Making the intangible, tangible: Assessment design that fosters curiosity, confidence and collaboration during international short-term study tours for Australian students

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A distinctive characteristic of study tours is their immersive nature, and the type of learning developed in such circumstances often relies on instinctive skills related to confidence, flexibility, curiosity, resilience and risk taking. To discover more about these learning experiences for adult undergraduate students studying varying disciplines in the creative industries at an Australian University, the researchers employed educational action research and developed assessment modules to foster student awareness of intangible skills and personal characteristics during short-term international study tours. On the completion of the tours, participating staff and students provided feedback, via a questionnaire and focus group discussions, that assessed the value of these modules in promoting learning and their contribution to personal growth and cultural sensitivity. Findings show that these modules were highly effective at enabling adult

*students to become aware of the skills they employed while being
actively engaged in international study tours. This study highlights the
potential significance of immersive assessment modules that provide
specific ways for students to engage with their host country and the
cultural differences to which they are exposed.*

Keywords: *Study tours, international education, higher education,
creative industries, assessment modules, work integrated learning*

Introduction

International short-term study tours can offer valuable learning experiences
and enhance students' personal growth. A recent Australian review of
learning abroad outcomes found that a well-designed short-term program
could have a significant and lasting impact upon participants (Potts,
2016). In a tertiary academic context, adult students who travel to overseas
destinations are generally required to complete conventional assessment
tasks such as reflective essays, journals and group presentations that enable
tour leaders to determine whether students have gained content knowledge
(source anonymised for blind review). Yet, adult students also acquire other
skills as they immerse themselves in new environments, often confronting
personal challenges when adapting to new places and cultures. These
intangible and transferable skills include 'intercultural competence' and
'global perspectives' that can improve their intellectual development (Potts &
Berquist, 2014, pp. 1–4). Other intangible and transferable skills frequently
associated with international study include 'curiosity, initiative, risk taking,
suspension of judgment, cognitive flexibility, tolerance of ambiguity,
cultural humility, and resourcefulness' (Bennet, 2008, p. 20), which can
have beneficial lifelong impacts, including the enhancement of future
employability (Foundation for Young Australians, 2015). For students within
the creative industries disciplines, these skills are particularly important as
they navigate the changing landscape of employment opportunities that are
often non-traditional and require unique abilities.

These intangible and transferable skills may be fundamental to adult
student experiences during short-term international study, or study tours,
but discerning and assessing them can be a challenge. Research shows the
opportunities for guided reflection and interaction with locals throughout

the time abroad can lead to the development of intercultural sensitivity (Campbell & Walta, 2015). These opportunities can also form part of the assessment tasks used within study tours. And similar to assessment practices in more traditional classroom-based contexts, improving assessment for learning is vital in a rapidly changing higher education environment and even the 'most well-designed and validated assessments are meaningless unless they are feasible to implement' (Coates (2016, pp. 663–664). This presents a challenge for those who wish to design assessment to support 'nebulous' intangible personal characteristics, and the lack of evidence about its benefit for students has thus far inhibited institutional recognition and support (Potts, 2015). As a consequence, there are currently no formal national assessment guidelines that address such outcomes in Australia (Tucker & Weaver, 2013). This, in turn, has limited the development of coherent administrative, logistical, pedagogical, and curricula frameworks that inform this learning for international study tours (Potts & Berquist, 2014).

To address this gap, the authors applied an action research methodology to design, implement, and evaluate assessment items aimed at helping adult students identify intangible personal learning during study tours. The focus was to encourage students to become more active in individual and group learning contexts within seven study tours offered at a large Australian university, located in a major city. All tours spanned two to four weeks and were offered across a range of disciplines, including architecture, fashion, industrial design, interactive and visual design, interior design, landscape architecture, creative writing and literary studies, dance, drama, entertainment and arts management, film, screen and animation, journalism, media and communications, music, and visual art. The tours were elective options in the students' undergraduate degree structure and were provisionally aligned with Work Integrated Learning objectives in the faculty. Although many of the specific study tours had been taught for numerous years, they are continuously evolving to respond to current trends and staff expertise and availability.

At the conclusion of the tours, the authors administered an online questionnaire with students and staff and held focus groups with students to better understand the impact of such assessment on students' awareness of the type of soft skills they were utilizing on study tours. This article presents the findings and suggests directions for future research in this critical area of higher education for art and design adult students.

Acquiring intangible skills as a process of 'being'

Universities face increasing demands to prepare adult students for success in a global workplace characterised by uncertainty and disruption, and where employers seek innovative people with intangible personal capacities such as initiative and resourcefulness (Andrews and Higson, 2008). In this regard, the visceral, immersive, and novel environments adult students face when on international study tours are ideal platforms to use skills that can enhance their employability while inspiring creativity. Barnett and Coate (2005) acknowledged the importance of using curricula to prepare students for a rapidly changing world through the development of flexibility, adaptability, self-reliance, and lifelong learning. They also recognised the ambiguous nature of these concepts and proposed that curriculum in this area should include 'knowing' as a personal and positional act to engage with discipline-specific ideas; 'acting' which includes experiences of practice and engagement often connected to a particular form of knowing; and 'being' which involves developing a sense of self and acquiring the capacity to flourish.

Intangible personal characteristics are best aligned with this concept of 'being'. These characteristics can include self-confidence of one's knowledge and identity within a larger context that facilitates employability. However, there are considerable challenges when seeking to operationalize the act of 'being' within a curriculum. This learning often depends on individual personalities and previous experiences, and is often internalised through a process of self-reflection rather than externalised through outputs, thus it can be difficult to assess. In addition, developing a sense of self can require varying amounts of time, which do not always comply with university time frames.

Previous research has investigated the nature of intangible skills during short-term international study, which identified that adult student learning is often associated with 'personal growth', 'cultural awareness and sensitivity', 'self-awareness', and 'communication skills' (see for example Bennet, 2008; O'Reilly, et al., 2014; Potts & Berquist, 2014; Fenech, et al., 2013; Tucker & Weaver, 2013; Chieffo & Griffiths, 2004; Ingraham & Peterson, 2004; Gothard, Downey, & Gray, 2012; and Roholt & Fisher, 2013). A quantitative study with 1,200 students in the US examined intangible learning outcomes for study abroad and determined a common thread in student learning

encompassed intellectual growth, professional development, personal growth, skills for relating to culturally different others, and enhanced self-awareness (Ingraham & Peterson, 2004). Similarly, a study of 1,500 students also in the US investigated levels of intercultural awareness and personal growth gained by students during short-term study abroad programs (Chieffo & Griffith 2004). The study aimed to assess students' intercultural awareness and personal growth, rather than measure actual learning outcomes or changes in behaviour, (167) and reported that 27% of students commented on personal development about 'adaptability, flexibility, patience, responsibility, respect for others' (173). An Australian study employing focus groups with students participating in short-term study tours, also found that participants reported increased confidence and intercultural sensitivity after their experience abroad (Bretag, 2017). Such studies have broadened our understanding of intangible learning outcomes.

Research has also sought to identify specific assessment strategies that enhance cross-cultural learning, producing assessment formats that supported engagement with cross-cultural encounters (Leask & Carroll, 2011). Findings showed correlations between intangible and informal learning and proposed that formal and informal learning contexts were important to achieve learning success. The study suggested three ways to improve adult students' experiences of international learning: an alignment of the formal and informal curriculum; designing and managing specific tasks; and professional development for academic staff (p. 647). Further, it reinforced findings by the Australian Council for Educational Research (2009) that 'much learning at university occurs in the informal curriculum, outside formal learning environments and that these experiences can and should support the learning which occurs as part of the formal curriculum' (pp. 651-652).

Research conducted across three universities in Australia investigated intangible personal characteristics as learning outcomes (Gothard, Downey, & Gray, 2012). Employing quantitative surveys, events, workshops, and weblogs to record the reflections of 413 students about international learning experiences, the findings suggest that experiential and reflective learning was the key to effective experiences. The researchers looked at ways to improve students' skills in interpreting cultural differences, cultural orientation, and their capacity to learn from everyday interactions by being able to 'objectify these outcomes for

personal, pedagogical and professional development' (14). To attain this goal, the researchers designed ten experiential learning modules that addressed themes concerning the exploration, reflection, stereotypes, cultural relativism, communication, adaptation, transformation, globalisation and cosmopolitanism, education and culture (23). The researchers included three phases of learning: pre-departure, in-country, and re-entry, but focused predominantly on pre-departure, as nine out of the ten assessment modules were directed at this phase.

Over the past decade, research into short-term international study has progressed to include detailed investigations into the relationship between intangible skills and developing assessment. Yet, few studies have specifically addressed the task of fostering adult student awareness about what they are learning on study tours as an integral component in assessing their learning. This needs to be addressed to better understand the full potential of study tours for intangible learning and ensuring assessment tasks more meaningful. Therefore, this research seeks to offer a contribution to this gap. The following sections outline the study aims, methodology and methods, and findings.

Study aims

This study aimed to develop assessment practices that encourage awareness of intangible personal characteristics and soft skills for adult students within the creative industries disciplines. Although the *Outbound Mobility Best Practice Guide for Australian Universities* offers practical guidance on outbound experiences, it does not address assessment for study tours (AIM Overseas, 2010). In addition, existing links between learning outcomes, assessment tasks, and teaching techniques are often ad hoc and depend on an academic's perspective and specific discipline demands. Therefore, we used an action research framework to design and implement assessment modules that can effectively motivate students' participation and active engagement in the destinations they visited, to encourage self-awareness in immersive study situations, and to foster reflection upon the value of intangible skills for their personal growth and intercultural awareness.

It should be noted that this paper reports on specific findings from a broader research project that investigates learning opportunities and assessment strategies during short-term international study

experiences. The topics of the larger study include student expectations and motivations; the benefits and challenges for students; and the challenges of measuring intangible learning outcomes.

Educational action research methodology

The research team employed an action research methodology which involves a cyclical process of research, action and reflection. Coined in 1940 by Kurt Lewin, 'action research' describes an iterative process of testing theory through practical interventions and action (Kingdon, Pain, & Kesby, 2007, 10; McNiff, 2013). More specifically, this research is informed by educational action research as a way to transform pedagogical practices. In this sense, the researchers are also academic practitioners who led several of the study tours and/or coordinated them administratively. Educational action research enables the practising educator to inform their 'personal' practice through enquiry, investigation and research (Carr & Kemmis, 2009, 7). Carr and Kemmis postulate that educational action research is not as much about education, as it is for education. Action research is fundamentally participatory and holds that one must learn by 'doing'. It is therefore actively oriented and considers that knowledge is best acquired when driven by praxis, rather than disembodied theory (Bradbury-Huang, 2010; Stringer, 2007; Kemmis, McTaggart, & Nixon, 2016).

This research is framed within the social constructivist theory which suggests that cognitive development is reliant on the interactions between an individual and the environment. Within this framework, this research assumes that learning would be achieved by the "internalization of cultural knowledge and norms and the use of tools and signs of the culture" within an international context (Sivan, 1986, p. 211). Because the context of a study tour is a critical component of its design, it stands to reason that the learning is dependent on this context.
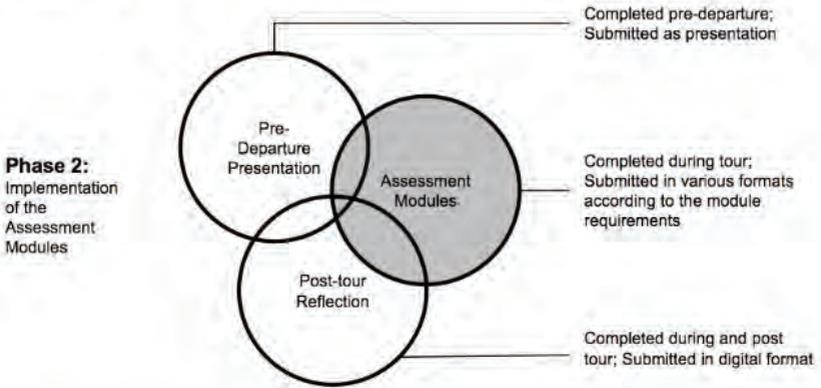
Using the action research process, the researchers first identified shortcomings with existing assessment practices during international study tours based on previous experience, the authors' research (source anonymised for blind review) and anecdotal feedback. Our university previously assigned two formal assessment items: a pre-departure group presentation that investigated the global sites to be visited, and a multiple-entry journal with a concluding 1,000-word reflective essay to

be submitted after the tour. The group presentation encouraged social bonding and directed student attention toward researching destinations to improve orientation. The reflective essay required adult students to reflect upon and critically analyse their experiences during a tour, using critical language and citing academic sources to support their insights. The journal aspect of the reflective essay expected students to keep records of their daily activities to be drawn upon for content in the essay.
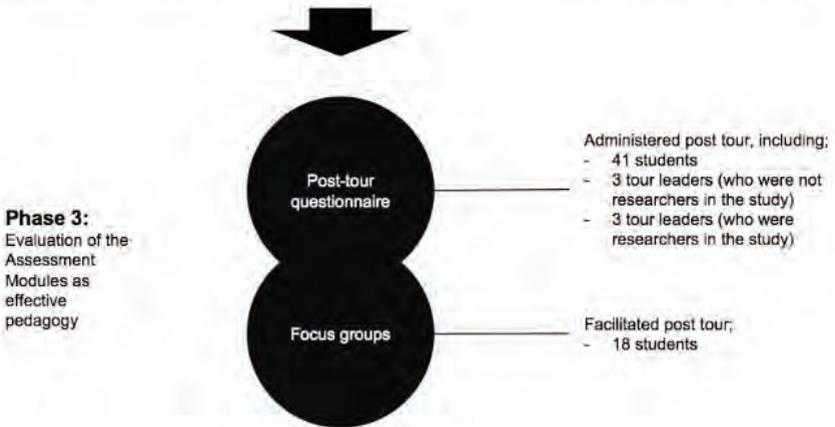
Based on revisions with tour leaders and students, the research team determined that the journal as part of an on-tour assessment was not completely successful in fostering and assessing intangible and transferable skills. This was supported through two years of post-tour questionnaires administered with students from previous study tours. The results suggested there was limited understanding of the learning that adult students were experiencing in international study tours, which prompted a review of existing assessment practices.

In response, and as the first step of the action research, the research team designed, pre-tested, and implemented assessment modules to replace the reflective journal assessment to more effectively target intangible learning. The assessment was developed to foster student awareness of a range of soft skills they would encounter in study tours, and the intention was to initiate a selection of assessment modules for future utilization. The assessment modules were accordingly envisaged as scaffolds that would enable teaching staff to develop module content that would meet specific requirements for each tour. Due to the multiple disciplines covered by the study tours, the modules were not designed with a specific disciplinary lens but instead were meant to be broadly applicable. Experienced tour leaders and administrators provided the initial input for the modules, and additional information was gleaned from student surveys in previous years. Tour leaders were consulted and cooperatively enlisted to implement the new assessment. Fifteen modules were developed for use in 2016 and are described in the next section. Refer to figure 1 for an outline of the research process.

Phase 1: Initial research and design of the Assessment Modules based on previously collected data and extant research.

Phase 2:
Implementation of the Assessment Modules

Pre-Departure Presentation

Assessment Modules

Post-tour Reflection

Completed pre-departure; Submitted as presentation

Completed during tour; Submitted in various formats according to the module requirements

Completed during and post tour; Submitted in digital format

Phase 2 involved administering the study tours and the deployment of the Assessment Modules which were completed by the students during the relevant tours.

Phase 3:
Evaluation of the Assessment Modules as effective pedagogy

Post-tour questionnaire

Focus groups

Administered post tour, including;
- 41 students
- 3 tour leaders (who were not researchers in the study)
- 3 tour leaders (who were researchers in the study)

Facilitated post tour;
- 18 students

Phase 3 involved the administering evaluation methods to determine the effectiveness of the Assessment Modules designed in Phase 2. This involved (i) post-tour questionnaires for students and tour leaders and (ii) focus groups with students

Figure One: Three phases of the research process

Development of assessment modules

The modules were designed to be completed quickly and relatively easily and were intended to encourage awareness of intangible learning. The

modules required individual and group activities and were designed to facilitate reflection on personal characteristics such as confidence, initiative, curiosity, resourcefulness, professional behaviour, cultural sensitivity, risk taking, and open-mindedness. Fifteen modules were designed, and each tour leader was required to select five modules that were most appropriate for tour location and student cohort. All students were required to attempt all modules unless there were extenuating circumstances (i.e. sickness). Figure Two lists the modules and the tour location.

Module Name	Tour Destination	Prescribed Task	Initiative	Resourcefulness	Professionalism	Open-mindedness	Cultural sensitivity	Critical thought	Risk-taking	Curiosity	Creativity	Flexibility	Empathy	Time management	Confidence
	Florida Cruise	Write a 300-word critical review	●	●	●	●	●								
Cultural Context	Los Angeles	Try a new food or drink particular to the location	●			●	●								
Cultural Products	Nashville	Attend a performance and post a review on Facebook	●	●	●			●							
Expectations	Florida Cruise	Determine one strategy or advice that you plan to implement on tour and why	●	●			●		●						
Industry Communication	HK, Taipei	Research and ask 3 questions of industry professionals		●	●					●					
Industry Engagement	Florida	Engage in group mtgs with industry professionals and ask one question in 3 separate mtgs	●	●					●	●					
Industry Networking	Los Angeles, Nashville	Obtain 2 different business cards from industry professionals	●	●	●				●	●					
Keywords	NYC, Tokyo	Respond creatively to 3 separate keyword prompts in different public places				●	●					●	●		
Local Culture	HK, Taipei, NYC	Talk to a local, go to a local restaurant or attend a cultural event and document the experience				●	●			●			●		
Logistics	Florida, LA, HK, Taipei, Nashville, NYC, Tokyo	Organize and facilitate a tour event for the whole cohort	●	●	●	●	●		●					●	●
Wayfinding	HK, Taipei	Take 5 photos that best represent the route from the airport to the hotel	●	●					●	●					
Orientation	Los Angeles, Nashville, NYC	Find 5 to 8 different culturally significant locations via walking or subway and photograph them	●	●						●					
Test a Stereotype	HK, Taipei, NYC, Los Angeles	Discuss a preconceived stereotype in a group and then find examples that support or negate it			●			●					●		
Presentation Summary	Nashville	Attend a panel at the conference, summarize and post to Facebook.	●	●	●	●									
User Experience	Florida Cruise	Provide a written report addressing user-experience for cruise management	●	●	●	●	●								

Figure Two: List of modules, intangible learning assessed and tour locations

The modules were designated around themes, such as *orientation, stereotypes, keywords, planning and leading an activity for the student cohort, exploring and experiencing a local custom or new cultural context, industry networking*, and *industry engagement*. For example, the orientation module (as shown in figure three) required students to photograph and/or geotag well-known landmarks within a city, encouraging them to explore their new environment and become more familiar with its layout and public transport. Undertaking this activity required resourcefulness, curiosity and initiative. In contrast, the stereotype module required students to work in groups to reflect on a previously held *stereotype* related to a site's people, food, infrastructure, customs, or industries, and determine whether their attitudes or opinions had changed after direct contact with the subject of the stereotype. This module was designed to encourage students to reflect upon empathy and cultural respect.

Figure Three: Example of assessment module

Other modules focused on *industry experiences*, including the *networking* module which required students to collect business cards from professionals they met during a tour and the *industry engagement* module, which required students to ask questions from industry practitioners who spoke to the group. These modules prioritised confidence, initiative, professional behaviour, communication and conduct, resourcefulness, and risk taking.

Evaluation of assessment modules

After the study tours ended in 2016, the authors used questionnaires and focus groups to evaluate the effectiveness of the modules. The questionnaires were designed to determine if students were becoming more aware of intangible learning through active engagement in tour activities rather than measure the rate of change or progress of learning due to assessment. In early 2017, approximately two months after completion of the tours, the researchers administered a follow up questionnaire with participating students (N=41) immediately following the study tours and facilitated two student focus groups to collect qualitative data (N=18). Participating students were enrolled in an undergraduate degree program and were predominately in their final year of study. They spanned a range of ages from 20 to mid-forties, but were most often between the ages of 21 and 24 years of age. In addition, three tour leaders who were not researchers on this project completed a questionnaire, and three of the researchers who also led tours completed the questionnaire in order to reflect on their experiences.

The two questions focused on the modules were analysed to assess their effectiveness. Q1: *Did the modules on tour support your intangible learning?* and Q2: *What was your overall experience of the modules? Please describe.* The students' open-ended responses were analysed using multi-phased thematic coding (Bauer & Gaskell, 2000; Flick, 2006), which incorporated open-coding to identify consistent themes, followed by axial coding to develop more specific themes (O'Reilly et. Al., 2014; Boyatzis, 1998). Where possible, the results are presented as specific percentages in the findings section based on this analysis.

In early 2017, a researcher (who did not lead a study tour) conducted focus groups with 18 students to gather more in-depth views of the modules and how they impacted their experiences and learning on

the tour. Students were asked to gauge the impact of the assessment modules in relation to the degree of difficulty they experienced, and whether they believed the modules had enhanced their overall learning experience. The focus groups were recorded and transcribed, followed by a thematic analysis of the data using a similar process to that of the open-ended survey questions. Due to the qualitative nature of focus groups, the results are presented in the findings section in general terms based on this thematic analysis. They were semi-structured, and initial questions included:

- *Which modules best assisted your learning while you were on the study tour, and why?*

- *Are there any modules that didn't assist your learning, and why?*

- *Do you see any benefits of completing these modules while on a tour? If so, what?*

At the staff level, a questionnaire was sent to tour leaders (N=6) requesting feedback about the value and impact of the modules for assessment. The questionnaire resulted in short answers which were thematically analysed using the same open-coding and axial coding process as stated above. The questions included:

Q1: *Did the module assessment enrich the tour experience for students?*

Q2: *Did the module assessment make students more aware of existing intangible learning?*

Q3: *Did engaging with the modules create more work for you on tour?*

Q4: *What suggestions would you make for improving the modules in the future?*

Although it was impossible to triangulate the results of the three data collection methods given the small sample size for staff, the researchers were able to develop a comprehensive understanding of the value of the modules. The next section discusses the findings.

Findings

Tour leader perspectives

The tour leaders believed the modules generally enriched the study tour experience for adult students and helped them become more active and reflective learners. The modules directed at individual activities enhanced students' reflections about what and how they learned while travelling, and modules aimed at group tasks served to improve interaction and solidarity. The group modules also fostered discussions between group members, entrenched the relationships students established in the pre-departure assessment group presentations, and gave a greater sense of belonging for those who had previously not bonded with other students. Five (out of six) of the tour leaders believed that the modules both complemented and enriched conventional academic assessment items because they precipitated more reflection about a variety of learning experiences.

The tour leaders raised a number of key themes in respect to their experience of the modules:

- *Staff perceived that students were more active in their approach to learning;*

- *Staff perceived that students had little trouble completing module assessments;*

- *Staff believed that adding modules was easily integrated into the pre-existing assessment.*

All six tour leaders agreed that the modules were effective in alerting students to the nature of intangible personal learning outcomes and encouraged them to think more deeply about this type of learning (question two). Tour leaders also referred to the positive impact on building students' confidence, improving initiative, and making them more open to engaging with new experiences (involving risk taking and open mindedness). However, there is room for improvement, as two tour leaders stated the keywords module was somewhat vague, making it challenging for students to comprehend and for staff to facilitate.

Despite the positive benefits, half of the tour leaders surveyed believed the modules generated slightly more work for them and their students

(question three). One stated there was additional work only in particular areas, while two out of six stated they did not do any additional work. The extra work for some tour leaders involved explaining the modules and answering questions about them as most students had not undertaken this kind of task before, and facilitating and assessing the modules on site. Two tour leaders reported minor logistical difficulties with recording and verifying student responses and their completion of tasks with multiple components on site.

Tour leaders offered a range of suggestions to improve the modules (question four). One leader wanted additional flexibility to tailor the module design to suit the needs of their particular tour and noted there are a variety of destinations and disciplines that would require unique attention. One leader wanted to increase the number of modules per tour because they believed they were more effective at generating learning than the academic reflective journal. Yet, other leaders asserted there were slightly too many modules (5) for a two-week tour.

The next section discusses findings based on student input.

Student perspectives

The majority of students (based on focus group discussions) believed the modules had a beneficial impact on their intangible learning skills and could be applied to industry and career contexts in the future. Overall, students reported gaining most from the modules when *tour leaders explained the relevance of the activity*; when the activity was *well integrated into the tour;* and they had *knowledge about their destination city before arrival.*

A majority of students also had a positive experience of the modules (question 2). As indicated in Table One, students used terms such as enjoyable, good, beneficial, interesting and helpful to describe their experience of the modules. However, some respondents offered a critical assessment of their experiences and used words such as annoying, unnecessary and unpleasant.

Terms

Positive	Negative	Neutral
Easy	Vague	Mild
Beneficial (3 times)	Unpleasant	
Fun	Confusing	
Engaging	Unorganized	
Relevant	Annoying	
Practical	Redundant	
Achievable	Unnecessary	
Challenging		
Enjoyable		
Concise		
Good		
Interesting		
Brief		
Helpful		
Really great		

Table One: Student terms describing the modules

Based on the post-tour questionnaires, students overwhelmingly thought the modules supported their learning and the acquisition of intangible skills (question 1), as one student stated, *"I believe this is a great way to build values and skills"*. Of the 41 respondents, 32 (78%) gave a positive response, three indicated a negative experience (7.3%), and four were neutral (9.8%). Two students did not respond. Positive statements included, *"Seeing and experiencing the culture there through the modules aided my curiosity, tolerance and open mindedness"*, and one neutral student, stated that the modules *"helped me to further think about what I'd learnt, but not much"*.

Some students believed that a few modules were unfocused and hard to understand. One student indicated that other elements of the tour were better able to support intangible learning than the modules, suggesting, *"Some modules acted to reinforce such intangible learning, but it was the guided and independent experiences on the tour that really supported learning"*.

In addition, some key themes were raised in the focus group discussions, including:

• The need for a *balance* of student effort required;

• The *context* of the module activity, including the mode of delivery and the location, should be carefully considered;

- The modules assisted with *retaining knowledge*;
- The modules enhanced *awareness of intangible skills* and personal characteristics;
- *Careful explanation* of the modules is necessary; and
- The modules fostered *collaboration* and group discussions.

The modules require a careful balance

A sense of balance between the simplicity and complexity of module tasks was significant in relation to the perceived benefit of the activity. If a module was too complex it often led to confusion, and if it was too simple some students became disinterested. Statements regarding module simplicity as a positive factor included, *"I like to think that if it was any harder ... it would take away from the cultural experiences that you were going to get if you spent all your time doing work ... so I reckon it was a good balance"*, and *"There was a nice balance between work and play so I wasn't stressed about assessment the whole trip"*.

Students generally thought the number of modules was reasonable and easy to complete. When asked to rank the ease of module completion between one (easy) and five (difficult), most identified it as very easy, rating it one out of five. Students found some module activities more challenging, ranking them two or three out of five. Comments included, *"I would say generally that most of the tasks were fairly easy to complete. I didn't find any of them a huge struggle"* and *"I think that all of our tasks in our situation were easy. I just had to sit down for 10-minutes and concentrate on this as opposed to going and doing other exciting and engaging things. Still very enjoyable, but easy"*.

The context of the modules is important

The design of modules needs to carefully consider the *context, mode of delivery, and location*. For instance, one module required students to exchange business cards with professional practitioners, but many did so merely as a collecting exercise, and some students felt it would have been more valuable if they had been given extra time to converse with speakers. Some students also said they did not have enough time to complete modules and felt the process was too rushed. For example: *"There were more things planned than what we could handle. The activities, or the*

tasks themselves, weren't necessarily hard but I just found them difficult because we always had a time limit, always rushed".

Another student would have liked to discuss the modules in pre-departure tutorials. This was a reasonable request, but certain modules were designed explicitly to forgo preparation time so students had to learn on the ground and rely on their initiative.

Modules aided in the retention of knowledge enabling students to focus on learning

One significant benefit of the modules was that it focused students' attention on acquiring skills for study and beyond, not entering the tour as a leisure activity. Comments to this effect included, *"Just staying on track and reminding yourself that it's not a holiday, that you're actually here to be learning as well"*. Students also believed the modules helped them retain knowledge and improve their learning, as with the following comments: *"When we worked together, teamed off, investigated different elements, came back together to consolidate our information, that was a really good way of learning"*.

Many students appreciated the more activity-based learning enabled by modules in contrast to conventional academic formats. Comments made about the active and immersive learning fostered by modules included: *"It was a completely different way of learning for me ... I'm so textbook ... it was definitely experiential learning and I found that really helpful"* and *"You ended up retaining more knowledge having actually experienced it, learning it and discussing it. It felt more natural. I thought it was better than having to write it all down"*.

The modules fostered the awareness of intangible skills

Students commented on the *general awareness of enhanced skills in intangible learning* relating to resourcefulness, initiative, flexibility, curiosity and open mindedness. When given a specific list of intangible skill options, one student commented, *"initiative and flexibility were probably the most integrated into our general activities"*.

Individual modules enabled active learning that fostered initiative, risk taking and resourcefulness. For example, the orientation module was extremely helpful for students adapting to life in a new city, as one

student stated: *"the [orientation] one … was really helpful … learning how to get around and feeling confident"*.

Industry-focused modules that required the exchange of business cards with industry professionals, or to ask questions of speakers, and to be aware of professional behaviour were also popular. Students noted becoming more aware of professionalism, curiosity, tolerance, initiative, open mindedness, resourcefulness, flexibility, empathy, cultural humility, and risk-taking. The modules also improved confidence levels and fostered leadership skills when actively engaging with a new environment.

The modules aided group discussions among students

A number of students expressed appreciation for modules that fostered interaction and discussion, placing considerable value on de-briefing and group reflection during discussions in order to learn about peers' views, such as: *"We did a lot of reflective talking together which was really good … it was nice to compare notes about our experiences"*. The group-focused modules promoted shared learning and reinforced group identity. Some students reported that the modules also improved their skills in critical reflection, as *"They made me think about what I was experiencing and really evaluate and reflect on the activities"*. This demonstrated that such modules successfully supported conventional academic learning outcomes associated with reflective analysis and critical thinking and supported students' awareness of their intangible skills and how they might be utilized while exploring a new environment.

Negative experiences of the modules

Despite the generally positive experience with the modules, some students suggested changes to the modules or commented on ones that did not work well. For example, several students requested a stronger industry focus or more discipline specific activities: *"Maybe you could have core modules relating to the industry stuff that everyone has to do and then have extra credit modules, or something like that"*. The keywords module and some planning activities did not work well, and there was a mixed response to modules that required students to try new food. As one claimed, *"the module in regards to eating something new … I feel like that's something you would do anyway while you are there, so maybe change it to more industry related"*.

Some of the modules were deemed to be disorganised or vague and students wanted more direction and explanation about the rationale for the modules and the expected outcomes. This can be rectified in future study tour assessment by alerting staff to the importance of contextualizing the use of module assessment for enhancing student awareness of intangible learning.

Discussion and conclusion

This research has found that the participating creative industries students experienced significant transformations on professional and personal levels during their study tour. This supports findings of study abroad experiences proposed by O'Reilly (2014) who suggested, 'International experiences can be transformative in nature as they may impact both personal and professional attitudes as well as extending an individual's global perspective' (57). Student awareness of intangible learning experiences is an important factor in facilitating these transformations. This research contributes to a greater understanding of intangible learning and how it can be facilitated and assessed. Moreover, adult students reported that their experiences were transformative in ways directly related to the awareness of transferable skills and personal characteristics.

Adult students revealed new insights into their personal growth and reported awareness of confidence, resourcefulness, tolerance, initiative, curiosity and greater maturity. These attainments go hand in hand with other intangible and transferable employability skills such as open-mindedness, curiosity, cultural respect, empathy, adaptability, time management, organization, leadership, confidence, creativity, and cognitive flexibility. One student described the benefit of these changes, *"It was probably the best experience of my life. I've always been such a quiet person, and so very shy. So, when I did this, it was like coming back in a leadership role".*

Designing assessment that facilitates students' understanding of intangible skills and personal characteristics, however, remains a challenging task. As this learning is inherently personal and subjective, it is not always clearly exhibited in student behaviour. Nonetheless, the assessment modules trialled during this research were intended to primarily support students' awareness of acquiring new skills. Students expressed satisfaction and the belief that gains in such learning enhanced their travel experience and

supported skill development in reflective and critical thinking. A limitation of this study is that only self-reported reflections provided by the students were used to determine their experiences. Additional methods, such as experience sampling technique in which a person records their feelings or experience at specific moments in order to link them with circumstances and situations, could be beneficial (Napa Scollon et al., 2009).

This type of transformation has been reported in other research, noting that feelings of personal transformation transcend 'achievements such as passing the course or obtaining a degree, to a level of personal and professional maturation that positively impacts society in an altruistic humanitarian way' (Walters, et al., 2016, p. 11). Dwyer (2014) found that 95% of students reported increased self-confidence and maturity (Dwyer 2004a and b; Potts and Berquist, 2014). Similarly, Fenech et al. (2013) observed that students gained 'improved awareness of global issues, and increased self-confidence and self-esteem' (458) and Tucker and Weaver (2010) observed improved student confidence. However, questions remain about the extended nature and scope of intangible skills associated with international study and their potential long-term effects. This is a limitation of the current study. Future research needs to investigate the long-term impact of study tours on students and if the intangible skills are beneficial to their future practice.

Students also expressed enthusiasm for working in groups and their willingness to hear about others' learning experiences during study tours as an outcome of completing the assessment modules. Other research suggests that group work is beneficial because it enhances the development of skills similar to real world practice (Fearon et al., 2012; Fellenz, 2006). It provides an opportunity to practice collaboration and negotiation. This suggests that future assessment modules should include additional group activities in order to foster social learning and capitalise on student enthusiasm for this pedagogical style. However, further research is warranted into group learning during study tours since other factors may also impact the student experience, including personality types and levels of introversion.

Findings of this research can assist the design of study tour assessment that enables adult students to focus on the nature of their intangible learning during an international short-term study tour. This study also highlights the potential significance of immersive assessment modules that provided

specific ways for students to engage with their host country and the **cultural differences to which they are exposed. The modules heightened awareness of intangible and transferable employability skills such as** open-mindedness, curiosity, cultural respect, empathy, adaptability, time management, organization, leadership, confidence, creativity and cognitive flexibility. Although more work is needed in this area, this is a positive step **in ensuring students within creative disciplines can more readily experience** the benefits of international study experiences.

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