

THIRD SPACE: EVALUATING A PILOT

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Prepared by:

Alette Willis, PhD

Zoi Simopoulou

Lorena Georgiadou, PhD

John Harries, PhD

Johanna Holtan

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Programmes for working, volunteering, and studying overseas are increasing in number in UK Institutions of Higher Education. These experiences are increasingly valued as opportunities for students to develop in their cultural awareness and “global competencies”, expand their learning and increase their employability. However, there are concerns that merely providing opportunities to go abroad will not in and of itself necessarily lead to the development of intercultural skills and competencies. It is now recognized that to maximize the benefits of international experiences, well-designed training and support provisions are needed for students.

THE THIRD SPACE PILOT

Third Space is a programme designed to provide support to undergraduate students in preparing for, participating in and returning from third-year study abroad experiences. In providing such support, Third Space aims to facilitate increased intercultural engagement, decrease anxiety and stereotyping, and increase a sense of belonging. Third Space consists of three phases, which correspond to the three phases of international educational experiences: the pre-departure phase, the sojourner phase and the return phase.

During the pre-departure phase, approximately 40 students participated in a weekend-long retreat off campus during which time they were provided with training in using storytelling for reflection and communication, dealing with “culture shock” and being an amateur anthropologist. They were divided into small groups based on the time zone they would be living in. On the second day, they were provided with a toolkit developed by the Third Space team consisting of 30 activity cards. They were instructed in the use of these cards and then were sent out in groups to explore Edinburgh. At the end of the day they returned and presented their reflections on their experiences using the storytelling skills they had learned.

During the sojourner phase, participating students were provided with a Facebook group and a blog. Those who wished to receive an Edinburgh Award for their participation were required to write 12 blog posts over their year away, reporting on their experiences using the cards. They were also contacted by the project coordinator to provide their reflections on their progress to achieving the goals they had set during the pre-departure phase.

Approximately one month after their return to Edinburgh University, students were invited to participate in an afternoon Welcome Home conference. At this conference they were led

through a reflective storytelling practice and then participated in a World Café facilitated in part by their peers.

Thanks to a grant from the President's Teaching Awards Scheme, we were able to evaluate the usefulness of the resources we provided to the students, the impact the pilot had on student experiences and the sustainability of the programme.

EVALUATION FINDINGS

PRE-DEPARTURE PHASE: WEEKEND RETREAT

Overall, participants felt that the training provided at the weekend retreat anticipated their needs and helped reduce their pre-departure anxiety. Meeting other students in the same situation provided them with a sense of community and also helped reduce their anxiety. Spending the second day using the toolkit to explore Edinburgh in small groups was highly valued. By practicing intercultural activities in groups in a city they had some familiarity with already, students reported that they extended themselves past their comfort zone and thereby increased their confidence, particularly in regards to meeting new people and going to new places.

SOJOURNER PHASE: BLOG, FACEBOOK AND TOOLKIT

For the most part, participants felt like a part of a community and felt supported while away. Participants found the blog writing to be useful both to reflect on their experiences and to share those experiences with others. They enjoyed reading other participants' blog posts, but wanted more commenting on blog posts in general. A couple of students felt that they were blogging into an empty space, because of the lack of feedback from their peers. Participants reported using the Facebook group periodically, when they needed to ask something logistical. However, they felt that this group was underused. Suggestions to improve the online community included having joint activities coordinated through Facebook, such as a joint blog post and requiring that students comment on each others' blog posts.

Students enjoyed the toolkit activities and those who had brought the cards with them valued their physicality. Some even decorated the boxes and some referred to the box as a container for their memories. We have since reduced the size of the cards making them easier for people to bring with them, although this will make it more difficult to put to other uses. Digital versions of the card activities are still available on-line. Many students reported that the activities took them out of their normal routine and encouraged them to engage with people and cultural

activities they would not normally have engaged with. It also encouraged them to explore more widely and in greater depths the places where they were living while abroad.

RETURN PHASE: WELCOME HOME CONFERENCE

20 students completed the Third Space Pilot, writing 12 blog posts and receiving their Edinburgh Award. Nearly all of these participants attended the Welcome Home Conference, with 3 volunteering to help facilitate part of that conference. The Welcome Home Conference was valued as a time to reconnect with each other, to see people that they had not seen in a long time (in some cases since the initial Weekend Retreat) and to share experiences with others who had been in similar situations. The reflective storytelling session was valued for providing them with a framework with which to look back over their time away. For many participants, this was quite an emotional process. Some students felt this story-work was rushed and would have preferred to have more time. About a third of the students stayed on in the room to talk after the conference was officially ended, testifying to the value they experienced in reconnecting with each other in person. Five participants signed up to help facilitate future programmes of Third Space.

CONCLUSIONS

The evaluation provided evidence that participants engaged in more intercultural activities than they anticipated they would have engaged in without the programme. There is also evidence that Third Space provided them with a sense of support and community and with skills that they found to be useful, all of which reduced anxiety and increased confidence. Third Space provided them with the means and the encouragement to not only engage in intercultural activities, but also to reflect on and process their experiences.

We theorise that the success of Third Space stems from the secure base it provides to participating students, which enables them to explore further and engage more with difference than they would be able to do without that sense of belonging and of being looked after. The sense of secure base was demonstrated through the appreciation expressed by the students for the welcoming environment of the Weekend Retreat; that it was off campus and that good food was provided for them, anticipating their physical needs. It was shown also by their experience that their support needs were anticipated, in terms of being provided with training in skills they had not yet realised would be useful to have. It was also expressed in their appreciation for being provided with a community of people in the same situation as themselves whom they would be able to contact while they were away. The physical toolbox was an important, tangible reminder of Third Space, which some students became quite

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Third Space

attached to. We theorise that the toolkit provided them with a physical representation of a secure base which they could see and touch while they were away from Edinburgh.

Of the twenty participants who completed the Third Space pilot, five volunteered to help facilitate the next Weekend Retreat, indicating that moving towards a student-led model would be possible. However, because students go abroad in the third year of their four-year undergraduate degree, they would likely only be available to help with Third Space for one year, which would mean that a new cohort of student facilitators would need to be trained every year.



INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCING THIRD SPACE

Opportunities for working, volunteering, and studying overseas are becoming a central element of UK Higher Education, as they promote the development of cultural awareness and ‘global competences’ that increase student employability, alongside improving the overall learning experience (Holmes, Bavieri, & Ganassin, 2015; Messelink, Van Maele, & Spencer-Oatey, 2015; Penman & Ratz, 2015). Nonetheless, it is widely reported that participation in international experiences on its own does not guarantee the development of intercultural awareness and competences (Byram & Dervin, 2008), neither does it improve employability (Messelink et al., 2015). What is essential for the maximization of the benefits of international experiences are well-designed training and support provisions that endorse a longitudinal approach, supporting students through transitions at pre-departure, sojourner and re-entry phases (Jackson, 2014a).

The Third Space Project (Third Space Pilot) is one such longitudinal provision that was designed and piloted at the University of Edinburgh to support students’ overseas experiences. The name derives from the idea that when one culture meets another, something new –a third space- is created (Kramsch & Uryu, 2013). The Third Space Pilot consists of a series of activities that wrap around students’ international experiences, offering tools to explore, reflect, engage, and share ‘culture’ during the different stages of an overseas adventure. The Third Space Pilot is comprised of a pre-departure two-day workshop (the Weekend Retreat), an online and physical set of card activities (the Toolbox) and a returnees’ conference (the Welcome Home Conference). Participants were also provided with a Facebook group for the project and were asked to blog regularly on a shared blog site. Those students who wished to receive an Edinburgh Award for their participation in the Third Space Pilot were required to complete 12 blog posts over the course of their sojourn).

The overall aims of the project were to enhance student learning and preparation in order to increase intercultural engagement; help decrease pre-departure anxiety and stereotyping; offer a sense of belonging while abroad; and provide a platform to share experiences both while abroad and upon return (Borghetti, Beaven, & Pugliese, 2015; Messelink et al., 2015).

The uniqueness of the Third Space Pilot lies both in its focus and its method of delivery. In terms of focus, the emphasis is on enhancing the quality of the students’ intercultural experience by inviting an exploration into the everyday life of the ‘host’ place. In this sense, the project not only engages with the practicalities of living and studying abroad, it encourages students to familiarise themselves with the ways and habits of other people beyond the compass of the normal experience of the visitor. In terms of delivery, these processes of exploration, whilst initiated by the provision of a Third Space toolbox (see below) and pre-departure workshop, takes place within a learner-centered pedagogical framework that allows for the creation of a virtual and actual community of intercultural “explorers”, constituted in the sharing of stories and experiences.

INTRODUCING THE EVALUATION

Given the Third Space Pilot's ground-breaking nature, the team wished to evaluate its structure, use and impact. As Jackson (2014b) suggests, education abroad programmes ought to be evaluated for refinement. As a result, we designed the Third Space Evaluation project. This project explored the ways in which the Third Space Pilot impacted upon students' intercultural experiences abroad (outcome and impact evaluation); and supported students while living abroad and upon return, with particular attention to culture shock and reverse culture shock (support evaluation). The evaluation also helped us establish what worked well and what worked less well in the programming and resources supplied, with a view to improving these in future developments of the project. Finally, the evaluation identified ways of engaging students in the future development and establishment of an ongoing Third Space Project (sustainability).

METHODS

The Third Space Pilot recruited 40 undergraduate students from across the University of Edinburgh (UoE) leaving in the summer of 2014 for their third year overseas and returning in the summer 2015. Students were invited to apply by submitting a cover letter discussing their understanding of the value of this programme, the impact it might have on their experience and demonstrating a general enthusiasm for the mission. The team collected and analysed multiple sets of data from these students: From the pre-departure phase, we collected both quantitative (questionnaire) and qualitative (interview) data. From the 'sojourner' phase, we generated qualitative data (reflexive narratives submitted for the Edinburgh Award and student blog posts). During the Welcome Home conference, we held a 'world café' event.¹ This event aimed to help us evaluate the overall resources, but also to investigate the role that the current Third Spacers would like to have in the project's future development. Both qualitative (group discussions) and quantitative (evaluations) data were generated from this phase.

Data was provided to us anonymously, therefore, we were not able to link information about the gender, age, nationality, discipline of study or location where they spent their year abroad to the responses. However, overall at the start of the Pilot, we had 4 males and 36 females, 8 from Science and Engineering and 32 from Humanities and Social Science. All were in their 20s.

The data was inserted in NVivo (qualitative data analysis software) for management and transparency purposes and an inductive thematic analysis (Joffe, 2012) took place: scripts were coded by two members of the team and several themes were generated. Then three team members who were involved in this evaluation engaged in a reflexive team-based approach to

¹ World Café is a creative research method where the research team constructs a café-like setting and invites groups of 'experts' to sit around tables and, with the help of 'hosts', to engage in collaborative dialogue, share knowledge and ideas. Participants are asked to rotate around the tables and work with different people, thus creating a living network of discussions and actions.

analysis (Willis et al. 2009), enabling higher-level interpretations of the data in relation to the project's research aims to:

- Evaluate the pertinence of the Third Space resources
- Explore the impact of Third Space (tools, values, community) on students' expectations and actual experiences of living abroad and returning home
- Investigate the sustainability of such a project as a student-led provision

In what follows we present the main findings of this inquiry. We examine the feedback students provided to us regarding each of the three elements of Third Space: Weekend Retreat, Toolbox and online supports while away, and the Welcome Home Day. This is followed by a discussion across all three elements, evaluating the contribution the project made to intercultural engagement and a look forward, toward the sustainability of Third Space.

PRE-DEPARTURE PHASE: THE WEEKEND RETREAT

OVERVIEW OF WEEKEND RETREAT

The Weekend Retreat was held over two days at a venue off campus in the centre of the Old Town of Edinburgh. On the first day, students were asked to think about what competencies for global citizenship might include, to write these on post-it notes and to group these on the wall. They were then assigned to groups based on who would be in the same timezone when abroad. Following introductory remarks, participants spent the rest of the day in workshops covering the following topics:

- Culture shock
- Storytelling
- Encountering new cultures and new places

Lunch and coffee breaks were provided both to fuel participation, by providing caffeine and calories, but also so that students could have ample time to talk informally to each other. At the end of the day, they were given the toolbox of cards to take home with them. On the second day, participants gathered at the venue in their groups. They were given instruction on how to use the cards, which aimed to be playful, engaged, but sensitive, and sent out to explore Edinburgh. Late in the afternoon, they returned to the venue and presented their stories of their explorations. These presentations were all of high quality, some were multi-media, others presented more in the tradition of oral storytelling.

In evaluating this element of the Pilot Project, we were able to draw on the evaluation sheets that were completed directly after the Retreat, a focus group held during the summer before students left, as well as reflections on the impact of the Weekend Retreat provided by returning students at the World Café event a year and a half later.

OVERALL FEEDBACK

The Weekend Retreat proved to be a valuable experience for students. Overall, they described it as inspirational, motivational and as a source of guidance. It helped them to specify their hopes and to look forward to their sojourn away. It also taught them a different way to engage with experiences, as this participant expresses:

It forced you to reflect, not just experience things as they came

The hospitality offered at the event through the choice of venue and the provision of food was

important to the students and helped them feel appreciated. This is summed up by this student:

The food was great and the venue was really nice

Spending an entire weekend based out of one venue with warm hospitality provided a secure base from which the students ventured forth to explore on the second day. The content of the workshops, the location and quality of the venue, the toolkit and the ongoing development of group bonds worked together to enable students to see Edinburgh with new eyes during their explorations. For example, this student wrote,

It was nice that the retreat was in the centre of Edinburgh, and I actually found new places which I have not been around before. Since then, I have gone back

The theme of visiting places in Edinburgh they'd never been before was mentioned by several students.

TIMING

Students acknowledged the usefulness of the general timing of the retreat in relation to their needs:

I believe that attending the retreat in Edinburgh before leaving for an exchange prepared me for the challenges that I had to face

However, the exact timing was not seen as optimal as it took place over Easter weekend with exams looming in the immediate future;

Everyone has exams coming up and I think a lot of us could have put more into it if we weren't so worried it was taking up revision time

Some people suggested that it take place much earlier in the semester, whereas others suggested after exams. One person wanted it to be compulsory, another suggested it be part of innovative learning week.

Responses also varied with regards to the length of the retreat: some thought it was too long with lots of repetition and suggested it be reduced to one day; others asked for a third day and some for it to be spread over a period of time:

It is quite a good idea for the retreat to be spread over the course of the semester, perhaps like societies like EGP. Then we would have a chance of getting to know our team members better as well as meeting more of the 40 people involved. Perhaps making Third Space a bit more like a society.

Timing was also an issue for those few participants who would not be going abroad until the second semester of the following academic year, making the retreat too far in advance for them.

SESSION: STORYTELLING

For some students, the storytelling workshop made a big impact as they had not experienced a workshop like it before, with one student reporting that it was the first workshop of “this kind” that they experienced and made them think about the importance of stories. Brought into the context of Third Space, they acknowledged its usefulness in articulating ideas and in ‘*learning how to tell stories of (my) experiences*’, in connecting with others, as this student reported,

Storytelling was a nice way to start the day, to find out about the new people from Third Space

Participants felt that this workshop was delivered in an inclusive way,

As I am not very creative, I was doubtful about how good the storytelling session would be, but I really enjoyed it and felt like it was open to everybody; even those who were not hugely creative

And it was felt to be helpful, given the requirement to blog for those engaging in the Edinburgh Award,

(It) helped you learn to articulate if you’d never done blogging specifically before

SESSION: CULTURE SHOCK AND REVERSE CULTURE SHOCK

The second session covered culture shock and reverse culture shock, its different stages as well as how to cope with it. Students found this session useful and generally felt it to be reassuring:

It was reassuring, helped to explain the experience better and portrayed the culture shock as a normal, common experience

Voicing it and staying with it allowed them not to be intimidated by it and to be prepared for it:

being taught more about it and the ways to embrace it and express myself instead of worrying

Some people spoke about being helped precisely by knowing about it; that is, having it named contained some of their anxiety. As one student said,

Maybe we had less culture shock because we knew it was going to happen

However, although students acknowledged the value of learning about culture and culture shock content-wise, they did not find that session, which was lecture-based, engaging enough, as this student expresses:

The culture shock workshop dragged on a bit with the booklets that seemed slightly pointless for the amount of time they took to complete

SESSION: TOOLBOX TALK AND ACTIVITY

During the second day of the retreat, students were given a talk about the use of the toolbox while abroad and then were sent out in their groups to use it in Edinburgh. This Day 2 talk built upon a session given by the same anthropologist the previous day, which was more generally about encountering other cultures. While most students made the connections between the two talks, one felt that the Day One lecture was interesting but too much of a lecture and another student felt the Day One lecture was a bit obscure:

Talk by the anthropologist was really interesting. It felt obscure at the time, but it was nice to reflect on different cultures and the different culture I was going to be with

However, for the most part, students felt that the personal talk given by the anthropologist prepared them for the outing, and in turn prepared them for going abroad,

John Harries presentation was really interesting and the personal stories of how he coped with encountering a foreign culture were helpful

The talk about 'getting us out there' made me more willing to be outgoing when I go abroad

Overall, the combination of the talks and then being sent out to explore, to put what they'd heard about into practice, was experienced as a powerful context for learning. Alongside the guidance, being encouraged to 'get out there' and then having a chance to do so in a familiar and safe environment allowed them to process some of their anxieties around meeting people. One participant called it a 'creative execution', that allows 'practicing meeting and engaging with local people'. Others expressed similar experiences of growing confidence:

It was so much easier to speak to strangers... Good simulation of how it was going to be meeting new people ... I know exactly how to make the most of using it when I am abroad without having to worry that I'm doing it wrong

(it) teaches how to observe, how to talk to people, what approach to adopt. More

relaxed after that

Trying out “getting out there” in a group context was also experienced as supportive:

...you can do ‘crazy stuff’ with other people...

(It) helped to learn that you can involve friends in activities, and if you are still too shy you can get help from friends and it’s more fun that way.

Students enjoyed their day of exploring, here’s one summary of activities,

...went out around town talking to people about Scottish food, made deep fried mars bar, it was really fun...

Exploring Edinburgh in a group using the toolbox enabled them to experience a city that they’d already known for at least two years in an entirely different way, ultimately opening them up to curiosity:

It teaches you about things on your doorstep you don’t even think about

The toolbox talk was very inspiring and I think this talk helped me to broaden my mind; whether I am in Edinburgh, at home, or abroad

KEY BENEFITS FROM THE WEEKEND RETREAT

PLANNING

Students spoke about the important role of the Weekend Retreat in informing the planning of their time abroad. It had helped them to set up tasks to do and to focus on practicalities:

It has also allowed me to organize my thoughts and make a coherent plan of what I wanted to do and achieve during my time abroad

I believe that the Retreat helped me to set out my goals for a year abroad, and really made me think about what I wanted to get out of my time in the US

This latter comment referred in particular to the process of identifying competencies for global citizenship.

NETWORKING

Networking was one of the central opportunities that the Weekend Retreat and Third Space in general offered and which students responded to in very positive ways. The

Weekend Retreat was the first time most of these students had met. Being placed in groups at the beginning of the weekend that were based on the time zone of where they would be living in a few months' time was greatly appreciated:

I think that putting us into small groups was a great idea. Before I left, I messaged one of my team who was living in Australia before I left to see how she was getting on and also whilst I was there. It was nice to know there was some connection through the internet

I definitely found the retreat worthwhile and the best part of it definitely was meeting people and forming a group that will hopefully get back in touch over our year away!

Participants did not have to be going to the same place in order to feel a strong sense of connection and community. Being with other people at a similar stage in preparing to go away was highly valued by almost everyone, partly for sharing logistical information and tips but more importantly for discovering that other people shared the same emotional experiences as they did:

Comforting. A lot of unprepared people in the same situation

Get more excited about going away when in a group of people going

Some students reported using the group-work elements of the retreat itself as an opportunity to practice making friends, a skill that they would need to engage in on their year abroad:

The Weekend Retreat was a good process in helping me get ready to leave. To know that there were many people in the same situation felt nice, and that we could talk to each other about this. I feel it prepared me with confidence in being able to not be shy and speak to new people, make new friends... [it] had an impact on my confidence.

Over the weekend I felt it was beneficial to get me ready for my travels abroad. It was especially nice to meet new people, learn about them and talking about our similarities. For example, I found someone who lives an hour away from me in Yorkshire. It is amazing how small this world is, and will be interesting to meet new people on exchange to learn about their backgrounds and stories

The ability to make new friends at the retreat was facilitated by the structured ways in which participants were brought together over the weekend, something some referred to as "team-building":

The Weekend Retreat helped in my team-working abilities more so than anything I

believe. Given a task for the group of three of us to collectively pool our talents together to achieve was educational as well as very enjoyable

Over the weekend, a sense of community was built between participants and between participants and Third Space facilitators, particularly the programme coordinator who would be their main point of contact at Edinburgh University when they were away. This provided a sense of support and reassurance:

So far the Third Space program has had an extremely positive influence on me. First of all, the Weekend Retreat helped me realize that I am not alone and would never be alone in any of the challenges I might face abroad. Having a strong network of cooperative people behind my back made me feel more comfortable and calmer.

Felt less alone, a part of “bigger community”, more relaxed, knowing if you feel lost you can message people from Third Space.

Reflecting back on her experience of Third Space during the Welcome Home event, this student expressed how important the Weekend Retreat had been in terms of connecting her with someone who became her “best friend” while abroad:

One of the girls I met there, who also went to Singapore, has even become my best friend on exchange, so in that way Third Space has had an impact on my life. Even though I'm not really in touch with any of my other team mates anymore, talking about our hopes and insecurities that weekend was still helpful and made me feel less nervous about going abroad


STUDENT RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE FUTURE OF THIRD SPACE

Overall, students valued the practice-based aspects of the Weekend Retreat, opportunities to engage in hands-on activities and to interact with each other most highly. Some suggestions for future Weekend Retreats included:

- *More practical sessions: what to bring? What to do when you get there?*
- *more activities/hands-on activities/active participation*
- *Less lecturing.*
- *Talk to people who did it before*
- *How to make friends?*
- *What to do when encountering a problem? (but maybe this is not what Third Space is about).*

- *less paper work (in relation to The Edinburgh Award?)*
- *More relaxed, more informal/social time*
- more group building activities
- a night out, going away for the weekend, camping
- Shorter retreat and conversely the possibility of a third day in the retreat.

Despite these recommendations, the overall sense from participants was that the Weekend Retreat offered a secure space for them to learn more about going abroad, to plan their travels as well as to network and connect with fellow Third spacers. Participants felt that it provided them with the following:

- targeted training on concepts and skills that students found useful while abroad
 - opportunities to practice skills, including team-building skills and skills associated with making friends
 - a meeting space for students who were in the same situation to share practical and emotional aspects of preparing to leave
 - A feeling of community with each other and of connection with the University of Edinburgh
- 

SOJOURNER PHASE: TOOLBOX, ACTIVITIES AND BLOGGING

Students were provided with a set of cards and a guide to using them during the Weekend Retreat. They were encouraged to bring the cards with them on their year abroad. Digital copies of the cards were also made available online, along with a blog and Facebook group. Students provided feedback on both the hardcopy cards and the online version.

Students made use of the activities on the cards in diverse ways. Most students followed the activity instructions on the cards. However, a few followed only the titles of the cards, saying that this allowed them '*complete freedom*' as opposed to the accompanying questions/description which could feel more restrictive.

The cards used in the pilot of this programme were A5 size, we have since reduced the card size, so that all 30 cards now fit in a 9.3cm x 6.7cm x 1.2cm sized box. In this section, the toolbox is discussed as an object (toolbox kit), as well as being identified with the activities. Blogging was seen as integral to the use of the toolbox, students often discussed writing alongside the toolbox and activities. The small amount of feedback we had on the Facebook group is also discussed in this section.

In its pilot phase, Third Space was integrated with the Edinburgh Award. For the Edinburgh Award, students were required to provide reflections on three separate occasions, again corresponding to the three phases of an international experience. Their first set of reflections was received about a month after the Weekend Retreat, the second approximately two months into their sojourner experience and the third around the time of the Welcome Home conference. Of the 38 participants who attended the Weekend Away, 20 completed the full programme.

Our evaluation of the sojourner stage of the Third Space pilot was based on feedback from the World Cafe and from anonymised reflections by students (which were initially submitted for obtaining the Edinburgh Award).

THE PHYSICAL TOOLBOX

Because of its size and restrictions on luggage, not all participants were able to take the box of cards with them. However, many of those who did reflected on how much they liked having a physical object, commenting on its aesthetic elements, expressing its value as something that tangibly connected them to the University of Edinburgh and/or using it as a container for their memories.

Some spoke of it warmly, noticing its distinctive physicality: the design, its white colour and its concreteness. People referred to it as '*aesthetically pleasing*', an object they were keen to show

I had it on display – I loved it

Some people's words carry an almost idealising quality, the box comes across as almost

[Type here]

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untouchable:

It is too clean, too nice ...

Didn't want to decorate the box, it was so nice!

Other people saw the box as an invitation to play: they filled it, they stored photos in it and entrusted their memories to it:

I really liked the box – it became a memory box – I kept there all the things I did not want to lose

It is a documentation, something that will stay with us and will always be there

For those students who physically manipulated and changed the box, they came to own that box and it became a point of self-reference:

It was my box, a memento

The physical box also enabled others to discover Third Space:

A friend doing an internship in Germany came over to visit, she was a science student, she found the box and she thought it was amazing, she took the activities on board while returning to her internship lab

Another recalled an evening when a friend came over to her place feeling low, found the cards and began to play with them. While speaking and recalling that moment, this student moved her hands as if she held the cards. The image evoked the aliveness that the physical toolbox brought with it. It became an object that fostered a reflection on different kinds of connectedness in a different set of spaces. Students contrasted this to online contact, stating it was important *“having a physical reminder of Third Space”*.

Some of the students chose their activities exclusively from the physical toolbox; they spoke of flicking through the cards and making piles with those cards' activities that were completed and those that they wanted to do. They had a physical object *'to pick up, read and show to friends'*. There is a tactile, almost manipulative yet inexhaustible quality in the students' descriptions of their engagement with the cards. They used the cards but the cards gave them something back in return and by means of their very use.

While the majority of participants enjoyed the toolbox and worked with its activities consistently across their stay, one student commented that she felt it was better suited to shorter sojourns:

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Third Space

The toolbox was thought provoking but I sadly can't say I have implemented too much of it during my year abroad. The time away is too long to have all those things in mind all of the time. If it was a week long expedition then I would definitely recommend it however it's difficult to keep such an open mind for such an extended length of time

For the majority of participants, the physical box was an important part of the Third Space experience. The survival of time by treasuring memories allows the self a sense of continuity in the face of change. Third space, by means of its box, turned into an anchor, a space that could hold the self through transitions between the familiar and the new.

TOOLBOX ACTIVITIES

The blog posts provide us with an indication of which activities were engaged in most often. All 30 cards were used as a basis to write blog posts by the students. This is a list of the cards in order of most popular to least:

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Activity	# Posts
Wildlife	30
My Favourite Place	21
Beautiful Buildings	19
Local Food	18
Create and keep	17
Festival Fun	16
Listen to Stories	15
Experience Map	12
Magic Portrait	11
Watch People Come & Go	11
Pets	11
Twinkle Toes	10
Favourite Foods	10
Local Expressions	10
Go Team!	10
Top of the Pops	9
Local Traditions	9
Volunteer	8
Ask for Directions	8
Personalise Your Box	6
Do the Chores	5
Local Games	5
Body Language	5
Everyone I have Met	5
Local Songs	5
Write a Postcard	4
Create a Story	4
Travel Manifesto	4
Create and give	4
Share a Story	2

In relation to the number and diversity of activities provided on the cards, there was a variety of responses, with some participants suggesting a greater variety of activities and others asking us to keep 'it' smaller. However, the latter comment could pertain to the size of the cards and not to the quantity. Most students were happy with the number and diversity provided:

I like that there were lots to choose from

And some students used them as inspiration to create other challenges for themselves:

The activities were both interesting and challenging. I think having the set of activities designed by someone else also inspired me to come up with my own ideas. I am very grateful I was given this opportunity.

The contribution that these cards made to participants' experiences abroad fall into three main categories, which are discussed below: Ideas, Reflexivity and Awareness.

IDEAS

Using the activity cards gave students ideas and inspiration:

The Third Space toolbox has been extremely helpful in giving me ideas for blog posts and in inspiring me to be outgoing and creative.

They gave us things to do I wouldn't have thought about before

Students experienced the activities as calls or prompts motivating them to do something new

They have good starting points and inspiration to do things we might not have done otherwise

The activities in the toolbox have really helped me find new ways of discovering Germany and meeting the locals

And to go to new places,

The Third Space retreat and toolbox has definitely improved my experiences in Australia. It has caused me to actively seek new places, and engage more with the environment around me

Perhaps most importantly, the toolbox activities provided an excuse to participants to try something they would not normally try, thereby pushing their limits:

going to a stranger and asking them something, I wouldn't have the confidence to do that .. but there it's like 'it's not me it's the card!'

I have definitely done activities and gone outside my comfort zone more than if I hadn't have had the ideas from the toolbox - they've been really useful

The activities on the cards forced us to do things and commit to them. I went to a football game for the Go Team card. I normally hate football, although I had fun doing it

Whilst abroad, I joined the ski team at my university and this opened up a wide array of opportunities to make the most of the -30 winter conditions, see new parts of the world, and get fit too!

AWARENESS

While acknowledging its constant interplay with reflexivity (see below), awareness is discussed separately here as a kind of preliminary noticing; a kind of staying on behalf of students that is ongoing and attuned to the present moment as it happens to them and as it is located in its wider context. Some of the activities can thus be thought of as an exercise in noticing:

While in Australia the requirement to write a reflection on an activity each month forced me to regularly put some time away to explore my surroundings

In noticing their surroundings students moved in and out of them, from the details to their context. In providing feedback they move between their surroundings and their experience of them as this participant demonstrates:

The Third Space Toolbox has helped me hugely- it has made me get out of my comfort zone and has also made me more aware of my surroundings. For example, I am constantly thinking about the places I have been; trying to figure out my favourite spot in Lille and what I can do to enhance my experiences even further!

The activity cards have been acknowledged as a means to seek, to do, to be aware and reflexive of one's actions. This awareness has an active feel attached to it as this is communicated by students' use of words and tenses such as 'actively seeking' or 'constantly thinking'. Those words seem to be attuned to awareness as something that is not exhaustive or special but always already present in its everydayness.

REFLEXIVITY

Alongside ideas and inspiration, students noticed the reflexive prompt that was implicit in the activities; someone spoke of them as 'tasks that may have pushed me more to do and think about'. Another said:

The toolbox and the activities have allowed me to reflect upon certain things which I may have missed. It makes me question certain elements of Canadian culture or my time abroad in general, and I really enjoy that. It's good to have a little guide

Some participants appreciated those activities that allowed them to adapt things to fit with their own sense of self, not only in reflecting upon them but also in the creation of new ones with the 'Create your own' activity card:

Good activities. Good selection. Some look at how you feel before as well as during

the time away. Create your own.

Students particularly valued activities that provided a retrospective reflection on the experience. The 'Postcards' activity served such a reflexive function by asking students to write a postcard at the Weekend Retreat, which was then mailed to them 6 months later, enabling them to reflect on changes across time.

BLOGGING

Writing for the blog appears implicit in students' responses, especially in discussions of awareness and reflexivity. Undertaking the Toolkit activities as part of a global blogging community, helped students to reflect on their own experiences.

I really enjoy the flexible nature of the different activities, allowing everyone to interpret them in their own way, meaning that when people post on the group blog I am able to see so many different countries in so many different way

Alongside the activities which offered a reflexive space by embodying a prompt to notice and to question the everyday and the surroundings, which are often taken for granted, students' reflexivity was further enhanced by the act of writing.

In our pilot programme, participants were required to write twelve blog posts in order to receive the Edinburgh Award. Students usually chose to base their blog posts on an activity from the toolkit. Blogging about their experience of using the cards enhanced all three elements of the activities. Knowing that they were required to blog and that their peers would read the posts, provided extra incentive to them to do things they would not usually do. Knowing that they would have to write about their experiences made them pay attention, to be aware. Finally, the act of writing was often experienced as a reflexive process in and of itself:

During the exchange, writing blog posts for Third Space has definitely helped me to think outside the box. Moreover, knowing that I've committed to writing those articles has sometimes given me the extra motivation I needed to do more cultural activities, for which I might otherwise not have made time

Writing also provided a frame for students' experiences. During the world cafe, some of the students talked about how they often had an experience which they later came across in the cards. Cards became then helpful in providing a structure or in the words of this student a

good framework if you want to write about something but don't know what to say

One student wrote half of her required posts after she had already returned, which is not what we had planned. However, for her, writing back was like 'thinking back'. Such retrospective reflection is facilitated by the writing of the activity rather than by the activity alone even if these are tightly tangled with one another:

The blog posts serve as a great way to frame my experience and pointers from the cards in the toolbox have made me look at events in greater detail

Although writing blog posts appeared to be an important enhancer to the toolkit, in terms of furthering inspiration, awareness and reflexivity, some students expressed anxiety about it:

I didn't know how to write a blog

More advice and 'direct' and 'concise' guidance on blog writing was requested in the form of examples:

I think maybe a bit more guidance on writing a blog post could have been helpful, maybe if we were shown other people's blogs?

A session on how to describe your experience in terms of skills that you gained?

Although the majority of the responses were about writing a blog, some people spoke about difficulties with writing in general and pointed to the possibility of alternative modes of expression and reflection:

I don't like writing – I am not good at grammar

I would use art if I could

Maybe a session on other ways to record your time abroad beyond writing, such as photography skills or film making?

While the majority of students communicated their experiences in writing, some others uploaded photos or videos of their activities. The 'Magic Portrait' was a favourite activity, which encompassed an alternative mode of reflection, by means of pictures:

It is open to interpretation – I am arty

The online community represented a virtual space of holding and of belonging that facilitated students' movement from it and back to it:

Last but not least, thanks to Third Space I felt like part of a community. Knowing that there were so many other people who might live through the same anxieties and feel the same excitement was relieving. Not only did this help me feel more relaxed, but it also served as a source of inspiration. Just by reading others' posts on the blog I would start feeling the urge to go out, explore, try traditional food or just wander the streets in search of new places and experiences to write about and give back to the community

However, students wanted more interaction online, more comments from others on their blog posts. Students desired more actual dialogue in the online space.

STUDENT RECOMMENDATIONS

Students found group work and team activities especially enjoyable and useful. There was a strong call for more team bonding and more time for people to connect with each other while they were away.

The Facebook group was minimally used. Some students mentioned using it to ask specific logistical questions. The blog itself seemed to have more potential as an online community. Many people mentioned reading other people's blogs. However, not many of them commented on each others' posts. One student spoke of feeling that she was posting into an empty space.

People asked for more group activity as it is something they enjoyed particularly for giving them the chance to '*complete a task together*':

Writing a blog post as a group was great same activity but different people from different places - for example having a group activity for which each would have to write a paragraph and ending up with a group writing

Idea about activity: create a big postcard that goes around the whole sub group. One person sends it to the next and so on until it arrives to Third Space in Edinburgh

Students asked for more contact not only among the members of their teams but also among teams as well as with the people from Third space:

Keep in touch with us more, maybe post more stuff on the Facebook group

RETURNING PHASE: THE WELCOME HOME CONFERENCE

As discussed earlier, the Welcome Home conference was designed as an opportunity for students to meet again, eighteen months after the Weekend Retreat, and share their experiences of traveling, living abroad and of returning 'home'. As part of the conference, we held group discussions in the form of a 'World Café Event', facilitated by student 'hosts'. In these discussions, we invited students to evaluate their overall experience of Third Space with a particular focus on phases one (Weekend Retreat) and two (Toolbox). For the evaluation of phase three (welcome home conference) we considered that standard questionnaire evaluations to be more appropriate (less demanding of students' time). As a consequence, the information we collected about the Welcome Home conference is not as rich as the data generated for the other two phases.

The Welcome Home conference was primarily appreciated for becoming a space of connection, reconnection and sharing of the experiences students had abroad. It is also interesting to notice how some of the students, such as this one, point to it as offering them the chance to give feedback to Third space:

The cafe was great for Third Space to receive feedback and I hope it will help very much. This was a nice way to meet people who I had never seen before, even from the first retreat we did

Students pointed to the careful organization of the event, valuing being provided with small groups to share their experiences in. Some wanted to spend more time in a larger groups, some in two groups or in their original groups to share their experiences with and 'talk as a whole'

about where we went and one of the most memorable moments you had

The mind mapping and storytelling session was experienced as a creative way of processing some of the experiences they had had while abroad. People wanted it to be less rushed and accompanied by an introduction so that they arrived at it more prepared.

The storytelling was a bit rushed. Next time there could be a bit more introduction to it so that we know what to expect before drawing the first mind map

While some people found the time and the length of the event appropriate, others wanted it to be shorter as well as closer to their return:

Maybe meet in September for the final meeting (if students are back by this time), because we can all reflect together, memories and moments are fresh in our minds

SUPPORT AND INTERCULTURAL ENGAGEMENT

INTERCULTURAL ENGAGEMENT AND LEARNING

Travelling abroad as part of the Third Space pilot has been an important learning and developmental experience for students on this pilot. These positive experiences have been described in more detail in the previous sections, where random interactions with ‘strangers’ have been greatly appreciated. For example, in the ‘toolbox’ section, we spoke in detail about Third Space participants initiating interactions with people from the host country and how they valued gaining confidence in doing so. Here we focus on their learning through a more in-depth engagement with people in the host communities, which emerged through fostering attitudes that were promoted by Third Space, namely openness, curiosity, respect for and valuing of difference, reflexivity. For example, one participant who spoke about joining a traditional dance group in Singapore that soon became ‘like a family’ to her, remembers:

‘I was the only one who has joined the class who wasn’t Asian’ (smiles as if both embarrassed and proud).

This reflection depicts a perhaps common tendency of Western ‘visitors’ of Eastern cultures to rarely engage with local cultural activities, which this student is honoured to overcome due to the prompt of a Third Space activity. As the literature suggests, meaningful intercultural encounters occur through creating relationships with people from other cultures. In addition to the material provided in the sections above, these three Third Spacers focus directly on the importance of their experiences with people:

The activities in the toolbox have really helped me find new ways of discovering Germany and meeting the locals.

I think the people were the best thing about it, not the place. They made me change my attitude and become more positive, open, appreciative and random;

The lady I was living with was an Italian film director, and she introduced me to people I would have never normally have been in touch with. Like, I spent one night with 40-year old Italian people talking about films.

Third Space participants endorsed and appreciated the quality of becoming a ‘reflexive inquirer’ who approaches difference and unfamiliar situations with curiosity and openness and who makes an effort to meet the people of the local community and explore their everyday life rather than presume **a priori notions of cultural difference (Davies 2008)**.

Third Space participants’ reflections also reveal that these attitudes seem to have been endorsed through experiential learning not only for their travels abroad but as more lasting attitudes to life in general:

I completely changed my attitude and realised that there are so many more ways of living. This will permeate my life from now on I think

I opened up a new side to life which I had never seen before. I learnt a lot about spontaneity, sustainability and mindfulness.

The toolbox and the activities has allowed me to reflect upon certain things which I may have missed. It makes me question certain elements of Canadian culture or my time abroad in general, and I really enjoy that.

These quotes demonstrate the role that Third Space played in the transformation of students and their personal development. What is also important to highlight is the fact that Third Space participants appear willing to transfer this useful learning back to their home environment, passing on their developed skills and attitudes of meaningful intercultural engagement:

The whole experience abroad changed my mind set. I want to transfer this attitude here in Edinburgh.

This was a particularly satisfying finding for the Third Space team as it demonstrated that our workshops, the Toolbox, the community we created and, importantly, the overall ethos we represent is not perceived as 'just a tool' for students to use when they struggle during their experiences abroad, but is appreciated and endorsed as a valuable attitude towards life. This is encouraging also in terms of the programme's sustainability, which is the topic of the final section of this report.

SUPPORT

Conceptually, Third Space does emerge out of student feedback as an in-between space, a third space between coming from somewhere and going to somewhere else. It facilitates the forming of connections between students and the new and unfamiliar contexts they find themselves in, while also keeping the sense of connection to their home communities alive. We have found it useful to draw on the psychoanalytic concept of 'holding' to examine why providing supportive connections to the familiar is essential to enabling students to open up to intercultural difference while they are away.

Briefly, 'holding' is a concept developed by Winnicott through his study of mother-child relationships. Winnicott found that children who felt secure in their relationship to their parent, who felt attached, connected and loved, and who could anticipate that their physical and psychological needs would be met by that parent were more willing and able to leave the proximity of their parent and explore new things. This ability to explore is essential for the development of the infant's self through the transitions of childhood development. In what follows, we use this concept in relation to the transitions of studying abroad, to explore why Third Space worked for most students in enabling them to extend beyond their comfort zones, open themselves up to intercultural experiences and process these experiences so that they

could develop as global citizens.

A SECURE BASE

As presented above, Third space did foster a sense of belonging that students' were able to maintain while they were away, as this student demonstrates:

It was also really good to know that there were other students doing the same thing as me, and many feeling the same emotions I was feeling. Although I didn't speak much to people, the community of third space helped a lot

This quotation illustrates that this sense of belonging to the Third Space provided participants with a sense of being held, particularly emotionally, across vast distances even when they were not actively communicating with each other. In this section, we revisit some of the findings from the sections above, in order to unpack what it was that provided this sense of belonging and being held.

While the positive feedback on the planning of the Weekend Retreat, the length of time, the venue choice and the food, were all good to receive in and of themselves, by thinking about what worked through the concept of holding, we further suggest that physically providing for students' needs in this way added to the sense of being held.

The training we provided at the retreat was also generally well received. Students felt that the workshop on culture shock anticipated needs that many had not even recognized they would have. Meanwhile, the preference expressed for participatory ways of engaging with the training, points to the benefits of being able to have their concerns expressed and named to each other and to the Third Space staff. In these ways, students generally seemed to feel that at the Weekend Retreat, both their physical and psychological needs had been seen by others, acknowledged and addressed, these are important aspects of providing a sense of belonging and being held.

By holding students physical and psychological needs in this way, students were able to prepare themselves for transitioning onto their year abroad.

OPENNESS TO THE OTHER DURING THE SOJOURNER STAGE

Winnicott's concept suggests that having a secure base, feeling held, is what enables people to be open to others, to engage with difference and to learn and grow through that engagement. As we have seen in the sections above, a number of students' responses convey an openness to otherness and point to a going out or a breaking of a pattern, of something old or, in some way, familiar:

The opportunity to try new things was a fundamental element of my year abroad. I

[Type here]

[Type here]

Third Space

did weird, crazy and fun things, and I don't regret any of it

I opened up a new side to life which I had never seen before

Students then brought the insights from working with otherness to reflecting on things they already did or had done before in new ways

It has made me branch out and try new things, but also find a new perspective on things I was already doing

They gained independence through their experiences,

Learnt how to be independent (broke_ankle) and realised I could really do things for myself

I just felt free

Students allowed themselves not only to open up to otherness but also to embody such otherness within the new setting:

I joined a dance team. I learnt more about the culture through this. I don't dance at all, so that was fun. No one knew me!

I joined a badminton team. I joined it because I'm not good at sports, and no-one knew me [in France], and I didn't know anyone there, so I thought why not?

And students developed in their sense of self:

I came out of my shell; I was a lot shyer in Edinburgh

I grew up a lot. It sounds cheesy but I felt like I found myself

While it is impossible to separate out how much of this opening up came from being abroad and how much Third Space contributed to this, the findings in sections above do indicate that whilst still in Edinburgh, the Toolkit, in particular was encouraging students to go out of their comfort zone, so we may assume that there is some contribution.

In the sections above, participant feedback drew attention to the physicality of the toolkit. From the perspective of support, we can see that the physical cards and box, provided an embodiment of third space. Some students took the toolbox with them and held on to it while away, while others spoke tenderly and possessively of it. Some called it a memento and others pointed to the physicality of it, pointing also to it providing a physical representation of holding that allowed them the security to open up to the other.

Art, for Winnicott (2005) is another kind of potential space, a space that encompasses a third area of reality and fosters play and creativity, that is the generation of new meanings and images. Some of the students spoke about a need to document, 'write' or reflect on their experience by means of art methods such as pictures and videos. Writing as a creative artistic form, provides a third space, intermediate between students and their experiences. It uses language to symbolise the experience and becomes then a third place from where students become aware of their experience, observe it and reflect on it. This reflexive dialogue fostered fresh spatial conceptualisations such as in the case of the student who began to think of the world as a small place or one who noticed 'things on your doorstep you don't even think about'.

SUSTAINABILITY

This pilot has been organised and sustained, in large, by the Third Space Team. Where possible, we invited students to take on a leading role in this project, for example through sharing their experiences and hosting group discussions at the Welcome Home Conference. Our ultimate aim, however, is to pass Third Space on to students' hands and create a sustainable provision that would be led by students for students. In the following section we briefly outline how students envisage their future involvement with Third Space and with 'passing on' the wisdom they accumulated to other students who are going abroad.

One of the project's approaches to sustainability has been that of bringing the Third space ethos back home. Students' response to that is unearthed from their feedback; one of them said:

The opportunities I had abroad have made me realise how important it is to welcome exchange students here. I want to try to help bridge the gap between international and host students

On several occasions in their discussions students seemed to be already thinking about the future of the project, wondering how future students can make the most of it and providing feedback with a lot of suggestions for improvement or things that might be helpful to people who will go abroad next. An element of sustainability, a consideration about the project's viability, seems to be coming also from them:

Because of Third Space I met a biology student like myself, who is also in Singapore on exchange. We have become very good friends, and meeting her before hand has really helped me when settling in here when I first arrived. She knows of people who have been on exchange from Edinburgh to Singapore before us and I think the information she got from this person about studying here is invaluable. I think as Third Space becomes bigger and more people join in it would be great to get in contact with people who have been to these Universities before to get a real idea of what we are getting ourselves into

I wish I'd done more to write on the blog and share my experience with the rest of

[Type here]

[Type here]

Third Space

the world and forthcoming Erasmus students, but I'm planning to be more active on this side

Next year you can show people our blogs

It is quite a good idea for the retreat to be spread over the course of the semester, perhaps like societies like EGP

Make the retreat compulsory because you [referring to one of the participants] missed out on a lot

The latter two quotes acknowledge Third Space's significant place in going abroad as an exchange student and invite permanence by turning it into a society; the project is also invited to take over more space and time by spreading over the semester.

Third Space looked to actively foster sustainability by inviting students to be involved in the ongoing running of the project. A group of students was involved in the facilitation of the World cafe event which included focus groups and discussions amongst their peers about their experiences abroad as well as with Third Space. In their feedback, both the facilitators as well as the rest of the students noticed and appreciated such involvement as positive and inclusive.

These student facilitators were thoughtful in their facilitation, note-taking and reflection as this student demonstrates in the process notes that accompanied the transcription of her focus groups notes:

People saw that they had new things and opportunities opened up through their experience abroad, but they found it hard to say exactly how they might use them here, now and in the future. Responses were quite general. Many said that the huge amount they learnt – both academically and socially - has and will have a big impact on their lives. Many also said that the friendships they made when abroad were very strong and they will always cherish the memories

The engagement, the careful note taking and processing of students' responses and experiences point to students' willingness to look after the project and to ensure some sort of continuity. The facilitators' engagement might also speak to a keenness to be part of the project and to give back to the future students what they have received.

A next step that the project is currently fostering is the training of a group of students who participated in the Third Space Pilot to become the facilitators of the workshops that run during the Weekend Retreat and prepare students for their time abroad. We have managed to secure some funding for this training and for the first time, this year's Third Space Weekend Retreat will be facilitated by large by students. Out of the 28 participants who completed the programme, five wished to continue to be involved in the programme by acting as facilitators for the next round of Third Space. Hopefully this will be a concrete step towards transferring

Third Space onto student hands.

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