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“A Life Altering and Special Journey”: The Lasting Impact of Mindfulness on Semester-long Study Abroad Participants

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Abstract

Keywords
Contemplative
pedagogy;
Mindfulness; Study
abroad

Education abroad is held up as a high-impact practice with the potential to engage college and university students in a transformative learning experience (Kuh, 2008). The Institute for International Education (IIE) reports that 347,099 U.S. students received academic credit for study abroad during the 2018-2019 academic school year (Institute for International Education, n.d.). Extensive research into student learning gains abroad have demonstrated that developing student metacognition, or one's ability to be intentionally self-reflective, is central to transformative learning in the study abroad experience (Vande Berg et al., 2012; Zull, 2012). Consequently, international educators are continually searching for pedagogies (praxis) to facilitate metacognitive learning within study abroad programs.

The burgeoning discipline of contemplative pedagogy (Bai et al., 2009; Zajonc, 2013) provides such a praxis for metacognitive learning. Yet the research on the use of contemplative pedagogy within the context of study abroad is still in a nascent stage (Clancy, 2020). In this paper, we present an exploratory case study of contemplative pedagogy and mindfulness practice on a semester-long study abroad program and, namely, its potential long-term impact on student participants. Analysis of questionnaires, answered on a voluntary and anonymous basis, 18 months after return to the home campus, reveals that students continue to use those practices: Students report sustained attentiveness to surroundings, in the present moment, greater self-awareness, improved connection to those in their communities, and a heightened remembrance of their study abroad experience. We conclude that contemplative pedagogy, associated with student metacognition, was a successful intercultural praxis within the exploratory case study, and may potentiate long-term effects in participants.

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Contemplative Pedagogy in Higher Education

In their book, *The Heart of Higher Education: A Call to Renewal*, Parker Palmer and Arthur Zajonc question,

How can higher education become a more multidimensional enterprise, one that draws on the full range of human capacities for knowing, teaching, and learning; that bridges the gaps between the disciplines; that forges stronger links between knowing the world and living creatively in it, in solitude and community? (2010, p. 2)

Contemplative pedagogy, through forms of introspection that balance third-person study and critical first-person reflection, provides such a multidimensional and holistic approach for higher education. The “third person” approach refers to the systematic study of the underlying philosophy, psychology, and phenomenology of the human contemplative experience (Roth, 2006), whereas the “critical first-person” approach encourages students to engage directly with contemplative techniques (Roth, 2014). Through this approach to introspection, contemplative pedagogy attempts to:

- (a) Identify the varieties of contemplative experiences of which human beings are capable;
- (b) Find meaningful scientific understandings for those contemplative experiences;
- (c) Cultivate first-person knowledge of them;
- (d) Critically assess their nature and significance. (Roth, 2014, p. 98)

Contemplative pedagogy offers numerous first-person experiential approaches to learning and education¹. Mindfulness specifically is one experiential method within contemplative pedagogy that in recent decades has seen an increase in popularity in multiple realms of society. In his hallmark book on mindfulness-based stress reduction, Jon Kabat-Zinn (2009) defines mindfulness as “moment-to-moment awareness” that is sought through a “systematic approach to developing new kinds of control and wisdom in our lives, based on inner capacities for relaxation, paying attention, awareness, and insight” (p. 2). In keeping with this definition, mindfulness in the higher education classroom is considered both a process (mindfulness practice) and an outcome (mindfulness awareness) (Barbezat & Bush, 2014).

Contemplative pedagogy, and the associated practice of mindfulness, provides for an experiential and facilitated approach to guide student metacognitive reflection. The teacher plays a key role in guiding the student through the contemplative practice and helping the student link the practice to mindful awareness. While the specific classroom approaches to first-person learning may vary, most applications of contemplative pedagogy involve experiential forms of meditation and introspection.

Barbezat and Bush (2014) posit that classroom introspective and contemplative exercises have four main objectives:

- (a) Focus and attention building, mainly through focusing meditation and exercises that support mental stability;
- (b) Contemplation and introspection into the content of the course, in which students discover the material in themselves and thus deepen their understanding of the material;
- (c) Compassion, connection to others, and a deepening sense of the moral and spiritual aspect of education;

¹ The Tree of Contemplative Practices provides a helpful illustration of the great variety of contemplative approaches in learning and education. See Center for Contemplative Mind in Society (2021) in References.

(d) Inquiry into the nature of their minds, personal meaning, creativity, and insight (p. 11).

Through its approach to experiential introspection, contemplative pedagogy provides higher education with a much needed multidimensional and holistic framework for third-person study and critical first-person reflection.

Study Abroad and the Role of Reflection

Consequently, the aspirations of contemplative pedagogy align with the need for guided and deeper levels of reflection within higher education study abroad programs. The importance of facilitating reflection within the study abroad experience is a relatively recent tenet of program development. Moreover, the research on reflective thinking within the context of study abroad is sparse (Savicki & Price, 2015). Formerly, the precedent to U.S. study abroad programs was the “European Grand Tour,” where students from Europe would travel the continent to bring back knowledge of other cultures to their home country (Hoffa, 2007). This European Grand Tour translated into the “Junior Year Abroad” (Vande Berg, 2007), where American students spent their junior year of college studying in Europe. The assumption of this study abroad “immersion model” was that students would learn solely through their presence in another culture. This model is centered on a student’s location in a different geographical space, and it does not necessarily account for the student’s reflection within that space.

Scholastic research of study abroad programs, however, has shown that learning is “the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience” (Kolb, 1984, p. 41). Hence, the “immersion model” has only a limited impact on improving a student’s intercultural understanding (Paige et al, 2004; Paige & Vande Berg, 2012). Many international education scholars advocate for an experiential/constructivist paradigm (Vande Berg et al., 2012) to guide study abroad program development. The experiential/constructivist paradigm is scaffolded on Kolb’s experiential learning theory. According to this theory, learning transactions take place between individuals and their environment. Further, within this paradigm, the study abroad experiential/constructivist scholars take “the theoretical position that the world we know is constructed in our mind through our ongoing perception of and interaction with external reality” (Stuart, 2012, p. 61). This view is espoused by Vande Berg et al. (2012), as they claim that,

...each of us learns through transactions between ourselves and the environment; what we bring to the environment – that is, our genetic makeup, our cultural makeup, and the ways that these have equipped and conditioned us to learn and to know – is ultimately more important than the environment in determining how we will experience it, and what we will learn from it. (p. 20)

The experiential/constructivist approach further advocates for what Vande Berg (2007) calls intercultural interventions, meaning that international educators play an active role in facilitating student reflection on study abroad programs.

The most ambitious evaluation of the impact of intercultural interventions on U.S. student intercultural development within study abroad programs is *The Georgetown Consortium Project: Interventions for Student Learning Abroad* (Vande Berg et al., 2009). This study utilized an intercultural intervention classification (Engle & Engle, 2004) to identify which interventions had the greatest impact on a student’s intercultural learning. Among seven study abroad intervention variables that were investigated, the study found that guided reflection by a cultural mentor was perhaps the “most important intervention to improve student intercultural

learning abroad” (Vande Berg et al., 2009). Paige and Vande Berg (2012) conclude that the Georgetown Consortium study reveals the impact of reflection and the importance of guiding the students’ learning process. Vande Berg et al., (2012) further summarize the importance of facilitated reflection within the experiential/constructivist paradigm:

...the data show that students learn and develop considerably more when educators prepare them to be more self-reflective, culturally self-aware, and aware of “how they know what they know.” In developing a meta-awareness of their own process of perceiving and knowing, students come to understand both how they habitually experience and make meaning of events, and how they can use that newfound understanding to help them engage more effectively and appropriately with culturally different others. (p. 21)

Thus, the experiential/constructivist approach to study abroad stresses the importance of self-actualization and reflection. Contemporary study abroad scholars believe that, in the context of international education, pedagogies should facilitate the reflection process for students through intercultural interventions in study abroad programs. Contemplative pedagogy shares similar objectives to those of the experiential/constructivist approach to international education, as it provides an experiential framework to guide critical first-person introspection. This exploratory case study seeks to introduce and understand contemplative pedagogy as a potential praxis for intercultural intervention within study abroad programs.

Description of the Exploratory Case Study

This article describes a study abroad program carried out in fall 2018 (August-December). In its curriculum design and implementation, the study abroad seminar described proposes a holistic approach to the inclusion of contemplative pedagogies in the study abroad classroom. For the purposes of accessibility and student comprehension of course content, the term “mindfulness” was used more generally to encompass contemplative pedagogy interventions conducted during the study abroad program (meditations, journaling, audio divina, visio divina, among others). This was a decision made based on students’ familiarity with the term, as opposed to the term contemplative pedagogy. Consequently, the terms contemplative pedagogy and mindfulness are used alternately throughout the article.

The home institution boasts of several study abroad programs that are faculty-led. Each faculty director is responsible for designing and teaching a seminar that fits institutional curricular needs and supplements the students’ experience of the host culture. The theme of the seminar is faculty-decided and thus varies from year to year and from location to location.

In fall 2018, 13 undergraduate students from a university in the midwestern United States, accompanied by a faculty director from the home institution, participated in a 15-week program in southern France. The group included seven women, four men, and two students who identified as non-binary. Among the students, there were four who were ethnic minority students, three of whom were first generation college students (two of these three were refugees). In addition to other language and culture courses, the students took part in a weekly seminar, “Experiencing Contemporary French Culture through the Five Senses (and beyond...)” organized and presented by the faculty director. The seminar touched on concepts of Ignatian and Benedictine spirituality and used the lens of mindfulness and the use of the five senses, as well as the senses of proprioception and interoception, as foundational principles. Proprioception and interoception are ways of sensing that exist beyond the traditional five senses of taste, smell, sight, touch, and hearing. Proprioception, as the name indicates, is the

perception of self, the sense of “knowing and feeling the body’s position in space both statically and in motion” (Kabat-Zinn, 2012, p. 56). Interoception is the experience and awareness of the internal processes happening inside our bodies, “an internal, embodied *feeling*, a felt sense,” or more simply put, it is the awareness of homeostasis (Kabat-Zinn, 2012, p. 56, his emphasis).

One of the main objectives of the course was to more intentionally appreciate and comprehend the host culture, a goal that was integrated in the intercultural and experiential engagements of the general education curriculum. The four-month abroad component of the program included on-site programming and visits planned by the faculty director. It was followed, upon return to campus, by a welcome back dinner (January 2019) and a follow-up gathering of the group (February 2019), which is typical for all groups returning from different semester abroad locations.

A robust pre-departure orientation (March-May 2018) preceded the program. Pre-departure activities aimed to prepare the senses for new experiences and foster greater attentiveness to the moment and awareness of the surroundings. Pre-departure activities included hands-on activities such as a blindfolded exercise that helped hone listening skills, a yoga class focused on mindfulness, and an introduction to the techniques of visio divina and audio divina (Calhoun, 2015; Paintner, 2000). Audio divina and visio divina are contemplative traditions from the Benedictine monastic order. Both require an openness and availability to the unexpected and an element of reflection. Traditionally, the practices are conducted in multiple stages. In a preparation phase, practicants settle into silence and stillness, becoming more aware and connected with the present moment as they breathe in, and letting go of any distractions as they breathe out, i.e., they shift focus from the head to the heart and become open to what the experience might offer. This is followed by a more passive phase of first listening (audio divina) or first observation (visio divina), during which practicants let their senses be filled by what they hear or see, non-judgmentally, and note the effects the experience might have or if there are certain elements that are more striking. A second listening or observation follows a moment of silence, to savor the first experience. In the second listening or observation, practicants focus more deeply on the element(s) that were most striking and discern any movements, memories, feelings, or emotions (pleasant or unpleasant), that may stir up as a consequence. They note, as well, any assumptions they may have brought into the experience. After another brief silence, there is a third listening or observing, building on what came before, and centering on what response is evoked by the experience, pondering how the awakening of those memories or feelings may be an invitation to act, or an indication of previously unidentified desires, in the practican’s personal life context. Another moment of silence closes the practice, allowing the mind to rest in awareness and gratitude for that which was learned, to simply be, and to release the images or emotions evoked. Practicants then have the option to journal and write down any reflections, simple or complex, on the experience.

Pre-departure activities also included reflective writing assignments, such as “Finding the unfamiliar in the familiar,²” or journal entries on a “phone fast³” and on familiarity with food at home and at school (with a special focus on the relationship between the senses and food).

The course taught in-country was organized into three modules: Experience (learning about

² For a description of select activities and assignments conducted during the study abroad program, please see Appendix A.

³ See Appendix A.

the Other through the senses); Reflection (learning of Self through the Other); and Action (discerning a sense of purpose, vocation in life, and how to give continuation to what was learned). The theoretical framework of the course included readings from Jon Kabat-Zinn (*Mindfulness for Beginners*), Thich Nhat-Hahn (*The Miracle of Mindfulness and Peace is Every Step*), Alain DeBotton (*The Art of Travel*), and Brené Brown (*The Gifts of Imperfection*). It also included film selections such as Gabriel Axel's *Babette's Feast*, based on Isak Dinesen's eponymous novella, and Albert Lamorisse's *The Red Balloon*.

Activities, discussions, and writing assignments in-country supported the themes introduced pre-departure, namely those of cultivating awareness; being in awe and wonder, and developing a childlike curiosity and surprise/astonishment (the "beginner's mind" often referred to in writings on mindfulness); the concept of transformation of things and people; and, contemplation on interdependence⁴. Specific activities in-country included the repetition of visio and audio divina, exploring involuntary memory with Proust's madeleine⁵, and spending time with a raisin⁶.

Each class period began with a two to three minute meditation, sometimes instructor-led, other times conducted by the students. Both the instructor and the students researched and practiced meditation techniques prior to leading the group. During the course of the semester, each student was responsible for researching, experimenting with, and leading the group in a specific mindfulness technique that spoke to them.

Site visits were organized according to the topics discussed in the seminar and focused on the five senses. After each experience, students journaled and submitted short reflections in response to their experiences, all of which were guided in instructor-crafted prompts. For instance, in order to explore the sense of sight, students conducted a visio divina at the Musée Picasso (in Nice), and at the Musée Bonnard (in Le Cannet); to explore the sense of smell, students visited the Fragrance Museum in Grasse, the world capital of perfume; to explore the sense of hearing, students practiced audio divina in a concert by select members of the Cannes Orchestra; to explore the sense of taste, students participated in a blind dinner; to explore the sense of touch, students joined in a grape harvest and in making bread together. An important multisensorial experience included a visit to the Carrières des Lumières, an immersive exhibit hall located in an old quarry.

Methodology

In order to better understand the students' experience with contemplative pedagogy during and after the study abroad program, the investigators (including the instructor of the seminar) contacted the students 18 months after their return to the United States. This time frame allowed for students to have some distance from the program. Yet, they were not so far removed from it (and from the institutions in the case of the students who had graduated), that it made it difficult to contact them.

In July 2020, all 13 students who participated in the fall 2018 France program received an email inviting them to answer a voluntary questionnaire. The email expressed an interest in studying and exploring more in depth the connection between the use of mindfulness strategies (contemplative pedagogy) and awareness of the five senses, and the transformation

⁴ See Appendix A.

⁵ See Appendix A.

⁶ See Appendix A.

and continued growth of students after their return. The questionnaire consisted of two sections: the first section pertained to Institutional Review Board (IRB) requirements and asked for students' permission to use excerpts of their responses for research purposes; the second section consisted of five questions referencing students' experience with study abroad and mindfulness:

- (a) What is the first thing that comes to mind [when you think of your study abroad experience with mindfulness]? What was memorable?
- (b) Are you still applying what you learned? What? How?
- (c) Has it had an impact (positive or negative) on your academic, professional, or personal life? How? Please elaborate, providing examples where appropriate.
- (d) Do you think it will have an impact in the immediate future/long-term for you? If so, what do you envision?
- (e) Is there anything further you would like to share about your experience with mindfulness?

Students were asked to "take 30 min or so of your time to sit, reflect intentionally, and honestly respond to the questions." Of the thirteen students, ten submitted answers on an anonymous and voluntary basis. At the time of the questionnaire, two of the respondents were rising seniors, while eight had graduated in May 2020.

Data Analysis

The investigators reviewed student questionnaire submissions to identify emergent themes (Patton, 2002) within individual student responses. Following an analysis of each student response, the investigators used a constant comparison process (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) that led to the identification of four common themes across all the student reflections. Following the model and goals described by Barbezat and Bush for contemplative pedagogy, student responses could be organized broadly into themes pertaining to the impact of mindfulness on:

- (a) their ability to focus and better manage time (coded as "External awareness");
- (b) their sense of grounding and self-awareness (coded as "Self-awareness");
- (c) their connections and relationships to others, be it in the host country or after their return to the US (coded as "Connections");
- (d) their ability to recall and create memories from the past experiences (coded as "Memory").

These themes align, to an extent, with the four objectives for classroom introspective and contemplative exercises described above.

Findings

The four themes explore different dimensions of students' relationship to their surroundings, and therefore of their construction of knowledge. In organizing data around those four themes, the aim was to focus on different dimensions of interaction with the world, recalling Kolb (1984) and Vande Berg et al's (2012) claim that it is through transactions with our environment that learning occurs. These interactions can be with our physical surroundings, with others, within ourselves, and with Chronos, or the passing of time. The first theme, External Awareness, relates to a more objective connection with the outside world and the present moment, as it is observed more outwardly. The second theme, Self-awareness, pertains to an internal process of discernment⁷. Connections, the third theme, follows, as it

⁷ The determining factor in separating the first two themes was that of directionality and exteriority/interiority: The notion of "External Awareness" holds a more objective value and one of attention to the exterior world, whereas

brings into focus students' connections to others, whether in the host country, or more interestingly, after their return home. Our analysis ends with a focus on the concept of Memory, the fourth theme, and explores the way in which students express how mindfulness can become a conduit for creating more meaningful memories, and connections to the past. Students observed that the connection to the past can propel individuals into a future continually influenced by mindful living, which focuses on the present, while being informed by the past, and on preparing for the future.

External Awareness

Students reported in the voluntary questionnaires that learning about mindfulness and practicing it regularly during the study abroad program meant that they were more grounded in the moment. They referred to feeling more connected to the present, and that “it [mindfulness] forces you to come into the moment and enjoy that moment rather than focusing on outside factors⁸” (Luke⁹). They also reported a greater appreciation for the little things in life, given the intentional shift to focus on, and be centered in, the lived moment and experience. These behaviors later translated to their lives after their return to the United States. Diana posits,

I am still applying what I learned. When I'm outdoors, I allow myself to connect with nature whenever it feels right. I allow myself to do that no matter if I'm observing something as small as an ant or as large as the sky. When I eat meals, I focus on food alone. In other words, I don't go on my phone or watch TV.

Similarly, Sam reports,

I also think the [study abroad seminar] gave us an opportunity to practice living in the moment. I'm much better at reminding myself that the only thing I have to care about is the “now,” the present moment.

Many students stated that with mindfulness they were able to focus more, to be more in tune and attentive to their surroundings. For instance, Rachel indicates,

Without a doubt I still apply what I learned in France to my life today. Coming back on campus I was more conscious of enjoying my swim season moment by moment, instead of just trying to get through the practice, meet, or race. As a senior I knew it was going to be fast, so I used techniques of slowing down, closing my eyes, opening my mind and taking a minute or two to actually feel with all my senses what the pool, the race and my uniform felt like. To this day when I am off on an adventure, whether it's a walk down the block or standing in front of something monumental away from home, I consciously remind myself to check in on what I am feeling. Instead of just using my sense of sight, I bring in the other four senses.

The ability to focus more was also noticeable in, and applicable to, the classroom experience post-study abroad:

I think it helped me focus in class more and keep me grounded in taking advantage of all the resources I had available around me. To re-explain this, I felt that I was more present in the moment of learning and had a stronger desire to use books, professors, and other

“Self-Awareness” indicates a personal perception, introspection, and the interior world.

⁸ Student excerpts are mostly verbatim, but may have minor grammatical changes, for the purpose of clarification and reader's understanding.

⁹ Student names have been changed.

tools to help me learn more. It kind of helped me be more curious about other topics than just my major interest. (Rachel)

The students' reported focus on the present translates into an equal focus to being committed to the moment in the future. Students took the time to be mindful and became acutely aware of the need to spend time with time, and grant time to time, i.e., to be patient with themselves and to take the time to learn and practice mindfulness in their lives on a daily basis. Sam summarizes this realization in saying,

I think this [mindfulness] will have an impact on me in the future. I see it as a way to cope with stress, and the fact that we were given time to practice living in the present is important for the future. It isn't always easy to live in the moment, especially under stress, and it takes time to learn. I was given time to learn and understand how to be mindful through this course.

Having the time to focus on the moment broadened students' awareness of their surroundings. It also awarded students the occasion to reflect and, moreover, to engage in metacognitive reflection.

Self-Awareness

Associated with the concepts of focus and time/time management, students consistently referred to a sense of grounding and self-awareness that came from practicing mindfulness in their daily lives. Sally comments,

My life feels more centered and wholesome. For example, as we discussed in our seminar, "when you are washing the dishes, you are just washing the dishes." I find that I get much more enjoyment out of everyday things now.

The concept of intentionality, embedded in the definition of mindfulness, permeates the responses to the questionnaire and can be applied to all four of the themes coded in our analysis. Intentionality is notably clear under the theme of inner awareness and grounding, as exhibited in Sally's response: "Yes, I think I will continue to become a more conscious and *deliberate* individual and hopefully come closer to finding *inner peace*" (authors' emphasis). Teddy's comment, "I know that my experience had an immediate impact on my life right away and it made me the person I am today. More mindful, more calm and more peaceful," summarizes the prospering of the qualities of ease and peace in students who participated in the study abroad course with a contemplative lens.

A greater sense of centering promoted ease and peace in students' minds. Betsy indicates how mindfulness became especially helpful in remaining grounded during challenging moments: "Anytime I am faced with a challenge, decision, or obstacle in my life, I will look back to my previous experiences and remember how mindfulness helped me through those moments."

In some cases, students reported how mindfulness and a greater sense of grounding engendered a heightened self-awareness and appreciation of the lived experience during and after the study abroad program:

... mindfulness is a valuable aspect of maintaining my mental health. Using it while exploring new situations (as we did in France) allows me to appreciate the different things I may not have noticed if I were being unmindful [...] Mindfulness continues to be a part of my life as I develop skills to manage stress and achieve balance in my life.

While I started mindfulness before I studied abroad, [the study abroad seminar] allowed me to expand it into new experiences and to fully take in everything happening around me. (Emily)

Luke, for whom “it is those little moments of pure bliss when doing something new or becoming acutely aware of how rare my experience was,” emphasizes how the strategies learned and practiced during the study abroad program became routine after returning home, especially as a tactic to finding inner peace:

I try to apply what I learned. [...] But when it comes to mindfulness, I try to apply those things in new places or when I want to feel at peace. I still meditate in the morning and journal following the meditation.

The practices learned and perfected while abroad can be grounding, especially in the recent times of the pandemic. Sam elaborates on this topic by stating that,

In the seminar, we learned different grounding techniques that I still use to combat my anxiety today [...] I'm much better at reminding myself that the only thing I have to care about is the “now,” the present moment. This mindset has really been helpful in *stopping patterns of rumination and catastrophizing in my life, which is incredibly valuable*. (authors' emphasis)

Furthermore, the internal awareness and self-reflective process helped center the mind and helped lead to success professionally. Betsy gives a concrete example of how mindfulness and, specifically meditation, provided grounding:

I remember meditating for days on end before filling out the application for a fellowship I was nervous about applying to. After each meditation I had a clear mind to put my best foot forward. Lo and behold I ended up receiving the fellowship. Personally, I was able to discover myself in a new environment. Being gone, for four months, I came back and did a lot of reshuffling and evaluation of my life. The person who went to France is not the same person who returned to the U.S.

The elements of ease, peace and groundedness deepened students' metacognitive processes, self-concept, and self-actualization. These elements also supplemented the transformative nature of students' abroad experience and may have engendered students' greater self-confidence and comfort with themselves.

Luke reveals how self-confidence, self-knowledge and growing into oneself resulted from the contemplative practices explored during study abroad:

It [mindfulness] also taught me to chase what I want rather than what is expected of me, that is why I created my own major rather than do something that was expected of me. Professionally I find myself being more driven for a couple of reasons. The first being that I want to be happy in my job, but I don't want that job to define me. I also want to have time to use the mindfulness teachings in new places around the world so that I can travel and enjoy the beauty in life rather than the grind. And personally, I simply feel more at peace, I am happy with where I am at in life. This allows me to loosen up and be myself. In addition, I am more comfortable on my own because I don't get caught up in my thoughts. I focus on the moments I am in.

In another response, the same student posits how mindfulness was grounding and allowed for acceptance of both self and of the lived experience:

Along with the fact that I want to see the world and experience new things and apply mindfulness, I seek happiness in life. I don't force something, especially if it doesn't make me happy. And finally, I don't let things out of my control bother me. I envision all of those things in my future, all of this while experiencing the world.

Students' increased inner awareness translated to a greater connection with self. It also translates to a greater connection to Other.

Connections

The unique nature of study abroad facilitates students' interactions and transactions with the host environment and lends itself to developing intercultural competence, when those interactions are lived intentionally and with respect for the host culture. Incorporation of contemplative pedagogies into the study abroad curriculum is conducive to such praxis, given their experiential and interventionist nature, as was demonstrated through students' responses. Mindfulness, practiced while abroad and used as a pedagogical strategy to construct knowledge about the host country, allowed for students' deeper experience of, and greater respect for, Other. Diana indicates that, "in my academic and professional life, mindfulness has reminded me to hone in on details and interact with others with as little judgment as possible, especially in cross-cultural and intergenerational interactions." In another response, the same student looked to the future and to the continued use of mindfulness:

It will have an impact on the immediate future and the long-term future for me. I see it especially having an impact on my upcoming time in France [in an assistantship program]. *With mindfulness, I will be able to foster deeper relationships with people and connections with everything.* I will have healthier and more fulfilling conversations with others and with myself. I will notice and savor the world more. My experiences will be approached with less judgment and bias. It will inevitably positively impact my entire life if I keep practicing it, and I hope I will. (authors' emphasis)

The study abroad seminar, rooted in a contemplative perspective, allowed students to learn about and experience the host culture in a very personal way while in the country. The focus on mindfulness engendered a greater attention to the present moment and to the surroundings, avoiding preconceived notions. In turn, this may have enhanced students' intercultural communicative competency. Emily provides the insight that, "Immersing [oneself] in the culture provides you with a perspective that you cannot gain through reading a textbook. The inclusion of mindfulness increased awareness of cultural experiences as well."

Moreover, mindfulness became integral in students' relationships with friends and family back home. As Rachel indicates,

Mindfulness has helped me in relationships. We practiced going for walks and explaining to each other what all of our own five senses felt on the way. It helped us live in the moment and bond in a better way with each other and the world rather than being oblivious to the natural beauty around us and simply having a conversation about our day.

Diana also reports the benefits of using mindfulness in personal relationships:

At the very least, I talk with members of my family. I practice active listening with others. I journal more than I used to and value connecting with myself in addition to the world around me. I still like to do a few of the meditations we practiced, such as the

loving-kindness meditation.

This meditation, where one visualizes someone progressively becoming happier by sending them love, is a meditation focused outward, in connection with others, and is therefore indicative of the students' engagement with people around them, be they acquaintances, longtime friends, or family members.

Looking to the future, some students see mindfulness as impactful in their relationships with others around them, personally and professionally. Teddy believes, "it will [have an impact in future]. I envision it benefiting every aspect of my life. Patience, appreciation, and respect are what I've learned and continue to learn from mindfulness. These things are valuable in relationships, in activity, and in general existence," and Rachel "will forever and always incorporate mindfulness into [her] everyday life-long term. Whether that means when [she's] eating, when [she's] working with patients, or when [she] get[s] the chance to travel again."

The content of the study abroad course and the structured practice of mindfulness also motivated students in academics upon their return. Rachel's experience is noteworthy in that "this experience with mindfulness while I studied abroad impacted me tremendously. So much so that I decided to complete my three-semester research capstone project on mindful eating" (authors' emphasis). The course content helped transform the student's relationship to food and inspired Rachel to pursue research and scholarship in the field of mindfulness, with the specific focus of nutrition.

Students report that learning about and practicing mindfulness allowed for connections with and for others at a deeper level, in their personal, academic, and professional spheres. In turn, it is our hope, it will continue inspiring the students in years to come, as they continuously look back on and recall their experience abroad.

Memory

Study abroad experiences will naturally be imprinted in students' memories given their newness and distinctive nature. However, respondents reported that the practice of mindfulness and focus on the five senses during the program enhanced their ability to retain images and feelings in their mind. When asked about what stood out for them in the program, many of them referred to the blind dinner, where students were asked to focus on smell, taste, and touch, rather than on sight, in order to enjoy small selections of typical Provençale foods. Sally recalls,

The first thing that comes to my mind is the blind dinner, which was a unique and amazing experience. Most of my memories are predominantly sight-related, so the blind dinner stands out as a memory that was more about how I felt.

The final underlying theme in students' responses regards how mindfulness became a conduit for memory. Given the nature, course objectives and learning goals of the study abroad seminar, it would be expected that students refer to the use of the five senses when asked about what they remember about their time in France. However, beyond the recognition of sight, smell, hearing, taste, and touch as key elements during fall 2018, students expanded on the concept of remembrance to expose how the attention given to their senses allowed for the creation of memories and of more meaningful recollections of the time spent abroad. Diana elaborates,

The incorporation of mindfulness into my study abroad experience made it altogether

more memorable. Small moments that would have otherwise been forgotten stand out in my mind and would not have meant as much to me. One experience that comes to mind as particularly memorable is the blindfolded dinner experience. I had never isolated and experienced taste like that in my life. I'm forever grateful for that experience.

In turn, Rachel recalls, "I so vividly remember breathing the fresh air and just feeling a sense of freedom and peace high up in the clouds."

Paying close attention to the senses in each moment captured photographic moments, where students could recall and remember a holistic experience of the moment:

The most memorable thing that always comes to my mind is the beach in front of the college. It's an image forever ingrained in my psyche and memories. I remember on one specific day, I walked out onto the sidewalk, the sun was high up in the sky, reflected in the sparkling turquoise waters. Sailboats floating in the distance, a gentle breeze floating through the air and the sand a golden tan. The gentle sound of crashing waves and smell of Nutella paninis wafting in the air from the kiosks. I remember thinking to myself I will forever remember this moment. Having to focus on all of our five senses, I became much more cognizant of the phenomena going on around me. (Betsy)

During the study abroad program, and as suggested by Byram (1997), students were asked to become sojourners, rather than tourists, and to learn through intentional transactions with their environment. Rachel substantiates this learning goal and demonstrates that, for this student, that goal was achieved:

The raisin activity, floating in the water (taking in what all five senses were experiencing), visiting the market with a different intention each week, the madeleine and tea, etc. Honestly when I think of France 2018 so many locations come to mind but not in the sense that I visited x amount of places, but I genuinely remember more of the journey to get there and what emotions I felt during the experience.

The strategy of focusing on process, rather than outcome, remained an intentional common practice for some, upon return: "When I'm in an area that I want to remember, I take a moment to experience it with all five senses" (Teddy). In turn, the use of mindfulness became foundational in creating meaning and purpose in students' final months of their undergraduate education:

Looking back at adventures I had during my senior year (my final swim meet, eating food in my apartment, moving out of my apartment) I remember more than what the scene looked like. I remember how the swim cap felt on my head, how accidentally overly-seasoned my chicken was for dinner, and how it made me feel to move out of such a room I lived for nine months in. I truly think living mindfully helps one appreciate the little things and acknowledge how much detail we once missed in our everyday living experience. (Rachel)

The purposeful scaffolding and organization of the study abroad seminar readings and experiences gave students tools to continue using mindfulness in their lives. Thanks to the continual reinforcement of contemplative practices throughout the semester, such as journaling, meditation, and audio and visio divinas, and the encouragement of student agency during the process, students not only remember the tools, but consciously opt to continue using them, after the semester abroad experience ended. Rachel insists,

I will forever and always incorporate mindfulness into my everyday life long-term. Whether that means when I'm eating, when I'm working with patients, or when I get the chance to travel again. If I feel it slipping and need a mindfulness refresher, I will take out the *Gifts of Imperfection* [Brené Brown] book or Thich Nhat Hanh or even a raisin.

In noting that the practice of mindfulness has strengthened their ability to recall certain moments and experiences in the past, students can choose to continue reaping the benefits through the practice of mindfulness in the future.

Limitations

The experience of incorporating contemplative pedagogy in the study abroad program was not without limitations and resistance. As Rachel notes, “some classmates didn’t take the mindfulness experience as seriously as I did. I am not sure why I was so drawn to this topic since day one and others were the opposite.” However, with repetition and scaffolding, students became progressively more open to it and even expressed gratitude in the end.

Terminology employed constitutes another limitation to the study. The authors are cognizant of the breadth and depth of contemplative pedagogy and of the fact that mindfulness is but one category within that field. When planning the seminar and in conducting the study based on the students’ experiences in the seminar abroad, the decision was made to use the term “mindfulness” as an overarching term that would be recognizable by the students. “Mindfulness,” in the context of the study abroad seminar and for the purposes of this article, is representative of contemplative pedagogy as a whole (thus including the multiple activities used that fall under the umbrella of contemplative pedagogy, such as meditation, journaling, audio and visio divina, visualization, among others). Finally, we also realize that the number of students in the sample presented is small and thus limits the reliability of inferences that can be made from student comments. More research needs to be conducted in this field to investigate the reproducibility of our results. A larger sample size may also provide more insight into whether demographics may play a role in students’ relationship to mindfulness. Ultimately, the goal was to begin a discussion of what contemplative pedagogy might look like and could potentially accomplish in the context of study abroad.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This exploratory case study illustrates how the integration of contemplative pedagogy in the study abroad curriculum can potentially have a long-term impact on students’ comportment. Eighteen months after the fall 2018 France study abroad program, 10 respondents out of the 13 students who participated in the program reported a global satisfaction with the course content (namely, the use of mindfulness as a foundational principle), and with the impact it had beyond the four months spent in the south of France. From the anonymous and voluntary responses to the questionnaires submitted, it became clear that students’ perception is that “when one takes this seriously and wants to live this way it is truly life changing and eye-opening” (Rachel). Ultimately, students recognized that mindfulness, as a way of living, can be transformative.

Students reported greater attentiveness and awareness, both external and internal, when interacting with life in a mindful way. This awareness took on the form of heightened focus and ability to reflect on the present moment, as well as an increased self-awareness and comfort with the discomforts of life. Students also reported being more present and intentional in several concrete situations, during and after the study abroad program. Through analysis of

students' responses, it is possible to ascertain that, in the students' view, mindfulness acts as a catalyst in their connection to others, whether in their more immediate circles, or in broader community settings, including those in the host country. Mindfulness, according to the respondents' perceptions, can become a conduit for memory. It creates a bridge between the past and present and allows for a more grounded and easeful propulsion into the future.

The lasting effects of contemplative pedagogy, and specifically mindfulness, are discernible in all elements of the triad of personal life/academic life/professional life of the respondents. In the students' personal sphere, it was noteworthy that they remarked a greater ease at recalling past experiences when those experiences were conducted through the lens of mindfulness. In the academic setting, students reported that mindfulness helped them deepen their understanding of course material and increased their ability for insight and creativity. Moreover, students' responses exemplified how mindfulness in the classroom is both a process and an outcome. Many of the students related, furthermore, that they expected mindfulness to remain an integral part of their lives after graduation.

The themes identified in this study (External Awareness, Self-awareness, Connections, and Memory), seem to align, to a degree, with Barbezat and Bush's (2014) four objectives for classroom introspective and contemplative exercises (Focus and attention building; Contemplation and introspection in the content of the course; Compassion and connection to others; Inquiry into the nature of students' minds). This alignment underscores, we believe, how the students were impacted by the contemplative design of the fall 2018 semester study abroad seminar. As noted previously, contemplative pedagogy gives students multiple opportunities to develop their metacognitive skills, through a combination of "first-" and "third-" person learning (Roth, 2006). Mindfulness allows students to engage with cultures in a different way, one that is more experiential and interventionist. The relational aspect of mindfulness applies to the people who are around the students, but also to the environment that surrounds them, to their senses, and to themselves. Based on these observations, we believe mindfulness has the potential to broaden students' worldview, all the while deepening their view and understanding of self. Thus, through the integration of contemplative perspectives in the classroom, and specifically within the study abroad context, students can learn the importance of intentional learning through interactions with the surrounding environment, which is the purpose of education.

The impactful outcome, however, requires that the process be carefully structured and scaffolded. As such, the element of intervention is highlighted as being integral. The director's role as guide is essential (Vande Berg, 2007). The facilitator of the seminar plays an important role in structuring the experiential process for the students, so as to implement the practices of contemplative pedagogy and lead students before they can be motivated to create their own self-practice. Moreover, it is crucial that facilitators maintain their own practice, in order for them to provide accurate foundations and modeling to the students (Barbezat & Bush, 2014). In the absence of this interventionist role, students' "experience would have been more of a 'trip' rather than a life altering and special journey" (Rachel). The commitment to mindful living, as modeled by the facilitator, makes it more about the journey, rather than the destination, more about the process, rather than about the outcome. Mindfulness in the study abroad setting is thus a facilitated experience, one that requires practice of practices, and which, in the context of the program described here, has the potential to inspire intentional and transformative learning.

In the context of a liberal arts education, contemplative pedagogy is well aligned with the

goals of educating the whole person, or *cura personalis*. We view the study abroad space, out of students' comfort zone, as especially advantageous for the integration of contemplative pedagogy in experiential teaching and learning. The setting of study abroad programs, in an international and unfamiliar location, is conducive to students' vulnerability and openness to engagement with their surroundings. In line with recent literature on integration of contemplative perspectives within teaching and learning at higher education institutions (Barbezat & Bush, 2014; Owen-Smith, 2018; Zajonc, 2013), we strongly recommend that directors of study abroad programs consider the inclusion of contemplative practices in experiential programs outside our national borders.

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Appendix A

Assignment	Description
Finding the Unfamiliar in the familiar	Students were asked to travel at home and in their neighborhood, to get to know it all over again and discover new things. They reflected on the experience and made note of these discoveries in a written reflection. The purpose of the activity was for students to seek what provided a sense of wonder and gratitude and to engage with their surroundings with greater receptivity and humility, beyond passivity. This activity was conducted pre-departure and midway through the program on-site.
Familiarity with food at home and at school	Students were asked to pay attention to specific meals, both at home and at school, at specific moments of the week/the summer preceding the study abroad program, and write journal entries on each of these meals, with a specific focus on the relationship of their five senses and the food that they consumed for each meal.
Contemplation on interdependence	Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh describes contemplation on interdependence as, “a deep looking into all dharmas [bodily and physical forms, feelings, perceptions, mental functionings, consciousness] in order to pierce through to their real nature, in order to see them as part of the great body of reality and in order to see that the great body of reality is indivisible. It cannot be cut into pieces with separate existences of their own” (1975, p. 72).
Phone fast	Consisted of asking students to refrain from using their phones for a period of 24 hours, with subsequent journaling to reflect on the benefits or disadvantages of such an activity. Students repeated this exercise three times during the program, once pre-departure and twice while on-site.
Raisin activity	The raisin activity, taken from Kabat-Zinn, consists of mindfully interacting with a raisin with all five senses, by spending a few minutes observing it, feeling it, smelling it, hearing it, and then finally taking a small bite to savor it slowly. The activity was followed by free writing.
Proust’s madeleine	The madeleine and tea are a reference to Marcel Proust’s madeleine, taken from an excerpt of his <i>In Remembrance of Things Past</i> (1981). Students read the excerpt, discussed voluntary and involuntary memory, and then experienced for themselves tasting a madeleine dunked in linden tea, as the author described in his novel. They were asked to describe the experience, compare to what was described in the novel, and then discern what might be <i>their</i> madeleine.