Blogging for Intercultural Communicative Competence in Study Abroad Programs:
All Breadth, No Depth?

Participants in study abroad (SA) programs (sojourners) are often encouraged to blog as a form of reflective writing, yet little is known about this practice. Generally, reflection facilitates sojourners' engagement in their personal and professional growth. Drawing from two different but complementary frameworks, we analyzed blogs from 51 sojourners in short-term SA volunteer teaching placements to examine the reflection that occurred through their writing. The two frameworks revealed different aspects of blogging practices: *types of reflection* (Maarof, 2007) were primarily descriptive, but *Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) Learning* (Elola & Oskoz, 2008) examples were more numerous and varied, documenting sojourners' navigation of culture in SA. Sojourners did not typically use their blogs for dialogic or critical reflection, instead chronicling experiences or representing reflection as completed actions. Although blogging can be useful for reflection in SA, the results from this study suggest that careful scaffolding may be necessary to encourage critical reflection.

Keywords: study abroad; pre-service teachers; reflective writing; blogging; intercultural communicative competence

1. Introduction

An increasing number of universities are offering SA programs (Take & Shoraku, 2018), including ones for pre-service teachers that include teaching placements (Goertler & Schenker, 2021). These sojourns provide participating students with the opportunity to advance their academic skills and develop knowledge above and beyond what is available on their home campus by living, studying, and/or working abroad. SA affords them occasions to learn host community languages through daily interactions with locals, participate in cultural events, and interact with peers and others who have different cultural norms, viewpoints, and beliefs (Shadowen, et al., 2015). As part of SA programming, sojourners commit to participating in preparation and debriefing activities, as well as planned activities while abroad to facilitate the learning goals of the program.

One of the goals of most programs is to equip sojourners with intercultural communicative competence (ICC). ICC refers to sojourners' abilities to challenge and change their beliefs, behaviours, and meanings (Byram, 1997). Simply working and living in a host community does not ensure the development of ICC (He, et al., 2017). With reference to change, Byram (1997) labeled those who go abroad and remain unchanged as "tourists", and those who develop ICC as "sojourners". Although ICC is an expected outcome of SA programs that is achieved by some sojourners, it is not a guarantee and assessing it is often challenging and/or overlooked.

Reflective writing is one way through which sojourners can consider their experiences of negotiating life immersed in an unfamiliar culture. One emergent reflective writing practice in SA programs is blogging (Douthit, et al., 2015; Elola & Oskoz, 2008; Lee, 2011, 2012; Lee & Markey, 2014; Pasterick, 2015, 2019). Although blogging has been investigated most frequently as part of classroom activities (Cirak Kurt & Yildirim, 2021; Ellison & Wu, 2008; Morris, et al.,

2019; Top, 2012) it is otherwise found as an informal activity (Khan, et al., 2021). Therefore, little is known about blogging as a deliberate reflective writing practice built into an SA program.

In this paper, we explore how sojourners engage in blogging as a reflective writing practice and to what extent sojourner blogs detail ICC learning. Using two lenses to investigate sojourner blogging, we examined the nature of blogging as a reflective practice. Firstly, we shed light on the *type of reflection* (Maarof, 2007) and secondly, what elements of *ICC learning* (Elola & Oskoz, 2008) were highlighted by blogging. This study serves to inform the use of blogging as a reflective writing practice within SA programming.

2. Literature

SA refers to "the experience of studying and living in another culture" (Shadowen, et al., 2015, p. 231). Through SA, sojourners leave behind their familiar home context and purposefully settle into another context for a predetermined amount of time. They may encounter a new language, live in unfamiliar housing, and experience novel routines. The sojourners' intentions are often associated with goals of self-improvement, expanded life experience, and encountering different perspectives. In addition to language acquisition, institutions that offer SA advertise the development of ICC learning, global citizenship, and internationalisation as the reasons to embark upon SA. All of these goals influence the growing popularity of SA within the student experience.

Critics of SA point out that the length of programs often works against some of the professed goals (Long, 2013). While the number of SA sojourners has consistently increased over the last decades, the average length of SA programs has decreased (Dwyer, 2004). In the US, the majority (64.6%) taking part in SA choose sojourns fewer than eight weeks in length, only 33.1% are on sojourn for 1-2 semesters, and merely 2.3% study abroad for a year or more

(International Institute of Education, 2018). In Canada, only 10% of undergraduates participate in SA (Biggs & Paris, 2017). Since ICC takes time to develop (Dwyer, 2004), short-term programs potentially limit the impact of SA on the international experience of sojourners.

Additionally, activities for preparation and debriefing, as well as guidance during the time abroad, are often overlooked in programming (Kruse & Brubaker, 2007). Few programs provide thorough pre- and post-sojourn workshops (Jackson, 2011). Efforts to counter the criticisms often centre around the use of the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI), a pre- and post-test survey design that provides sojourners and program administrators with a snapshot of the sojourner's learning (Bennett, 2002; Anderson, et al., 2006). However, to promote ICC requires a strong understanding of what it means in the context of SA.

2.2 Intercultural Communicative Competence

"Intercultural" is a complex term, as cultures are fluid, not monolithic or static. Further, boundaries between cultures are often blurry, shifting, and subjective (Witte & Harden, 2011). The term intercultural recognizes the differences between the unspoken yet known between two contexts. Competence is usually defined in two different ways: 1. A narrower view dealing with particular skills and abilities (e.g., navigating the bus system in the host country); and, 2. A holistic concept, which is a broader concept beyond surface level behaviors and into the realm of deep-seated traits, habits, or virtues (e.g., understanding different perspectives, challenging stereotypes) (Witte & Harden 2011, p. 6). Building intercultural competence is commonly identified as an educational goal in higher education academic plans and strategies.

Focusing on the meaning and significance of intercultural competence within the discourse and pedagogy of foreign language education (Hoff, 2014), Byram's Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) model "has been particularly influential" (Hoff, 2014, p. 508). Byram (2008) divided ICC into four components: 1. Attitudes; 2. Knowledge; 3. Skills of

interpreting and relating; and, 4. Skills of discovery and interaction. While not exhaustive, these dimensions can help us understand different aspects of ICC. Together these components may be seen to comprise the broader holistic concept.

To promote ICC development in SA programs, activites before, during and after the sojourn are often built into program design (Goertler & Schenker, 2021). Before departure, some programs provide pre-departure training workshops covering topics such as cultural awareness, strategies for adjustment, and reflection on cultural stereotypes. While abroad and immersed in the culture, some participants take courses, meet with liaisons or advisors, engage in service learning or community placements. Some even participate in research. Upon return, they may have opportunities such as debriefing workshops or presentations to their home community. To provide a more in-depth sojourn learning experience, some programs, like the one in this study, have built-in opportunities for reflective writing throughout the program that provide additional insight into the learning that takes place while abroad.

2.1 Reflective Writing

Reflective writing in SA is based on the belief that by engaging in this practice, writers can work through and make explicit their thoughts, concerns, challenges, and conclusions about their sojourn (Cohen-Sayag & Fischl, 2012). Through reflective writing, sojourners enhance learning and gain self-awareness of their personal and professional understandings (Colwell, et al., 2016; Wood & Virzi, 2019; Vogt, 2020). For the purpose of reflection before, during, and after traveling abroad, sojourners may choose private and/or public reflective writing.

Reflective writing, as a private activity, can take any form chosen by the sojourner, such as journaling. If guided by a program organiser, however, reflective writing is likely to take on a more structured approach (Brockington & Wiedenhoft, 2009; Gelfuso & Dennis, 2014; Savicki & Price, 2015). Some structured approaches include a 'letter to a future self' or critical incident

debriefing (see Elverson & Klawiter, 2018; McAllister, el al, 2006), dialogue journals (Dressler & Tweedie, 2016), digital storytelling (Perry, et al., 2015) or online journals (Gabaudan, 2016). Alternatively, reflective writing in SA might be a public activity such as posting on Facebook (Lee & Ranta 2014) or blogging (Henry, 2021; Hourigan & Murray, 2010; Lee, 2012; Pasterick, 2015). The nature of the writing may influence the nature of reflection as the writers' sense of audience may affect what they see as the purpose for the writing.

Generally, blogs are a vehicle for the creation of new knowledge, a platform with which to share information and opinions, and a way to connect socially (Dumova & Fiord, 2011). They are no longer merely an online method of personal journaling (Walker Rettberg, 2014). Importantly, bloggers are their own publishers, broadcasting their own individual ideas (Henry, 2021), while also inviting interaction (Luik & Taimalu, 2016). These attributes may make blogging attractive for sojourners.

In SA, sojourner blogging is sometimes embedded in program expectations, yielding various benefits for the sojourners and the program organizers. Bell (2016) examined blogs in an Erasmus program and found that students used blogs to voice their apprehensions about the program, which allowed program organisers to learn from student experiences and potentially improve pre-departure preparation. Colwell et al. (2016) assigned blogs before, during, and after a language program in Italy and concluded that they encouraged self-reflection and documented students' personal growth and sense making with the education system in the host country. Pasterick (2015, 2019) found students were able to move beyond an emotional reaction to analyze their experiences through their blogs. This type of reflection profited from teacher and class feedback and served to mediate the development of interculturality. Lee (2011) found that blogs documented learner autonomy and intercultural competence in SA. Regardless of the

length of the SA program, blogs were a form of reflective writing that could draw out participant reflection, which, in turn, could also influence future program design.

However, when participants chose their own topics, they often did not lead to the same level of ICC as when instructors chose the topic. Douthit et al. (2015) noted that without specific instructions, ICC did not necessarily occur. Hourigan and Murray (2010) advised that instructors need to teach about the platform and not assume students know how to use it. Interaction among bloggers is also not guaranteed and program organizers often find they have to mandate it for it to occur. Downey & Gray (2012) observed that, despite the propensity of commenting behaviour on social media, this behaviour "does not translate well into educational settings" (p. 7) and interaction among students did not occur spontaneously. Therefore, preparation is needed for students to effectively use blogs in SA programs.

Blogging as an SA reflective practice holds the most promise when the medium suits the reflection. The public nature of blogs is both a problematic and beneficial feature (Henry, 2021). Henry (2021) examined the travel blogs of US volunteer teachers in Nambia and found their topics often touched on geopolitical issues such as border crossing challenges, but often stopped short of a more in-depth critical examination of their own privilege and the injustice of immobility of the local people they worked with. Knowing the blogs are public may cause sojourners to be less open and position themselves in the best possible light (Hanney & Skirkeviciutey, 2020). However, it is also possible that being conscious of how they are portraying themselves may encourage critical reflection if they see themselves as critical thinkers (Henry, 2021). The authentic yet undefined audience may keep the bloggers on their toes, thinking twice before writing, eager to consider how their words are taken up by others. Indeed, when bloggers receive comments on their posts (Lee, 2012), they report finding the process of

blogging more meaningful. Thus, blogging as a reflective practice draws part of its strength from the public nature of the medium, but critical reflection and ICC development are neither automatic nor guaranteed, necessitating further investigation into blogging during short-term SA programs.

Keeping this is mind, our research is guided by the questions:

- What types of reflection do the blogs of SA participants reveal?

- To what extent do the blogs of SA participants reveal ICC Learning?

3. Methods

3.1. Participants and Setting

In this study, we present data from two consecutive cohorts of Canadian pre-service teachers (n=51) who took part in a short-term SA placement in one of seven different countries for the first two months of their fall university semester. Sojourners were placed in a variety of countries, and their level of integration with the host culture varied based on their destination. Some participants lived with host families and dormitories, while most participants lived independently in accommodation such as AirBnB rentals. All students were fluent, if not first language, speakers of English studying in a post-secondary faculty of education. Some students were exposed to a new dialect of English, some learned the local language through formal classes organized by the liaisons, while others had only informal language learning opportunities. Since a goal of the program was to provide an opportunity for volunteer teaching, some participants primarily observed teachers, others taught isolated lessons and still others taught classes with varying degrees of supervision. See Table 1 for more details about the nature of each placement.

Table 1

Participant Information

Placement	Number of participants		Living Arrangements		Second Language Learning	Teaching
	cohort 1	cohort 2	cohort 1	cohort 2		
Western Australia	4	2	dormitory		English dialect	observation
Eastern Australia	n/a	1	independent		English dialect	observation
Brazil	1	3	independent		classes	observation
China	n/a	3	dormitory		classes	classes
Germany	5	6	independent		informal	lessons
Japan	5	5	homestay	dormitory	classes	observation
Spain	4	3	independent		informal	classes
Vietnam	3	6	dormitory	independent	informal	classes

3.2. Conceptual Lenses and Data Analysis

The 51 sojourners who participated in a short-term SA volunteer teaching placement produced blog posts— usually five blog posts each. Blogging was a program requirement, but not tied to a course or assessment. They were given instructions to use a professional tone, since future employers might read them, but sojourners were not required to cover particular topics at particular times. We analyzed blogs based on two different analytic frameworks— conceptual lenses (Elola & Oskoz, 2008 application of Byram, 1997; Maarof, 2007) and compared and contrasted the results of the two analyses.

Firstly, Maarof's (2007) conceptual lens, focused on types of reflection, guided our preliminary analysis. Secondly, Byram's ICC model as outlined in Elola and Oskoz's (2008) seminal work on blogging and ICC, was selected to deepen our analysis as it provided a more focused conceptual lens pertaining to foreign language education. For both frameworks, blogs were harvested from a website selected as a blogging platform in this study for each participant; blogs were subsequently converted to Word documents. Although many participants had included pictures in their blogs, these were removed and left unanalyzed, as they were not included in the Institutional Research Ethics Board application. Two reviewers separately coded all the blogs, which had been printed out. The two reviewers then met to compare and discuss the codes they had assigned. After arriving at consensus for both methods of analysis, all codes were subsequently inputted into NVivo for ease of organization.

The first method of analysis, based on the types described by Maarof (2007), involved identifying *types of reflection.* In describing how reflection was understood, four different types of writing were identified: 1. *Descriptive writing;* 2. *Descriptive reflection;* 3. *Dialogic reflection;* and, 4. *Critical reflection.* In preparation for initial coding, we conducted a focused discussion to share interpretive understandings of the four types of reflection described in Table 2. Subsequently two coders went through all blogs, classifying the sojourner writing into the four types of reflection previously described. In the rare cases where the two coders were unable to come to consensus, these examples were brought to a third reviewer who made a decision about the category.

Table 2

Types of Reflective Writing

Types	Descriptions	Our analytical understanding	Participants who blogged this type (/51)
Descriptive Writing	Reporting of events or literature	describing *what* happened	51
Descriptive Reflection	Writing which contains some sort of rationale or reasons based on some evaluations or, judgment	describing *why* in reference to self.	48
Dialogic Reflection	Writing that reflects a dialogue with the self and shows evidence of the attempt to explore possible reasons. It suggests a form of thinking aloud on paper	*describing why? but* beyond self and referring to others, showing evidence of *cultural humility[i]*	30
Critical Reflection	Writing which involves providing reasons or justifying for 'decisions or events...takes accounts of the broader historical, social, and or political contexts	describing *privilege, power, critical thinking.*	8

The second method of analysis was to identify *ICC Learning,* since the ICC model "more effectively conceptualized the additional knowledge, skills, attitudes, and abilities that are

necessary for successful cross-cultural communication" (Bickley, et al., 2014, p. 138). For this round of analysis, two members of our research team independently coded all the blogs after doing a few exemplars together. They then met to discuss and compare results. In this round, the two coders were able to reach consensus about all the assigned codes. Results were inputted into NVivo for data management.

This method of analysis divided examples of ICC into five categories, along with eight definitions (see Elola & Oskoz, 2008 for an in-depth description of this model), as outlined in Table 3. We treated the differences in the definitions as subcategories.

Table 3

ICC Learning

Category	Definitions/Subcategories	Coding term	Participants who blogged this category (/51)
Interest in knowing other people's way of life and introducing one's own culture to others	To be interested in other people's experience of daily life, particularly those things not usually presented to outsiders through the media	Interest in Others - general	42
	To be interested in the daily experience of a variety of social groups within a society, not only the dominant culture	Interest in Others - specific	46
	To realise that cultures can be understood by seeing things from a different point of view and by	Changing Perspective	46

Ability to change perspective	looking at one's own culture from their perspective		
Ability to cope with living in a different culture	To be able to cope with a range of reactions one experiences when living in a different culture (euphoria, homesickness, physical and mental discomfort, etc.)	Coping	48
Knowledge about one's own and others' culture for intercultural communication.	To know some important facts about living in the other cultures and about the country, state and people	Cultural Knowledge - facts	49
	To know how to engage in conversations with people from my culture an explain to them differences and similarities between countries	Cultural Knowledge - exchange	42
Knowledge of the intercultural	To know how to resolve misunderstandings which arise from people's lack of awareness of the viewpoint of another culture	Communicative Knowledge - resolving misunderstandings	13

communication	To know how to discover new	Communicative	9
process	information and new aspects of the	Knowledge -	
	other culture for one's self	discovering	

4. Results

4.1. Types of Reflection

All blog posts were primarily composed of *descriptive writing*, which are statements of fact and descriptions of events or experiences without reflection. Descriptive writing was expected, considering the nature of blogs as travel diaries (Henry, 2021; Walker Rettberg, 2014). For instance, Addison wrote descriptively about the presence of Halloween in Japanese classrooms. "[The] teachers I have worked with have been incorporating Halloween-themed lessons into their teaching practice. We played a pin-the-face-on-the-pumpkin style game to learn the English names of facial features, coloured Halloween pictures, played Halloween music, and decorated classrooms" (Addison, Fall 2016). She went on to conclude "it's very cute and an easy way to foster students engagement". In documenting this experience, she did not interrogate the presence of a previously-North American holiday in a Japanese classroom, rather she ended her blog entry at this description of this observation. In a similar way, blogs provided a platform for all participants to document personal and professional experiences while abroad.

Next to descriptive writing, almost all blogs also included *descriptive reflection*. This type of writing goes beyond mere descriptions of events and experiences to provide reasons or explanations about the events or experiences described. As an example, Maren used descriptive reflection in writing about a talk the host liaison gave on Germany's memorials to the Holocaust. She wrote that he "spoke of the 'remembering culture' … and the ways in which the events of the past are collectively handled. This resulted in an interesting conversation …which I imagine will come up as an intriguing thread throughout our stay here" (Maren, Fall 2016). Similarly,

Rebecca observed student classroom cleaning activities in Japan and linked them to the host culture. "This responsibility is placed on the students. I believe that this aspect of Japanese school culture teaches students the importance and the responsibility that they have of caring for their classroom and for one another's well-beings" (Rebecca, Fall 2016). *Descriptive reflection* like Maren and Rebecca provided, shed some light onto what sojourners perceived were the reasons behind some of their observations.

Instances of *dialogic reflection* were only found in 59% of all blogs (30/51). Demonstrating a shift in perspective or weighing multiple perspectives, sojourners wrote of previous misconceptions and how those thoughts might be challenged by their placement experiences (e.g., "I might be biased in my perception", "Initially I thought … but maybe", "Before coming to Japan … and although… everyday learning tasks were not [standardised and strict]"). Specifically, in one post, a sojourner who traveled to Spain compared the affectionate manner of interactions in schools with the more cautious attitude she perceived in Canadian schools:

> Affection is something that could easily be misconstrued … but I feel like there
> are many benefits to being affectionate with students … [since] students spend the
> second most amount of their time in schools, it would make sense that they be
> exposed to positive treatment such as affection and hugs when they are unable to
> at home. I believe that it is human nature to seek nurturing affection and that it is
> essential for positive human development. (Irene, Fall 2016)

Irene's writing revealed a dialogue in which she weighed the pros and cons of affectionate interactions with students with the prudent behaviour she had been socialised to

adopt as a student teacher in Canada. She sided, in the end, with relaxing her previously held beliefs in favour of actions that would model healthy human interaction.

Critical reflection was the most infrequent type of writing as it was found in only 8/51 (16%) of the blogs. Since critical reflection involves referencing the social, political, or historical context, it moves the writing away from description, and calls for the blogger to reference outside knowledge. One sojourner, who brought her family along on her placement, wrote of conversations with her children about the historical and political relations between Indigenous and settler peoples in Australia:

> I started to explain the colonial history and attitudes leading up to today, and I had to stop myself and acknowledge that … in Canada, I may be able to explain some of the larger issues involved … but here beyond knowing that historically colonial Britain was extremely bad for indigenous populations I have a less than surface knowledge about what has happened… (Kaleigh, Fall 2016)

In a follow-up post, Kaleigh continued her critical reflection by referencing her deepening understanding of Indigenous relations emerging from her online coursework.

> Our readings this semester, as well as our travels have made me contemplate my own sense of displacement. This has lead me to contemplate further about how indigenous students, who should be most at home in lands like Australia and Canada, experience their own sense of place, knowing that they are uniquely at once at home and yet surrounded in a dominant culture that can be all too unwelcoming at times. (Kaleigh, 2016)

> In a similar way, Corinne, placed in Germany, reflected critically on the privilege of voting and the challenge of confronting a difficult past. She compared how Germans were

negotiating memorials and conversations around the historical inequities of World War II with the efforts of Canadians to discuss the historical treatment of Indigenous peoples.

> Historically, this is the first generation since the 1930s … that has been able to publicly express their political views. It makes me wish our generation at home appreciated their right to vote as much as these people do … I admire the fact that the Germans are fully acknowledging their past as a way of healing and creating a new future … It makes me wonder how much more healing we could have accomplished over decades with our Native Peoples had we adopted this policy of full disclosure and acknowledgment much earlier than just within the last decade. (Corinne, Fall 2017)

Both examples demonstrate how critical reflection in a blog post involved referencing learning about the historical, political, and/or societal contexts, often making comparisons between the home and host countries.

At times, other sojourners also wrote of dialogic or critical reflection that had occurred but did not write the blog post in such a way that the post itself contained the reflection. For example, Maren (Fall 2016) wrote that 'This [topic] resulted in an interesting conversation about the various ways of enacting religious education and separate schools was one which I imagine will come up as an intriguing thread throughout our stay here'. Although she reported an interesting conversation and considered its intrigue, she did not actually relate the contents of the conversation, her thoughts, connections to the historical, political, or social, or the evolution of her thinking. Thus, following Maarof (2007), we did not consider posts such as Maren's as dialogic or critical; however, they did hint at reflection having occurred *fait accompli* outside of the blogging practice itself.

In all, neither dialogic reflection nor critical reflection were commonly found in blog posts. Most of what was written in the blogs was informative and described experiences and events, often providing reasons or explanations for these experiences and events. The sojourners primarily treated their blogs as a travel diary, rather than a reflective tool (Walker Rettberg, 2014). In some cases, where sojourners mentioned dialogic or critical reflection as a *fait accompli,* those reflections were not elaborated upon. So, the blog posts themselves did not contain those types of reflection, even if there was evidence that it might have occurred. In the cases where we did see critical reflection, sojourners like Kaleigh and Corinne were bold in making vulnerable statements that revealed wondering, questioning, and learning.

4.2. ICC Learning

In the second phase of analysis, we looked at various aspects of ICC learning, which were outlined in Table 3. Specifically, the blogs revealed *cultural knowledge – facts* (about the host culture), *coping*, *changing perspectives*, *cultural knowledge specific to the host country's educational system*, *general cultural knowledge acquired after a more in-depth exposure to the host culture*, *resolving differences*, and *discovering how and where they, as sojourners, could learn more*. For each of these aspects, presented in descending order of their frequency within sojourner blogs, we provide evidence of how sojourners demonstrated these aspects of ICC.

4.2.1. Cultural Knowledge – Facts

This subcategory of knowing some important facts about living in the other cultures and about the country, state and people was highly represented in participant blogs (49/51 or 96%). A sojourner in Vietnam commented that "Vietnam has only been accepting tourists since the 1980's (as told by a tour guide). So, tourism is still a new and strange thing here which has been very apparent at times (people have taken photos of me on a few occasions)" (Steffi, Fall 2017). A participant in Spain described a cultural festival:

On the weekend of September 24th, the city of Barcelona transformed into a celebration

of the city's patron saint, Our Lady of Mercy in their Fiesta De La Merce. The festival is

a celebration of ancient folklore and contemporary art, culture and technology.

Processions of the *gigantes* (giants) and *cap grosses* (fat heads), creation of human

towers and traditional dances such as the sardana are danced to traditional music. The

energy, excitement and music filled the streets as we explored venues filled with

contemporary art and cultural shows from around the world. The festival was closed with

the incredible *corre foc* (fire run) where the devils emerge from the gates of hell to

shower the streets and people with their fireworks. (Brenda, Fall 2016)

These extracts are typical of the cultural knowledge that sojourners blogged about.

4.2.2. Coping

This next most frequent ICC category, found in 48/51 (94%) of the blogs, provided

examples of being able to cope with a range of emotions one experiences when living in a

different culture, and examples included euphoria, homesickness, physical, and mental

discomfort. Regarding language learning, one sojourner discussed coping successfully and

developing language skills: "I'm having great difficulty understanding Portuguese due to the fast

pace most people speak at, but as the days turn into weeks, I'm recognising a lot more

vocabulary and getting accustomed to their culture" (Mikayla, Fall 2017). Reflecting on her

sojourn, Tammy wrote "now that I have the confidence to travel on my own and put myself in

new situations, I can look forward to a future full of more opportunities like [this sojourn]"

(Tammy, Fall 2017). Coping was usually documented as positive coping, as few examples point

to difficulties in coping beyond what the blog writer could manage.

4.2.3. *Changing Perspective*

Changing perspectives, documented in 47/51 (92%) blogs, primarily centred on preconceptions of education and/or language. Carolyn, placed in Germany, discovered she had negative preconceptions about the German educational system which she later questioned.

> I was a little skeptical about the tiered German school system as it felt restrictive and appeared to be putting students into a box. Through the presentation and questions [...], it became clear to all of us that the German school system is very good at one thing in particular: ensuring that students are successful after grade school. (Carolyn, Fall 2016)

In a similar manner, Alissa articulated her own preconceptions about levels of schooling in Vietnam that she had to adjust after she experienced both the high school and junior high levels.

> With the high school observation under my belt, I assumed that the junior high would have a similar class structure. If a grade twelve English class can be game based, it makes sense that younger students, with less patience and lower English skills would be similar. Again, I was wrong… It is the epitome of standardized education…I have never seen two completely opposite styles of teaching. (Alissa, Fall 2016)

These changing perspectives provided evidence of the ICC learning acquired by sojourners during their time abroad.

4.2.4. *Interest in Others – Specific*

Evidence of specific interest in others, found in 46/51 (90%) of the blogs, was often expressed as interest in the language and people of the host country. Matthew provided a "what I plan to do here" list on which he listed "learn Brazilian Portuguese" at the top. He elaborated "I can speak English and French fluently and I have studied Chinese extensively but with Portuguese I am back to square one... knowing 3 languages [beyond English] is a way for me to work hard and push my perspective a little bit further" (Matthew, Fall 2016).

Amandeep delved into specific aspects of the culture of Japan and provided this description of a

concept that intrigued him:

> Of great personal interest was the term Satoyama Culture, which was explained to me as –
> Responding to the changes between seasons and understanding that environment. Living
> life taking only the resources that are necessary for daily life from the Earth while
> preserving the nature around and respecting what has been taken. (Amandeep, Fall 2016)

Several sojourners wrote about specific cultural aspects they desired to learn about or from

unexpected encounters. Sojourners used their blogs to document this learning - learning they

perceived as unique and unlikely to be considered everyday knowledge about the host country.

4.2.5. Interest in Others – General

A related, but different category is Interest in Others – *General*, in which sojourners

expressed interest, to varying degrees, in other people's experience of daily life (in 42/51 or 82%

of the blogs). Tegan (Fall 2016) expressed her enthusiasm for her host country, Japan, and

"experiences like transportation everyday, going to the grocery store, [and] using the

complicated disposal system". In contrast, Mikayla noted conflicted feelings about Brazil's

culture:

> There is a refreshing vibrancy and energy in the air, but it is … hard to appreciate all Brazil
> has to offer, without first acknowledging their history and struggles. With this in mind, I
> hope that this [...] experience can create a starting point into examining Brazil's culture,
> traditions, language and education system. (Mikayla, Fall 2017)

4.2.6. Cultural Knowledge – Exchange

Some sojourners took their observations of the host cultures farther, engaging in

conversations around differences and similarities between countries. This category also surfaced

in 42/51 (92%) of the blogs and involved discussions with locals in their placements as well as peers in the program. Katie noted:

> I [...] had a lot of fun talking [to students] about Canada in comparison to Australia and answering their many creative questions … they were learning about stereotypes, so I was able to briefly talk about some of the misconceptions that people have about Canada and Canadians. (Katie, Fall 2017)

Sojourners sometimes noticed, in themselves, how these discussions resulted in deeper understanding, especially when comparing their thoughts with their pre-sojourn self:

> I know this [change in my learning] because of the depth and understanding that I notice within my conversations with other teachers, peers, and group members where three months ago I wouldn't have been able to carry out the same dialogue. (Cassidy, Fall 2016)

Although often leading to authentic cultural exchange while on study abroad, these conversations when experienced by sojourners were some of the most difficult, as noted in the next section.

4.2.7. Cultural Knowledge - Resolving Misunderstandings

Demonstrating knowledge of the intercultural communication process was not highly represented in participant blogs as it occurred in only 13/51 (25%) of the blogs. These references ranged from the developing an awareness of their rate of speech to identifying strategies to deal with communication difficulties. Ava (Fall 2017) noted, "It made me think about how to enunciate and speak English in such a way that ELL students in my future classrooms can understand." Additionally, Corinne (Fall 2017) commented that, when her Russian roommates tried to speak to her slowly in Russian, "It didn't work (haha) but it made me realise what I sound like when I speak very slowly to my ELL students. Just because you're slowing down it doesn't mean it makes sense to them." Through the blogs, the sojourners documented experiences resolving or attempting to resolve differences they encountered during their time away.

4.2.8. Cultural Knowledge – Discovering

This least represented ICC learning subcategory, in only 9/15 (18%) of the blogs,

encompassed knowing how to discover new information and new aspects of the host culture for

one's self, such asking locals, doing online research, or reading local papers: 'After asking the

teachers at [the host] elementary school, I learned that this type of environment of shared

responsibility, and in a way, class independence from the teacher, was standard to most

elementary schools" (Ava, Fall 2016); "From what I'd gathered through research online, [the

German Realschule] is loosely equivalent to middle school [in my home country]" (Maren, Fall

2016); "In reading the local papers I have gotten the sense that many concerns we have at home

related to class size, and issues surrounding technology in schools are also issues of public

interest here" (Kaleigh, Fall 2016). In specific cases where sojourners felt it helpful to index an

outside source, they did so and made explicit note of it in their blogs.

From an ICC perspective, the SA participants did express ICC knowledge and learning in

their blogs as a result of their SA experiences. Most blogs included examples of the first four of

five categories of ICC, demonstrating their interest in and knowledge of other cultures and

different peoples. They also demonstrated an open mindedness, as reflected in the high number

of blogs containing reference to the ability to change perspective. Sojourners indicated high

levels of adaptability with all blogs including some reference to their ability to cope with the

challenges of experiencing and living in a new culture. However, fewer sojourners discussed

communication strategies to exchange information and resolve differences with members of the

host community.

5. Discussion

Alone each of the two lenses employed in this study--types of reflection and ICC--

offered a narrow view of the reflective practices of sojourner bloggers, but when combined a more expanded perspective emerged. Applying two lenses to the blogs revealed that sojourners were not always engaging with their blogs in reflective ways (Maarof, 2017). Instead, through descriptive writing, the blogs were used to first and foremost describe and document sojourners' experiences, serving as online travel diaries (Walker Rettberg, 2014). As Henry (2021) noted "this is no slight on the blogger's prose, but rather an observation that the 'mundane' when visiting a new place becomes highlighted" (p. 821). The few who reflected in a dialogic or critical manner were drawn to reference similarities or differences between the social, political, or historical context of the host country and their own (Lee, 2011).Their posts may have emerged from the question prompts of program organisers, but such a connection is difficult to draw, since even more of the sojourners wrote on individually chosen topics, which may have resulted in less critical reflection.

However, the lack of critical or dialogic reflection did not indicate a superficial engagement with the host culture or unchanged thoughts or behaviours. The occurrence of *fait accompli* reflection suggested that reflection occurred, but sojourners saw blogs as a platform for documentation rather than a medium for reflection. Henry (2021) observed how sometimes a blogger "cuts the reflection off" after presenting a difficult topic, rather than unpacking it (p. 829). The reasons behind this missed opportunity for critical reflection are subject to interpretation beyond the scope of this study. What the findings do suggest, is that it may be helpful to expand our expectations of how reflection could be articulated by sojourners, finding room to consider *fait accompli* reflection as evidence of reflection between their blog posts.

Through the lens of ICC, the sojourner blogs may be viewed as richer in descriptions and examples of ICC learning, where perhaps they lacked reflection. Sojourners documented varied

aspects of personal (e.g., coping, changing perspectives) and cultural learning (e.g., facts, general and specific knowledge) as noted in the descriptive writing and reflection that typified their blog writing. Although descriptive in nature, we argue that blogging as a reflective practice may not only document, but also prompt the reflection that is documented. While study abroad research typically examines whether learning has occurred (see Mitchell & Paras, 2018), this study illustrated the potential of a specific medium, blogging, that students used to learn from their experiences. Thus, blogs are a fruitful medium for ICC learning, but not necessarily for dialogic or critical reflection.

This dual lens of Maarof's (2007) types of reflection and Byram's (1997) ICC comprised important aspects of our study, with each shedding light on different aspects of participant study abroad experience.

6. Conclusion

Blogs are reflective tools for some sojourners, but possibly a medium more frequently used to document learning than to facilitate the learning itself. Using Maarof's (2007) types of reflection and Byram's (1997) ICC yielded more evidence of ICC than critical reflection. While we recognize that other types of reflection are also valid in making sense of personal and professional learning, the findings from this study underscore potential limitations of the medium and our study. We, like other SA researchers, incorporated blogs into the sojourn design with the aspirational goal of promoting critical reflection.

However, we recognize three limitations. First, the public nature of blogging might serve to discourage critical reflection, which may require sojourners to reveal negative encounters or personal vulnerabilities. Second, the fact that blogging was requisite for the program may have resulted in sojourners' motivations for blogging being more extrinsic than intrinsic. Third, the guidelines provided to the participants may not have sufficiently encouraged dialogic or critical

reflection, but rather may have been more likely to elicit evidence of ICC learning. These limitations inform our calls for future research.

In future research, we encourage researchers and educators to embrace the public nature of blogs, rather than protect them by embedding them in limited forums such as university learning management systems. We posit that additional insight might be gained from interrogating the nature of sojourners' motivation to blog and interact with the blogs of other sojourners within their programs. We argue that further research on the role of scaffolding and prompts in drawing out dialogic or critical reflection would further our understanding of the affordances and challenges of this medium. As evidenced by the findings from this study, blogs provided opportunities to reflect in a variety of ways, including critical reflection, and document ICC learning about the host culture that emerged during the sojourn.

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[i] Cultural humility is defined as 'a commitment and active engagement in a lifelong process that individuals enter into on an ongoing basis with patients, communities, colleagues, and with themselves' (Tervalon & Murray- García, 1998 , p. 118).