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American students abroad: Negotiation of difference?

Celeste Kinginger Pennsylvania State University, USA
cxk37@psu.edu

This paper considers the ways in which American students' active engagement in local host communities abroad is at risk. Constraining forces include the new demographics of American study abroad, prejudicial attitudes toward international education and sheltered program designs, a research enterprise committed to representing the perspectives of students primarily, and the influence of globalization on communicative practice and habits of thought. To counter these influences, the elements of an activist stance are proposed.

1. Introduction

The title of my paper comes from an article in the recent issue of *The Modern Language Journal* Focus Issue (December 2007), in which David Block documents the rise of identity as a construct relevant to SLA. Block (2007) notes that poststructuralist views on identity as a process and a contested site of struggle seem particularly well suited to describe immersion in new sociocultural environments where identity is destabilized and people must strive to achieve a new balance. New input, according to Block, upsets taken-for-granted points of reference, but the outcome is not merely adding the new to the old. Instead, the result is what is now famously known as the THIRD PLACE (Bhabha 1994; Kramsch 2006a), where 'there is what Papastergiadis (2000) called a NEGOTIATION OF DIFFERENCE during which the past and the present "encounter and transform each other" in the "presence of fissures, gaps, and contradictions (p. 170)"' (Block 2007: 864). The negotiation of difference results in ambivalence:

> Ambivalence is the uncertainty of feeling a part and feeling apart. It is the mutually conflicting feelings of love and hate. Moreover, it is the simultaneous affirmation and negation of such feelings . . . Ambivalence, it would seem, is the natural state of human beings who are forced by their individual life trajectories to make choices where choices are not easy to make. However, a natural state is not necessarily a desirable state and in studies of individuals' life stories, there are attempts to resolve the conflicts that underlie ambivalence. (Block 2007: 864–865)

Block is describing the work that people do to craft identities in response to new sociocultural environments and the pain that people experience when old identities lose their relevance and

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transparency, especially in cases where changes are 'forced'. The negotiation of difference is a result of active participation and engagement in these environments. It requires a genuine investment in learning (Norton 2000), it can yield discomfort, ambivalence, even anguish, but it can also generate significant insight of the kind that is routinely attributed to programs of education abroad: intercultural awareness, empathy, global civic engagement, and language ability.

This talk, originally delivered to a group of language educators working in the US, is about the importance of an activist stance toward the design and use of study abroad programs. That is, educators need more knowledge of the relationship between study abroad and language learning, heightened critique of the current knowledge base in this domain, and more engagement in the choice, design, and use of programs abroad. American students can and often do choose to negotiate difference in their study abroad experiences, and this choice leads to language learning. However, on the contemporary scene, there are a number of forces at work to constrain and downplay any emphasis on language learning as negotiation of difference for these students. I will outline four constraining forces, moving from the national to the individual level and illustrating my points with examples from my own and others' research.

2. Reading the statistics

A review of policy documents and demographic figures related to American study abroad reveals a disturbing trend: although study abroad is prioritized, at least in principle, and participation is on the rise, the overall nature of the phenomenon suggests a general de-emphasis on language learning. One of the current administration's responses to the tragedy of 9/11 was to start a discussion about increasing the participation of American students in programs abroad. The Abraham Lincoln Study Abroad Fellowship Commission (Commission on the Abraham Lincoln Study Abroad Fellowship Program 2005) described study abroad as the next major step in the evolution of American higher education, equivalent in impact to the establishment of land-grant universities in the late 19th century, or the GI Bill at the end of World War II, a move consolidating the post-war middle class. By unanimous approval of the Senate, the year 2006 was named 'The Year of Study Abroad', and a recommendation was forwarded to fund scholarships sending at least one million students abroad each year.

Although the Senate bill put forth following the Lincoln report has yet to be approved, demographic information shows that even without a new infusion of funding, more American students go abroad each year. According to the Institute for International Education's 2007 'Open Doors Report' the most recent available statistics show the number of US students studying abroad increasing by over 150% in the past decade. In the years 2005–2006, 223,534 American students went abroad on academic programs, an increase of 8.5% over the previous year. Of course, these numbers correspond to a small proportion of the entire population: less than 3% of full-time students, according to Gore (2005). Also, the Junior Year Abroad model has lost its currency, and there is less involvement of students specializing in languages. Programs now normally take place over timeframes of a semester or less and

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enroll students majoring in the social sciences, business or management. According to the Institute for International Education (2004), from 1985 to 2003, the percentage of students spending an entire academic year abroad dropped from 17.7% to 7.8%. In the same period, the number of business majors going abroad rose from 10.9% to 17.6% while the number of foreign language majors dropped from 16.7% to 8.5%. The typical contemporary study abroad sojourn does not involve a long-term investment in language learning by a student whose academic program foregrounds language.

The 2007 Open Doors Report also offers information about the destinations and gender distribution of American study abroad participants. A significant percentage of American students abroad chose officially Anglophone destinations, particularly the United Kingdom (18.2%) and Australia (6.1%), and the majority opted to study abroad in Europe (58.3% in 2005–2006) or Latin America (15.2% in 2005–2006). It is worth taking into consideration the fact that many European universities now offer instruction in English both to their own and to international students. This development is taking place in the context of the Bologna Declaration, in which member states agreed to create a barrier-free European Higher Education Area by 2010 through structural convergence (and standardization) of their higher education systems (Papatsiba 2006). The majority of American students, that is, the ones who go to Europe, are increasingly likely to receive instruction delivered in English. In its gender distribution, the current generation of study abroad participants is quite similar to those of the past, with females in the majority: 65.5% female to 34.5% male in 2006. These figures raise questions about the feminization of study abroad and about why study abroad attracts so few male students.

3. Bungee jumping in Zimbabwe: the image and practice of study abroad in higher education

A partial answer comes from Gore's (2005) Foucauldian analysis of policy documents related to study abroad in the United States. Gore was mystified by the persistent marginalization of study abroad, despite decades of efforts to highlight its value for overcoming severe deficits in Americans' global awareness. One of the examples Gore cites is the National Geographic–Roper 2002 Global Geographic Literacy Survey, in which American students scored next to last:

> Of the college-age Americans surveyed, 87 percent couldn't locate Iraq on a map of the world, 70 percent couldn't locate New Jersey, 20 percent couldn't find the Pacific Ocean, and 11 percent couldn't even point to the United States. (Gore 2005: 5)

In an attempt to uncover the ideological and historical roots of beliefs about study abroad, Gore undertook an analysis of discourse in American international education, exploring how 'a constellation of dominant beliefs has coalesced to form an episteme held by the U.S. higher education community' (p. 23). Within the dominant discourse, 'study abroad programs are perceived as attracting wealthy women to academically weak European programs established in a frivolous Grand Tour tradition' (p. 24). The Grand Tour – intended to complete the

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education of British gentry through post-Oxbridge exposure to the Continent – tied study abroad to leisure and general cultural edification rather than to productivity or focused learning. Now, the feminization of study abroad further serves to associate overseas education with lack of academic rigor and professional purpose. Study abroad, according to the dominant discourse, is most appropriate as a decorative add-on to the education of elite women. The purported academic weakness of study abroad is further associated with underlying prejudicial attitudes in which higher education of true quality is only available in the United States, and in which the liberal arts curriculum is disassociated from vocational goals.

Gore's analysis also uncovered an alternative discourse, highlighted in the post-9/11 era, according to which study abroad is conceived as an important, academically strong source of professional development by way of the liberal curriculum, particularly for the disenfranchised female majority. Students go abroad in order to contribute their part to global understanding and peace, willingly facing hardship and embracing challenges in a quest for educational experience unavailable at home, and emphasizing the connections between the liberal arts curriculum and the skills and knowledge needed for future careers or humanitarian endeavors.

Whether they subscribe to the dominant or the alternative view, American students abroad are often placed in programs that do not foreground the importance of engagement in local communities (Ogden 2007). In part, this tendency may be attributed to the general role played by colleges and universities in students' self-image and social life. Acting *in loco parentis*, colleges are assigned responsibility for students' bodies and minds as they traverse the divide between adolescence and adulthood and prepare to assume financial and personal independence (Matthews 1997). Whether they are at home or abroad, students' affiliations with their schools are carefully tended: today's students are tomorrow's alumni. American students generally expect to receive service from their schools related to their health, personal comfort, and extracurricular activities, regardless of where they are.

This reality stands out on the background of other countries' practices. In describing European study abroad, with particular reference to the United Kingdom, Coleman (1997) notes that European students have customarily undertaken a full year of residence abroad during which they are expected to act as independent, responsible adults, navigating the foreign university and other settings on their own. For language students in the UK, residence abroad has traditionally been a mandatory part of the curriculum. For Coleman, therefore, what is remarkable about American study abroad is the closure and cohesiveness of study abroad groups. American programs 'generally envisage the short-term transfer of cohesive groups of American students to a different geographical base, where they may benefit from formal (classroom) and informal (naturalistic) language learning but without necessarily abandoning an American educational framework and academic support' (Coleman 1997: 1).

While abroad, American students tend to rely upon each other or their programs for social and psychological support (e.g. Twombly 1995; Kline 1998). Some programs (see, for example, Levin 2001) explicitly downplay language learning and negotiation of difference in favor of a 'coming of age' model explicitly encouraging in-group solidarity and rejection of local social networks. Levin's ethnography of study abroad in France followed students as they systematically removed themselves from any linguistically challenging activity, opting, for example, to avoid the university cafeteria by instead shopping for peanut butter and salsa at anonymous big-box stores, akin to the Wal-Marts of home, such as Leclerc or Carrefour.

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Feinberg (2002) had an undergraduate research assistant interview '30 or so' of her peers to collect insight on the value of study abroad from the students' perspective. The accounts thus gathered invoked both the 'redemptive self' and the therapy speak typical of contemporary American personal narratives (McAdams 2006), repeatedly emphasizing personal growth, self-discovery, and bad behavior in the company of other Americans, all taking place on a backdrop of the world as exotic fantasy playground. Feinberg's students borrowed images from television shows such as *Survivor* and from publicity campaigns where indigenous peoples around the globe display their taste for American products. The real inhabitants of these locales were either ignored or interpreted as obsessed with American commodities and displays of power:

> The responses from Peter, who had spent 10 weeks studying and working on service projects with a group in South Africa, Zimbabwe, and Lesotho, were representative. When asked what he had learned from his African experience, Peter used the first-person pronoun seven times, eliminating Africans: 'I learned that I'm a risk taker, um, that I don't put up with people's bull, uh, what else? That I can do anything that I put my mind to. I can do anything I want. You know, it's just life is what you make of it.'
>
> Peter didn't mention that Zimbabweans live in an impoverished dictatorship where 25 percent of the population is HIV-positive, and thus they cannot do anything they put their minds to – a lesson he evidently didn't learn. Instead, like so many other traveling young people, he claimed to have learned about himself, and talked about group dynamics; students' transgressive behavior, like drinking too much; and bungee jumping at Victoria Falls – rather than southern Africa's cultures or social problems (Feinberg 2002).

Reconsidering Gore's findings in light of reports such as Levin's or Feinberg's, it becomes clear that the accounts students bring back with them from programs in which they have been enjoined to avoid engagement with local communities serve to re-voice, reinforce and perpetuate the negative image of study abroad represented in the dominant discourse. Although this phenomenon is hardly new, it may be in a process of intensification as the image of the United States, and our foreign policy, continues to decline. For example, in one of the programs where participants in my study (Kinginger 2008) were enrolled, in the spring of 2003, the onset of mass protests against the US-led invasion of Iraq led the program directors to move toward a more sheltered model, with students enjoined to avoid interaction with local people, stay together, and join excursions, designed exclusively for them, to local tourist destinations.

4. Study abroad research: illusions of national self-sufficiency?

One of the places where one might expect to find insight on American students' language learning as negotiation of difference is the growing body of research devoted to language learning in study abroad (see Kinginger forthcoming for an overview). In this literature, however, there is very little attention allocated to the precise qualities of students' interactions with their hosts, and the perspectives of the people with whom students interact is almost entirely absent (cf. Schmidt-Rinehart & Knight 2004). The vast majority of studies aim to document the outcomes of study abroad in terms of skills conceived as products owned by individuals and displayed in monologic performances such as the ACTFL Oral Proficiency

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Interview or the Discourse Completion Task. When researchers note, repeatedly, that individual differences seem to be amplified by study abroad, the approach they normally take is to focus on the time-on-task that students report (e.g. Ginsburg & Miller 2000; Freed, Segalowitz & Dewey 2004). There is little inquiry into the students' motives for participation in study abroad or of the extent to which they enter their programs with sincere desire to learn. Even when the research focuses on sociolinguistic or pragmatic features at the intersection of language and culture, only rarely (e.g. in Shardakova 2005) do they attempt to find out whether or not students have begun to appreciate the local meanings of the speech acts or discourse features they use.

The outcomes-oriented literature is complemented by the efforts of qualitative researchers to understand and explain the nature of student experiences abroad. In reading these studies, one may begin to appreciate the very diverse ways in which American students greet and position themselves in relation to language learning and interacting with hosts. In studies of language socialization at family dinner tables (Cook 2006; DuFon 2006; Iino 2006) the voices of both hosts and students are included as we catch a glimpse of actual negotiation of difference at the micro-level of specific interactions. Some ethnographic studies present careful interpretation of students' views in light of host community ideologies and practices (e.g. Wilkinson 1998), and therefore allow the reader to appreciate how these views are situated, and should be interpreted, in local contexts. In other qualitative studies, however, the exclusion of host perspectives leads to problems of interpretation very similar to those of the students interviewed for Feinberg's (2002) article. Because these researchers are committed to representing the emic perspective, but limit the scope of their inquiry to the students themselves, because novice interactants by definition do not understand their new environment or the local meanings of actions or utterances, and because American students typically do not stay long enough to develop such an awareness, we wind up with research serving to perpetuate ethnocentric views of the world. That is, we learn quite a lot about what is wrong with the rest of the world, and why it is better to be American. One example comes from Pellegrino-Aveni's examination of factors influencing students' choice to speak out or to withdraw from foreign language speaking in the context of L2 'self-construction' while studying in Russia: 'the overarching experience of self-presentation in an L2 and the maintenance of security (i.e., status, validation, safety, and control) in a second culture' (Pellegrino-Aveni 2005: 7). Using grounded theory methodology, Pellegrino-Aveni analyzed ethnographic observation and learner diaries to identify relevant social-environmental cues by which learners gather information on their status, validation, safety, and control in interactions. Here, the 'self' is the metaphysically independent entity recognizable to readers of works in social psychology of the 1970s. What matters above all is how this self interprets the events befalling it.

While the author identifies and describes a variety of cues used by learners in their self-construction (e.g. social hierarchy and distance, caretaker behavior, self-attitude), the reader is presented with vivid and compelling stories illustrating the struggles facing language learners abroad. However, features of the sociocultural environment that were not noticed or recorded by the students tend to be excluded from the analysis, in which themes are understood to emerge from the data. Thus, the analysis rests entirely on the perspectives of novices who do not necessarily know how their interlocutors appraise and assign meaning

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to the phenomena under consideration using their own, culturally-derived interpretive tools.

Pellegrino-Aveni (2005) notes that the learner diaries she studied include many references to bad caretaking approaches on the part of interlocutors. Some of the clearest examples come from the classroom setting, where 'cultural differences in foreign education programs may foster unexpected conflict for learners. For example, American learners are generally unaccustomed to the directness and openness with which Russian instructors typically perform caretaking duties' (p. 57). Participants in the study complained of interactions with their instructors in which students were openly criticized or compared with other students.

Rebeccah, for example, was greeted by her teacher with recognition of her achievement as the holder of a BA degree in Russian and an apparent attempt to foster a sense of solidarity. However:

> Later in the lesson, I didn't understand some words (she had asked us to please say something if we didn't understand). So I asked what the words meant, and she turned to me & said (basically), 'you're a bad student, you finished college already and you should be ashamed for not knowing!' I replied sarcastically and hurtfully in English, 'Thank you.' I really felt like crying! She completely cut me down in front of the class. (Pellegrino-Aveni 2005: 58)

Following this initial interaction, Rebeccah never regained her sense of security in the presence of this instructor, opting instead to skip the class and to criticize the teacher, commenting on her abrupt and domineering style, or her criticism of American students' global apathy. More than a month after the incident recounted in her journal, Rebeccah continued to blame this instructor for the state of her speaking skill, which 'still sucks' (p. 59). While it is certainly possible that this instructor was simply inept and intentionally hurtful in her classroom manner, it is also possible that her style should be understood from within a system in which a teacher's proper role and authority is interpreted differently from the way Rebeccah understood it. American students are accustomed to instructional interaction in the United States, where an egalitarian ethos leads teachers to avoid overt criticism and to attribute accomplishments to students even when they have been co-constructed with the teacher (Poole 1992). Moreover, in the United States, privacy laws forbid public exposure of facts about students' academic history. In fact, the provision of overt criticism in Russian classrooms may be traceable to an understanding of the public/private dimension of social life that is fundamentally different from the corresponding cultural and codified legal concepts guiding interpretation by Rebeccah and her American classmates (Pavlenko 1999). In Pellegrino-Aveni's book, however, we only learn about Rebeccah and her 'self', and must conclude that Russians are harsh teachers.

A more generalized phenomenon in the American study abroad literature is the finding that young women complain of sexual harassment. Whether they are in Russia (Polanyi 1995), Argentina (Isabelli-García 2006), France (Kline 1998), Spain (Talburt & Stewart 1999), or Costa Rica (Twombly 1995), these women are greeted with unfamiliar gender-related practices such as the *piropo* or other undesired sexual advances. These practices are noticed and criticized by the young men accompanying them who may then celebrate their own heterosexual identities as defenders of women, enlightened by an upbringing in a country defending gender equity (Kinginger 2008). There is very little effort to describe what these

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students are doing, if anything, to induce foreign men to harass them: we do not know what their behavior is like or how that behavior is normally interpreted locally. Complaints about sexual harassment do not seem to characterize the comments of study abroad participants from places other than the United States.

In order to understand this phenomenon, it is instructive to consider the perspectives of students from the countries under critique. For example, Patron (2007) offers a qualitative study of French students on a year abroad program in Australia, where gender-related practices were just as shocking as those of France for American students, and had a similarly negative but very different effect on the students' self-concept. For Arlette, the absence of overt flirtation in social settings 'struck at the core of her identity as a woman' (Patron 2007: 62):

> La drague, j'ai trouvé ça vraiment bizarre. Parce que c'est presque politiquement incorrect de draguer. Au bout d'un moment je me suis dit: 'Bon, il doit y avoir un problème avec ma personne. Voilà je dois pas être belle ou je dois avoir pris du poids, ou ya quelque chose parce que ya jamais personne qui me drague. Personne me fait des compliments' . . . les gens ne se regardent pas en fait . . . C'est désagréable parce qu'on se sent moins bien et en meme temps on se sent plus en sécurité.
> Picking up, I found this very weird. Because it's almost politically incorrect to pick up people. After a while, I said to myself: 'OK, there must be a problem with me. There, I must not be beautiful, or I must have put on weight, or there must be something because no one ever tries to pick me up. No one gives me compliments' . . . In fact, people don't look at each other . . . It's really unpleasant because you don't feel good about yourself but at the same time you feel much safer.

Gender issues are of course highly sensitive, no doubt in part because gender equity in the United States remains a distant goal. Meanwhile, it is almost always possible to gain approval by leveling critique at actions interpreted as overt sexual harassment, and this is what happens, without reference to host perspectives, in the study abroad literature. As a result of this omission, we are led to conclude that the rest of the world is wrong about gender, and we are right. Thus, it may be that in some cases, the very people who are charged with providing insight on international education are blinded by illusions of national superiority and contribute to the construction of dominant discourses in which education of true quality can only be found in the United States.

5. Globalization and the American student abroad

Globalization has been defined as the 'intensification of worldwide social relations' as 'the constraints of geography' are decreasingly relevant (Block & Cameron 2002: 1), and raises questions about the benefits that accrue to students who change places. With widespread availability of global communications technology and easy access to travel, students abroad need no longer consider themselves distanced from their families and home social networks. They may choose to screen out their local environment, and the people in it, in favor of extensive interactions through an electronic umbilical cord, with people they already know. As never before, they may opt to retain personal control of their communicative environment, blocking out the sounds of their surroundings with ear buds and an iPod. They may receive multiple and lengthy visits from their mothers, boyfriends, or college roommates. They have

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no need to rely on local media for information, and at times of anxiety such as the beginning of the war in Iraq, they may quite easily turn their attention away from the affordances of their host community and scroll for hours through the pages of foxnews.com.

Globalization has also intensified the domination of English as the acknowledged *lingua mundi*, and this means that American students abroad increasingly encounter their own language in the settings they frequent. English is the preferred medium for exchanges among their fellow international students, and competence and interaction in English are in demand. It is becoming more difficult to find situations in which American students can be engaged in language learning as negotiation of difference, and easier to dismiss foreign language competence as irrelevant. These students, more and more, need to choose to foreground their identity as language learners if they are to learn languages.

In their book on globalization and language teaching, Block & Cameron (2002) comment on the diffusion of capitalism accelerated by the fall of communism and dramatic increases in the efficiency of communication. Accompanying this development is a consumerist approach to education and a tendency to treat all that is desirable as a marketable commodity, including language competence and the experience of global culture in general. Here, they cite Barber's (1995) dystopic vision of the world as a vast and homogenized entertainment shopping experience ('McWorld') and Matthews' (2000) 'cultural supermarket' in which the most affluent 10–15% of the world's population wander through the aisles choosing the identities they perform in their social worlds. 'There is a creeping uniformity in all aspects of our lives,' they write, 'from how we dress to how we eat, from our entertainment preferences to our work habits and from the design of our buildings to our attitudes towards personal freedom' (Block & Cameron 2002: 4). Whether or not we agree with the claim that globalization is a homogenizing, disenchanting process, distancing us from authentic experience, it is legitimate to wonder about its influence on study abroad. As they navigate a landscape dotted with Disney icons, Starbucks stores, and McDonalds' corporate logos, to what extent are our students at risk of reading the world as a superficially exotic but basically familiar source of infotainment?

Finally, in some parts of the world, globalization is viewed as an American bid for worldwide economic and cultural domination, and therefore contributes to the negative image of their country that American students are likely to encounter when they go abroad (Falk & Kanach 2000). According to these authors, the United States may be viewed with admiration or mistrust, but is rarely viewed with indifference. These perceptions place American students in a unique position both to suffer indignities and to learn. The way in which students react to criticism of the United States can vary considerably, of course, and may depend to some extent upon whether or not they carry with them some version of the 'alternative' approach described by Gore (2005). My research suggests, however, that many American students arrive in their study abroad destinations without having given much consideration to the image of their country, or its foreign policy, in the places they visit (Kinginger 2004, 2008). These students may find it shocking to be confronted on these issues by host family members or peers. Some cannot accept the legitimate curiosity of their hosts; they react defensively and recoil into national superiority, cutting themselves off from the very people who are most likely to nurture their language learning.

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6. An activist stance

In my book about American students in France (Kinginger 2008), many of the issues mentioned here are illustrated in case studies of individual students. In particular, problems in coping with criticism of the United States are revealed in the case of Beatrice, who became alienated following attempts to defend the invasion of Iraq to her left-leaning French-Tunisian host family. Deirdre is a student whose consumerist approach to study abroad contributed to her recoil from all local social interaction in favor of online interactions with people at home. The case of Ailis shows how American students can abandon engagement in local social networks in order to embark on a modern-day Grand Tour, in which the world is reduced to a constellation of superficially appreciated landmarks and shopping outlets. In addition to these, however, the book includes three more case studies of students whose dispositions toward study abroad were quite different. There are the cases of Liza, who regarded study abroad as highly relevant to an imagined career with the Foreign Service, and Bill, whose motivation was crafted from a general humanist stance emphasizing the value and quality of personal relationships and the importance of intercultural awareness. There is also the case of Louis, whose ardent interest in the academic study of the French language and of Francophone literature led him to remarkable achievement and insight. Elsewhere, I have written the story of Alice, a working class woman who risked everything for a chance at language learning and global awareness (Kinginger 2004). Together, these cases show that the erosion of study abroad as a meaningful experience, including negotiation of difference, does not touch every student in the same way. There are still a lot of American students who approach study abroad with bright hope and deeply felt desire for a multilingual and cosmopolitan future steeped in global humanism.

In defense of these students, the profession needs an activist stance in relation to learning and language in study abroad. Professional folklore would have us believe that the benefits of study abroad are evident to all, and they are not. Received wisdom also sustains the assumption that study abroad offers unlimited learning opportunities in which students are confronted with difference and learn from it. As we have seen, our students are at increasing risk of failing to notice their own ignorance of the communities they join through study abroad. As educators, we need to upgrade our ability to argue in favor of meaningful study abroad experiences explicitly including an emphasis on language learning as negotiation of difference. Is it possible to develop intercultural awareness or symbolic competence (Kramsch 2006b) without the deep appreciation of others that comes with language learning? Most of us would likely respond that 'no, it is not', yet the exclusion or downplaying of language within discussions of international education is extremely common, even in the context most prized by language educators. We need to be able to say, precisely, why students should be enjoined to engage actively and in the local language with the host communities they visit, and we need to pay attention to the ways in which programs encourage or inhibit this engagement. As researchers, we should move beyond our focus on American students and their perceptions, and design studies including the students' host families, teachers, and program administrators. We need studies moving beyond description and into analysis of student experience in relation to sociocultural contexts, including the local settings frequented by the students and the students' own histories of engagement in language learning. We need

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studies linking language learning to the negotiation of difference and the development of global awareness, intercultural competence, and civic responsibility. We do not need any more laundry lists of complaints about the practices of others. As citizens, we should give vocal support to programs of international education, to an emphasis on their quality as well as their quantity, and to funding for students of diverse backgrounds who are likely to bring an 'alternative' perspective to their studies abroad. As human beings, we should celebrate the work that it takes to value the perspectives of others, whether we call it 'negotiation of difference' or something else.

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CELESTE KINGINGER is Associate Professor of Applied Linguistics and French at the Pennsylvania State University. She is affiliated with CALPER (Center for Advanced Language Proficiency Education and Research), a National Foreign Language Resource Center located in the College of Liberal Arts at the Pennsylvania State University. Her most recent publication, *Language learning in study abroad: Case studies of Americans in France* (Blackwell, 2008) approaches study abroad through the lens of sociocultural theory. Her current work includes a second volume about study abroad, *Language learning and study abroad: A critical reading of research* (Palgrave/Macmillan, forthcoming).

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