THE
FORUM
ON EDUCATION
ABROAD

Capturing Photo Narratives in Short-Term Study Abroad

Annie Nguyen[1]

Abstract

In a qualitative study, photo narratives from eight students covering eighty total photos were collected and analyzed to understand the existing student experience across eight short-term study abroad programs from three different institutions in Texas. Photos and their connected narrative interviews were examined for compositional focus, statements connected to intercultural growth, and whether photos were related to planned program activities. Given the growing visual libraries of students, this research provides an initial look at ways digital media already exists in study abroad. Moving forward, photo narratives offer the potential for education abroad leaders to embrace digital media while enhancing intercultural learning through structured assessments rooted in visual theory and photoethnography to better prepare and reveal students' stories, learning, and intent.

Abstract in Vietnamese

Trong một nghiên cứu định tính, những câu chuyện bằng hình ảnh của tám sinh viên bao gồm tám mươi bức ảnh được chọn, sau đó phân tích để hiểu được trải nghiệm của các sinh viên hiện có trong tám chương trình du học ngắn hạn từ ba cơ sở đại học khác nhau ở Texas. Các bức ảnh và các cuộc phỏng vấn về các câu chuyện được kết nối của họ đã được kiểm tra về trọng tâm thành phần, về các tuyên bố liên quan đến sự phát triển giữa các nền văn hóa, và về việc liệu các bức ảnh này có liên quan đến hoạt động của chương trình đã được lên kế hoạch hay không. Với các thư viện trực quan ngày càng tăng của các sinh viên, nghiên cứu đã cung cấp một cái nhìn ban đầu về các phương tiện truyền thông kỹ thuật số hiện có trong chương trình du học. Trong tương lai, việc tường thuật bằng hình ảnh sẽ mang lại tiềm năng cho các nhà lãnh đạo giáo dục ở nước ngoài tiếp nhận phương tiện truyền thông kỹ thuật số trong việc tăng cường học tập giữa các nền văn hóa thông qua các bài đánh giá có cấu trúc bắt nguồn từ lý thuyết trực quan và việc mô tả dân tộc học bằng ảnh để chuẩn bị và trình bày tiểu sử, quá trình học tập, và ý định của các sinh viên được tốt hơn.

1 YORK COLLEGE OF PENNSYLVANIA, YORK, PA, USA

Corresponding author: Annie Nguyen, project.nguyen@gmail.com

Keywords:

Introduction

In a world of Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, and Twitter, students are building a vast digital history of their study abroad experiences through images. These images have been used by institutions in a variety of ways, often focusing on marketing and testimonials from students. As assessment of study abroad continues, photos offer a unique qualitative perspective by which students both capture and reflect. Often these reflections within education abroad programs are influenced by the initial prompt and used more as a final reflective assignment. How then do international educators leverage those photos and visual activities in a way that students are able to reflect on their intercultural development more deeply in short-term study abroad? Specifically, how can photo narratives be designed to prompt more meaningful reflection and growth?

This article considers eighty student photos collected as a part of understanding the existing student experience in eight short-term study abroad programs across three different institutions in Texas. While the collection of these photos provided additional qualitative data to a larger study, the results demonstrate a potential for those photos to prompt deeper reflection when integrated throughout the study abroad experience. Rather than as a single point of reference, if the initial prompt is revisited at multiple points during the course, photo narratives could benefit intercultural learning by pushing students as visual observers and narrators to rethink their experiences across activities. One program specifically offers a method for incorporating visual narratives into a more iterative pedagogy as a form of refining storytelling. And within the new and limited environment for study abroad, digital, and visual means of observing and reflecting on experiences may offer some alternatives for students to engage in seeing, thinking, and wondering about intercultural experiences remotely. These photos demonstrate the ways that students currently reflect and use photos as a broad way of capturing their experience; however, if photo narratives are to be truly reflective of intercultural learning then such assignments should look at ways to deepen those assessments through initial design and the ability to revisit and revise. Educational leaders who aim to use photos as a form of program assessment should understand the importance of structuring photo assignments in a way that reveals more about students' stories and intent in order to enhance reflections on intercultural development.

Background

While many studies and assessments document student satisfaction, less examine the documentation of more programmatic educational parameters (Engle, 2013). As research continues to grow, guides such as the *Handbook for Advancing Comprehensive Internationalization* are pushing for more documentation and portfolios for understanding student learning abroad (Olson et al., 2006). Documents within study abroad can contextualize experiences and provide more meaningful insights and evidence into student learning (Deardorff, 2011; Merriam, 2009). Despite the increasing ways documentation occurs during study abroad, much of the conversation on assessment still focuses on quantitative self-reporting surveys (Anderson et al., 2006; Jackson, 2008; Pedersen, 2010;

Williams, 2005). The additional layer of documents can allow for ongoing qualitative reflection that connect those intercultural experiences to meaningful academic intervention in such a way that the documentation is not merely happenstance.

Jackson's (2008) research involving Bennett's IDI instrument is an example of this where students were also required to write essays and reflective journals as a part of her study on the short-term sojourn of Chinese students to England. Williams (2009) incorporated photos as part of a multidimensional approach to assessing intercultural competence in study abroad. The study employed entries from a Photo Contest for study abroad participants sponsored by Texas Christian University's Center for International Studies. These photos are submitted based on the University's rubric of learning outcomes for study abroad, which allowed insights into the perceived intercultural development of students (Williams, 2009). Although both the documents in these studies were single points of reference, they push for reflective models in conjunction with other programmatic assessments of intercultural competence.

Visual anthropology and photoethnography expand on those points by offering another avenue for student documentation and insights. In describing themes of visual anthropology in photography and film Devereaux (1995a) notes that "representation is always happening across national boundaries of psychological, social, or cultural specificities" (p. 5). Though not explicitly used within study abroad, image-based research has a long history and is expanding the types of visual forms used for understanding social and cultural contexts (Drew et al., 2010; Groves & Timothy, 2001; Pan et al., 2014; Prosser, 1998; Rose, 2014). Although less discussed than their quantitative counterparts, these studies illustrate ways that documents have been used to make observations on intercultural development and to process the lens that students are using while abroad. Kelly (2009) illustrates a case study that specifically incorporated images alone to examine students' study abroad experiences. Removing students' ability to add a specific narrative, Kelly (2009) asserts that "students as intentional, critical observers can deconstruct the meaning(s) of their study abroad sites by approaching what they see in a focused and systematic way, through semiotics, the study of signs" (p. 104). This activity along with a photo essay, spurred class discussions and provided students an opportunity to see how photos alone can be interpreted in many ways based on the observer (Kelly, 2009).

Methodology: Framing the Narrative

These photo narratives were documentation drawn from a larger study involving eight different short-term study abroad programs from three institutions in Texas. These are not necessarily generalizable to all short-term study abroad programs and are constricted to one state where institutions represented a mid-sized private university, large public regional university, and large public national university. The programs themselves were identified by each institutions' Study Abroad Office and each faculty leader was contacted to request participation in the study. Once faculty cooperation was obtained, meetings and digital letters were arranged to obtain consent from student participants in each program per the IRB for the overall study. The photo narratives were provided by one student from each program who was chosen by lottery from the participants and who signed additional consent forms for two interviews including a photo-directed interview along with consent to share visual media for the purposes of the study.

Data Collection

Each student was directed prior to their study abroad to prepare photos for their interview upon return with the prompt to select ten photos that they felt encapsulated their study abroad experience. As opposed to Kelly's (2009) case study, students were not given added direction on how photos should be presented. Rather, these photos examined how students currently catalogued their study abroad experience through visual storytelling as a normal part of the travel. Within four weeks of their travel, photo-directed interviews were conducted only as part of this research and not required for their normal study abroad program. Students were asked to provide commentary on each photo along with an explanation of their interpretation of the prompt. Photos were transferred digitally, and transcriptions were made of each interview.

Data Analysis

The transcribed interviews and accompanying photos were analyzed in four ways: student selection process, compositional focus, narratives as a part of intercultural growth, and structured versus unstructured activities. Beginning with the selection process, each students' interview was examined for themes or patterns as to why students chose that particular set of photos to be represented. It is through that selection of representation by students that their choices could be understood in two ways: as an interpretative document for reconstructing the study abroad experience and as a narrative device for understanding what students see through the act of photography.

In understanding photos as a form of capturing destinations and travel, content analysis has been used to establish visual context (Pan et al., 2014; Stepchenkova & Zhan, 2013)—often looking for specific attributes or themes identified by "the main focal items in the pictures...and their frequencies" (Zhang et al., 2019, p. 598). Focusing on the content, the photos in this study were coded and categorized by their main visual focus: place, objects and signs, photos of self in a still position, photos of self actively doing something related to an activity or emotion, still group photos, photos of the group actively doing something, and finally four categories for photos that include locals from the host location (still with self/others from the group, active with self/others from the group, still of locals only, and locals actively doing something). The act of photographing something can signal importance and values about what the photographer chose to capture (Merriam, 2009). This provided a point of reference about what students were observing versus the narratives that students were retelling from the photos.

The visual connection between travel and student perception echoed a form of photoethnography that allowed for distinct narratives enhanced by the student interviews. The narratives from the photo-directed interviews were coded by hand for comments related to the Intercultural Growth Framework (Nguyen, 2017b), which follows a "process of intercultural growth through concrete experience (stress), reflection and observation (growth), empathy and adjustment (adaptation), and local experimentation (growth)" (p. 53). This Framework was adapted from Kim's (2001) Stress-Adaptation-Growth dynamic and Kolb's (2005) Experiential Learning Cycle as shown in Table 1. Kim's (2001) theory is described as a process of cultural adaptation through a series of experiences that allow for deculturation and acculturation. This process stems from stressful intercultural experiences that allow a person to grow sometimes in a seemingly backwards direction in order to adapt and revise cultural interactions based on these experiences. In a similar vein,

Kolb's (2005) experiential learning theory goes through a cyclical process of specific experiences wherein a person grows through reflection, steps back to abstractly conceptualize the experience, and finally grows again with active applications based on the experience. With regard to more direct components of intercultural competence, Williams (2013) further illustrates how these experiential learning cycles within study abroad reference the terminology and values laid out by the Association of American Colleges and Universities (2013) in its VALUE rubric specific to *Intercultural Knowledge and Competence.*

Table 1. Theoretical Framework Connections to Intercultural Competence

Coding Framework	Development Framework	Learning Theory	Learning Outcomes
Intercultural Growth Framework	Stress-Adaptation-Growth Model	Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle	Intercultural Competence Component
Concrete Experience	Stress	Concrete Experience	• Observation
Reflection & Observation	Growth	Reflective Observation	• Cultural Self-Awareness • Curiosity • Openness
Empathy & Adjustment	Adaptation	Abstract Conceptualization	• Knowledge of cultural worldview frameworks • Empathy
Local Experimentation	Growth	Active Experimentation	• Verbal and nonverbal communication • Curiosity • Openness

Finally, each photo was designated as connected to either a structured or an unstructured event based on the program syllabi in order to understand the ways that intentional programmatic design might influence what students chose to capture and share as part of their experience. And from that, looking at how those planned activities in conjuncture with forms of photo narratives could provide a model for more iterative designs that push student learning toward deeper levels of adaptation and growth.

Limitations

The overall study was on short-term study abroad and so the programs represented here only range between two to five weeks falling within the Open Doors Report (Institute of International Education, 2020) definition of short-term study abroad as less than eight weeks. These photo narratives are limited by not only the sample size, but the state in which these programs operate. Though the data was informed by the IES surveys (Nguyen, 2017a) and longer individual interviews (Nguyen, 2017b), this article focuses specifically on the photo documentation and how students (whether assigned as part of their program or not) captured and shared their experience visually. Though the data is limited to only eighty photos from these eight student experiences, the process of analysis for these photos helps to illustrate ways that students are capturing their experience, the stories prompted by those visuals as a method of intercultural reflection, and how that is connected to planned programmatic activities.

Photo Narratives

And yet we know that the photo is not merely the result of a process or apparatus but also, always, the product of intention, selection, editing, chance, desire, convention, and ideology: a cultural object, in other words, the outcome of human will and interest.

(Nickel, 2009, p. 42)

Photo Selection Process

As part of this research, all students were prompted to select and bring ten photos that they felt encapsulated their study abroad experience to their post-trip interview. Beyond that initial prompt given prior to their travel, the instructions were meant to be open to the students' interpretations. During the interview following their study abroad, students were asked: *Did you have a particular theme in mind when choosing these ten photos?* These statements of theme (selection criteria) ranged from focusing on people within the program to wanting to capture the overall experience with specific descriptors related to time, the day to day, or learning (Table 2). This selection process sets the stage for the presentation of photos that the students chose, providing a narrative tone that students could go back to when reasoning why *this* photo. It is, as with any exhibition, a process that "assumes an initial judgment of value: it is important to show and know about this" (Kratz, 2002, p. 91).

What differentiates this process from a formal exhibition is the fact that students are not professional photographers, with one exception from the Mexico Program. Still, even in the casual nature, students considered the visual appeal of the photos when selecting them. During interviews some made compositional comments like, "And so I thought it was kind of a cool angle—showed the depth of the different areas" (*Peru*). For the most part, each student kept in mind the concept of an overall experience, choosing a variety of photos across locations and time. The most obvious deviations in photo choice based on theme was in the France and the Netherlands Program, which focused on photos of the program group (fellow students); and the Italy Program, whose choice to focus on the daily experience really did bring a different lens to programmatic place and activities. The Mexico Program, while stating a similar theme to other programs, differed from other programs composition due to the student's professional background as well as the fact that most of the photos were for the program's narrative journalism project that required a story from locals; this project pushed student engagement with the community and called for multiple visits, editing, and faculty and group feedback. Keeping the stated selection criteria for these photos in mind informed the subsequent visual and narrative analysis.

Table 2. Photo Selection Process by Program

Program	Theme	Quote
Peru	Overall Experience: Time	"I tried to get a decent spread all throughout the trip. Not all at the beginning, middle, or end. "
Ghana	Overall Experience	"...what I thought was like holistic of the whole trip "
France; Netherlands	People: Program Group	"...all my photos that I picked, there are people in them. And, because I thought it was more about like us.... There's only 10 of us."
China	Overall Experience	"I wanted to portray China, I wanted to portray the people that I was with, and I wanted to portray just my whole experience in taking pictures."

Italy	Daily Experience	"Like I first I had a couple pictures of like Pisa, the monument, and just like touristy things, but those really weren't what we were doing most of the time. Like most of the time, when I think of what I did the past month, it was like this, exactly."
Mexico	Overall Experience: Learning	"I just focused on the ones that were like...I felt like I was learning something from them or just more significant moments that I enjoyed."
Germany, Austria	Overall Experience	"I think they're representative of the trip as a whole and they show parts of the educational aspects as well as parts of the cultural immersion that we had."
Turkey, Germany, Poland, Hungary, Austria, Czech Republic	Overall Experience: Narrative	"I wanted to have a photo where I could tell you like multiple things about it. Like, it's not just me in front of something; it's like there's a story with it."

Compositional Focus

Much of the literature surrounding photo analysis and interpretation discusses context, selection, historical knowledge, and the potential perceptions and misperceptions of the photographer (Cloutier, 2016; Hüppauf, 1995; Kratz, 2002; Pan et al., 2014; Rookwood & Palmer, 2009; Staveník, 2015; Stepchenkova & Zhan, 2013; Willis, 1995; Zhang et al., 2019). Part of that process is not only seeing the various settings and interactions captured but being aware of the relationship between the photographer and what is being photographed (Hüppauf, 1995; Kratz, 2002; Pan et al., 2014; Zhang et al., 2019). Any observations about photos used in this study are aware not only of the presentation, but also the context of that experience. As such, the initial analysis of the photos themselves considered the visual and compositional focus from the perspective of photography itself as an interpretive tool for how students engage and observe within study abroad.

While there are many features within a photo, for the purpose of analysis the ten photos from each program were coded based on the main visual component (Table 3). This provided ten categories: place (specific settings or buildings), objects and signs, photos of self in a still position, photos of self actively doing something related to an activity or emotion, still group photos, photos of the group actively doing something, and finally photos that include locals from the host location (still with self/others from the group, active with self/others from the group, still of locals only, and locals actively doing something). Such compositional categories indicate student engagement with the photo, not only as an extension of selecting the photo as having value but alluding to what is most important *in* the photo. Is the most important visual the place itself? Is it important that I (the student) am in the photo? In group photos, who is included? What are the people in the photo doing? How often are locals of the country included? Am I (the student) engaged with the locals or taking photos of the locals? Many of these questions require the narrative accompaniment of the interview, but on a purely compositional level there can be some interpretation on how the student captured their experience. For example, photos of places (buildings, parks, monuments, etc.) had the second largest frequency in total; however, this drew mainly from two programs that had photos focusing on landscapes and places with no people included—Peru and Ghana. Most programs provided photos with people, often still group shots with others from the program (the most frequent) or photos of the student participant alone by a landmark or point of interest (the third most frequent). If we group those

categories involving people together, 55 of the 80 photos (nearly 70%) include a person engaging with the experience.

Table 3. Compositional Focus for each of the Ten Participant Photos by Program

Program	Place	Object/ Sign	Still Self	Active Self	Still Group	Active Group	Still Group w/ Locals	Active Group w/ Locals	Still Locals	Active Locals
Peru	7		1		1		1			
Ghana	7	2			1					
France; Netherlands			1		6	3				
China			4		3		2	1		
Italy	2	1	3		3	1				
Mexico	2	1		1	1	1	1	2	1	
Germany, Austria			3	1	5		1			
Turkey, Germany, Poland, Hungary, Austria, Czech Republic	2	1	3	1	1					2
TOTAL	**20**	**5**	**15**	**3**	**21**	**5**	**5**	**3**	**1**	**2**

In casual travel, one might expect photos of places and people with whom one is traveling. And though photos of locals can often be othering, one might hope that those captured as part of study abroad provide insights toward more meaningful intercultural engagements. Thus, the category wherein locals from the host culture are included is represented here. While some of those local interactions were passing observation, seven of the eleven total photos that include locals came about as part of an intentional programmatic choice. In Peru, the photo captured Peruvians as part of a visit to a Women's Weaving Co-op. Two of the three photos in China were with Chinese university students as part of a "buddy" partnership between universities. All four photos in Mexico were programmatic, including host family members, local university student group members, and the locals interviewed for their main project (Figure 1). This category did not indicate all programmatic interactions with locals, but it did show in some respects the importance to the student that people, both fellow colleagues and locals, had in engaging and remembering the experience. How those visual cues then appear in the student narrative allows for further analysis along the Intercultural Growth Framework.

Figure 1. Locals Interviewed during Mexico Program

Visual Cues and Narrative Development

Part of context is recognizing the relationship of the photo to the photographer. In any visual engagement, Devereaux (1995b) comments on how the observer is inclined to project onto the interpretation whether they are aware of it or not (p. 60). Thus, the photo-directed interviews were a large part of understanding the student interpretation of not just what they found compositionally significant, but how they viewed the photo and the meaning behind what is being captured. Photos alone can be misleading in understanding the research as Rose (2014) notes that "interviews with participant-generated visual materials are particularly helpful in exploring the taken-for-granted things in their research participants' lives" (p. 28). While the compositional reading provided some interpretation of the photos, it was the interviews that afforded richer narratives on how those photos might fit in the spectrum of intercultural development.

Interviews directed at student photos were coded as shown in Table 4 to illustrate the frequency at which each photo prompted statements related to the Intercultural Growth Framework: concrete experiences (stress), reflections and observations (growth), empathy and adjustment (adaptation), and local experimentation (growth) (Nguyen, 2017b). Each photo inherently captures a concrete experience that participants decided were valuable to share. Beyond the photo itself as a concrete experience, transcriptions of the interviews were reviewed for statements that might indicate deeper reflection about what was captured, comments on adapting to a new culture or empathizing with different circumstances, and finally meaningful engagement or interactions with locals. Outside the narrative of what happened in the picture, the selected photo provided visual cues that prompted students interviewed to tell stories of growth and adaptation that demonstrated potential gains in intercultural competence.

Table 4. Frequency of Intercultural Growth Codes as prompted by Participant Photos

Program	Concrete Experience (Stress)	Reflection & Observation (Growth)	Empathy & Adjustment (Adaptation)	Local Experimentation (Growth)
Peru	10	9	4	2
Ghana	10	8	2	5
France; Netherlands	10	5	3	0
China	10	7	5	4
Italy	10	8	3	1
Mexico	10	8	5	4
Germany, Austria	10	9	4	4
Turkey, Germany, Poland, Hungary, Austria, Czech Republic	10	8	3	1
TOTAL	**80**	**62**	**29**	**21**

Reflection and Observation

Photo narratives were marked as reflection and observation when they made a point of reflection or observation about the place or culture. Some examples include, "…the I Amsterdam sign, which is a very popular area. And they call this the Watering Hole. It's just like a, you know, a foot deep of water and people just, you know, put their feet in. A lot of people were like reading or had their children around this area" (*France & the Netherlands*) or "I picked because the Berlin Wall has such a negative connotation and was such a bad thing for so long, but in—in recent years they've taken pieces of the Berlin Wall, and this is what's considered the East Side Gallery, where they have hired people to come in and paint this almost glorified graffiti across the wall. And so, Berlin has taken something that was so negative and turned it into something that's positive and an attraction for people and that people can enjoy now" (*Germany and Austria*). In both these cases, the photo was of the still self as part of the composition. While there may be focus on the person, the place or objects in the photo can prompt further reflection about those experiences. And they often do, with the majority (77.5%) of photos being coupled with reflective or observational comments.

Empathy and Adjustment

Though much less frequent, 36.25% of the photos included comments related to empathy for the culture or comments about adjustments made within the new environment. In the case of the Mexico Program, the photo itself was a landscape, but there was a much larger story behind it to which the student connected, describing "how this family got displaced. Because this, where the lake is, used to all be agriculture. And they flooded it to make a lake to let in tourism, so it like pushed all these families out. And so, I thought it was significant just cause it's—that lake is a big part of our story" (*Mexico*). Or when adjusting to a structured visit in Turkey, the photo mainly focused on the person in traditional clothing, but still articulated feelings of "…here's me in a mosque with the head covering. And like I said, there was a real push to blend in, you know. Cause like it, it wasn't that desirable to stand out as an American in Turkey. So, you know, do, do your best to go

with the customs" (*Europe*). The photos acted as cues, but rarely captured the full story that these students wished to share through visual alone.

Local Experimentation

In fact, for many photos without any local people in the composition, stories about local interactions would be a major point of focus. The Peru Program had a photo of the Presidential Palace in Lima, but the elaborate story that followed was only briefly connected to the building itself where "[they're] finally like, 'What is this? Like, why is there these guards and everything like there? I mean, obviously it looks kind of important.' And he goes, 'Oh, that's the Presidential Palace.' And then he immediately just starts talking about like his parents voting behavior or something years ago and stuff'" (Figure 2). This prompted conversation with other local assistant guides to confirm the aspects of the tour and reflect further about expectations.

Figure 2. Presidential Palace in Lima, Peru.

Another case occurred with the Ghana Program, where the photo seemed like a fairly nondescript building, but related to this "really cool experience to get to work [at a children's orphanage] and to get to meet the woman who started it all. And the woman who served here for twelve years. The woman who's really doing it all on her own. So it was really cool. She was an amazing woman. And I think we all left definitely wanting to support her in some way" (Figure 3). Compared to eleven of eighty photos (13.75%) that included a local person in the composition, almost twice as many comments were made involving local interactions (26.25%). While these photos captured part of the experience, there was much more in the narrative that spoke to students' intercultural development.

Cue Narrative

In general, photos were used by students more as a visual cue that "provide a vehicle for invoking and considering situations, events and issues" (Hodgetts et al., 2007**,** p. 266). Given the undirected nature of the task, one might expect the photos to prompt mostly descriptive experiences with some cultural or location-based observations as illustrated by

the frequency of comments related to reflection. Still, the frequency of comments indicating empathy, daily adjustments, or local interactions was not lacking and the photo-directed narratives suggested moments where the students were able to adapt to and better understand the observed cultural worldviews and have those experiences confirmed through local interaction. As such, the intercultural development described in each photo was both expected and yet surprising for different reasons. The frequency of intercultural growth comments for such short-term programs might follow expectations of greater reflective comments than mentions of deeper empathy, adjustment, or local interactions; however, the depth by which students communicated their experiences beyond what they took photos of was somewhat unanticipated.

Figure 3. Missahoe Orphanage in Have Village, Ghana.

Placed in the context of the compositional focus, what students took pictures of was rarely an indicator of how students talked about the photo. For example, the code for local experimentation wherein a student mentioned a distinct verbal or nonverbal interaction with locals from the program location did not necessarily match with photos that included a local. Ghana had zero photos that included locals as part of the visual composition and yet in five cases the photo cued a story of interaction with locals related to the place or object in the photo. Or in the opposite situation, there were photos with locals that were made more in observation without any further intercultural interaction. Similarly, photos involving the self or program group were not always limiting of the stories accompanying the picture. Rather, what could be interpreted as controlling of the narratives was more in the selection process than in the compositional focus. Whereas most students chose photos based on the overall experience with some nuances, only the student participating in France and the Netherlands provided a very narrow criterion of only including photos of program members. In this case, the stories described programmatic experience and observations, but rarely moved outside of the program group or place.

Planned Programming

Taking these interpretations one step further, photos were divided based on whether they were planned as part of the program (structured activities) or not (unstructured activities). These were limited to what was included in the syllabi provided by faculty and through interviews from the students. Within this very limited context, the total frequency of intercultural growth and adaptation codes (comments related to reflections and observations, empathy and adjustment, and local experimentation) beyond the ten equal concrete experiences for each program appears to occur in higher frequency in programs where the photos included involved more planned program experiences (Table 5). Five of the eight programs (Peru, Ghana, China, Mexico, and Germany and Austria) using photos from planned experiences tended to prompt narratives from students that spoke to intercultural growth with higher frequency.

Table 5. Structured versus Unstructured Activities based on Photos by Program

Program	Total Intercultural Growth & Adaptation Codes *Total comments from Table 4 not including concrete experiences	Structured Activities	Unstructured Activities
Peru	15	7	3
Ghana	15	8	2
France; Netherlands	8	4	6
China	16	8	2
Italy	12	5	5
Mexico	17	8	2
Germany, Austria	17	6	4
Turkey, Germany, Poland, Hungary, Austria, Czech Republic	12	4	6
TOTAL	**112**	**50**	**30**

The photo selection process was open to interpretation and is limited by what students found to be valuable, but the trend appeared to be that students offered more narratives of reflection, adaptation, and local interaction when the photos were related to structured (planned) cultural activities and interactions. While students were not directed as to the types of photos to include, this does suggest that intercultural growth is aided by being part of an intentional process. Students appear to be able to connect their experiences more clearly to aspects of intercultural learning when there is some structure to link to the meaning of those activities.

Revisualizing Photo Assignments

This research examines the existing climate around photos and photo narratives in short-term study abroad. The photos and accompanying narratives offered a varied look at each study abroad and were influenced by the criteria students used for selecting photos and how they were connected to planned programmatic experiences. As a part of selection, those students who had a broad interpretation that included some cultural consideration

tended to have more visual cues to draw from within their interviews. The composition of the photos offered an initial examination that was not necessarily indicative of the subsequent narratives. Rather, the narratives prompted by the photos allowed more room for students to reflect on experiences within the program and connect to aspects of intercultural development, specifically with regard to planned activities focused on intercultural outcomes or local interactions. While limited to only these eighty photos across eight programs in Texas, these photo narratives demonstrate that photos and visual cues offer a means of qualitative assessment for understanding and expanding on students' intercultural reflection. Instead of the more common post-travel reflection of photo activities, these assignments can be revisualized (or reinterpreted) by both faculty and students as ongoing assessment within the program to provide multiple points for students to observe and re-engage with their study abroad. With more intentional prompting and ongoing programmatic reflection, photo assignments could be designed to create more opportunities for deeper intercultural learning.

Some of those opportunities can be seen in the existing photo assignments within these eight programs. Only two had actual photo specific assignments: Mexico and Peru. All of the other programs offered some form of journaling or blogging that may have included photos or sketches but were not explicitly required. Peru had a final photo journal due following the travel that was used in a similar manner to other summative reflection essays. Mexico on the other hand had a more interesting model rooted in journalistic disciplines where its photo assignment was a larger photo and video project with several iterative stages of development that speaks to the potential for intentional uses of photo narratives as a reflective tool beyond what is seen in these results. By designing the photo assignment to be assessed throughout the program, the feedback students received allowed them to not only revisit those locals they interacted with as part of the story and take new visual observations but reflect deeper on those interactions throughout their time abroad.

The Mexico project itself began with focused preparation asking students (in groups with local university students) to look for a meaningful story about the culture and people where they were traveling. During the trip, those photos and stories were assessed at set intervals through critiques by both the faculty and other students in the program. The interview tells how the student and their group dismissed several stories in their search and then visited multiple times to ask questions and reflect on what they were learning. Following the interview for this research, students would continue to work and reflect on their photos and video for the assignment in last critiques ahead of their final presentations. This feedback let students revise their initial observations as well as adapt each subsequent interaction made to refine their story. What may have started as passing reflection or observation was pushed during this assessment process to ask not only whether the story was interesting from a journalistic perspective, but whether the students had interpreted those narratives correctly both visually and reflectively each time they interacted with the locals involved. While most photo assignments follow the model of a summary reflection, the program in Mexico offers a model for more iterative pedagogy that ensures feedback from which the students can re-engage with the experience. This can be seen in the quality of photos that were selected and the frequency of intercultural growth comments related to the program.

With the Mexico program, students revisited the same experience, but the feedback process could easily allow students to understand earlier the limitations of what they are photographing and how they are reflecting so that students can work on providing more

visual and narrative depth to capturing future activities abroad. In the same vein, even in alternate travel settings, students can still exercise the process of digitally capturing and interpreting intercultural experiences. Photos from such experiences can be used in classes where the students attempt to determine what is happening visually and then given further narratives on which to reflect. Through global partnerships, students could work in groups through video interviews, tours, and photo-sharing to reflect on and revise intercultural narratives remotely. Photo narratives offer a rich swath of visual documentation by which students could benefit from the feedback process illustrated in Mexico to deeply engage with the stories and cultural interactions in study abroad and their alternatives.

Moving forward, the process of taking, selecting, and talking about photos in study abroad should look at not just including photos, but enhancing the visual documentation of study abroad experiences. Critiquing students throughout the program and not simply after it has ended will allow them to not just photograph the travel experience, but to better connect what photos they take to how they both remember and talk about those moments. Certainly, photos document the experience and can be honed to visually impart stories, but it was still the students' narratives that added to the memory of why it was important and what deeper values those moments might have had. And it is those narratives that should be revisited during study abroad to improve how students are reflecting on and capturing their experience.

> *When I see this photo I supply to this image a memory of the smell of woodsmoke, the ruckus of turkeys and baaing lambs, voices carrying up the mountain slope from neighbours' courtyards, truck horns, and scratchy cantina music. The feel of dawn frost under my bare foot. You, who have likely never been there, can supply none of this. What meanings and associations extrinsic to this image do you supply?*

> (Devereaux, 1995b, p. 57)

Implications for Practice

Photo narratives offer a key intersection by which study abroad can embrace digital media while enhancing intercultural learning. At a quantitative level, varying research has shown that well-planned, intentional study abroad programs can provide some number of positive gains (Anderson et al., 2006; Dwyer, 2004; Jackson, 2008; Pedersen, 2010; Vande Berg et al., 2012; Williams, 2005). Part of that intentionality is building in programmatic interventions such as cultural mentoring and other formative reflection that focus on intercultural development (Coryell, 2013; Vande Berg et al., 2012). As we move beyond how effective it is for these programs to exist and into areas of pedagogy related to evaluating and improving experience, then programs will need to focus on incorporating multidimensional forms of evidence for student development and documentation. In particular, Williams (2009) illustrates how photos when connected with particular narratives of intercultural growth can prompt students to reconsider their perspective on what was initially captured visually and refine their reflections toward stronger intercultural development. Kelly (2009) proffers another case study for using photoic essays that explore synthesizing experiences only through images and revisiting better ways of capturing their intended stories, noting that "although students have visual and technical competence, they often make the mistake of taking photos as a way of remembering the story behind the image instead of visually capturing the story" (p. 107). Even in training with quantitative instruments such as the Intercultural Effectiveness Scale (IES), Visual Speak image tools were used as a method for creating and interpreting

intercultural stories to better understand the development process (C. Cartwright, personal communication, August 7, 2014).

Digital media has changed the way in which people visually capture and share their experiences (Duggan, 2013; Hjorth & Pink, 2014; Knoblauch et al., 2008; Murray, 2009). There is an opportunity here for research to include visual document analysis as a process for building qualitative portfolios in study abroad assessment. Moreover, those visual narratives can offer more formative ways for students to understand and reexperience how they are viewing and capturing their study abroad experience. And perhaps more importantly, how students use feedback on their photo narratives to better engage with intercultural activities within their programs. Educational leaders using photos through activities should look at how to prompt deeper reflections and feedback throughout the program in ways that allow students to reorient and re-reflect on their experience. Even remotely, assessment should be used to allow students time to virtually revisit experiences to reflect on things they may have missed in first viewing. Photo narratives may start as stories in composition but incorporating more intentional guided reflection adds another layer for interpreting visuals (whether in person or virtual) and benefits the students by facilitating and potentially reinforcing intercultural learning. Photo narratives and visual assignments should be considered not just as a singular reflective tool or a means of collecting potential marketing materials, but as part of a robustly designed activity that strategically facilitates student engagement within their study abroad programs. Those same questions about what students found important compositionally, can be used to ask students about the lenses, perspectives, and narratives they have in mind for the next photo. Faculty should consider that when designing photo activities, so they align existing travel photos with prompts that push students to use those skills in a way that focuses on intercultural growth.

These eight programs are just a small sample of photos that students are already taking as a part of study abroad. With intentional design, activities could be planned to align student's digital habits with institutional learning outcomes toward intercultural development. Within existing practices of marketing and student testimonials, guided photo narratives could prompt richer stories that resonate more deeply with students. This can be seen in the various ways faculty and institutions are starting to frame study abroad photos and finding ways to maximize their use both at the programmatic and the institutional level. Strickland offered guidance as a faculty leader to a program in Peru and directed students to take photos through specific disciplinary lenses, steering photos away from Urry and Larsen's (2011) tourist gaze. Each photo assignment was directed to have students reflect more on what they were taking photos of and how those photos spoke to the global context of their disciplinary studies (Nguyen, Strickland, & Williams, 2017). Through prompts based on intercultural learning outcomes, Williams (2009) discusses the study abroad photo contest at Texas Christian University that works to extend student reflection beyond the photo-taking of tourists. Williams has continued to refine the rubric and guidelines for the contest so as to encourage stronger narratives from students that are better connected to institutional learning outcomes (Nguyen, Strickland, & Williams, 2017). By embedding intercultural and even interdisciplinary guidance ahead of time, students can reflect early on the composition and narrative aspects of the photos they take abroad. Photo narratives are becoming an increasingly common activity, particularly in short-term study abroad; in order to maximize student learning, international educators should

revisualize those assignments as ongoing narratives that provide feedback, guidance, and discussion, so students can engage, adapt, and reassess their own study abroad experiences.

References

Anderson, P.H, Lawton, L., Rexeisen, R.J., & Hubbard, A.C. (2006). Short-term study abroad and intercultural sensitivity: A pilot study. *International journal of intercultural relations, 30*(4), 457-469. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2005.10.004

Association of American Colleges and Universities. (2013). *Intercultural Knowledge and Competence VALUE Rubric.* Retrieved from http://www.aacu.org/value/rubrics/pdf/InterculturalKnowledge.pdf

Cloutier, K. (2016). Photoethnography in community-based participatory research. In L. A. Jason & D. S. Glenwick (Eds.), *Handbook of methodological approaches to community-based research: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods* (pp. 283–291). New York, NY: Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/med:psych/9780190243654.003.0028

Coryell, J. E. (2013). Learning on-Location: Evaluating the Instructional Design for Just-in-Time Learning in Interdisciplinary Short-Term Study Abroad. *Journal on Excellence in College Teaching, 24*(2), 5-31.

Deardorff, D.K. (2011). Assessing intercultural competence. *New directions for institutional research, 2011*(149), 65-79. https://doi.org/10.1002/ir.381

Devereaux, L. (1995a). An introductory essay. In L. Devereaux & R. Hillman (Eds.), *Fields of vision: Essays in film studies, visual anthropology and photography* (pp. 1-18). Berkley, CA: University of California Press.

Devereaux, L. (1995b). Experience, re-presentation, and film. In L. Devereaux & R. Hillman (Eds.), *Fields of vision: Essays in film studies, visual anthropology and photography* (pp. 56-73). Berkley, CA: University of California Press.

Drew, S. E., Duncan, R. E., & Sawyer, S. M. (2010). Visual storytelling: A beneficial but challenging method for health research with young people. *Qualitative health research, 20*(12), 1677-1688. https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732310377455

Duggan, M. (2013). Photo and video sharing grow online. *Pew research internet project.*

Dwyer, M. M. (2004). More is better: The impact of study abroad program duration. *Frontiers: The interdisciplinary journal of study abroad, 10*(1), 151-163. https://doi.org/10.36366/frontiers.v10i1.139

Engle, L. (2013). The rewards of qualitative assessment appropriate to study abroad. *Frontiers: The interdisciplinary journal of study abroad, 22,* 111-126. https://doi.org/10.36366/frontiers.v22i1.321

Groves, D. L., & Timothy, D. J. (2001). Photographic techniques and the measurement of impact and importance attributes on trip design: A case study. *Loisir et Société/Society and Leisure, 24*(1), 311-317. https://doi.org/10.7202/000172ar

Hjorth, L., & Pink, S. (2014). New visualities and the digital wayfarer: Reconceptualizing camera phone photography and locative media. *Mobile media & communication, 2*(1), 40-57. https://doi.org/10.1177/2050157913505257

Hodgetts, D., Chamberlain, K. & Radley, A., (2007). Considering photographs never taken during photo-production projects. *Qualitative research in psychology, 4*(4), 263–280. https://doi.org/10.1080/14780880701583181

Hüppauf, B. (1995). Modernism and the photographic representation of war and destruction. In L. Devereaux & R. Hillman (Eds.), *Fields of vision: Essays in film studies, visual anthropology and photography* (pp. 94-124). Berkley, CA: University of California Press.

Institute of International Education (2020). Open Doors Report. *IIE.org.* Retrieved from www.iie.org/opendoors.

Jackson, J. (2008, July). Globalization, internationalization, and short-term stays abroad. *International journal of intercultural relations, 32*(4), 349-358. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2008.04.004

Kelly, D. (2009). Semiotics and the city: Putting theories of everyday life, literature, and culture into practice. In E. Brewer & K. Cunningham (Eds.), *Integrating study abroad into the curriculum: Theory and practice across the disciplines* (pp. 103-120). Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing, LLC.

Kim, Y. Y. (2001). *Becoming intercultural: An integrative theory of communication and cross-cultural adaptation.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Knoblauch, H., Baer, A., Laurier, E., Petschke, S., & Schnettler, B., (2008). Visual analysis: New developments in the interpretative analysis of video and photography. *Forum qualitative sozialforschung/Forum*: *Qualitative social research, 9*(3), Art. 14.

Kolb, A. Y., & Kolb, D. A. (2005). Learning styles and learning spaces: Enhancing experiential learning in higher education. *Academy of management learning & education, 4*(2), 193-212. https://doi.org/10.5465/amle.2005.17268566

Kratz, C. A. (2002). *The ones that are wanted: Communication and the politics of representation in a photographic exhibition*. Berkley, CA: University of California Press.

Merriam, S. B. (2009). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. John Wiley & Sons.

Murray, S. (2008). Digital images, photo-sharing, and our shifting notions of everyday aesthetics. *Journal of visual culture, 7*(2), 147-163. https://doi.org/10.1177/1470412908091935

Nguyen, A. (2017a). Intercultural competence in short-term study abroad. *Frontiers: The interdisciplinary journal of study abroad, 29*(2), 109-127. https://doi.org/10.36366/frontiers.v29i2.396

Nguyen, A. (2017b). Intercultural growth framework: Reflection and assessment in short-term study abroad. *NAFSA research symposium series, 1*, 50-67.

Nguyen, A., Strickland, M.J., & Williams, T.R. (2017, November). *Maximizing photo narratives in short-term study abroad*. Round-Table Session presented at the CIEE Annual Conference, Austin, TX.

Nickel, D. R. (2009). 'Impressed by nature's hand': Photography and authorship. In R. Howells & R.W. Matson (Eds.), *Using visual evidence* (pp. 42-54). New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.

Olson, C. L., Green, M. F., & Hill, B. A. (2006). *A handbook for advancing comprehensive internationalization: What institutions can do and what students should learn*. American Council on Education.

Pan, S., Lee, J., & Tsai, H. (2014). Travel photos: Motivations, image dimensions, and affective qualities of places. *Tourism management, 40*, 59-69. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2013.05.007

Pedersen, P.J. (2010). Assessing intercultural effectiveness outcomes in a year-long study abroad program. *International journal of intercultural relations, 34*(1), 70-80. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2009.09.003

Prosser, J. (Ed.). (1998). *Image-based research: A sourcebook for qualitative researchers*. Bristol, PA: Falmer Press.

Rookwood, J., & Palmer, C. (2009). A photo-ethnography, a picture-story-board of experiences at an NGO football project in Liberia (part 1). *Journal of Qualitative Research in Sports Studies, 3*(1), 161-186.

Rose, G. (2014). On the relation between 'visual research methods' and contemporary visual culture. *The sociological review, 62*(1), 24-46. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-954X.12109

Staveník, A. (2015). From Illustration to photo-ethnography: Photography as a key component of ethnographic publications. In K. Nedbálková & K.S. Janků (Eds.), *Doing Research, Making Science: The Memory of Roma Workers* (pp. 99-114). CDK: Brno.

Stepchenkova, S., & Zhan, F. (2013). Visual destination images of Peru: Comparative content analysis of DMO and user-generated photography. *Tourism management, 36*, 590-601. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2012.08.006

Urry, J., & Larsen, J. (2011). *The tourist gaze 3.0*. New York: Sage. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446251904

Vande Berg, M., Paige, R. M., & Lou, K. H. (2012). *Student learning abroad: What our students are learning, what they're not, and what we can do about it*. Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing, LLC.

Williams, T. R. (2005). Exploring the impact of study abroad on students' intercultural communication skills: Adaptability and sensitivity. *Journal of studies in international education, 9*(4), 356-371. https://doi.org/10.1177/1028315305277681

Williams, T. R. (2009). The reflective model of intercultural competency: A multidimensional, qualitative approach to study abroad assessment. *Frontiers: The interdisciplinary journal of study abroad, 18*(1), 289-306. https://doi.org/10.36366/frontiers.v18i1.267

Williams, T. R. (2013). Examine your LENS: A tool for interpreting cultural differences. *Frontiers: The interdisciplinary journal of study abroad, 22*(1), 148-165. https://doi.org/10.36366/frontiers.v22i1.324

Willis, A. (1995). Photography and filme: Figures in/of history. In L. Devereaux & R. Hillman (Eds.), *Fields of vision: Essays in film studies, visual anthropology and photography* (pp. 77-93). Berkley, CA: University of California Press.

Zhang, K., Chen, Y., & Li, C. (2019). Discovering the tourists' behaviors and perceptions in a tourism destination by analyzing photos' visual content with a computer deep learning model: The case of Beijing. *Tourism Management, 75*, 595-608. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2019.07.002

Author Biography

Annie Nguyen, Ed.D., is a designer whose background in architecture and work abroad influences her perspective on building educational structures that best support intercultural growth, specifically incorporating intentional and meaningful visual reflections. Her research on the documentation and development of intercultural competence in short-term study abroad and subsequent collaborative presentations with colleagues on maximizing photo narratives informs her current work with faculty developing global programs at York College of Pennsylvania.