore International Students*, London, Routledge, 190-203.
- Normand-Marconnet Nadine (2015), “Study Abroad in International Branch Campuses: A survey on Students’ Perspectives”, *Journal of International Mobility* I, 3, 81-97.
- Norris E.M., Dwyer Mary (2005), “Testing Assumptions: The Impact of Two Study Abroad Program Models”, *Frontiers: The interdisciplinary journal of study abroad* 11, 121-142.
- Patron M.-C. (2012), “Introduction”, in Ead., *Culture and Identity in Study Abroad Contexts: After Australia, French without France*, Bern, Peter Lang, 15-21.

- Polezzi Loredana (2012), *Intercultural Capabilities and Study Abroad: Student Perceptions and Experiences. A Comparative Project in Collaboration with Monash University*; online: <http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/cross_fac/iatl/funding/fundedprojects/strategic/polezzi_final_report.pdf> (11/2018).
- Potts Davina (2016), *Outcomes of Learning Abroad Programs*; online: <ieaa.org.au/learning-abroad> (11/2018).
- Prebys Portia, ed. (2013), *Rapporto 2013. Educating in Paradise. Il valore dei programmi universitari nord americani in Italia-caratteristiche, impatto e prospettive*; online: <http://www.aacupi.org/2013_IRPET_Study/IRPET_Study_1_ITA.pdf> (11/2018).
- Ramirez E.R. (2016), "Impact on Intercultural Competence When Studying Abroad and the Moderating Role of Personality", *Journal of Teaching in International Business* XXVII, 2-3, 88-105.
- Ross Charlotte (2010), "Critical Approaches to Gender and Sexuality in Italian Culture and Society", *Italian Studies* LXV, 2, 164-77.
- Sit Anita, Mak A.S., Neill J.T. (2017), "Does Cross-cultural Training in Tertiary Education Enhance Cross-cultural Adjustment? A Systematic Review", *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* 57, 1-18.
- TenHaken V.R. (2014), "Designing Study Abroad Programs to Develop Global Competencies for the Twenty-First Century Organization", *International Journal of Business and Management* II, 2, 94-104.
- Tran L.T. (2016), "Students' Academic, Intercultural and Personal Development in Globalised Education Mobility", in Chi-hung Clarence Ng, Robert Fox, Michiko Nakano (eds), *Reforming learning and teaching in Asia-Pacific universities*, Singapore, Springer, 95-113.
- Trede Franziska, Bowles Wendy, Bridges Donna (2013), "Developing Intercultural Competence and Global Citizenship through International Experiences: Academics' Perceptions", *Intercultural Education* XXIV, 5, 442-455, doi:10.1080/14675986.2013.825578.
- Tsiligiris Vangelis (2016), "Transnational Education 2.0: The Next Generation"; online: <<https://www.ieaa.org.au/professional-development/event/tne-20-the-next-generation>> (11/2018).
- UNESCO (2013), *Intercultural Competences. Conceptual and Operational Framework*; online: <<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0021/002197/219768e.pdf>> (11/2018).
- Van Lier Leo (2010), "Forward: Agency, Self and Identity in Language Learning", in Breffni O'Rourke, Lorna Carson (eds), *Language Learner Autonomy: Policy, Curriculum, Classroom*, Oxford, Peter Lang, ix-xviii.

