

Towards maximising  
intercultural learning  
for Australian  
university students  
in an English-  
speaking study  
abroad program in  
Malaysia

By Louise Townsin



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**Torrens University  
Australia**

LAUREATE INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITIES

## Background

- Australia in the Asian Century White Paper (2012)
- New Colombo Plan (DFAT, 2014)
- Internationalisation initiatives in higher education

**...Increasing levels of participation in outbound student  
mobility experiences...**



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## Research Problem



- Scarce research on participating Australian students & their international experiences
- A dearth of research on intercultural competence of Australian university students
- The linguistic context of study abroad programs is often unexplored, especially in relation to destinations that are culturally and linguistically diverse where students use the English language within multilingual environments

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## Research Questions



Prior to embarking on a compulsory study abroad program, how do Australian university students indicate their intercultural orientations (comprising skills, attitudes, knowledge and identity?)

How do students perceive they will participate in the study abroad?

How do students' responses illustrate the potential for study abroad to support the growth of intercultural competence?

## Theoretical considerations

- Process model of intercultural competence (Deardorff, 2006)
- Identity at the individual level (Kim, 2008, 2009)
- Imagined identities and communities (Norton, 2000)
- Intercultural capital (Pöllmann, 2013)



## The Study Abroad Program

(Engle & Engle, 2003)

Duration	12 weeks
Target language	N/A
Language used in coursework	English
Academic work context	Attend with other local and international students
Housing	Off-campus, independent
Provisions for cultural interaction, experiential learning	Optional participation- organised by host university
Guided reflection on cultural experience	Basic pre-departure sessions (focused on administrative matters), student support contact at the commencement of program, home university academic support provided mid-way, all other cultural learning according to host university arrangement

## Research Design

- Participants- Jack, Leon and Stephanie (convenience sampling)
- Development of interview schedule
- Data collection- 30 minute semi-structured interviews on campus
- Hybrid process of deductive & inductive thematic analysis to interpret data



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## Findings

- Multicultural discourse
- Ethnorelative perspectives not yet fully developed
- Comparisons between Australia and Malaysia
- Intercultural communication challenges not expected



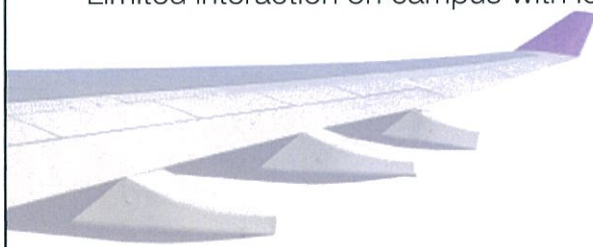
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## Findings

- Limited planning for reality of experience
- Imagined identity of tourist
- Social activities & existing relationships prioritised
- Anticipated separation on campus
- Limited interaction on campus with local students



## Implications

- Encourage students to see links between study abroad and intercultural learning
- Assist students to develop understanding of power structures & relations (Che, Spearman & Manizade, 2009)
- Pre-departure education- how cultural values influence experiences of intercultural encounters (Marx & Moss, 2011)

## Implications

- Students could learn more about the global variation of the English language

*Do You  
Speak  
English?* 

- Institutions should take care to resist discourse surrounding limited academic importance of study abroad (Gore, 2009)

## Further Research

- Pilot study to better understand the extent to which students participate in opportunities for intercultural learning during compulsory study abroad program in Malaysia
- 7 days of data collection on site
- Interviews with students, teachers & support staff
- Small focus groups with students
- Observation in classes
- Survey
- Socio-cultural learning theories that can support learning for critical intercultural citizenship (Byram, 2006)