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BLOGGING WITH THE FACEBOOK GENERATION: STUDYING ABROAD WITH GEN Y

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Abstract

Web 2.0 technologies create opportunities for distance learning with particular promise for students while they are on international exchange. The current generation of students departing for study abroad is electronically literate or 'digital natives', who have thoroughly integrated internet and communication technologies into their daily lives. But their modes of interacting may not be adequate to really gain all that they might learn through study abroad. Many international exchange programs, at the same time, have not kept pace and are missing significant opportunities to reinforce intercultural learning while students are sojourning abroad. This paper reports on qualitative and strategic findings from the project 'Bringing the Learning Home,' an Australian Learning and Teaching Council-funded pilot project to develop reflection-based curriculum for improving study abroad outcomes. In particular, we discuss qualitative findings from in-country blogging and re-entry workshops using photo elicitation, reflection-based learning, and meta-cognitive teaching strategies, with intercultural skills and professionalization as primary goals. Perhaps most importantly, we found that online tools and visual literacy, with adept instruction and practice, could produce a virtual 'third space' where students could better reflect on cultural differences, sharpen their own intercultural skills, and gain the metacognitive skills necessary to become life-long learners from experience.

Introduction

Students and universities alike dedicate significant resources to study abroad and international exchange in higher education. Only recently, however, has research been conducted in Australia to ascertain whether the educational benefits for tertiary students sojourning overseas match the rhetorical justifications of these programs (Forsey, Broomhall S & Davis, 2011). Although students may claim that they have had 'the trip of a lifetime' (Lean, 2009), and study abroad offices may collect fleeting anecdotal evidence from participants, researchers have failed to clearly articulate what sojourners have learnt from the experience (Merritt, 2011). For many students, although the experience is dramatic and memorable, their exchange appears to be 'hermetically sealed' as participants have neglected to deeply engage with their experience to gain metacognitive insights that might translate to broader learning in areas like intercultural communication. Moreover, our students use of online tools like social networking sites threaten to insulate them even further from engaging with host cultures, if we are not careful.

In the same vein, study abroad advisors often hear very positive but simplistic adjectives from students to describe their sojourns overseas: 'awesome', 'great', 'wonderful' (Merritt, 2011). For those involved in the educative process, such bland, innocuous and superficial terms used to encapsulate such a potentially powerful learning experience is troubling; if students are unable to articulate what they have learned, can we be confident that they are growing more sophisticated and cosmopolitan in their perspectives? Too often, study abroad participants fall into the trap of shallow or superficial learning, sometimes even confirming stereotypes or drawing only simple conclusions about

confidence or personal values that do not leverage the experience of being abroad. Sojourners need to embed or concretize the learning into metacognitive processes. If anything, the increasing use of online social media, where short posts and photos dominate, seems to increase this tendency toward superficial, if any, learning, with quantity of interaction replacing depth of reflection, and excursion into host culture replacing immersion.

As Aldous Huxley (1932: 5) warned, 'Experience is not what happens to a man; it is what a man does with what happens to him.' The study abroad experience is potentially a profound and powerful teacher, and yet experience alone does not constitute learning. At the same time, Seymour Papert (1987) has cautioned that a 'technocentric' view of online learning support fails to realize that the pedagogical strategies we adopt are as important as the technological platform we choose in facilitating student learning (see also Harris 2005). Based on these complementary perspectives, our study attempted to reinforce student learning by incorporating best practices for experience-based learning and online reflection to work with Gen Y students participating in educational exchange programs. In particular, we sought to use a group photo-blog to develop a cultural 'third space,' to use a term by Homi Bhabha (1994), where students could reflect in more sophisticated ways upon cultural difference, in part by sharing experiences with students sojourning in a wide variety of places.

Weblogs as teaching and research tools

The proliferation of personal weblogs (or 'blogs') in education has augmented exchange, collaboration, and communication among professionals and students (Churchill 2009; Top, 2012). Recently, blogs have emerged as a useful research modality within educational practice and theory (Dyment, O'Connell & Boyle, 2011; Lee, 2010; 2011; 2012). As an effective teaching method and research tool, blogs also have the capacity to generate a rich source of qualitative data for educational researchers (Deng & Yuen, 2011; Ellison & Wu, 2008; Halic, Lee, Paulus & Spence, 2010).

In essence, weblogs are a form of personal publishing, generally consisting of text-based entries or 'posts' that are presented in reverse chronological order (Downey, Gothard & Gray, 2012a). Blogs allow participants to share personal reflections, photographs, and weblinks while creating a steadily growing archive of posts, which can be searched, accessed, or linked to by visitors to the site (Hourigan & Murray, 2010; Lee, 2010; Yang, 2009). Unlike fixed web pages, blogs are not generally static; new content does not replace old, but merely displaces it further into the blog archive or 'down' the blog.

Blogs are part of the pattern of Web 2.0, the shift to platforms that allow user interaction and generation of content rather than just fixed presentation of designers' information; this shift is sometimes characterized as being away from 'broadcast' models to more 'conversation'-like structures (Dyment, et al. 2011). Blogs create unique opportunities that are not shared by all online technologies because of their nature and design (for a longer discussion, see Deng & Yuen, 2011). Blogs frequently allow visitor 'comments', creating opportunities for asynchronous discussion (Downey, et al. 2012a). According to Halic and colleagues (2010, p. 207), weblogs allow a "social construction of knowledge, which happens by means of sharing knowledge, asserting different perspectives and interpretations, and critiquing viewpoints". Unlike closed learning management systems (LMS), like Blackboard or Moodle, which are accessible for online discussion to enrolled participants only, blogs often generate much broader audiences and encourage rich, multimedia expression as most blogging platforms support embedding of video and photographs as well as weblinks.

We specifically chose blogs as a reflection tool because of our commitment to narrative and storytelling as a form of experience-based learning. Research on narrative finds that a good story moves us, teaches us, and potentially even transforms us (Gray & Stuart, 2012). By virtue of its own very nature, blogging incorporates many elements of good autobiographical storytelling. Blogs tend to be personal and introspective, unlike shorter-format online media (such as Facebook), and their multimedia nature encourages students to share both their reflections as well as primary evidence of their experiences

(such as photos or links to websites about the places that they have been). Because of the chronological nature of blogging, students can review their own progress and transformation over the course of the study abroad experience and generate new narrative understandings about what they experienced, or 're-story' older experiences on the basis of new insights. In particular, we chose a team weblog format for student reflection because we sought to build upon photo-based techniques for experiential learning.

Photo-elicitation

According to Loeffler (2005) photo-elicitation has emerged as an effective means of linking experiential and theoretical knowledge through the exploration of values, attitudes, memories and meaning. Because photo-elicitation has been used widely across a range of disciplines, it is also called 'photo-reflection' (Bessell, Deese & Medina, 2007); 'photo-voice' (Wang, 1999; Weiser, 2009); 'photo-language' (Cooney & Burton, 1986); and 'photo-therapy' (Martin, 2009). Photo-elicitation was purposely chosen as a research method and discussion format because of the twofold perceived educational benefits (Bessell, et al. 2007; White, Sasser, Bogren & Morgan, 2009).

Firstly, photos are an *aide-mémoire*. Talking through a visual image encourages introspection, reflection, dialogue, self-discovery, two-way communication and personal development (Harper, 2002). Molly Rogers (2005), for example, writes of the power of photography to preserve a moment:

Since the advent of photography the photographic image has been regarded as an aide-mémoire. The very act of taking a photograph signals the moment as worthy of remembering and, while objects break, landscapes change, and people die, the photograph endures, allowing it to be used to remember 'what has been'.

Students can share photos, ask about each other's photos, and generally engage together with a shared artifact. By using photos as part of our reflection, the research team believed that we could help students to recall their own changes in perceptions and adapting to a new culture while abroad. In re-entry activities, for example, we could use a 'photo passport' that the students had assembled prior to departure to reflect on changes in their own values and perceptions (see Gray, Downey & Gothard 2012).

Secondly, and perhaps most importantly, as researchers seeking student-generated data from a Gen Y cohort, we had to engage them strategically. The best way to capture the energy and hook the attention of this group, especially given that our project was entirely voluntary, was a method built upon their own ways of sharing experience, memorialising their lives, and reflecting, to the degree that they did. With digital photography so pervasive in their day-to-day interactions, we sought to leverage their prior patterns of interaction, including sophisticated but only partially conscious visual literacy, into greater experience-based learning and metacognitive development.

In this project photo reflection also provided both a research method that simultaneously acted as a mode of sharing our results through curriculum development (Banks, 1998; Collier & Collier, 1986; Prosser & Schwartz, 1998). That is, student photos both helped us to understand student experiences and encourage greater reflection, and also to, in turn, share concrete examples of the types of learning that can be achieved through facilitated reflection in study abroad.

'Gen Y' as 'digital natives'

Over the past decade or so, social researchers have been developing a profile of 'Generation Y' and its relationship to new communication technologies, including in education (Barnes, 2009; Howe, 2005; Howe & Strauss, 2000; McCrindle, 2009). Within the university-going population of students, many 'Gen Y' students are technologically savvy and have integrated new media of communication into their daily lives and self expression (Holland, 2012; Oblinger 2003; Oblinger & Oblinger, 2005; Twenge, 2006; Young, 2009). Some of our students have been immersed from a very early age in technology such as video games and internet, shaping their expectations (Black, 2010; McQueen,

2010). These 'digital natives', as Prensky (2001) referred to them, are skilful masters of these technologies and use social networking tools such as Facebook as a fundamental part of their academic and social lives (see Gunn-Lewis & Leenheer, 2011; McLoughlin & Lee, 2008, p.10; Roberts, Foehr & Rideout 2005). Although older generations may recognise that these technologies are pervasive, our students often see them as absolutely obligatory, as necessary for the daily lives and social interactions as telephones and other older communication technologies. Of course, not every member of Gen Y is equally technological savvy, or has access to the economic means to engage in these communication practices (Shah & Abraham 2009), but our project sought to explore these new channels as potentially buttressing extra-curricular learning goals.

Not surprisingly, the most digitally adept members of Gen Y often need to feel connected through social media and resist any attempt to disconnect them from these technologies. Part of an 'always switched on' culture, this group is wired '24/7' researchers are finding, often monitoring social media during most daily activities (McQueen, 2010; Roberts et al., 2005). The intensely tight, 'always switched on' social networks, in addition to small family size and consumer-based lifestyles, can make members appear excessively focused on themselves, leading some to refer to them as 'Gen Me' (Twenge, 2006).

Study abroad with Gen Y

Correspondingly, the landscape is changing quickly in study abroad as a result of these technologies. Whereas most students did not have mobile phones as recently as 2005, acquiring a phone and local SIM card are now among the first order of business for students arriving in their host country (Gunn-Lewis & Leenheer, 2011). Especially because Australian students disproportionately travel to Europe and North America, where the same communication technologies are also ubiquitous, they bring much of their online social milieu with them. Most of our students maintain high levels of connection when overseas, complaining bitterly, for example, if they do not have wireless internet access while sojourning abroad (as do their parents, in some cases!).

Anthropologist Robert Gordon (2010: 115-116) that 'connectivity' has tended to intensify interaction with people who are already socially close at the expense of encounters with strangers. That is, 'connectivity' tends to reinforce existing social relations at the expense of insulating students from building new social contacts, especially in challenging contexts like an international exchange program. In addition, the asymmetry that once held in communication while travelling – that the traveler communicated when possible or by choice – has been upset. As Gordon (ibid., p. 117) writes:

The new electronic technology has also problematized the relationship between home and abroad. People are able to participate in preexisting social networks even while physically absent. The social implications are important. In writing and sending postcards and letters, the decision to communicate is the traveler's, and these decision remind one of who and what is important. With e-mail and cell phones, the traveler and those at home have equal and reciprocal opportunities to communicate. Travelers can easily be overwhelmed by the quantity of email and the obligation to respond.

In addition, the specific patterns of communication can exacerbate pernicious tendencies that undermine intercultural learning, such as snap judgment, exoticisation, excessively critical reactions, and withdrawal from challenging social interaction. With little chance of persuading students to disconnect, our project sought to consciously counter-act some of the potentially deleterious tendencies of our students' forms of connection.

Methodology

During 2010 and 2011, a grant from the Australian Learning and Teaching Council enabled researchers from three universities to work with pilot groups of students on all campuses to develop curriculum that supported learning while studying internationally. More than 400 students from a wide range of disciplines (for instance, arts, law, engineering, education, health sciences, human sciences, and others) participated to varying degrees. The only restriction on participation was that students had

to spend time abroad in a university recognized program.

Given the project considerations, including the need to produce publicly available teaching materials and the voluntary nature of participation, our research team started a group weblog (OzStudentsAbroad.com) to collect and facilitate student photo reflection; over 100 students were enrolled in the group weblog. Previous research on the incorporation of blogs into learning demonstrated that the asynchronous nature of online 'discussion' through comments and links made blogs an especially useful tool for experience-based learning, especially when students were not having parallel experiences, due to scheduling, the diversity of overseas programs, and the intensity of cultural difference (see Deng and Yuen 2011; Halic et al. 2010; Lee 2009; Top 2012 on the use of blogs in tertiary pedagogy).

Because participation in our pilot project was entirely voluntary and no credit was being offered, we relied entirely upon student enthusiasm; our experience was that class-based LMS were not attractive to students unless they were required to use them, and the practicalities of using an LMS platform with students enrolled from multiple universities discouraged us from using these formats. We hoped that the opportunity to publish their own reflections online, on a strong and attractive collective website, would provide some students with sufficient incentive to participate. The resulting drop-out rate was high, but the approximately two hundred reflection essays collected, some with a dozen or more photos, were impressive; some of them ran to over 5000 words. In addition, the research team also found that some of our students started their own individual travel blogs at the same time, or used pre-existing blogs to document their trips. □

Students were given instructions and invited to post photos from their international experience. They were encouraged to reflect about their photos. When possible, they were oriented prior to departure to the basic frameworks for understanding experience-based learning, including Kolb's (1984) cycle of reflection (experience – reflect – process – apply), which is based on John Dewey's educational philosophy. In some cases, we also provided a basic orientation to anthropological understandings of cultural relativism and interpretation (see Downey, Gothard & Gray 2012b). In our most extensive pre-departure workshops, we used photo-elicitation to encourage student reflection on their current state prior to sojourn and anticipating travel, and to create a visual representation, a 'photo passport,' that helped them to communicate their own sense of self to people in their host country (as well as for later reference during re-entry).

Overall, we collected more than a thousand photographs from students' sojourns abroad, and conducted multiple pre-departure and re-entry workshops in various formats with over six hundred students on the three participating university campuses (Macquarie, Murdoch and the University of Wollongong). Most of the photos are available through the project weblog (OzStudentsAbroad.com), and videotapes of the workshops are accessible, together with the resulting curriculum materials, through the project website (<http://www.tlc.murdoch.edu.au/project/btlh/index.html>). Because of the voluntary nature of the project, our pre-departure workshops varied significantly, some of them short presentations embedded in our home universities' predeparture orientation for students leaving on diverse programs.

Findings

Although the voluntary nature of our program posed certain challenges, including a marked fall-off in participation, the project provided a compelling proof-of-concept, that blogging and photo reflection can help students to become aware of and better articulate inchoate learning while abroad, including increased communication skills and heightened global awareness. As many study abroad programs are not in a position to institute obligatory, credit-granting educational programming to accompany international exchange, voluntary blogging is a viable option, attractive to a significant minority of students. If your program is seeking to encourage greater reflection among students and to generate student accounts of intercultural learning, a voluntary weblog might be sufficient to start the process,

building a body of articles, photos and other materials that will enrich your campus' international exchange programs. Overall, our findings run the gamut from practical to more theoretical.

Students blogged on an eclectic range of subjects, from observations of campus life to quite personal discussions of problems while adjusting to living abroad. We used a menu of self-selected categories to encourage them to see relations among their posts and with each other. The most frequently chosen categories were 'cultural differences', 'fish out of water', 'predeparture', 'time to reflect', 'festive season', and 'I'm not from here,' with country-based categories also numbering among the most common (the US, UK, France and Germany being the most frequent). Some of the cultural differences posts (and related topics) were quite long and included accounts of multiple experiences; in some cases, single posts had more than a dozen photos, interspersed with extensive narrative. Although the researchers had assumed most posts would include a single or event, in fact, students more often posted multiple photographs and proved quite adept at integrating text and image. Moreover, the use of the categories predominantly about reflection itself, or one's sense of being out of place, suggest that students were actively engaged in meta-cognition about their own adjustment processes.

Pragmatic issues

One of the strengths of blogs as an online forum is that free providers (such as WordPress.com, Blogger and Tumblr) provide excellent tools at virtually no, or very low cost. Opening a weblog on one of these independent platforms is an attractive option, but university IT policies about online publishing vary. In general, we have found that Australian universities do not have clear policies about class blogs or educational blogs; some universities are hesitant to encourage student online publishing, with fears running ahead of actual problems, and others are benignly oblivious to the proliferation of online publishing. If your institution has a online publishing policy, or better yet, actually supports the creation of program weblogs, of course, these are likely the best option, not just for promoting student learning, but also for reincorporating student work into promotion, publicity, and orientation in your international programs.

Using an independent platform for blogging means that whomever is designated the site 'administrator' will have control over the content, but the role can be demanding, especially if you seek to review all content before it becomes publicly accessible. An independent site will likely not be able to carry the visual identity or official recognition of your university, which may pose a problem if posting to the blog is a requirement for assessment in a course, but the separation does provide some degree of independence.

An external provider, however, brings a number of advantages, including that independently-hosted websites are easy to change, and that independent providers such as Blogger or WordPress provide sophisticated support so that the site will appear professional even if the administrator has minimal web design experience. The external host automatically backs up content and likely is less vulnerable to hacking than your university website because providers are in the business of refining the necessary software and security protocols (for more discussion, see Downey et al., 2012a). For research purposes, independent providers often provide tools for thematic analysis or tracking of traffic to the site that have proven extremely useful in our own qualitative research.

Interactional dynamics

One of the primary advantages to using blog-based reflection as part of your study abroad programming, including in-country reflection and journaling, is the opportunity for other students to read, discuss, comment upon and link to each other's work. The strength of Web 2.0 technologies like blogs is that these platforms de-centralise production and communication, allowing wider participation, even interaction with people who are not part of the class. Blogs can be made semi-public or fully public so that students can compare their insights and experiences across different host countries, comment on each other's experiences, and provide support for more reflective and profound engagement. Because online discussion forums like blogs are asynchronous, students can participate when their schedules permit without the necessity of arranging online 'meet-up' times, which can be

especially challenging if students are dispersed in different time zones.

Virtually all blogging platforms allow students to present in their posts rich media, including photographs or embedded video clips, although students will likely need a separate host for videos (such as YouTube or Vimeo) as the memory requirements of video can be great. If the resulting works are public, they can be treated as part of the students' pre-professional portfolios, examples of their work that may be shown to potential employers or graduate programs, or even used with future cohorts of students preparing to go on international exchange.

As a genre, our research team has found that blogging encourages greater introspection and more elaborate reflection than social networking sites like Facebook, although instructors may still need to scaffold student writing and participation. Some blog platforms, especially Tumblr, and 'micro-blogging' sites such as Twitter, do not encourage extensive posts, but may be integrated into a more comprehensive online communication strategy for supporting students' learning while they are in country especially. In our document about communication strategies in the 'Bringing the Learning Home' curriculum, we discuss some considerations for such a comprehensive communication strategy, including the integration of multiple media channels (Downey et al., 2012a; see also Gunn-Lewis & Leenheer, 2011).

The research team actively sought to encourage students to discuss cultural differences and, when possible, not simply use the blog to share their judgments or complaints about their host culture. The project benefited from some early student examples that were excellent, and we were able to use their peers' work as a point of reference. Because of the importance of these themes, the curriculum that resulted from this project emphasises strongly the themes of 'exploration' and 'cultural relativism and analysis' in the pre-departure materials.¹

Perhaps the most important thing that we learned about the use of the weblog as a tool for reflection and in-country support is that, even more than with face-to-face interaction or discussion groups, facilitators must work hard to create a sense of community amongst students. Deng and Yuen (2011: 448) found that students really appreciated comments made on their posts, and were disappointed when no one did comment. Even so, Deng and Yuen argued that students did not themselves, on their own, take the initiative to post more comments; our research suggested the same pattern. Research on the use of blogs in education has repeatedly revealed that students, by and large, do not comment on each others' posts unless required to, and even then, do not get as much out of comments on their own posts as they report deriving from reading other students' posts (see Ellison and Wu, 2008). One problem is that their habitual forms of commenting on Facebook and other social media do not translate well into educational settings.

In our experience, both in this project and in other online forums with students, they are accustomed to high volume, shallow exchange, with the posting of affirmations such as 'Liking' posts and clever comments in text-speak. We believe that modeling and engaging in more substantial comment and questioning – publicly – can help students to develop more robust engagement with each other's ideas. But we have to emphasise that this process requires commitment by the instructor to the online forum, including consistent monitoring for new posts and student comments. If you are considering this option, you may want to enroll all members of your office in these online groups and use other mechanisms (such as 'syndication' protocols like RSS) to facilitate more agile interaction and provide a built-in community of commenters. In other words, support staff for online reflection must become a bit more like the 'digital natives' themselves for these types of support to work.

In summary, although students are 'digital natives,' they do not instinctually know how to create vital reflective communities online. Instructors will have to foster a community of critical reflection (Yang,

¹ All curriculum materials are available for download from the project website:
<http://www.tlc.murdoch.edu.au/project/btlh/>.

2009), in part by modeling the types of interaction, commenting, and discussion that they wish to see. We need to build these ideals into the requirements for the course, but also to become more thoroughly engaged ourselves in the digital milieu in which our students are communicating. The best predictor of student satisfaction with blogging used as a classroom technology, according to Top (2012), is 'sense community'; students gain this sense of community from the experience of reading and commenting on each other's posts, and receiving feedback in turn. At the same time, instructors should recognise that, even if students are not commenting, they may be taking away a great deal from the opportunity to read each others' reflections.

Creating a 'third space' online

Scholars in the field of intercultural competence, like O'Dowd (2003), advocate the creation of what anthropologist Homi Bhabha (1994) has called a 'third space,' neither students' home, nor their host culture, where students can be more neutral and comparative, recognizing that ways of life and social strategies vary significantly across cultures. Without in-country support, students can instead use on-line social networking as a way of staying partially in their 'first space' or home culture. They may even use friends at home to complain about their host country and reinforce an unwillingness to adapt to their 'second space' (recognising that some of our students are already inter-cultural, depending on their backgrounds).

By reflecting publicly on a weblog about what they have seen, students allow other students on exchange to use their observations to construct this broader comparative perspective. On a shared blog or discussion site, students can read about fellow Australians trying to adjust to life in Spain, Austria, Argentina, Sweden, Japan or the United States. The shared, multi-directional exchange among peers, on a public forum, can provoke students from other institutions, even members of the host country to respond. By making the forum more open and not focusing on exchange in a single country, we can use Web 2.0 to create a multi-directional flow among students and instructors. In this way, we believe that a reflective blog can become a shared 'third space' which reinforces the value of cosmopolitanism and models a global perspective.

If you are successful in creating an online 'third space' among students on study abroad, you may counteract some of the pernicious types of interaction in which students sojourning abroad can engage. For example, an online community of fellow students studying abroad can fight the tendency of students to 'enclave' while abroad, joining with other international students to complain about the host culture. Students can also find support from other sojourning exchange students if members of their host culture and friends back home are not sympathetic. Often, the most willing ears will be other students experiencing similar concerns in a range of places. Students sojourning abroad, eager to compare their experiences, can constitute a receptive, empathetic, inquisitive, and creative audience for our observations while abroad.

A scaffolded, well-structured online 'third space' encourages students to see cultural comparison more broadly, as students sojourning abroad in a variety of countries compare home and host, with more opportunity to consider various options for cultural adaptation. Instructors can point out conceptual links and comparisons between different students' observations, just as students can put up virtual links to each other's posts. Especially as they communicate laterally, reading each other's reflections, they can better gain a broader perspective on variations of culture, notice that they are not alone in their own problems adjusting, and move to a position of cosmopolitanism from which they can gain greater analytical appreciation of both their hosts and their home.

Concluding Comments

Upon their return, students who have sojourned abroad are potentially a resource for the whole community, if we find ways of helping them to share their experience. Our research team believes, based on our research and first-hand experience, that helping students to communicate about their

study abroad and exchange can improve the programming in our international offices, add a new dimension of global awareness to on-campus education, and generally inspire greater interest in other countries. If our programming is successful, and if we guide students effectively, their reflections and other forms of communication should become the most persuasive proof of the power of international education and study abroad.

But for online reflection to be effective, especially as a tool for group discussion and shared learning, we must recognise that our students, although 'digital natives,' may be habituated to forms of interaction that are not adequate to create a cosmopolitan 'third space.' Without encouragement and support they are unlikely to fully realise the global perspective that is available through their international exchange. If we do not create a virtual 'third space', the same online tools that might encourage greater cosmopolitanism can instead be used by students to dig into their preconceptions, avoid greater interaction with their host culture, and insulate themselves in a virtual bubble of 'home.' Although some might de-connect in order to engage more fully with their host culture, most Gen Y students will not do so voluntarily, so we strongly advocate using these new channels and new communication practices, including digital photography, to leverage our students' pre-existing strengths into new skills and awareness. To do so, however, 'digital immigrants,' including the researchers themselves, have to learn a few new tricks and be willing to follow our students where they go, even when it is online.

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