

The Drop-Off: Pedagogy for Study Abroad Educators Fostering Intercultural Competence

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Abstract

In the pursuit of developing intercultural competence in students studying abroad, effective experiential learning strategies are sought by study abroad educators. This article presents an implementation of one such strategy called “The Drop-Off” (Batchelder, 1993). The Drop-Off involves small groups of students who explore a previously unknown town in order to develop an understanding of the history and culture of that town. The purpose of the Drop-Off is for student groups to discover how to best utilize the targeted skills of observation and conversation by asking appropriate questions, listening and acquiring facts about a town previously unknown. These skills are integral to developing the core components of intercultural competence for appropriate and meaningful interactions across cultures. Implemented over two semesters in Ireland with 35 first-semester college freshmen, this pedagogy, accompanied by extensive preparation and guided reflection, may have contributed to a significant mean change in score from pre- to post-Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) for the combined semesters. This article details the process in its entirety from preparation to execution to discussion and final assignments.

Keywords: study abroad; developing intercultural competence; Drop-Off; Intercultural Development Inventory; experiential learning strategies; first semester freshman study abroad.

“I learned that I no longer want to be a tourist in Ireland; I want to be part of the Irish community.” –Wes

Study abroad provides the ideal setting to introduce students to new practices for learning, a time to break out of the traditional academic mindset of required seat-time, lectures and textbooks. The study abroad experience presents a unique opportunity to discover hands-on, real-life strategies for enhancing communication skills and problem solving processes.

Originally designed by Donald Batchelder, *The Drop-Off* (Batchelder, 1993, pp. 135-141), is an experiential learning strategy which encourages direct exploration and involvement in a previously unknown community either in one’s home country or abroad. The Drop-Off consists of small groups of students who are assigned a town to explore in order to develop an understanding of the history and culture of that town. The purpose of the Drop-Off is for the student groups to discover how to best utilize the targeted skills of observation and conversation by asking appropriate questions, listening, and acquiring facts about their assigned town. These

skills are integral in the development of the core components of intercultural competence for appropriate and meaningful interactions across cultures.

Batchelder's article was discovered while the program director was reviewing references from related articles on experiential learning strategies. The purpose of this article is to chronicle and share our implementation of Batchelder's original idea as one strategy for fostering intercultural competence during a semester abroad program over two fall semesters in Ireland for first semester freshmen. The first attempt during Fall Semester One of introducing and implementing the Drop-Off was a shorter version of what would later evolve into a tiered approach to the exercise. The second iteration, during Fall Semester Two, incorporated additions and improvements to the original exercise.

The co-authors of this article write from the perspectives of facilitator/director-in-residence and student participant of the initial drop-off endeavor for our study abroad program. We hope to provide a practical framework for study abroad educators who wish to replicate the Drop-Off with their own students from conceptualization to execution. Detailed within this article, the reader will come to understand our preparation methods and expected results; the process – including participants, town selection, pre-activity assignments and student directives; debriefing procedure and questions for each of the Drop-Off activities; and follow-up assignments for the half-day, full-day and overnight Drop-Off experience. Finally, our hope is that the reader will find the information in this article worthwhile for replicating the Drop-Off experience in a setting of their choice and realize positive student growth in intercultural competence through this experiential learning method.

Primary Goal of The Drop-Off

“Our group had an almost two-hour conversation with a retired history professor named Tom. This experience was informative and enjoyable as he not only gave our group information about the history of [our town], but he also provided us with an Irishman's perspective on the problems that are facing Ireland.” –Caitlin

The overarching goal of the Drop-Off activity is to foster growth in intercultural competence. This is evidenced by the students' growth on the Intercultural Development Continuum as measured by the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI ®). The IDI, developed and owned by Mitchell R. Hammer, Ph.D., IDI, LLC, “is a 50-item cross-culturally generalizable, valid and reliable assessment of intercultural competence” (Hammer, 2012/2013, p. 26). The IDI was the assessment instrument of choice for our program because it is “well-reputed, widely used, easily administered, and independently evaluated....As a theory-based test, the IDI meets the standard criteria for a valid and reliable psychometric instrument” (Engle, J., Engle, L., 2015).

The Intercultural Development Continuum

The Intercultural Development Continuum provides a framework for understanding IDI scores. The outcomes we desired for each semester abroad were an increase in students' intercultural competence through advancing along the continuum from a monocultural

mindset towards an intercultural mindset. Table 1 provides a brief description for each of the five orientations and the score range within each orientation. For a more thorough understanding of the IDC, a link has been provided in the reference section of this article.

Table 1

Intercultural Development Continuum (IDC™) Scale

Monocultural Mindset		➔			Intercultural Mindset
Denial [55-70*]	Polarization [71-85*]	Minimization [86-115*]	Acceptance [116-130*]	Adaptation [131-145*]	
Little recognition of more complex cultural differences	Judgmental orientation; “us & them”	Highlights cultural commonalities that mask deeper recognition of cultural differences	Recognizes cultural commonality & difference in own & other cultures	Able to shift cultural perspective and adapt behavior to cultural context	

*Indicates score range within each of the 5 orientations of the IDC

Hammer defines intercultural competence as “the capability to shift cultural perspective and appropriately adapt behavior to cultural difference and commonalities. This capability is conceptualized in terms of a range of orientations along the Intercultural Developmental Continuum (IDC™) of intercultural competence,” as shown in Table 1 (Hammer, 2012/2013, p. 26). The IDI was adapted by Hammer (Hammer, M. R., Bennett, M.J., & Wiseman, R., 2003, p. 421) from the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) by Milton Bennett (1986). The IDC identifies a continuum of five orientations from the Monocultural mindset of Denial and Polarization, thru the transitional stage of Minimization to the Intercultural mindset of Acceptance and finally Adaptation. It is important to emphasize that growth in intercultural competence is life-long and varies widely across cultures.

In his explanation of the IDI, Hammer (2012) suggests that students in the Denial stage engage in increased interaction with people from other cultures in order to better understand cultural differences and similarities. This face-to-face interaction “promotes learners’ openness and curiosity toward the target culture and raises cross-cultural awareness” (Lee, 2011, p. 90). Students who learn to listen openly, observe freely, and engage in nonjudgmental interactions, begin to foster an understanding of cultural differences.

Definitions

Taken from the wider body of study abroad literature for the purposes of the Drop-Off activity, definitions of terms adopted for this article are included in Table 2.

Table 2

Definitions of Terms Adopted for the Drop-Off

Term	Definition
Study Abroad	“An activity offered within higher education in a myriad of shapes and sizes by the highly diverse group of higher education providers

	and support organizations that so uniquely enrich the U.S. educational landscape” (Wanner, 2009, p. 81).
Study Abroad Experiences	“Events or actions that take place during study abroad including culture learning” (Hoff, 2008, p. 55).
Experiential Education	The Association for Experiential Education defines this term as a “philosophy that informs many methodologies in which educators purposefully engage with learners in direct experience and focused reflection in order to increase knowledge, develop skills, clarify values, and develop people's capacity to contribute to their communities” (What Is Experiential Education, n.d., para. 2, 2017).
Intercultural Competence	“Most often viewed as a set of cognitive, affective, and behavioral skills and characteristics that support effective and appropriate interaction in a variety of cultural contexts” (Bennett, J., 2008, p. 97). We embrace this definition, while acknowledging that intercultural competence is complex, ongoing and varies among experts worldwide in the field of study abroad. Components of intercultural competence include tolerance of ambiguity, cultural empathy, cognitive complexity, humble curiosity, humility and suspension of judgement (Crabb & Maloney, 2016). Development of the components of intercultural competence are cultivated and not achieved serendipitously. The Drop-Off, as an experiential learning strategy, provides a laboratory for recognizing and rehearsing these components thereby learning to shift one’s frame of reference in a cross-cultural setting.

The Drop-Off as a Strategy for Fostering Intercultural Competence

“Some of the main skills we employed were money management...analytical observations (not only observing things, but also considering the meaning or cause of what we observe), time management...social skills (starting conversations with random people), teamwork, or figuring out who is best suited for different tasks...and decision making, since the members of our group did not always agree on everything.” –Peyton

Conceptualizing the Drop-Off

The originator and director of our Irish Studies Program envisioned a highly experiential approach to learning abroad and sought literature on experiential learning methodologies. Within the literature, the Drop-Off article was discovered. In collaboration with the director-in-

residence, the program director combined critical experiential learning components with the Drop-Off activity and altered the idea to fit our Irish Studies Program. The over-arching goal was to foster growth in intercultural competence in our student participants.

The participants were not to simply identify current habits of a town, but to peel back the layers of history and to ask the question, “why?” They were to uncover the source, the root of where and how their assigned town began. This was accomplished through participation in one overnight Drop-Off experience (Semester One) and expanded to three separate experiences including a half-day, full-day, and overnight Drop-Off in sequence (Semester Two). Each of these experiences provided opportunities for the students to practice the skills of observation, conversation with townspeople, listening, and acquiring facts about a town never before explored, while working as a team to problem solve in a new environment. Acquiring an understanding of a town’s culture and history in a relatively short period of time became the primary task.

After completing the overnight Drop-Off during Semester One, we recognized that a tiered approach would enhance the experience and added the half-day and full-day Drop-Off prior to the overnight experience for Semester Two. Both semesters incorporated guided classroom discussion both before and after each experience along with the presence of an on-site cultural mentor.

The three-tiered approach of participation in a half-day, full-day, and overnight Drop-Off experience for Semester Two introduced students to alternate modes of learning in a less intimidating and more gradual way than the overnight only Drop-Off experience of Semester One. As the creator of the Drop-Off explains, “The drop-off requires the participants to walk up to a variety of people, open conversations politely, show respect, seek information, modify their behavior, and make contact at a basic human level. The whole process of cross-cultural entry and reaching out to people comes into play” (Batchelder, 1993, p. 138).

While classroom learning is necessary and important, experiential learning is equally impactful. Darla Deardorff (2011) explains, “Beyond integration of intercultural competence outcomes within courses, it is important to understand that intercultural learning is transformational learning, which requires experiences (often beyond the classroom) that lead to this transformation” (p. 70). Through participation in the Drop-Off, students would have the opportunity to rehearse the concepts introduced and discussed in the classroom prior to Drop-Off experience (Semester One), building upon each experience (Semester Two).

Guided classroom discussion (pre- and post- Drop-Off) is fundamental and may add to student growth as discussions elicit responses and observations regarding their experiences. During all Drop-Off experiences of both semesters, the development of cultural humility, curiosity, and openness was encouraged through intentional engagement in observation and conversation with residents about their town. While participation in the Drop-Off is an excellent first step in fostering growth, simply having the experience is not enough. Results are revealed after practicing objective observation and nonjudgmental listening, then followed up with structured and guided discussion of the experience.

Finally, the on-site presence of a cultural mentor to guide students through their experiences is an important component of not just the Drop-Off but the entire study abroad experience. “Effective cultural mentoring means engaging learners in ongoing discourse about their experiences, helping them better understand the intercultural nature of those encounters, and providing them with feedback relevant to their level of intercultural development” (Vande Berge, Paige & Lou, 2012, p. 53). In fact, during the study abroad semester, cultural mentoring has been identified as one of the most influential factors in fostering intercultural competence (Hammer, M., 2012, p. 133). Our rendition of cultural mentoring was real-time, face-to-face and on-going throughout the semester and further intensified during the Drop-Off preparation and debriefing during both semesters. As a fundamental component of the experiential education paradigm, the cultural mentor serves to facilitate student learning through guided reflection in order to make meaning of their experiences. (Vande Berge, Paige & Lou, 2012, p. 38).

Experiential Education and the Drop-Off

Over the course of the Irish studies program, the program director conducted an ongoing review of the literature on experiential learning methodologies in order to compile an arsenal of activities designed to increase students’ intercultural competence and awareness of transferable skills while studying abroad.

Experiential education, by definition, fits neatly within the study abroad experience. The Drop-Off, as an experiential educational methodology, and inclusive of preparation and reflection, provides sojourners the opportunity to develop the skills of observation, conversation, listening, knowledge-gathering, problem-solving, team-building and intercultural competence. This new avenue of experiential learning enhances skills and content taught in the typical classroom setting. “Learning happens and is seen on at least two levels: There are physical changes in the brain as a person is processing information and there is a potential change in behavior that the learner can perform” (Richlin, 2006, p. 25). Within higher education and study abroad, educators use a variety of methodologies to stimulate the learning process. Commonly used methods are lectures, laboratories, small group work, research projects (Atkins, Brown, 2002, p. 225) and on-line learning. The traditional college course is based on students sitting in a classroom listening to lectures, taking notes, and regurgitating information for a final exam. However, an increasing amount of empirical literature promotes the importance of active and experiential learning, which involves purposeful engagement between students and class content in order to develop meaningful connections with the material. This change in educational perspective shows that “no longer supplemental to the acquisition of content, experiential approaches are considered fundamental to meaningful learning” (Lewis & Williams, 1994, p.5). Lewis and Williams (1994) further elaborate that educators are moving from the image of students being passive receivers of knowledge, to a humanistic model based on constructing and utilizing meaningful experiences. They explain that work environments require flexibility, adaptability, and the ability to transfer knowledge and skills from one experience to another. Therefore, “Educators are being held accountable for what learners know and are able to do. The

pressure for accountability has caused educators to design competency-based measures of learning and experiential techniques for assessing learner outcomes” (Lewis & Williams, 1994, p. 5).

Furthermore, Lewis and Williams (1994) explain that action learning was designed to encourage students and employees to better respond to change (also known as active or experiential learning) and that this concept follows a systematic methodology. It begins with students identifying their assumptions, and goes on to assess these assumptions against available evidence. Finally, students reconstruct their assumptions based on new knowledge and skills they have obtained, continuously testing and revising them as new experiences are encountered. Instead of relying on a professional to hand them information, this style of learning encourages students to become instigators of their own education, asking them to attain the knowledge they feel is necessary based on the needs at hand (Lewis & Williams, 1994).

The Drop-Off needed to be a holistic method of learning, focused on understanding cultural differences, applying in-class history lectures to real-life environments, using teamwork to accomplish an assignment, and understanding the personal, long-term implications of the knowledge gained. From the experience students could learn to identify and develop skills transferable to future learning and working: “When learning is conceived as a holistic adaptive process, it provides conceptual bridges across life situations such as school and work, portraying learning as a continuous, lifelong process (Kolb, 2014 p. 33). In order to promote the transfer of skills and knowledge, certain components must be included in the activity.

The Drop-Off experiences are valuable, provided that debriefing occurs offering meaning to the knowledge gained. Students were guided through all debrief sessions - the overnight experience for Semester One and each of the three experiences of Semester Two. The debriefing occurred in the classroom and in a timely manner (optimally within a day or as few days as possible of the experience). Experiential learning is often grounded in the constructivist approach, which states that “meaning is not inherent in experience. Rather, knowledge is socially constructed as people observe and interpret it” (Lutterman-Aguilar & Gingerich, 2002, p. 44). Therefore, team work and problem solving in a new environment is of paramount importance. Lee (2011) analyzed student reactions to blog groups, providing further support for team-based experiential learning: “students believed that they benefited from reading each other’s blog entries through which they gained different cultural perspectives and further reflected on their own” (p. 97). Working with others allows students to exercise their problem-solving skills while being introduced to others’ perspectives, which fosters humility and the suspension of judgment, both components of intercultural competence.

Unfolding The Drop-Off

Preparation

Preparation for the Drop-Off (for both semesters), began with classroom discussions, activities and assignments (listed in the ‘assignments and activities prior to the Drop-Off’ section of this article). Batchelder’s article, *The Drop-Off* (Batchelder, 1993, pp. 135-141), was

introduced to help students begin to understand the evolution of a town. Discovering the culture, history and development of their assigned town would be the crux of the Drop-Off activity.

In order to move beyond the Minimization stage on the IDI, one must become culturally self-aware and able to recognize patterns in differences and similarities. Knowledge of and interaction with other cultures is the first step in being able to shift one's cultural framework and behavior patterns (Hammer, 2012). To guide students in "pushing them further back in time" in the history of the town, it is helpful for them to be "turning over a few good questions in their minds" (Batchelder, 1993, p. 139). Establishing a specific goal and questions regarding the economy, landscape, politics, behaviors, beliefs, layout, and artifacts stimulate interest in valuable knowledge as opposed to surface level tourist information (Batchelder, 1993). This level of in-depth interaction with the culture requires students to "critically examine culture, not just accumulate facts and knowledge about a culture," which is a more productive method in increasing intercultural competence (Perry, 2011, p. 457).

Initiating conversations with B&B owners, shopkeepers, restaurant staff, and other locals, students not only gain unique insights into the town's culture, but they may also be exposed to one or more cultural "incidents". According to Storti (2007), these are "unsuccessful interactions" and further defined as "a cross-cultural encounter to have gone wrong whenever one or more of the parties is confused, offended, frustrated, or otherwise put off by the behavior of any of the other parties" (p. 26). Prior to the Drop-Off, Semester One and Semester Two students read and participated in guided discussion of Storti's book in order to understand cultural "incidents." Students were also led in a classroom discussion on why and how asking questions about a town's economy, landscape, politics, behaviors, beliefs, layout, and artifacts reveals valuable knowledge about a town and its history. These preparations readied the students with a critical-thinking mindset for the Drop-Off .

Expected results – 1: employing new knowledge.

One goal of the Drop-Off is to ignite in students the desire to employ this technique in their own hometown or any other new locations they encounter. Knowledge gained through the Drop-Off experience is best utilized when students test their own learning techniques and translate them to relevant situations in their own life (Deardorff, 2011). Experiencing these learning techniques in multiple settings allows for a more comprehensive understanding as well as the ability to translate the methods to a wider range of situations (Batchelder, 1993). The application of techniques used in alternate contexts reinforces skills to increase intercultural competence.

Expected results – 2: obtaining transferrable skills.

An additional goal for the Drop-Off experience is that students identify transferable skills applicable not only while learning about another culture, but also at home, in the workplace, and with interpersonal relationships. Knowing how to deal with and adapt to cultural differences is an aspect of the Adaption stage of the IDI (Hammer, 2012). The notion of transferable skills is

initiated, tested, and discussed during this three-part experiential learning process (preparation, execution and debriefing). As “students become conscious of their approaches to others and to life situations. They begin to be aware that there are some important skills involved and that they can personally develop and master these skills” (Batchelder, 1993, p. 138). In the end, the goal is for students to desire to discover the “why” of people, experiences, and places; to see there is a deep history behind why things are the way they are; and to practice the skills learned on the Drop-Off during future intercultural situations as well as in their native culture.

Expected results – 3: measureable gains on the IDI.

Our Irish Studies program was originally developed as a living learning community. Every course, every activity, every trip, was intentionally designed to provide opportunities to increase the students’ intercultural competence. The addition of the Drop-Off activity, we believed, could maximize the students’ chances of increasing their scores on the IDI both individually and collectively.

Process

“Using the museum as a knowledge base, we planned the rest of our trip around what we learned.”-Alexis

The process of incorporating the Drop-Off into the students’ study experience abroad unfolded gradually over each of the two semesters referenced in this article. A description of the participants, the in-class preparation required for the students and the student directives for carrying out the actual Drop-Off group experience follow below. Participation in and completion of the classroom lectures, discussions, assignments and activities, followed by the Drop-Off and debriefing, fulfilled the requirements for a course on living cross-culturally.

Participants

Referenced in this article over the course of two fall semesters, 35 total freshman students participated in the university’s freshman Irish studies program and in the Drop-Off experience (Table 3, below). Students were enrolled in a North American faith-based university located in the mid-west. Each of these students chose to begin their college tenure as part of the university’s first-semester study abroad program in Ireland.

Table 3

Summary of Participants of the Drop-Off Over Two Semesters

<i>Semester</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Male</i>
Fall Semester 1	23	18	5
Fall Semester 2	12	9	3
Total	35	27	8

Students from both semesters consented to take the Intercultural Development Inventory® (IDI) pre-departure and again at the conclusion of the semester abroad. The director in residence obtained IDI Qualified Administrator (QA) status between Semester One and Semester Two and therefore provided the second semester group of student participants with a 30-minute individual feedback session to discuss their placement on the continuum as measured by the IDI and an explanation of the customized Intercultural Development Plan (IDP). While both semesters completed the IDI pre-departure and post semester abroad, the second semester students received additional individualized discussion and planning on how they could intentionally increase their intercultural competence throughout the semester based on their IDI score. This may have been a factor in the larger gain from pre- to -post IDI scores for Semester Two as compared to Semester One. The reader will find in Table 4 of the Results Section of this article further explanation of the gains in intercultural competence as measured by the IDI for each semester.

Identifying the Towns.

Preparing students (both semesters) to be “dropped off” in a previously unknown town began with a classroom introduction of Batchelder’s article, “The Drop-Off” (1993) and included discussion of the process of the development of a town. To prime students to collect deep, meaningful information about the town which they would soon be exploring, we asked them questions to turn over in their minds and to carry with them as they explored. Questions such as, “who came there first, why they chose the place, what they did to survive, how long they lived, how they amused themselves, how the place gradually grew and changed, etc.” (Batchelder, 1993, p. 140) would prove beneficial.

Towns were chosen by the director in residence using the following criteria:

- Reasonable proximity to the other towns – number of towns used varied according to number of students per semester
- Size – minimally, large enough to have accommodations, yet not too large
- Time of year - some towns “close down” during the off season
- Region of the country – regions were changed from Semester One to Semester Two to keep the experience unique for each semester
- Safety – all towns were vetted for safety of tourists.

Assignments and activities prior to the Drop-Off.

Prior to the overnight Drop-Off (for both semesters) and in addition to the introduction and discussion of Batchelder’s article, a variety of other important assignments and activities were assigned, addressed in class and graded. These included:

- Pre-semester administering of the Intercultural Development Inventory
- Students identified a preliminary list of their personal goals and fears for the semester
- Activity: Self Awareness: Identity Tag Game (Bernardo & Deardorff, 2012, pp. 151-154)

- Two in-class lectures covering an overview of intercultural competence with guided discussion
- Storti (2007) book assignment, *The Art of Crossing Cultures*, read and answer chapter questions (created specifically for our program) followed by in-class guided discussion (covered during two class times over several weeks)
- Explanation and discussion of Deardorff's O-SEE (Observe, State, Explore, Evaluate) technique (Bernardo & Deardorff, 2012, pp. 58-60)
- Activity: Introduce Core Concepts: Four Analogies (Bernardo & Deardorff, 2012, pp. 61-68)
- Activity: Understanding Differences: The Form and Strange Situations (Bernardo & Deardorff, 2012, pp. 81-83) (Bernardo & Deardorff, 2012, pp. 91-97)
- Activity: Written description of and reflection on a personal "critical incident" (an experience where a misunderstanding or uncomfortable interaction occurred due to cultural differences)
- Review and guided discussion of personal goals, fears and strategies for accomplishing goals and overcoming fears (midway through the semester)
- Activity: Drop-Off experience
- Activity: Drop-Off debrief (following overnight for Semester One and following each of the three (half-day, full-day and overnight) Drop-Off's for Semester Two)
- Maintaining an "Engaging Culture" journal throughout the semester which included: first impressions and reactions assignment; notes from class discussions; thoughts, observations and questions about the culture; notes from guided tours of sites visited; notes from their Drop-Off experience(s)

Student directives for the Drop-Off.

Across every Drop-Off experience (half-day, full day and overnight for Semester Two, overnight only for Semester One), the directives remained consistent with the exception of duration of the Drop-Off.

- The facilitator divided students into groups of 4-5 members per group based upon the following criteria: personality types (i.e. extroverts paired with introverts); no current roommates within the same group; and known friends were divided among different groups.
- Towns were pre-determined according to the previously stated criteria, however locations were not revealed to the groups until immediately before departure for the half-day and full-day Drop-Off experience (Semester Two).
- Transportation for the half-day and full-day (Semester Two) Drop-Off were via the local railway system.
- A coach was hired for transportation to the overnight Drop-Off locations. As an added challenge, students' groups and towns were not revealed until actual arrival in the

assigned town (Semester One and Two). For the overnight Drop-Off (both semesters), the students were collected the next day at a predetermined time and location.

- All individual (smart) phones were collected and each group given one (dumb) emergency phone. No computers or tablets were permitted. This approach was adopted in order to encourage teamwork and prompt students to make face-to-face contact with each other and the townspeople to obtain information, as opposed to searching for information on the Internet. Additionally, no group-to-group contact was permitted.
- Students were asked to bring actual cameras, if they owned one, to document the experience in the absence of phone cameras.
- An envelope of cash was given to each group – enough to provide for their needs based on the length of the Drop-Off. Factors taken into consideration were lodging and meals and miscellaneous expenses. One person per group, who became known as the treasurer, was assigned to disperse cash, track and collect receipts for all expenses incurred during the experience. The treasurer then returned receipts and change for meals, lodging and miscellaneous expenses to the facilitator upon return of the group.
- Groups were instructed regarding pick-up locations or required return times.
- Safety instructions were reviewed and a reminder given to care for one another and appropriate behavior was expected by all group members at all times.
- Students were reminded that they were expected to adopt and maintain a group mentality: in their communications with each another and with the people of their town; in the management of expectations for their group; and for problem-solving amongst the group throughout the experience.
- Students were reminded to practice humble curiosity and the O-SEE (Bernardo & Deardorf, 2012) skills learned in gathering facts, details, and information about the history, culture, character, mood, politics, social issues, and religion of their assigned town.
- Groups were reminded that feelings of disequilibrium are quite normal due to the novelty of the experience and the cultural differences.
- All participants were encouraged to embrace every part of their Drop-Off and to strive for a wonderful and memorable experience.

Further thoughts on organizing the Drop-Off.

Students were to spend the allotted time in their respective assigned towns gathering information from a variety of sources including: interpersonal interactions, tourist boards, pubs, coffee shops, museums, monuments and plaques, churches, hostel and B&B owners and one group even went to a barber shop. No clues were given prior to the experience as to the best way or place to garner information. Students were to uncover the distinctive and unique qualities of their assigned town by investigating how the history, geography, economy, religion, etc. impacted the past and current culture of their town. Team members budgeted and managed their funds to pay for food, lodging and miscellaneous expenses. Groups that demonstrated maximum

productivity planned, problem-solved and prioritized their time and resources. Ideally all Drop-Off experiences should be completed within the first half of the study abroad term.

Debriefing

“Megan organized all of our ideas into a tentative schedule...I kept track of the money...Grant was the optimist who kept spirits high and was always pushing us to do anything spontaneous. Matt brought his Boy Scout skills into practice by always being prepared...and carried his backpack containing all of the essentials wherever we went. Overall, everyone had an equal say in whatever we did and I think we balanced each other well.” –Mara

Almost immediately, students in both semesters were eager to share initial reactions to their experience both personal and group. The director-in-residence encouraged this informal debriefing opportunity. However, a critical component of the Drop-Off, the formal debrief, occurred the day following the experience (or as soon thereafter as possible). During both semesters, the facilitator created a relaxed classroom atmosphere by providing hot drinks, a snack and arranged the classroom so that “town groups” could sit together for reflection. Small notebooks were given to each town group. We prioritized allowing ample time for the participants to respond to questions as town groups and as individuals within the larger group. All questions were first discussed within the “town groups” and then shared amongst the larger group. Debrief questions became more in-depth as the number and length of the Drop-Off experiences increased. Questions for discussion included:

Following the half-day experience (Semester Two).

- List your observations of the town.
- What facts did your group learn about the town?
- What strategies did you use to learn about your town?
- What skills did you/your group use during the experience?
- What did you learn about yourself as part of a team?

Following the full-day experience (Semester Two).

- What are two take-aways from this experience?
- What processes did your group use to learn about your town?
- Think about the processes your group employed that were effective? What did you try that was not effective? How did you have to adapt to gain a better understanding of your town?
- What questions did you develop about your town? What did you want to find out? What did you hope to find out but did not? What were other questions, not only from the objectives, did you asked along the way as you adapted?
- How do you feel about yourself as a result of the experience? (Affective)
- What conclusions do you have about yourself as a result of the experience? (Cognitive)

- What did you learn about your town?
- What was similar/different about your town and your previous town (or your home town)?
- What was similar/different about your town and our base town in Ireland?
- What was distinctive/unique about the culture of the town you visited? Use O-SEE to support your responses.

Following the overnight experience (Semesters One and Two).

- What are two take-aways from the experience?
- What skills did you or the group use during the experience?
- What skills did you develop and/or use for the first time during the experience?
- What processes did you use that were effective? Not effective?
- How do you feel about yourself as a result of the experience? (Affective)
- What conclusions do you have about yourself as a result of the experience? (Cognitive)
- What questions did you develop about your town? What did you want to find out?
- What did you learn about your town?
- How did you work together as a group? What characterized your group?
- What did you learn about yourself as part of a team? What were the group members' roles? What did each member bring to the group?
- What was similar about the culture and people of the town you visited and your home town?
- What was unique or a distinctive aspect about your town using O-SEE (Bernardo & Deardorff, 2012, pp. 58-60) to support your responses?
- What did you do better this time than on the previous Drop-Off's (Semester Two)?

Assignments

To encourage the participants to reflect on the skills they employed and to discover deep appreciation for their Drop-Off town(s), written reflections – while flexible in a majority of the content – were required. Responses contained two elements, “(a) information about the town and how it was derived and (b) a description of the personal learning and investigation process, with specific reference to the cross-cultural skills involved and how they were used” (Batchelder, 1993, pp. 137-138). The reflection assignment requirements increased with the length of the Drop-Off experiences.

The half-day Drop-Off experience assignment (Semester Two). Town groups were assigned to submit a *collective* written (three pages minimum) response:

- Identify a distinctive aspect of their assigned town
- Document facts discovered about their town; supporting all responses with observations.

The full-day Drop-Off experience assignment (Semester Two). Students were assigned to submit an *individual* written (three pages minimum) reaction to the experience and to incorporate:

- Facts, details and information about the town studied
- Personal learning processes utilized and developed
- Include a minimum of three O-SEE examples.

The overnight Drop-Off experience assignment (Semesters One and Two). The overnight Drop-Off was, in a sense, a capstone experience for the students both as groups and individuals. The assignment requirements following the debrief incorporated two components.

Individual reflective paper. A three pages written response to the following:

- What did you learn about yourself as part of this group? In what ways did you have to learn to adapt within the group? (Cognitive focus)
- How do you feel about yourself as a result of the experience? (Affective focus)
- What conclusions do you have about yourself as a result of the experience?
- Personally, what did you come to appreciate and understand about Ireland or the Irish from this experience?
- How have you grown in your listening, observing, relating skills from this experience?
- How are you becoming more ethno-relative and/or less ethnocentric?

Group presentation.

- A presentation lasting 5-7 minutes
- Present all the facts about your town discovered while the group was there in an organized, informational and engaging format (no internet information or internet images accepted) and include the following:
 - O-SEE examples to support your facts
 - A unique aspect about the culture of your town compared to other towns in this country you have visited
 - Information about your town: religion, history, politics, economy, geography, etc.
 - Your overall group reaction to this experience.

Results

“The spirit of this tourist town cannot be understood by reading pamphlets or merely watching the day to day activity – it can only be found in engaging the people of [our town] ...” –Group response

A comparison of the pre-and post-IDI scores over two semesters of freshmen studying abroad is shown in table below. We wondered whether or not there would be a mean gain in the scores over the course of the semester. Every activity – both in and out of the classroom – was designed to aid student growth in intercultural competence. It is

not unreasonable to suggest that the Drop-Off activity played a role in providing students the skills needed to move along the continuum toward a more intercultural mindset.

Table 4

Comparison of Pre-and Post-IDI Scores: First Semester Freshmen Abroad

<i>Semester</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Pre-IDI M</i>	<i>Pre-IDI SD</i>	<i>Post-IDI M</i>	<i>Post-IDI SD</i>	<i>Significance 2-tailed t-test</i>	<i>Cohen's d</i>
S1	23	84.274	14.269	96.934	14.282	0.000***	0.887
S2	12	83.85	6.258	106.535	15.319	0.000***	1.939
Total	35	84.128	12.019	100.226	15.142	0.000***	1.1776

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Table 4 shows pre-test and post-test scores of intercultural competence as measured by the IDI of two freshmen first-semester study abroad groups using a Repeated Measures and Within Subjects Design. We hypothesized that the Drop-Off exercise could be an impetus to growth on the IDI for S1, S2 and the groups combined. Our results indicated a 12.660 mean point gain for S1 which moved this groups' developmental orientation from the cusp of minimization to the middle of minimization. Semester 2 also began at the cusp of minimization and moved solidly into minimization with a 22.672 mean point gain. The total of the combined groups mean change in score was a gain of 16.098 points, again moving from the cusp of minimization to the mid-point of minimization. Minimization is considered to be a transitional orientation between a monocultural and intercultural mindsets. Statistically significant gains for all groups of students (*sig.* 0.000; $p < .001$) are shown in table 4 indicating growth towards intercultural competence as measured by the IDI.

Conclusions

We conclude that a tiered approach: half-day followed by full-day and culminating with the overnight sequence for the Drop-Off, provides students the opportunity to practice and gradually build upon skills acquired. Since our own understanding of the process developed from Semester One to Semester Two, we adjusted the experience by adding the additional, shorter Drop-Off experiences during Semester Two. We recognized that the overnight Drop-Off experience of Semester One would benefit from less of a "sink or swim" approach experiential learning so, Semester Two emphasized more of a gradual approach to learning how to derive information about an unknown town. Our adjustments took into greater consideration the season of the year and weather, town sizes and the differing personalities of the whole group of students each semester.

Secondly, the Drop-Off exercise is replicable and can be repeated with a variety of group sizes. While we only used this exercise in one country, we found it easy to change locations and adjust to a different number of students from Semester One to Semester Two. After familiarizing oneself with Batchelder's (1993) article and carefully choosing suitable towns, a program

director should be well prepared to facilitate the preparatory activities, the actual Drop-Off and the debriefing.

Finally, we conclude that the Drop-Off exercise for both semesters, utilizing the preparatory assignments and activities and followed up with debriefing, may be a successful strategy to increase post-IDI scores therefore demonstrating an increase in students' intercultural competence. A by-product of Batchelder's (1993) original intent for the exercise (field-testing theoretical concepts on the origins of communities), the Drop-Off "participants found themselves experiencing many of the same feelings and personal reactions which they would later encounter overseas in the cross-cultural situation" (p. 135-136). Leveraging the opportunity to help students articulate reactions to cross-cultural experiences such as the Drop-Off through guided reflection, will increase intercultural competence.

As an experiential learning strategy, and accompanied by thoughtful preparation and reflection, the Drop-Off is an excellent pedagogical strategy for fostering growth in intercultural competence.

Discussion

During the overnight Drop-Off experience, the director-in-residence remained in close proximity to all the assigned towns (approximately within an hour drive). Semester One was our first attempt at facilitating the Drop-Off so we stayed in a nearby town as an extra precaution. The students only knew that we were "a phone call away in case of emergency", and not where we were lodging. The students discussed in this article were first-semester freshmen and the overnight Drop-Off occurred midway through the semester abroad. Timing of this activity within the semester also influenced our decision to remain within an hours drive. Students did not indicate that they knew where we were staying or that this affected their experience in any way.

Batchelder did not address the issue of facilitator proximity to the students during the Drop-Off, however, the article was written 25 years ago and times have changed. Personally, the director felt a great responsibility for the students' safety and accountability to their parents and the university. Pragmatically, our Semester One overnight Drop-Off was on the other side of the country – we needed to stay in the same region as we would be collecting the students the next day. We remained vigilant in our responsibility to each student, their families, the university and the program at all times throughout the semester.

Execution of the Drop-Off during Semester One was a big undertaking in planning and preparation. As facilitator, I felt a sense of relief and satisfaction upon completion. This satisfaction was affirmed during the debriefing time as the students revealed their experiences and knowledge gained, then further affirmed by the group gains in intercultural competence as measured by the IDI. Even after the conclusion of the semester and after returning to the home campus, students enthusiastically talked about the Drop-Off activity with future program participants, making the experience a "selling point" of the Irish Studies program.

Implications for Future Studies

An implication for future study might include a compilation of themes from the students' assignments that indicate what specific factors may have contributed to the shift in their frame of reference. Another study might investigate how students may (or may not) apply the components of intercultural competence – tolerance of ambiguity, cultural empathy, cognitive complexity, humble curiosity, humility and suspension of judgement – specifically to the Drop-Off activity.

Yet another implication for future research might be a study of the increase in self-efficacy as a result of the Drop-Off. As one student testified, “I knew that I had not only the desire, but the capability to carry out an adventure, and I want to do it again. Just the fact that I was unsupervised in another country could have been frightening, but it only made me more happy with myself and my group.” Throughout the remainder of the semester, students verbally expressed an increased confidence and enthusiasm for face-to-face interactions with the townspeople as a result of their Drop-Off experience recounting the Drop-Off experience as one highlight of their study abroad semester.

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