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A Typology of Reflective Learning

By

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## Abstract

### A TYPOLOGY OF REFLECTIVE LEARNING

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This study explored the phenomenon of reflective learning, looking at a specific case: a study abroad program in Nepal and the participants of the program. The intent of the study was to explore the reflective learning phenomenon in relation to the participants during the time of the program, particularly, exploring the process of reflective learning.

Data was gathered using semi-structured interviews. Interviews were conducted at three separate periods of the 11 week program: weeks two and three; weeks five and six; and weeks ten and eleven. These interview dialogues were the unit of analysis, using a grounded theory methodology to discover major themes and characteristics.

The findings are presented in two sections, one presenting a Typology of Reflective Learning, and two, a typological description of particular learner types. The Typology of Reflective Learning was found to consist of four main category types: Focus of Reflective Learning; Means of Reflective Learning; Intent of Reflective Learning; Influences on Reflective Learning. All learner participants expressed varying degrees of these basic core category types when discussing their reflective learning. The typological description of particular learner types presents composite pictures of particular learners who were representative of a learning continuum, of which all learner participants were a part. The representative learners presented were of three types: Questioning Learner; Synthesizing Learner; and Content Informed Learner.



Dedicated to my mother and father

## **Acknowledgments**

First, I would like to give special thanks to the 31 participants whose words gave a voice to this study. It was do to their kindness and generosity that I was able to embark upon this reflective journey of learning. I hope my words have given justice to their insightful learning. I would also like to thank my advisor, Dr. Murari Suvedi, and my two committee members, Dr. S. Joseph Levine, and Dr. John Schweitzer. It was do to their informative guidance that I was able to progress and complete this endeavor. I would also like to thank all those who helped in providing informative insight regarding this text and its many revisions. You know who you are! Finally, I would like to give thanks to my mother and father, who taught me the most important lesson in life, the value of learning.

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## **Chapter I**

### **Introduction**

#### **Overview**

This study explored reflective learning as it related to persons learning in the context of the Spring 1999 semester, Study Abroad Program in Nepal, offered through Michigan State University. The idea of reflective learning has been written about extensively by numerous individuals interested in educational philosophy and learning theory (Dewey, 1933, 1955; Perry, 1970; Agrayis, & Schon, 1974; Freire, 1974, 1990; Schon, 1983; Boud, Keogh & Walker, 1985; Mezirow, 1990). The works produced by these individuals have described reflective learning within the contexts of a variety of interests, respectively: educational philosophy (Dewey, 1933, 1955); intellectual development (Perry, 1970); professional practice (Agrayis & Schon, 1974); emancipatory social process (Freire, 1974); learning from experience (Boud et al. 1985); and adult learning theory (Mezirow, 1990).

A discourse regarding reflective learning has extended the parameters of educational policy and research in relation to learning processes. A discourse is a series of norms, rules, values and practices that guide a social phenomenon (Best & Keller, 1991). The general purpose of this study was to add to the discourse regarding reflective learning, exploring its potential presence, and significance, with learners participating in a study abroad program in Nepal. During the process of conducting and completing work on this study, it became apparent that developing a typological analysis of reflective learning was a fruitful possibility. Thus, although this objective did not inform the initial

intent of the thesis, it does form the basis for the overall findings.

Because the study was contextually dependent on reflective learning, facilitated through the participation in a study abroad experience in Nepal, adding to the discourse regarding learning through study abroad experiences was also of interest. The discourse surrounding study abroad learning experiences must often defend against disavowing views towards the learning that can occur through these types of experiences. Thus, the continuing discourse must often look to substantiate new validations of the learning that can occur for a learner participant in this type of learning program (Goodwin & Nacht, 1988; Hoffa, 1996, Sommer, 1997, Pusch, 1997). An additional aim of this study was to add to the continuing discourse surrounding learning through participation in a study abroad experience, by giving a voice to the learner in the process of learning.

### **Reflective Learning**

The idea of reflective learning has been defined from the vantage of varying perspectives. These definitions are generally inclusive of the particular rhetoric conducive to the particular perspective through which it is informed. The variability in definitions is, in part, do to the ambiguity associated with the phenomenon of reflective learning, as well as an indication of the differing perspectives through which it is discussed and defined. Following are a few of these varying definitions so as to present the reader with an understanding of the phenomenon.

Boud et al. (1985) argues that the concepts' inception can be found as far back as Aristotle's discussions of practical judgement and moral action in his Ethics. In their own view, "reflection in the context of learning is a generic term for those intellectual and

affective activities in which individuals engage to explore their experiences in order to lead to new understandings and appreciation's" (Boud et al., 1985, p.19).

Jarvis (1987) defines reflective learning as "a process of deep thought, both a looking backwards to the situation being pondered upon and a projecting forward to the future, being a process of both recall and reason" (p. 86-87).

Boyd and Fales (1983) state reflective learning as " the process of internally examining and exploring an issue of concern, triggered by an experience, which creates and clarifies meaning in terms of self, and which results in a changed conceptual perspective" (p.100).

To clarify these definitions, contrasting views of learning may be of benefit. In contrast to reflective learning, Dewey (1933) pointed out the process of trial and error as a means through which individuals come to learn specifics to a problem. In this case, learning is confined to the information that is specific to the inquiry of interest. Other non-reflective learning occurs through such processes as memorization and skills acquisition. These processes deal more with the receiving and giving of information.

Reflective learning, however, looks to make the connections between experiences and the learner, and the perceptual relationships that govern those experiences. Reflective learning involves a dialectical relationship between the learner and experience, involving a revolving process of relating new experiences and knowledge to that which was previously known.

As stated above, definitions regarding reflective learning vary in their terminology, particularly in relation to the context for which they are used. Still, most definitions express a notion of thought and learning, containing both cognitive and

affective dimensions, which relates past knowledge and experience with new experiences and new ideas that stem from them, in seeking to come to a new, revised, or reaffirmed understanding or meaning of the experience for the individual learner.

Much of the emphasis on reflective learning is the result of an educational shift of perspectives from the teacher to the learner. This perspective accounts for the individual learner actively engaging in her/his socio/cultural environment, and how the individual recognizes the harmony or disharmony he or she has in this environment (Jarvis, 1987). Many authors point to the significance that this so-called disharmony, uncertainty, disequilibrium, etc., has for the process of reflective thinking and reflective learning (Dewey 1933; Piaget 1950; Brookfield, 1987; Mezirow, 1991).

### **Learning/Study Abroad**

Michigan State University, along with other educational institutions within the United States, is continuing to increase the availability of study abroad programs to its students. Study abroad programs have been referenced as a "new prototype" for understanding different perspectives of education that are more holistic and multifaceted (Kauffman et al., 1992). The increased proliferation of these programs may be perceived as a genuine recognition regarding the potentials such learning programs offer to students. Some argue that these learning opportunities have become widely recognized as important for a student's overall undergraduate education (Laubscher, 1994). Others have gone as far as to voice a warning that "leaders of American academe should recognize that this is a fast-moving field that they ignore at their peril" (Goodwin & Nacht, 1988, p. 118).

Michigan State University has seemingly recognized these declarations, and has taken direct policy initiatives in making the opportunity to study abroad increasing available for its students, with the ultimate objective to make it a part of an undergraduate students educational curriculum. It has established an institutional goal of sending 40 percent of its undergraduate student population overseas, for study abroad, by the year 2006.

The advances in travel and communicative technologies are creating profound changes in world dynamics. As citizens from various places become spatially and temporally closer, the necessity for facilitating the development of global perspectives has become a growing reality, as the realities of our world continue to transform. Integrating a study abroad learning experience into a student's undergraduate education may be viewed as a response to this changing global situation. These factors were additional reasons for conducting this study, with a specific interest in understanding the phenomenon of reflective learning, in the context of a particular study abroad experience in Nepal, and how it relates to the learner.

### **Reflective Learning and Learning/Study Abroad**

Study abroad programs often create novel learning experiences for participants. The novelty of the experience, introducing new social, cultural, and psychological assumptions, has the potential to foster the emergence of new perspectives that could potentially impart multiple directions and extend the frontiers of what previously defined the parameters of participants learning and knowledge (Kauffman et al. 1992). As such, reflective learning could be important to participants in their overall process of

understanding and making meaning of the learning process that engages their thinking on this level (Dewey 1933; Mezirow, 1990) because of the potentially disorienting nature of the experience. In essence, the assumptions that previously defined what and how a learner understands their reality can potentially be confronted. Brookfield (1987), describes these assumptions as, "self-evident rules about reality that we use to help seek explanations, make judgements, or decide on various actions" (p. 44). Polyani (1962) views these assumptions as being imperative to what he calls implicit personal knowledge, or what we take as being given or self-evident. In confronting these assumptions, learners may potentially engage in means through which to reinterpret or adjust these assumptions. This study explores this phenomenon in relation to the context of a study abroad program in Nepal, with the assumption that such an experience may involve elements of disharmony or uncertainty, which then may trigger a process of reflective learning for the learner participants of the program as they construct new meaning from these experiences.

Sommer (1997) and Pusch (1997) claim that because it is an experience that is not only defined by the context of travelling to a new environment, but also by the learning structure within which individuals are participating, the potential for reflective learning in a study abroad experience is significant. In a sense, the study abroad situation creates a theme around which learning emerges and functions. Heflich & Iran-Nejad (1995) argue that this thematic aspect fosters good opportunities for reflective learning to occur.

Learning opportunities are best structured in a manner that recognizes the dynamic and active aspects of learning by making them stimulating and attractive, able to guide attention, interest and curiosity. This dynamic and active learning environment takes place within the context of an overall theme, to which learning activities can be reflectively related (Heflich & Iran-Nejad 1995, p. 13, from Marsh & Iran Nejad, 1994).

The theme in this case is the Michigan State University Study Abroad Program in Nepal, with a group of learners dynamically responding to various learning experiences they have during the program.

Literature relating to learning through a study abroad experience has explored learning results primarily in relation to participant expectations prior to the experience and its effects on learning following the conclusion of the program (Pizzini, 1979; Marion, 1980; Pyle, 1981; Carlson & Widaman, 1988; Oppen, S., Teichler, U., Carlson, J., 1990; Burn, 1991; Kauffman, Martin, Weaver & Weaver, 1992). Additional studies discuss participant perceptions of the experience following its conclusion (Sikkema & Niyekawa-Howard, 1977; Oppen et al., 1990; Laubscher, 1994). The former studies, exploring expectations and impacts, have explored defining demographics of participants in understanding learning outcomes and success, as well as administrative factors that may be influential on learner outcomes, and the differences in learning outcomes of participants versus non-participants. The latter studies, exploring participant perceptions, allow the voice of the participants to describe the perceived success of the learning experience following its conclusion. Underlying most of these works are policy initiatives which try to gain more control of who does, and should, participate, as well as to determine how learning can be maximized for the participant.

Assumptions guiding these types of studies are that:

- 1) Outcomes can be controlled and predicted more accurately, and ensured to be more effective, by understanding characteristics of participants, which can be used in developing effective program designs;



- 2) Learner perspectives following the conclusion of the program provide useful information regarding outcomes of the learning experience.

This study does not aim to counter these assumptions, but rather, the *point of departure* is defined differently. This study assumes that all participants are potential reflective learners during the time of the experience, and assumes a learner-perspective by allowing the voice of the learner, in the context of the learning environment, to provide a description of the learning experience. In short, this study gives emphasis to process, more than learned outcomes. In exploring the individual learner, this study assumes the control and predictability of reflective learning to be situated within the learner, during the time of the experience, and looks to explore this phenomenon at this time.

### **Purpose of Study**

The purpose of the study was to explore the reflective learning of participants in a study abroad experience by allowing the voices of the learners to describe their perceptions of this learning from their experiences during a study abroad program in Nepal. Guiding this purpose were the following objectives:

### **Research Objectives**

- 1) To explore the content of learner interview dialogues in understanding reflective learning in relation to the present discourse surrounding the phenomenon.

- 2) To explore the phenomenon of reflective learning over the extent of a particular study abroad program in Nepal.

### **Context of the Study**

As stated in the Purpose of Study, this study was conducted in the context of a study abroad program in Nepal, offered by Michigan State University. From January 15 to April 1, 1999, a group of 31 undergraduate students from Michigan State University participated in an eleven week learning experience in the Kingdom of Nepal. The program is multidisciplinary, and is open to undergraduate students from all majors.

### **Nepal**

Geographically situated on the northern edge of the Indian subcontinent, Nepal is bound between two giant socio/cultural civilizations: India and China. Historically, Nepal served as a significant conduit through which the socio/cultural creations of these two civilizations flowed. Positioned as it was, the current Kingdom of Nepal assumed, as well as recreated, some of the socio/cultural forces that informed these two civilizations. Today, this is revealed in many ways, such as in the two great world religions: Hinduism and Buddhism, which are interchangeably practiced by the populace in conjunction with more traditional beliefs. Food, clothing, norms, values, and countless other socio/cultural phenomenon have all been significantly influenced by the flow of ideas and peoples between these two countries. Entire volumes of texts have and could discuss these factors alone, but important to this study is how these extraordinary socio/cultural factors can be significant to a learner coming from the United States. Specifically, Nepal offers the

opportunity of living and learning in a place with a composite of social, cultural and psychological norms that stand strikingly opposed to much of the normative perspectives that compose the social, cultural and psychological reality of many learners originating from the US.

Some have argued that the greater degree of difference found between learning experiences, the greater the overall emotional and intellectual shock will be to the learner. (Sikkema & Niyekawa-Howard, 1977). This shock or dilemma is often cited as a key for any learning to begin when it involves challenging basic assumptions that guide learning (Dewey, 1933; Brookfield, 1987; Mezirow, 1991; Jarvis, 1992).

Others place this in respect to the enculturation process of individuals within their respective cultures, which is the way that determines how the perceptions of individuals are shaped in respect to the world they live in, as well as how the group socially defines and interacts with their environment to survive (Laubscher, 1994). Laubscher (1994) states that the degree to which the differing perspectives caused by enculturation effects the study abroad learner is in large part related to the difference in the two cultures. In an obvious sense, Nepal and the United States are quite different in a myriad of circumstances. It was with this in mind that prompted the exploration of reflective learning with participants in the study abroad program.

### **Study Abroad Program in Nepal**

The Study Abroad Program in Nepal has various academic components that encourage learning about and gaining an understanding of Nepal, i.e. in regards to: culture, society, governance, language, religion, natural resources, etc. Participants also

live with Nepalese families during the extent of the program. This opportunity increases the exposure participants have to some particular social and cultural norms found in Nepal and with particular groups of people.

The program is academically structured so that to receive credit, participants are expected to meet basic program requirements and complete various assignments based upon their learning. These assignments include:

- 1) Attending daily lectures at a host institution;
- 2) Completion of examinations based upon the material covered in the lectures;
- 3) Participation in field based activities;
- 4) Completion of reflection papers based upon two specific field experiences;
- 5) Recordings of daily observations in a journal and the writing of two research papers on individually selected topics of interest.

In addition to these “basic” requirements, which constitute the *core curriculum*, participants are required to complete two research papers on particular topics of interest. These papers are intended for the fulfillment of additional academic credits for which participants must register to participate in the program. Combined, these various components are intended to provide a holistic, multifaceted learning experience for the participants.

Participants spend eight weeks of the program in Pokhara, a major metropolitan area of the country. During this time, participants attend daily lectures on academic

topics, and participate in study-tours to different parts of the city and surrounding area. The additional three weeks are spent on three separate weeklong study tours in the capital city Kathmandu, a national park area, and a trekking conservation area. This format constitutes the basic academic structure of the study abroad program in Nepal.

The uniqueness of studying and learning abroad, which is context dependent, makes it necessary to understand that the learning that occurs cannot be separated between program learning activities and experiences and those experiences that the learner encounters in a non-formal setting. Thus living, as well as more organized learning opportunities, was considered interdependent and integral in exploring the reflective learning phenomenon for this study. In addition, the more general experiences of the participants, both individually and in a group, were considered pertinent for exploring this phenomenon.

### **Operational Definition of Terms**

*Reflective learning:* the assessment or reassessment of assumptions guiding perspectives through which knowledge is constructed that involves a process of deep thought, both a looking backwards to the situation being pondered upon and a projecting forward to the future.

*Experience:* program specific and non-formal experiences of the learner that are relevant to their learning and reflective learning during the period of the study abroad program in Nepal.

*Understand*: to grasp the meaning of the idea; to realize clearly and apprehend the character or nature of the idea.

*Constructivism*: an epistemological position that defines the relationship between knower and known as interdependent. In relation to learning, it posits that learners construct knowledge themselves, both individually and socially constructing meaning as they learn. There is no knowledge that exists independently from the meaning that the learner attributes to the experience.

*Qualitative Analysis*: a nonmathematical process of interpretation, carried out for the purpose of discovering concepts and relationships in raw data and then organizing these into a theoretical explanatory scheme (Strauss & Carbon, 1998).

*Michigan State University Study Abroad Program in Nepal*: the program occurring during the Spring, 1999 Semester.

## **Chapter II**

### **Review of Literature**

Following is a review of the literature that was considered relevant for this study.

Three main areas of interest are explored:

- 1) Learning
- 2) Reflective Learning
- 3) Learning/Study Abroad

Each of these topics is explored separately. The literature presented in this section will be critically reviewed in order to get a clearer understanding of the discourse surrounding learning, reflective learning, and study abroad that is presently used in academic and applied settings.

Beginning with learning, the review provides a brief historical development of learning theories and how they relate to each other, and the perspectives that governed their development. By exploring learning in general, a clearer idea of reflective learning can be created by contrasting the two ideas. The review of literature pertaining to reflective learning explores: the historical underpinnings of this idea; the more recent development of the notion; how it relates to how we define learning; and what the central focus of various learning strategies should explore. Finally, an exploration of literature relating to learning/studying abroad is presented. This phenomenon, for the purpose of this study, is also referenced as learning abroad, the two often used synonymously for this type of experience. This brings together, along with the literature on learning and

reflective learning, the contextual base from which this study was grounded. Although the reflective learning aspects of these study abroad experiences are related and discussed in literature, both explicitly, and more implicitly in the cross-cultural learning objectives that structure and inform these experiences, there was little literature found in exploring this phenomenon in depth during the time of the experience. The exploration of the literature provided the basis from which this study departed in exploring the phenomenon of reflective learning.

## **Learning**

Learning is conventionally defined as change. Understandably, learning and understanding how people learn is an idea under constant change and revision, as more is learned about this phenomenon. Theories of learning are inextricably bound to epistemological assumptions that convey a perspective on the relationship between knower and known, which in turn are in relation to ontological perspectives that describe the nature of reality itself. Epistemological and ontological perspectives have changed and developed in relation to the historical worldview perspective that predominated or gained acceptance during a particular time and place. A worldview is often referred to synonymously with a model, conceptual framework, meaning perspective or paradigm (Mezirow, 1991). This worldview, paradigm, etc., is generally referred to as an accepted model or pattern (Robinson, 1993). Kiseil (1982) defines a paradigm, in this context, as "that which we look through rather than look at in viewing the world" (p. 95). It confronts questions regarding such ideas as the human condition, whether or not there is sin, what is considered beautiful, etc. (Lincoln, 1985). Maguire (1987) defines worldview as a general perspective that is used to create a coherent picture of a complex reality. A



particular worldview is bound to the spiritual beliefs and basic principles through which individuals function in a society. It essentially creates a perspective from which reality can be interpreted (Maguire, 1987).

This continual flux in world view, and the ontological and epistemological perspectives embedded within them, has encouraged changing views on learning theory, both in how learning is understood, in general, and to whom those theories should be ascribed. Major trends in understanding learning theories, developed in relation to these epistemological notions, have explored learning from differing perspectives ranging from:

- 1) How a person's behavior changes in relation to what they have learned;
- 2) The mental schemata of the mind and its organization of what is learned; and
- 3) Dialectical relationships between an individual and their learned content/experience.

All of these perspectives look to explore the process of learning and what it means to learn. These general perspectives may respectively be referred to as behavioral, cognitive and constructivist theoretical views of learning.

### **Behaviorists**

Origins of learning theory stem from a behaviorist perspective, which explained the phenomenon as a stimulus-response relationship between the learner and learned. Thorndike (1928) expounded the idea of trial and error learning or what he referred to as

connectionism, which falls within behavioral perspectives of learning. Simply stated, this theory of learning explained a manner of behaving whereby a learner would repeat an act when acquiring the desired results until a time when the same act would produce a result in disharmony with the desired outcome.

Two other behaviorist theories of learning focus on the conditioning of that which is learned. Pavlov (1927) propounded the notion of classical conditioning, while Skinner (1971) developed the notion of operant conditioning. Both theories associate a conditioned response to a reward from a stimulus. What is learned is conditioned on the stimulus which elicits the appropriate change in behavior, thus alluding to something learned.

Behaviorist learning theory is most often associated and conceptualized with the metaphor of learning as occurring like that of a machine. To stimulate the inert machine-system to action, a stimulus is input into the system inducing a resultant action, thereby indicating the success of the stimuli to the action of the machine. In relation to a theory of learning, behaviorist view learning as that of a stimulus which produces the desired behavior change, or learning. As for a learner she/he is viewed as a passive receptacle into which new information should be placed. Essentially, behaviorists explain learning with little to no attention given to mental processes of the individual (Wilhelmsen, S., Åsmul Stein I. & Meistad, Ø, 1998). Attention is given towards behavior change influenced by the stimuli, rather than to the influences the individual may have on the process. Cognitive psychologists would challenge this notion and posit a new perspective in regards to how *people* learn.

## **Cognitivists**

Cognitive learning theories place importance on the mental construction of the mind and how the mental constructions one brings to the experience in part shapes what is known or learned (Grabe & Grabe, 1998). Like behaviorists, cognitivists view knowledge as absolute, and capable of being transmitted to a learner, yet include psychological characteristics of the individuals mind as an important determinant of learning.

Cognitive theories view knowledge as symbolic, mental constructions in the minds of individuals. Cognitive psychologists refer to schemas (or schemata) as the organized constructions of an event that individuals develop, and which serve to create normative perspectives for what is expected by the individual (Mezirow, 1991). Learning is a process of assimilating these symbolic representations to memory where they may be processed.

## **Constructivists**

A recent elaboration of cognitive learning ideas, constructivism, has extended the process beyond exclusively focusing on the mental constructions of the mind, and posits the engagement of the individual to what is learned as a process of constructing knowledge and meaning.

A constructivist learning perspective posits a dialectical relationship between the individual - learner - and reality - learning environment. Constructivism, as part of a cognitive family tree, branches out in many directions with a rich history in philosophy, psychology, and education (Mahoney, 1991). Although it has many roots in these areas of

interest, it has only recently emerged as a theory to describe learning. Some see its beginnings in the works and writing of Immanuel Kant. Kant (1965) viewed humans as dynamically involved in the construction of their knowledge, not passive recipients of information. This is facilitated through knowledge that is actively checked with previously assimilated knowledge, after which a new, constructed interpretation is made (Cheek, 1992).

Reality, or what is learned, is no longer an absolute entity, existing apart from the person, but rather is part of process whereby it is constructed by the individuals. Reality, or what is learned as reality, as posited by a constructivist perspective, is thus relative and not absolute (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The (re) construction of reality, or what is learned, recognizes that individuals have different (re) constructions, and thus there are potentially multiple realities that can be learned. This contrasts with behavioral and some cognitive perspectives, which view knowledge as absolute.

Much of constructivist learning theory stems from the work of Piaget (1950) and is an extension of other work in cognitive psychology. Piaget viewed the mind as containing a series of structures that over time are reorganized via new experience. The brain tends to seek "equilibrium", yet new inputs continually challenge this state, forcing change to occur to establish this state once more. Within these structures are units referred to by Piaget as schemas (Moll, 1990; Bereiter, 1994). It is these schemas that become reconstructed as a person learns. Over time, and with additional experiences to process, an individual reconstructs their reality, always tending towards a state of equilibrium. The emphasis is on the changing *quality* of the learner and learned, rather than the *quantitative* increases in information.

## **Adult Learning**

Although much of Piaget's work was with children, constructivist notions of learning have been influential on adult learning theory as well. Adult learning theory is an emerging field of learning theory that explores the similarities and differences guiding the predominant assumptions regarding learning. The work of Eduard Lindeman (1926) and later Malcolm Knowles (1980) gave insight into a new conceptualization of how adults learn and the idea of adult learning. Lindeman challenged the notion that learning and education was something reserved for the young, and saw the potentials for education, and learning throughout adulthood, as significant and important in understanding the meaning people construct when learning. He formed a new conceptualization around learning that looked to facilitate the meaning making of the whole of life. The experience of the learner became foremost in importance and the approach was based on situations relevant to the learner, not subjects and manifest information (Lindeman, 1926).

Like Lindeman, Malcolm Knowles sought a new interpretation of learning, specifically related to adult learning. Knowles confronted the basic assumptions that premised pedagogical notions of learning. These pedagogical assumptions were contrasted in relation to something Knowles referred to as Andragogy, which was originally defined as 'the art and science of helping adults learn (Knowles, 1980). Table 1 provides a contrasting view of the basic assumptions guiding these two theoretical perspectives of learning.

**Table 1: Pedagogy and Andragogy**

Assumptions		
About	Pedagogical	Andragogical
<i>Concept of learner</i>	Dependent personality	Increasingly self-directing
<i>Role of learner's experience</i>	To be built on more than used as a resource	A rich resource for learning to self and others
<i>Readiness to learn</i>	Uniform by age-level & curriculum	Developing from life tasks and problems
<i>Orientation to learning</i>	Subject-centered	Task-or problem-centered
<i>Motivation</i>	By external rewards and punishments	By internal incentive, curiosity

(Adapted from Knowles, 1980, *The Modern Practice of Adult Education: From Pedagogy to Andragogy*.)

What emerged from this dialogue regarding pedagogy and Knowles concept of andragogy, was a debate regarding the assumptions given towards learning, especially how it contrasted between children and adults. The emphasis was on the self-directing potential of adults. Knowles (1975) describes self-directed learning as "a process in which individuals take the initiative, with or without the help of others, in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating learning goals, identifying human and other resources for learning, choosing and implementing learning strategies, and evaluating learning outcomes (p.18).

Knowles's ideas have been criticized on a variety of points (McKenzie, 1977; Knox, 1977; Label, 1978; Knudson, 1979; Jarvis, 1983), one of which is the mutual exclusivity of andragogy and its assumptions. Jarvis (1983) points out that these

assumptions are at times, and in certain circumstances, equally applicable to children. Knowles would eventually respond to a variety of criticisms (Jarvis, 1983) and remark that andragogy and pedagogy are not mutually exclusive, but part of a larger continuum of learning that recognizes the learner and context as varying, and thus inclusive of both ideas.

The importance of the dialogue, regarding these two ideas, was the recognition that learning should not be looked at in absolute terms, but that it works along a *continuum* of assumptions and premises, which in turn guide the learning of the learner. Although the cited criticisms demonstrate a degree to which Knowles failed to provide a true picture of an adult learning theory, his ideas were important in generating a discourse surrounding the phenomenon of adult learning and how it may contrast with previously held assumptions regarding learning.

As a result of the interest spurred by contrasting views of learning, and adult learning, others began to explore the concept to come to a clearer theoretical understanding. In Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning (1991), Jack Mezirow provides the basis of an adult learning theory under many of the premises of constructivist ideas. Mezirow (1991) presents constructivist assumptions developed by Candy (1989) in directing his ideas of adult learning:

- People participate in the construction of reality.
- Construction occurs within a context that influences people.
- Construction is a constant activity that focuses on change and novelty rather than fixed conditions.
- Commonly accepted categories or understandings are socially constructed, not derived from observation.
- Given forms of understanding depend on the vicissitudes of social processes, not on the empirical validity of the perspective.
- Forms of negotiated understanding are integrally connected with other human activities.

- The subjects of research should be considered as "knowing" beings.
- Locus of control resides within the subjects themselves, and complex behavior is constructed purposefully.
- Human beings can attend to complex communications and organize complexity rapidly.
- Human interactions are based on intricate social roles, the rules governing which are often implicit.

(Candy, 1989, p. 98)

Mezirow, along with other Constructivists, posit the importance of meaning making in the learning process. "Meaning is an interpretation, and to make meaning is to construct or interpret experience - in other words, to give it coherence" (Mezirow, 1991, p. 34). Constructivists believe that individuals learn through their experience and that meaning is rooted in that experience (Daley, 1999).

For constructivists, the learner is not an entirely passive receptacle, as behaviorists would claim, nor is learning an exclusive function of the mental schema of the mind of the learner, as cognitive learning theories suggest. Constructivist learning theory posits that "learners actively construct and reconstruct knowledge out of their experience in the world" (Kafai and Resnik, 1996). For Mezirow (1991), "Learning may be understood as the process of using a prior interpretation to construe a new or a revised interpretation of the meaning of one's experience in order to guide future action" (p. 12). Learning, as a process, denotes a continuous action, dynamically changing from one level to the next. This being said, learning is a complex process with a multitude of interacting variables functioning to form an outcome. In viewing learning as a process of making meaning, this perspective introduces a notion that knowledge and meaning are constantly in flux. Checking the meaning or understanding an individual has, requires a process of learning that involves the individual in a dialectical process of reconstruction. How one comes to



understand this meaning is presented next, by exploring the phenomenon of reflective learning, and how it relates to learning in a general sense.

### **Reflective Learning**

As a social phenomenon, learning typically tends toward social and cultural reproduction, because that is how it is often defined. Learning emphasizing this type of reproduction is typically non-reflective, and may include such activities as memorization, skills acquisition and preconscious learning (Jarvis, 1992). Reflective learning, however, explores the potentials of learning that are antithetical to the social/cultural reproduction that comes to define and direct a great deal of learning goals. Individuals often unconsciously internalize these social and culturally prescribed goals. Mezirow (1991) sees reflection as, "the intentional reassessment of prior learning to reestablish its validity by identifying and correcting distortions in its content, process; or premises" (p. 15). This reference alludes to the individual and the control they have in internally assessing learning, yet it is important to recall that this phenomenon of reflection and reflective learning is inextricably bound in relation to the socio/cultural environment within which the individual functions.

From a socio/cultural perspective, reflective learning provides the basis of a theoretical critique of the growing propensity of a technocratic consciousness developed through the spreading idealism of the scienticization of social life worlds (Outhwaite, 1994). Scienticization or scientism is defined by Habermas (1968) as "science's belief in itself: that is, the conviction that we can no longer understand science as one form of possible knowledge, but rather must identify knowledge with science" (p. 4). In respect to

the growing presence of science and technology in modern times, society and its individuals look to seek rational means through which to interpret the world (Weber, 1958). The scientific and technocratic consciousness is structured by longstanding scientific beliefs grounded in positivistic interpretations of reality that posit an epistemological position of an objective reality that can be explored, interpreted and controlled. Peoples within modern societies eventually accept the legitimacy of the science and technology, which leads to hegemony. Hegemony is defined by FeenBurg (1995) as a "form (of) domination so deeply rooted in social life that it seems natural to those it dominates (p. 12). The rationalization of reality through scientific, technological design is effective in entrenching modern hegemonies (Feenburg, 1995). This modern, positivist position of interpreting reality began the departure of reflection from the dialogue in regards to what we know (Outhwaite, 1994). Thus science, and the knowledge and truths it produces, are legitimized by science itself, rather than allowing an unbiased discourse to determine legitimacy of knowledge and truths.

In critique of this departure of reflection from the dialogue of knowledge, Jurgen Habermas (1968), in Knowledge and Human Interests, looked to demonstrate that the scientific way of knowing is not the only valid form of knowing and knowledge (Welton, 1993). In exploring the creation and legitimization of knowledge, Habermas distinguished between three types of knowledge: technical, communicative and emancipatory. Table 2 presents these three types of knowledge.

**Table2: Habermas's Knowledge Types**

Knowledge Type	Use of knowledge type
Technical	Prediction and control of people and environment
Communicative	Making meaning and the development of understanding through consensus
Emancipatory	Critical reflection on assumptions of first two knowledge types

(Adapted from Habermas' three types of knowledge, Habermas, 1971)

Technical knowledge is the base knowledge from which human seek to gain control and predictability over their environment. In modern societies this is realized in the form of positivistic assumptions of science.

Communicative interests serve to facilitate meaning making, and can be influenced by ones lifeworld - culturally transmitted and linguistically organized interpretations that symbolically prestructure the world of everyday life, learning - the transformative potential of recognizing the means through which an individual constructs their ideas, and social interaction, and the material reproduction of our social world through interaction (Mezirow, 1991). Ideally, rational discourse should provide the forum for developing and creating a situation suitable for communicative knowledge and meaning to be formed, yet these are often unchecked in this type of discourse, and the assumptions guiding the creation of them often go unchecked both by individuals and society. Robinson (1993) describes these assumptions as "the rules of thumb that guide

our actions, the common sense beliefs and conventional wisdom that have been ratified by our interpretations of experience" (p. 35).

The emancipatory component of knowledge alludes to the desires individuals have for emancipation from domination. These are usually created and legitimized through both technical and communicative knowledge. It is from this desire that the potentials of reflection can be realized by individuals. Through confronting assumptions that guide the first two types of knowledge, the assumptions can be transformed or reconceptualized by an individual or society (Habermas, 1968).

By elucidating these three different types of knowledge gained through learning, Habermas provides a perspective on reflection, and how it can serve the interests of learning and reflecting on the hegemonic tendencies of society, as well as psychological and cultural barrier built up within an individual. As Habermas (1968) points out, to disavow reflection is positivism (p. vii). By pointing out these tendencies of knowledge, Habermas provided added insight for educators and learning theorist interested in reflective learning. In particular to learning, his typology of knowledge demonstrates the various forms of knowledge that can be created and reified both by society and the individual. In regards to reflective learning, Habermas' insights give credence to the validating potential such learning can have.

The previous presentation on reflection and reflective learning was given to provide the socio/cultural perspectives from which it arises. This relates to the individual(s) in society, and how they construct their knowledge. These are inextricably

bound to each other. Following is a departure from this perspective, where the idea of reflective learning is explored in greater depth.

Educators and learning theorists have attributed various degrees of significance to reflective learning (Dewey, 1955; Argyris, 1982; Schon, 1983; Kolb, 1984; Boud et al., 1985; Brookfield, 1987; Mezirow, 1990; Freire 1990). It is often referred concomitantly as critical analysis, critical awareness, critical consciousness, critical reflection, emancipatory learning, or perspective transformation (Robinson, 1993). Although the works created by these individuals recognize the importance of the reflective component of the learning process, some would argue that there is still a lack of attention given to the function it serves in much of learning research. Some of this lack of attention has been attributed to an unclear understanding of what the term denotes both in psychological and common usage (Mezirow, 1991). Even so, there are many individuals within the field of education who have given considerable attention to the concept of reflection. Following is a review of some of those individuals who have written about reflection and learning.

The educational philosopher John Dewey wrote extensively about reflection and its relationship to experience and thought (Dewey, 1933, 1955). For Dewey, experience was prominent in the connection to thought and learning. Through the dynamic process of engaging in experience, individuals have the ability to reflect upon the situation they are experiencing. This allows for movement past assumptions based upon rote understanding, to a dynamic process of understanding through reflection upon experience,

Thought or reflection, as we have already seen virtually if not explicitly, is the discernment of the relation between what we try to do and what happens in

consequence. No experience having a meaning is possible without some element of thought” (Dewey, 1955, p. 169).

For Dewey, reflection is the means through which insightful understanding and learning from an experience can be achieved. And it needs to be done critically and with the focus of reflection on the learning experience.

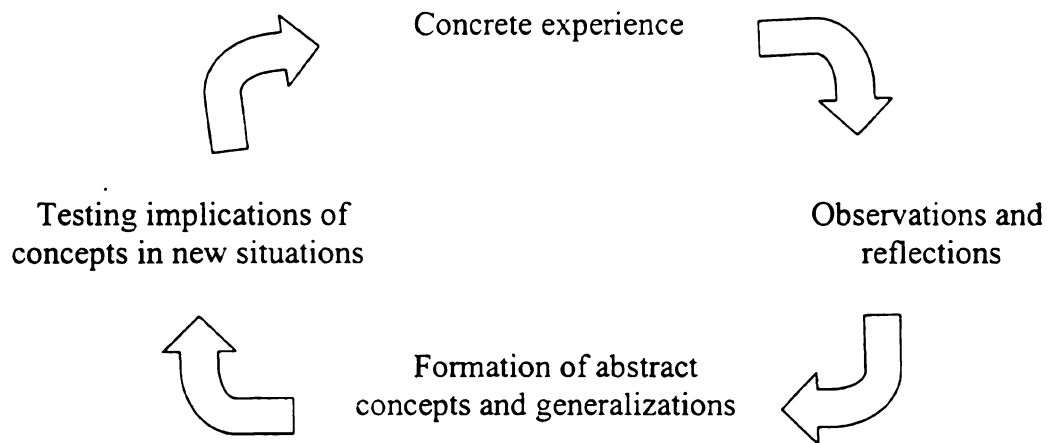
Experience as trying involves change, but change is meaningless transition unless it is consciously connected with the return wave of consequences which flow from it. When an activity is continued into the undergoing of consequences, when the change made by action is reflected back into a change made in us, the mere flux is loaded with significance. We learn something. (Dewey, 1955, p. 163)

In this sense it is a causal set of acts aimed at understanding that which is held in uncertainty (Dewey, 1933). Through the employment of reflective thought, individuals can proceed to “transform a situation in which there is experienced obscurity, doubt, conflict, disturbance of some sort, into a situation that is clear, settled, harmonious” (Dewey, 1933,p.100-101). Thus for Dewey, reflection on our experiences propels the mere experience into a cognitive construal of learning. He saw reflection involved with experience and learning as forming a loop, where the two continually reinforced one another through elucidating the relationships inferred through the experience (Boud et al. 1985)

In elaborating on the importance of experience and reflection in learning, Kolb’s model for experiential learning (Kolb & Fry, 1975) was developed to show the important role experience could have in a person’s learning (Figure 1). Kolb's ideas on experiential learning are recognized as important in the discourse of reflective learning because his model links learning theory to practice (Lewis & Williams, 1994). This model contrasts

with learning models that place more emphasis on cognitive approaches to learning (Boud, 1985) and thus are less involved with the actual experience of the learner. Kolb looked to describe learning as a process through which knowledge is transformed through experience.

**Figure 1: Kolb's Model of Experiential Learning**



(Adapted from Kolb, 1984)

The model generally demonstrates the process of experiences becoming transformed into abstract concepts that latter can be applied to new experiences. It is a cyclical representation, yet an individual can begin the learning process in this model at any point (Jarvis, 1987). The model represents four stages in which individuals, through observing and reflecting upon experience, conceptualize meaning from these observations and reflections for application involving new experiences (Kolb & Fry, 1975). Ultimately, this model relates the postulate that experience, which is not reflected upon, is learning, which is unrealized (Lewis & Williams, 1994).

As Boud et al. (1985) indicates however, in Kolb's model, little emphasis is actually ascribed to the role reflection plays in the overall process. Although Kolb generalizes the importance of each of the four aspects in his model:

- 1) concrete experience
- 2) reflective observation
- 3) conceptualization
- 4) active experimentation

and how learners, if they are to be effective, need the capacity to develop these abilities, he does little to elaborate on the reflective component of the model, aside from including the notion in the model itself (Boud, 1985). Jarvis (1983) also points out that the emphasis in this model is on the experience and not the learner. Recognizing that learners are different and bring to experiences different perceptions of phenomenon is important in recognizing the dynamics of learning and learner (Jarvis, 1983).

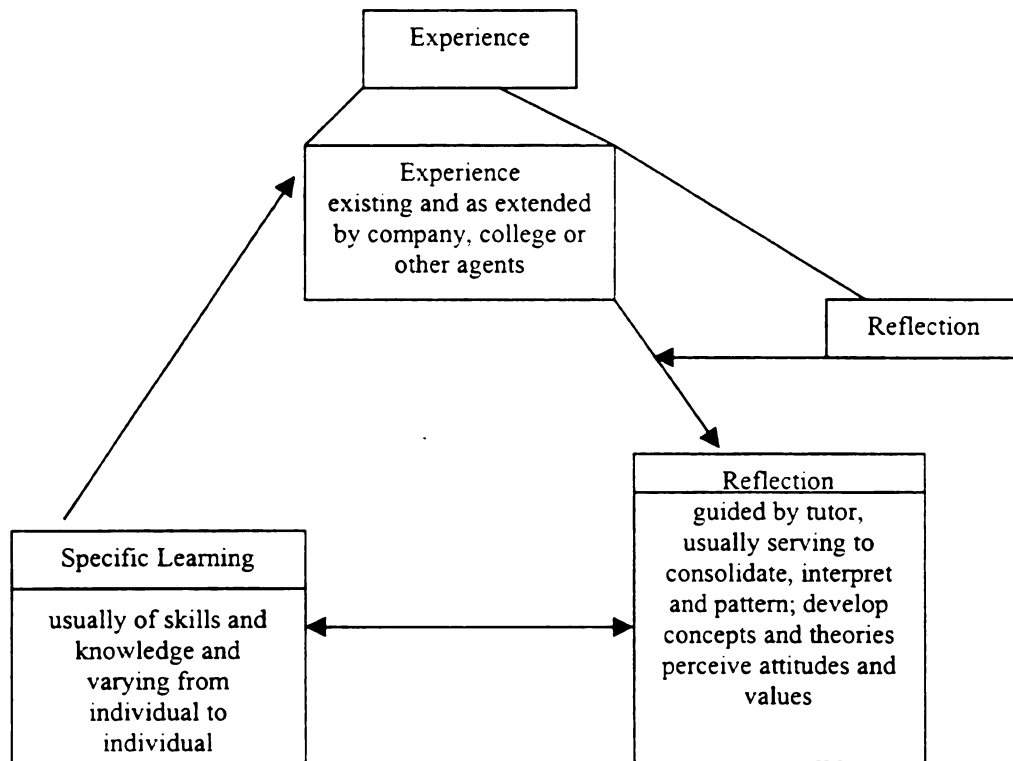
Another model (Figure 2) that incorporates reflection into the process of learning was developed by the authors of, The British Further Education Curriculum and Development Unit (FEU, 1981).

This model represents three phases of the learning process:

- 1) The experience of the learner
- 2) The specific learning which occurs on the basis of that experience
- 3) The reflective activities which are needed to extract specific learning from the overall experience.



**Figure 2: FEU Experience and Reflection Model**



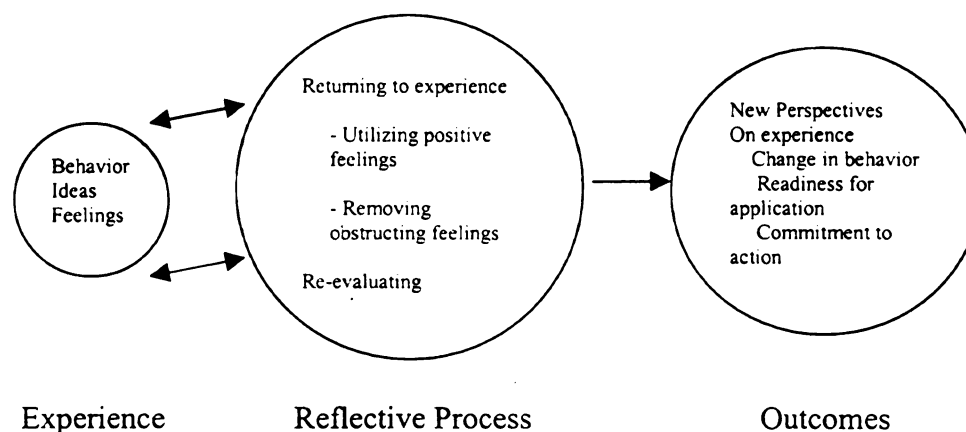
Rather than a cyclical process in accordance with reflection, this model argues that both instrumental, i.e. specific skills, etc., as well as learning through the use of reflection can occur. However, there is little development of the notion of reflection beyond pointing to its purposive nature (Boud, 1985).

Both of the models explained above represent interpretations of how reflection can be incorporated into a process of learning. They both however give only marginal attention to it as a critical element in ones learning experience, focusing more on the experience itself as an integral part of learning.

David Boud and colleagues (1985) elaborate further on the idea of reflection and its involvement with learning. In their discussions on reflective thought, they bring in a number of factors indicative to reflective learning, which begin to create a clearer image of what one means when talking about reflective learning (Jarvis, 1987).

Boud et al. (1985) first address the fact that reflection, as a part of the learning process, is individual and personal, as well as purposeful process. They also describe it as a complex process that involves emotive states such as ones feelings. (Boud et al., 1985). Boud et al. (1985) developed their ideas into a model (Figure 3) that includes the affective dimensions of learning involved in the actual experience.

**Figure 3: Reflection and Learning Model**



(Adapted from Boud et al., 1985)

Boud et al. (1985) elucidate the interactive process that reflection and learning embody. Their inflection of both affective and cognitive domains of thought (feelings, behavior and ideas) point to the interdependency that these factors may have in determining how one reflects on their learning. They center the aspect of reflective learning within the individual as a purposeful process, as well as elevating the

idiosyncracies of the emotive learner when addressing experience and reflective learning. This elevation of the individual adds to the complexity of reflective learning attending to the emotive states of the individual, as well as to the experience itself.

The ideas and works of Paulo Freire (1982, 1990) also give credence to the notion of reflection and its relation to one's learning (Jarvis, 1987). Freire's work centered around the efforts of education and learning for emancipating certain oppressed peoples of Brazil, by developing within these peoples, the ability to critically reflect on their social situation. He saw their oppression as part of their learning in that it was internalized in a non-reflective manner. Freire, however, recognized other types of learning, learning that incorporated reflection with problem posing education, which sought to emancipate individuals from their oppression (Freire, 1990). It was this type of learning, where individuals, as learners, have the ability to reflectively think and utilize their creative abilities to their fullest potential in understanding their situations, which Freire envisioned as the goal of education and the learning it espouses (Jarvis, 1987).

Important in understanding Freire's ideas with reflection and education is the importance he placed on action resulting from this newly developed creative thinking.

The insistence that the oppressed engage in reflection on their concrete situation is not a call to armchair revolution. On the contrary, reflection – true reflection – leads to action. On the other hand, when a situation calls for action, that action will constitute an authentic praxis only if its consequences become the object of critical reflection. In this sense, the praxis is the new *raison d'être* of the oppressed; and the revolution, which inaugurates the historical moment of this *raison d'être*, is not viable apart from their concomitant involvement. Otherwise, action is pure activism. (Freire, 1990, p. 52-53).



Freire's ideas about reflective learning fall within a larger scope of his work, which deals with a theory of education. He also focuses more exclusively on the social phenomenon of oppression and the potential reflective learning has for developing "conscientization". In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1990), Freire defines conscientization as "learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality (p. 19). His ideas point to the powerful change that can occur through critical reflection on one's situation. It can be envisioned as not only emancipation from overt oppression but emancipation of the mind and how one thinks and learns (Jarvis, 1985).

The adult learning theorist Jack Mezirow is another individual who has focused his attentions towards the aspect of reflection and learning. Mezirow's focus returns to the individual, and the personal aspects of learning. Mezirow, in his analysis of reflection and learning, developed a theory of reflectivity as a means to understand how individuals, based upon the perspectives they bring to an experience, reflect upon the experience in terms of their perceptions, thoughts and action (Mezirow, 1990 ). Thus he goes further in elucidating upon the specific function reflection can have within the learning process, particularly with adult learning .

Mezirow defines seven levels of reflectivity:

1. *Reflectivity*: an awareness of a specific perception, meaning, behavior or habit;
2. *Affective reflectivity*: awareness of how the individual feels about what is being perceived, thought or acted upon.

3. *Discriminant reflectivity*: the assessment of the efficacy of perception, thought, action or habit;
4. *Judgmental reflectivity*: making and becoming aware of value judgements about perception, thought, action or habit;
5. *Conceptual reflectivity*: self-reflection which might lead to a questioning of whether good, bad or adequate concepts were employed for understanding or judgement;
6. *Psychic reflectivity*: recognition of the habit of making percipient judgements on the basis of limited information;
7. *Theoretical reflectivity*: awareness that the habit for percipient judgment or for conceptual inadequacy lies in a set of taken for granted cultural or psychological assumptions which explain personal experience less satisfactorily than another perspective with more functional criteria for seeing, thinking or acting (Jarvis, 1987, p. 91).

Mezirow's particular interests are with the notion of critical reflection - the last three levels of reflectivity - that pertains to a process of reflection most likely to occur in adulthood. At this level, reflection engages the premises which guide assumptions, not just the content and process of how situations are defined for the individual. This usually transpires due to a disorientating situation, where perspectives upon what one grounds basic belief are confronted. "Reflective learning involves assessment or reassessment of assumptions." (Mezirow, 1991, p. 6). An individual reexamines these assumptions that surround these beliefs and looks to gain meaning within the new parameters this

incidence has produced (Mezirow, 1994). For Mezirow, this reflection upon past assumptions can be profound, leading an individual to the transformation of previous beliefs to those incorporating new perspectives and meaning.

A review of both the idea of reflective learning itself, how it is socially conceived and relevant, and how it has been expressed by various individuals within the field of education and learning demonstrates the significant and "transformative" potential this type of learning embodies. While Dewey's ideas construct an overview of thought and experience and the potential for individuals to reflect and learn from those experiences, Kolb, the British Further Education Curriculum and Development Unit (BFECD), and Boud et al. provide exclusive models of learning that attend to the experience of learning and the importance of considering the individual respectively. Kolb's ideas introduce the reflective element into a cyclical process attending to experience through transformation that is facilitated through reflection and action. BFECD model explored multiple types of potential learning through experience. Boud et al. returned the focus back to the individual and the emotive complexities that must be considered as interdependent with the actual experience and the reflection that ensues.

Finally, Freire and Mezirow introduce reflection on a critical level. This critical reflection is viewed as a part of transformative learning, which for Mezirow is directed towards personal development, while for Freire is aimed at social change. Freire elucidates upon a theory of education that contrasts reflective and non-reflective learning, while Mezirow looks acutely at the notion of reflection and the critical role it can play in allowing transformation of meanings and thus of what an individual learns.

All of these views regarding reflection and reflective learning have been incorporated in this section to provide some insight into the various ways in which it has been interpreted as an element of learning. Although each stress different aspects of its importance and potential for change, each has propelled the discourse surrounding this idea further. Following this path of learning is a discussion of just how reflection could fit into learning abroad.

### **Learning/Study Abroad**

Much has been written about the potential benefits a study abroad experience can have for students participating in such programs (Sikkema & Niyekawa-Howard, 1977; Goodwin & Nacht, 1988; Carlson, et al., 1990; Kauffmann, et al., 1992). In Abroad and Beyond (1988), Goodwin & Nacht, examining study abroad programs from a variety of different sized educational institutions, highlighted 10 educational and social goals of various study abroad programs. These included:

- increasing cultural experiences
- creating multicultural individuals
- internationalizing the educated citizenry
- fulfillment of distinct institutional missions
- exploration of roots
- mastering a foreign language
- exploring the world as a laboratory
- to know oneself and ones nation in broader perspectives
- to learn from others



- to improve international relations

This list outlines a number of benefits for this type of learning experience. Exactly how to interpret, measure and understand what kind of meaning it has for the learners participating, however, is often ambiguous, and has been an issue of contention for those evaluating learning outcomes (Edwards 1987; Kauffman, et al., 1992; Sommer 1997).

Predominantly, literature relating to learning/study abroad has emphasized the impacts such experiences have on learners (Kafka, 1968; Rose, 1969; Morgan Jr., 1972, 1975; Bower, 1973; Duffy, 1976; Nash, 1976, Hensley & Sell, 1979; Pizzini, 1979; Marion, 1980; Pyle, 1981; Carlson & Widaman, 1988). Laubscher (1994) points out that the results of these types of studies are often "mixed" and "inconclusive". The overall intent is to measure the effects of programs to determine proper policy and program initiatives. Yet, Laubscher (1994) points out that these studies still lack continuity on the effects on participants.

Study abroad is a branch of a larger international education paradigm. Mestenhauser (1998) views the international educational paradigm to be in a period of transition following the end of the Cold War. International education has the potential to seek out important goals like improving quality of life and creating a more peaceful understanding of the world.

Study abroad is often seen as a learning experience for broadening ones awareness of the world (Keeton & Tate, 1978). By some it has been described as a type of experiential learning. Experiential learning and its associated theory rely heavily on the works of learning theorists like Dewey (1955) and others, as well as the ideas

stemming from developmental psychology. Dewey maintained strong importance to the ideas of learning through experience.

The nature of experience can be understood only by noting that it includes an active and a passive element peculiarly combined. On the active hand, experience is trying—a meaning which is made explicit in the connected term experiment. On the passive, it is undergoing. When we experience something we act upon it, we do something to it; something to the thing and then it does something to us in return. Such is the peculiar combination. The connection of these two phases of experience measures the fruitfulness or value of the experience. Mere activity does not constitute experience. It is dispersive, centrifugal, dissipating (Dewey, 1955, p.163).

However, as he elucidates further and others involved in study abroad have reiterated, to have an experience is not necessarily to learn from something (Sommer 1997), “Experience as trying involves change, but change is meaningless transition unless it is consciously connected with the return wave of consequences which flow from it” (Dewey, 1955, p.163).

Others have argued similarly that a study abroad experience, based upon experiential learning ideas, brings learning from a passive state to an active one (Sikkema & Niyekawa-Howard, 1977). A passive state is a level of learning that lacks any personal involvement by the individual, and is bereft of any affective dimensions of learning. It is claimed that this type of learning and understanding can be acquired without an individual even leaving their home, and can be achieved by studying the literature, history, religion, etc. of a particular culture (Sikkema & Niyekawa-Howard, 1977). Active learning however involves the ego of the learner, and is achieved on the affective level of learning. The difference between passive and active learning is that the former understanding lies in the *intellectual and rational* understanding of the individual, while

the later lies in the *affective* understanding achieved.

In a historical perspective, the ideals of becoming world-cultured citizens has a long standing tradition in the privileged classes of Western-social-elite, whereby traveling to different places of the world was a manner of acquainting the youth of these groups with a better understanding of the arts, sights, and sounds of other peoples and places (Goodwin & Nacht, 1988,p.10). These culturally learned citizens were to move into the leadership roles of society, bringing a broadened multicultural perspective to such fields as business, government, education, etc.

Today the ideals of globally aware citizens is partially expressed through the efforts of programs organized through public institutions for study abroad in the United States (Goodwin & Nacht, 1988; Carlson, Burn, Useem & Yachimowicz, 1990; Kauffman et al, 1992; Pusch, 1997; Sommer, 1997). Whereas in the past the opportunities were bound within certain privileged sectors or society, a new perspective involves a greater inclusiveness, guided by the democratization of educational institutions, and subsequent opportunities for individuals from the middle class in the United States (Goodwin & Nacht, 1988).

The interest and numbers of students participating in study abroad programs in the United States has been increasing rapidly over the past few years, with as much as an eleven percent increase occurring 1997/98, as reported in the Institute of International Education, Open Doors Report (Davis, 1998). As a measure to accommodate the ever increasing tendencies of a globally interdependent world, the potentials for study abroad programs have been recognized as "...one of the most powerful tools available for internationalizing the curriculum in American colleges and universities" (Kauffman et al.,

1992, p. 1).

Over the last few decades many institutions of higher learning in industrialized countries have promoted cooperation with institutions from other countries in the attempts to develop study abroad programs for their students. These programs have been characterized by:

- (1) Arrangements between two or more institutions of higher education
- (2) Providing opportunities for students to study at one or more partner institutions
- (3) Comprising organizational and educational infrastructures aimed at easing the mobility and promoting successful educational experiences abroad
- (4) Incorporating at least in part a component of the degree program in which students are regularly enrolled at the home institution

(Wagner & Schnitzer, 1991).

The role reflective learning has in this whole process of exploration has been addressed in a few studies (Laubscher, 1994, Sikkema & Niyekaw-Howard, 1977). Although these studies have indicated the benefits, and presence of such learning during programs, the phenomenon has not been explored in depth.

In addition, Laubscher (1994) points out that the majority of study abroad studies have been quantitative in nature, exploring effects, but there has been little done through qualitative techniques. Furthermore, he adds that most studies have explored outcomes rather than process. Although, Laubscher's work explores process in relating to how

students learn non-formally in study abroad programs, it explores this phenomenon after the conclusion of programs.

This study looks to integrate the theoretical discussions regarding reflective learning, with the applied learning experience of a study abroad program, in exploring any significant relations between them during the time of the experience. It therefore explores process, at the time of the experience, using qualitative techniques to explore the phenomenon of reflective learning for a study abroad program in Nepal.

## **Chapter III**

### **Methodology**

The purpose of this study was to explore reflective learning for persons participating in a study abroad program in Nepal. Following is an account of the naturalistic paradigm, which was used to guide this research, as well as an account of grounded theory methodology, which was used to analyze and interpret the data.

#### **Naturalistic Study**

The research paradigm that structured the intent of this research is that of a naturalistic inquiry described by Lincoln & Guba (1985). A naturalistic inquiry generally seeks to describe human processes and to use descriptions of the participants as means for understanding those processes. Naturalistic inquiry looks at the phenomenon in relation to its natural context.

This study is a qualitative approach that seeks to understand reflective learning in the context of the learning experience. Creswell (1998) defines qualitative research as "an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explores a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting" (p. 15). The naturalistic paradigm, as a qualitative approach, guided this study.

The ontological assumption of a naturalistic paradigm is that reality is interdependent between subject and object, and the reality, as it is understood is a

construction between the knower and that which is known - Constructivism.

Constructivism is one of several post-positivist epistemologies (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Guba & Lincoln, 1989) that challenge the principles guiding objective realism as a means to interpret the world and to gain knowledge of it. Constructivists claim that what is viewed as knowledge and truth is the result of one's individual or social perspective (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Knowledge of the social world is created through interaction, and is not discovered as some distinct entity existing absolutely, in disjunction with the knowing subject. Essentially, there is no "real world" existing apart from the human activities that construct knowledge and truths (Gergen, 1988). What are taken to be self-evident truths, are context-specific, socially constructed realities (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). As such, Constructivists emphasize the importance of capturing individuals' unique realities and understanding particular meanings of social phenomena.

A constructivist perspective was developed in opposition to assumptions claiming exclusive states of an objective or perceived reality. An objective assumption claims the existence of a reality independent of the subject involved in that reality, which can be explored and understood in isolation from the knowing subject. That is to say they are exclusively distinct from one another. A perceived assumption posits the notion of exploration and understanding of this reality, yet recognizes the incompleteness of the inquiry. The object or phenomenon of inquiry is always bound to the limitations of the perceiver, who can only understand a limited amount of the object or phenomenon at one time. A constructionist position finds the notion of a reality to be explored as "dubious" and maintains that there are multiple realities occurring simultaneously, and that these are

constructed in a dialectical process between an individual and the phenomenon being explored. (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Lincoln & Guba (1985) articulate important axioms that a naturalistic inquiry assumes. An axiom is a principle or rule (Barnhart, 1963), which in this case, is used to guide a particular paradigm of exploring a phenomenon. These axioms can be contrasted with axioms of a positivist paradigm to elucidate the philosophical differences.

A naturalistic paradigm assumes realities that are multiple, constructed, and holistic verses a positivist paradigm that envisions a single reality that exists. Knower and known are interactive, inseparable according to a naturalistic paradigm, while positivistic inquiry assumes dualism - object and subject are distinct from each other - which allows the researcher to remain independent from the object or phenomenon being studied. In a naturalistic paradigm, time and context bound working hypotheses are possible, whereas operationally determined generalizations are the intended purpose of positivist inquiries. That is to say they are exclusive of time and context and can be generalized to situations that are consistent with the terms that have been used to define their context. The naturalist paradigm assumes dynamic entities rather than dualistic. Causes and their effects are assumed to be indistinguishable, while the positivist paradigm assumes there are causes that have subsequent effects, and that they can be distinguished from one another. Finally, the naturalist paradigm acknowledges that inquiry is value bound, while the positivist paradigm assumes value free inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 37). By elucidating these axioms, the naturalist paradigm establishes vastly different assumptions that may guide the study as compared to a positivist inquiry. In this way, the naturalist paradigm can be thought of as a post-positivist inquiry, one in which it seeks to succeed



the failings of positivist inquiry and redirect inquiry in a proactive manner (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

In addition to these guiding axioms, Lincoln & Guba (1985) identify fourteen characteristics of naturalistic inquiry. These characteristics operationalize the naturalistic inquiry through the guidance of the previously mentioned axioms.

1. **Phenomena are studied within their natural setting.** The ontological belief is that realities are context bound and cannot be properly understood in isolation. The act of observation influences what is observed therefore the best understanding of the study should take place in the natural setting of the phenomenon.
2. **Human beings are the primary data gathering instruments.** Human beings bring adaptability to the complex reality that the paradigm assumes, and assures the meaning of the interaction between the phenomenon and the environment, as well as the interaction with the researcher, is understood.
3. **Tacit knowledge is used as well as propositional knowledge for determining the meaning of observed phenomenon.** Intuition is a valued knowledge source in addition to propositional knowledge.
4. **Qualitative methods of data collection are used, such as interviews and observations.** Qualitative methods are claimed to be more adaptable in understanding multiple realities and the many influences and values that are determinant of it.
5. **Purposive sampling is used for finding information rich cases.** This increases the data that may be discovered using grounded theory methodology.

6. **Data is analyzed inductively.** Inductive analysis, as opposed to deductive, assumes that there will be a relationship between the investigator and phenomenon. Influences, like values, are considered part of the analytic structure and are not held as independent of the study. Inductively derived data also is more likely to reflect multiple realities.

7. **Theories emerge from and are grounded in data.** Grounded theory (see below) is the methodology of choice.

8. **The research design emerges from the interaction of the inquirer and phenomena of study.** Emergent design is favored over an a priori design. This design assumes interaction between the measuring instrument - investigator - and the phenomenon. Assumptions made prior to the study would limit the potential realities that exist. The naturalistic paradigm makes the assumption that the environment is rich in data, and that the investigator cannot predict what will be given in advance.

9. **Negotiated outcomes.** The investigator negotiates the emergent meaning with the participants of the study.

10. **Phenomena of study are described through the case study mode.** Using a case study, the investigator can represent multiple realities, as well as referring to the interaction he has on the phenomenon.

11. **Idiographic interpretations reflect the particulars of the case rather than law-like generalizations.** Idiographic - pertaining to a particular case - interpretations focus on the value of particular cases rather than the generalizations that can be made from the findings. Context and the factors that

determine the nature of reality in the context are considered paramount in understanding the phenomenon.

**12. There is preference for tentative rather than broad application of the findings.** Because the naturalistic paradigm assumes multiple realities, and that these realities are determined by the particular context and the interacting factors within the context, broad application is generally thought to be inapplicable.

**13. Focus determined boundaries.** The parameters that define the study are emergent from the study rather than predetermined.

**14. Validity and reliability of the study are established through the special criteria of trustworthiness.** These characteristics contrast with the positivistic paradigm that aims to demonstrate internal and external validity, reliability, and objectivity. The naturalistic paradigm use credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability in establishing the trustworthiness of the study. (Lincoln & Guba 1985, p. 39-43)

### **Rationale for a Naturalistic Study**

This study was conducted in view of the above criteria and axioms for a naturalistic study. The purpose of the study was to explore the reflective learning of participants in a study abroad program in Nepal. In order to understand this phenomenon, as it was occurring in the context of the learning experience, it was necessary to engage the learners during the time of the experience, that is, in context. Because of this direct engagement between the researcher and the learners during the experience itself, a number of underlying assumptions of a naturalistic approach were apparent. Most

notably, data would be gathered by conducting interviews with learners participating in the program. Thus, the researcher would be the primary data gathering instrument for the study, a qualitative research method for data collection. The interviews served as a means through which to gain an understanding of how learners understood and articulated the meaning of their experience, which was under a constant process of construction.

In addition, this study approaches this phenomenon from a constructivist perspective of reality. How truth or knowledge is constructed by individuals or groups depends on their experiences and is influenced by the conditions of their lives (Hartsock, 1983; Smith, 1987; Gergen, 1988). The interview dialogue with the learners provided an opportunity to explore their own understanding and meaning from the experience that were a part of their perceived learning. Exploring the multiple perspectives that the learners provided was important in understanding the complexity of the phenomenon of reflective learning. Because of these reasons, a naturalistic paradigm was used to guide the overall framework of the study. Guided by this philosophical position, the study proceeded to incorporate a grounded theory methodology as a means to interpret the phenomenon of reflective learning as it occurred for the participants of the study abroad program in Nepal.

### **Grounded Theory**

The grounded theory methodology is a qualitative approach to research. Whereas quantitative methods seek to predict, by explaining how and why something happened, through the use of statistical procedures, qualitative research seeks to understand the meaning or nature of an experience.

Qualitative methodologies allow the researcher to take an active role in the natural setting of the study. Rather than assuming the role of expert, a qualitative study assumes the researcher's role to be one in which the researcher attempts to gain a better understanding of the meaning the individuals involved in the study bring to the phenomenon (Creswell, 1998). The grounded theory methodology used for this study allowed for this type of relationship and understanding to be developed between the researcher and the participants, and facilitated the interpretation of the data.

Strauss and Corbin (1998) refer to qualitative research as, "...a nonmathematical process of interpretation, carried out for the purpose of discovering concepts and relationships in raw data and then organizing these into a theoretical explanatory scheme" (p. 11). They also point out that the grounded theory methodology is not an incorrigible set of precepts to follow exactly, but rather a principle to be used creatively in the understanding of an area of study. These principles can be used to both generate theory, as well as develop useful descriptions and conceptual ordering of phenomenon. The latter, that of developing useful descriptions of the conceptual ordering of reflective learning, was consistent with the goals of this study to discover more about the concept of reflective learning in the context of a study abroad program in Nepal.

A naturalistic inquiry favors inductive data analysis, characteristic six (see above), using substantive theory that is grounded in data, characteristic seven (see above). Substantive theories are specific to time and place. Strauss and Corbin (1998) describe grounded theory as a methodology that inductively derives theory through a systematic gathering and analysis of data. Theory, thus grounded in the data itself is more likely to "resemble" the reality under investigation, as opposed to a conceptually determined

theory based on experience or speculation (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This opposition to a priori theories is founded on the notion that theories should be "grounded" in the natural context of the phenomenon, exploring the interactive social processes that are existent (Creswell, 1998).

### **Rationale of Grounded Theory**

Grounded theory methodology was selected in order to probe the interview responses of particular individuals in regards to their reflective learning and to examine emergent concepts from the interview dialogue. Specifically, it was used to develop descriptions and conceptual ordering of a phenomenon (i.e. reflective learning) by allowing the guiding concepts to emerge from the data. Instead of approaching the study with an a priori hypothesis to test the validity of the phenomenon in relation to a hypothesis, the interest was in exploring and gaining a better understanding of the phenomenon in the context of the experience.

### **Questions Guiding Study**

The exploration of the objectives of the study was facilitated by the following guiding questions that were explored with the learners in terms of their reflective learning:

1. What they were reflecting about?
2. The reasons for why they were reflecting on what they described - How did this come to be?
3. The associations they made in reference to their reflections - What are the possibilities?

4. The expectations of the learner in regards to their reflections and their learning
  - What is the relevant meaning for them?

(Interpreted from Barer-Stein, T., 1987)

Stemming from these guiding questions, a specific protocol was developed and used during the interview (Appendix A). Participants were interviewed at the beginning, week two and three, midpoint, week five and six, and conclusion, week ten and eleven of the program. The interview questions were adjusted during the course of the program in response to the emerging trends and interests of the interview dialogue, as they became apparent (Appendix B).

### **Assumptions of the Study**

Creswell (1998) points to the importance of the rhetorical assumptions of a qualitative study as it pertains to the language and terms used. These terms can be contrasted with those that typically guide a quantitative study, "Hence, instead of terms such as internal validity, external validity, generalizability, and objectivity, the qualitative researcher writing a case study may employ terms such as credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability " (Creswell, 1998, p. 77, from Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Along with these rhetorical assumptions, the following assumptions were made in regards to this study:

1. The subjects would actually reflect upon their learning in this program.
2. The subjects participating in this program would describe their reflective learning.

3. The subjects would talk honestly about this process.
4. The study is specifically looked at a case example - Michigan State Universities 1999 spring semester Study Abroad Program in Nepal - for analysis.

An overriding assumption of this study is that it was necessary to recognize the interaction between the participants and the researcher, and the meanings derived from that interaction. That is to say that whatever meaning was derived from interviews and observations involves both the participants and the researcher dynamically interpreting different meaning structures through interaction. The researcher participated in the group, and the dynamics and interactions that took place are part of the meaning that both the participants and researcher constructed. Recognizing this, and acknowledging the meanings and interpretations that result, is important when interpreting results.

An assumption guiding this inquiry was that the focus would be on the learner, and their own perspectives of their experience. This focus presupposed that learners would be characteristically distinct based upon their personal as well as social/cultural histories. This presumption was assumed, yet not explored, as a functional factor in the reflective learning of the learner.

### **Study Population and Data Sources**

The data from the study were collected from interviews of the participants in the study abroad program in Nepal offered through Michigan State University during the 1999 Spring semester. Of the 31 participants in the program, 29 agreed to participate, and



were interviewed. There were 10 men and 19 women participants. Pseudonyms were used to protect the confidentiality of the participants in the final writing of the findings.

The participation was completely voluntary, and participants were told that they could discontinue their participation at any time. One participant dropped out of the study.

A series of three interviews were conducted with 23 of these 29. Again, these were conducted in the beginning, mid-point, and conclusion of the program. Various obstacles (sickness, absenteeism) prevented conducting all three interviews with the six of the twenty-nine participants. With these six participants two interviews were conducted. The analysis separated those who had three interviews with those with whom only two were conducted to maintain consistency in the overall analysis.

This study utilized a semi-standardized interview approach adopted by Berg (1995). This approach uses an interview schedule or protocol to be explored during the interview. The semi-standardized interview allows for topics to be explored in varying order and to probe interviewees beyond the answers to the prepared questions. This is contrasted with a standardized interview process, where participants are asked the same questions in a systematic order (Bogdan & Bilken, 1992). Since the interest was in exploring how participants understand and describe their reflective learning, the semi-standardized interview was found most appropriate for this study.

Roughly speaking, interviews were conducted at the beginning, midpoint, and end of the study abroad experience. Each interview lasted between 20-30 minutes depending on the articulations of the interviewee. Some interviews were more interactive than others, yet an attempt was made to create a comfortable dialogue between the interviewee

and the researcher so that interviewees were comfortable revealing their experiences. Learners often described, or were asked to describe, a particular learning experience while in Nepal. This helped put their understanding in relation to the context of their present learning. These experiences were often contrasted with past knowledge and experiences that learners had before participating in the study abroad experience.

The interviews were taped and later transcribed for use during analysis. The interviews were considered the primary source of data. A field journal was kept for secondary information. Periodic reviews of participant journal entries and papers that were completed for the course requirements were also perused.

Berg (1995) states that the use of an interview allows one to enter and explore another's perspective. The researcher was actively engaged with the participants throughout the extent of the program, which allowed for the establishment of trust to be developed. The establishment of a trusting relationship between the researcher and participants is a key to qualitative research studies (Berg, 1995; Creswell, 1998).

The use of interviews in exploring the perceived realities of the learner-participants, and the grounded theory method used to interpret this phenomenon, remains consistent with a constructivist perspective, which guided this study. This assumes that all participants may not understand their experiences in the same way and that like-worded questions may have different meaning to different participants. The semi-standardized structure allows the voice of the participant to reveal his or her own perspectives. Being too dependent on pre-structured questions would create a bias in terms of what the researcher expected to hear. As Berg (1995) points out, the researcher cannot be aware of all the necessary questions to ask in advance. The interview protocol

allowed for perspectives to remain focused, while still allowing for individual perspectives to emerge.

## **Data Analysis**

The analysis for this study followed two forms:

- 1) Exploring across case themes and categories (see Findings, Section One)
- 2) Exploring within case themes and categories, and relating these across case for comparison (see Findings, Section Two)

Objective one, exploring reflective learning across case, was done through the analysis of all 29 interviews for the study, which correlates to Section One, Reflective Learning Deconstructed, found in Chapter 4. These interview transcripts were analyzed for key themes, and then later coded for the purpose of discovering major categories for organizing the data into a typology.

The 23 participants who were interviewed three times during the course of the study were considered for the within case analysis, which allowed for preserving whole parts of participant dialogues, and were used for objective two. This analysis allowed for the exploration of how participants perceived and constructed their knowledge and learning over the course of the program, exploring both similarities and differences between the learner participants along a continuum of learning, and which served to form the development of a typology of learners. The results of this analysis are presented in Section Two of Findings.

In this study, the transcribed interview dialogue was used to explore major themes. An exhaustive review of all interviews was conducted until it was determined that all major themes had been discovered. These themes were reflective of the major points of interest discussed by the participants - elements that were present in the transcribed interviews in the form of verbatim - as well as implicit implications revealed from the transcribed dialogue - interpretive reading of the symbolism or meaning underlying the physical data (Berg, 1995). All interview transcripts were read through two complete times. Those themes that were found in the first reading were checked with those found in the second reading of the interviews in ensuring that all possible themes were found.

Open coding was then used to explore themes for major categories. Coding is defined by Strauss & Corbin (1998), "as the analytic processes through which data are fractured, conceptualized, and integrated to form theory" (p. 3). The purpose of open coding is to open up the inquiry and to begin to explore what the information that has been obtained may reveal, which allows for the organization of information and the development of a coding scheme.

Open coding is the process of reviewing the data and arriving at initial categories of analysis of the phenomenon. It pertains to the identification of concepts and the discovery of their properties and dimensions. These categories can be segmented further to explore subcategories within them so as to understand the phenomenon to its' fullest extent. Subcategories as stated by Strauss & Carbon (1998), "specify a category further by denoting information such as when, where, why, and how a phenomenon is likely to occur" (p. 119).

After general themes were gleaned from interview transcripts, the transcripts were again reviewed in exploration of categories and subcategories within these general themes. This was done sentence by sentence.

Once these were discovered, core categories were determined, which were representative of the connections between categories and subcategories. This process is referred to by Strauss and Carbon (1998) as axial coding, which is the process of relating categories to their subcategories, termed axial, because coding occurs around the axis of a category, linking categories at the level of properties and dimensions.

Representative portions of interview dialogues that were consistent with categories and subcategories were gleaned from the interview dialogue transcripts. These were arranged as a means to organize and conceptualize the data for eventual reporting in Section One of the Findings.

For Section Two of the Findings, the 23 interview transcripts were reviewed in their entirety, exploring major themes relative to learner profiles. Six representative participants were gleaned for this review. These were used because they were representative of the general continuum of learning that all participants represented, and because their verbatim dialogue most explicitly and clearly revealed these representations. Sections of the transcribed interview were presented and threaded together with explanations revealing how these participants represented various levels of the learning continuum.

## **Verification**

Qualitative research achieves validity and reliability through a process of

verification. Verification described by Creswell (1998) is " a process that occurs throughout the data collection, analysis, and report writing of a study and standards as criteria imposed by the researcher and others after a study is completed" (p. 194). Creswell (1998) describes eight verification procedures used in qualitative study and suggests the researcher employ at least two of them in any given study. The verification procedures employed in this study fall under the criteria of trustworthiness described by Lincoln and Guba (1985). Two of these criteria, credibility and transferability, will be used.

The criteria of credibility was employed by the following three techniques:

- 1) prolonged engagement in study context; persistent observation
- 2) external check, i.e. peer debriefing
- 3) member checking

The researcher was actively involved with the participants throughout the eleven weeks of the program. Interviews were conducted at convenient times for the participants, usually at the place where they were living, and were in essence part of the context of the overall experience. The researcher's presence during the extent of the experience allowed for ongoing observations, as well as checking the interview dialogue with the academic work and non-formal interactions of the participants. The prolonged engagement with the participants of the study and persistent observations allowed for a degree of validity to be established for this study.

A peer, who was in Nepal for part of the time of the study, was consulted for reasons of checking and cross-checking observations and techniques used during the

study. This allowed for a critique of the research during the time of the study. The peer was consulted regarding interview protocol questions in terms of clarity and appropriateness. Changes were made based on suggestions made by the peer.

Member checking is described by Creswell (1998) as the process where "the researcher solicits informants' views of the credibility of the findings and interpretations. Upon completion of the program, and initial coding of the data, a sample of participants was chosen to interpret the interpretation of interview transcripts and how these were coded for analysis. These were referenced with one another and checked with the consistency between the researcher's coding of the same data.

The criteria of transferability for this study was established as explained by Guba & Lincoln (1989). This is accomplished by allowing participants to provide in depth descriptions of their experiences and by providing a description of the context of the study. This gives the reader a clear indication of both the particular context of the study, as well as participant's descriptions of their experiences.

In addition to establishing the trustworthiness of the study, the criteria for establishing authenticity will be employed as described by Guba & Lincoln (1989). Authenticity ensures that participants' constructions of the phenomenon have been collected and represented accurately and will be ensured in this study by using the criterion of fairness. Fairness was established by allowing all participant learners who so desired to participate in the study.

## **Limitations of the Study**

The study explored the reflective learning of learners participating in a study abroad program in Nepal offered through Michigan State University. The findings are in reference to this case, which limits the generalizability.

Some of the data used for this study was gathered by interviewing student participants, whereby questions addressed their learning. This assumed that the subjects who were interviewed were able to articulate and understand the process of reflective learning in the context of their experience. Since it was necessary to avoid leading the thoughts and answers of the learners in regards to the concept of reflective learning, articulating the exact notion to them was avoided. If the question was explicitly stated, the question itself may have prompted the reflection only at the time of the interview. During some interviews, this lack of specificity led to ambiguous responses by the learners, or a misunderstanding of the question. When this situation arose, adjustments were made to the questions to make them less ambiguous (see Appendix A & B). This ambiguity, and the confusion it caused when answering some questions, is important to note.

A specific profile of the learners would have provided more defining characteristics of their personal histories. This information would have supported how differences in learner testimonies were reflective of these differing histories. By not exploring defining characteristics of the participants, this study is limited by the immediate perceptions of the learner, and cannot be checked with other factors that might determine these perceptions.



The member checking conducted for the study included two non-participants and three participants of the program. Some differences in coding were existent between both, the two groups, the group as a whole, and how the researcher coded the data.

Recognizing that some statements had different meanings, or multiple meanings that were different from what was used in the final analysis points to both the complexities of the phenomenon and the differing interpretations that can exist between individuals. Still this presents a limitation to the study.

Exploring differences in male and female reflective dialogue may have also provided further insights into the explored phenomenon. The lack of attention given to these potential differences or similarities is considered a limitation of the study.

## **Chapter IV**

### **Findings**

This chapter is divided into two main sections. The first section, Reflective Learning Deconstructed: Typology of Reflective Learning, presents salient categories that emerged from the analysis of all learner interviews conducted during the study which were used to develop a Typology of Reflective Learning. The four main categories that guide the presentation of this section are 1) Focus of Reflection; 2) Means of Reflection; 3) Reflective Intent; 4) Influences on Reflection. These categories were used to organize interview dialogue and were the basis for analysis in creating a Typology of Reflective Learners, for Section Two.

Section Two, Reflective Learning Reconstructed: A Typology of Reflective Learners, presents a number of different individual learners and their interview dialogues, which are representative of particulars of reflective learning along a given continuum of learning. This analysis looks at the learner over the time of the program, and explores the content of their interview dialogue, and the categories illuminated from the analysis in Section One, as a means to elucidate and construct a picture of an individuals reflective learning over time. These two perspectives present two different views, the first, the categorical content of reflective learner interviews as a Typology of Reflective Learning, and the second, the learner reflecting on their learning over the extent of the program, developed as a Typology of Reflective Learners.

The intent of conducting the interviews was to explore the phenomenon of reflective learning of learners participating in a study abroad program in Nepal. The study

was context dependent, thus the exploration accounted for the fact that living and learning were inseparable. Learning was assumed to be a function of both personal and academic experiences, and thus it was assumed that reflections would presumably involve both of these aspects of the learners' experiences. The respondents were both learners in a traditional sense, attending lectures organized through the study as well as "non-traditional" learners engaging in a new environment, actively seeking and reactively responding to these experiences, while constructing meaning through the dialectical relationship they developed through these experiences. As stated in Chapter III, the epistemological position guiding this study assumes the existence of multiple realities for each individual, and thus, these two distinct learning situations were considered existing simultaneously and in relation to one another, and recognizes that individually, participants may have varying perspectives on similar experiences. In other words, each individual articulated experiences from these situations in their own unique existential manner.

### **Section One. Reflective Learning Deconstructed: Typology of Reflective Learning**

The interview dialogue revealed a number of core categories, relative to reflective learning, which were developed as a Typology of Reflective Learning. The core category types used for this typology were as follows:

- Focus of Reflection
- Means of Reflection
- Reflective Intent
- Influences on Reflection (Table 3)

**Table 3: Typology of Reflective Learning**

Core Category Types	Definitions
<i>Focus of Reflection</i>	Subject/content of dialogue
<i>Means of Reflection</i>	Means sought to foster reflective learning
<i>Reflective Intent</i>	Result/Action/Change from reflection
<i>Influences on Reflection</i>	Variables affecting reflection both articulated by learner and implied through dialogue

The *Focus of Reflection* category describes different foci of reflective thought that was articulated by the learner. That is to say the subject of interest that was described. This was often in the form of specific examples provided by the learner as representative of their learning.

*Means of Reflection* refers to the mechanisms, situations, etc. that learners actively pursued, or reactively responded to in reflecting on their learning.

*Reflective Intent* indicates any perceived result/action from ideas articulated through the level of reflection or a perceived possibility of change that could result from an experience, idea or concept that was learned.

*Influence on Reflection* category explores the implicit and explicit influences on reflective learning of the learner.

The focus of reflection and means of reflection were the categories that constituted the greatest majority of the interview dialogue with learners, and thus provide the most salient findings for this study. All four, core categories, however, are explored

and are interdependent with one another. For instance, learners focusing on particular interests related these experiences to past knowledge, which in turn was evident of the intent that the learner revealed in using this newly acquired knowledge in making it meaningful to their life. Similarly, the means through which learners reflected on their experience were a function of the influences that were prevalent at the time – time itself being an influence - which was often guided by their experience, a factor of their reflective focus. The manifest continuity of typological categories was apparent while developing these categories, and was a direct cause for the development of Section Two of Findings. This section is an aggregate of categories, which attempts to address this phenomenon in continuance. For the sake of this section however, these core categories are dis-aggregated, and presented disparately so as to provide a clearer understanding of the uniqueness of the typological core categories and how they related to the reflective learning of the learner.

### **Core Category Type One: Focus of Reflective Learning**

The differences in reflective thought were demonstrated in the testimonies of the learners, where different degrees of focus were saliently present. Three main foci were discovered and these were broken down into categories of content, process and premise reflection. These are presented together in Table 4.

**Table 4: Focus of Reflective Learning**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Relevance to Reflective Learning</b>	<b>Subcategories</b>
Content Reflection	Talking about experiences-	• Relativity

	past and present; explicit emphasis on subject matter of the experiences of the learner	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Holistic world view</li> <li>• Learning of Self</li> </ul>
Process Reflection	Talking about perceptions on learning process	<p><i>Explicit references</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relating present to past knowledge/experiences</li> <li>• Dialogue with other learners</li> <li>• Observations</li> </ul> <p><i>Implicit traits</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Revealed through dialogue on how learners related new and old information and knowledge to present knowledge</li> </ul>
Premise Reflection	Talking about psychological, social, or cultural assumptions that possibly influence learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Western verses Easter ideologies</li> <li>• Cultural parameters of perception</li> <li>• Assumptions about Self and how one understands Self concept</li> </ul>

(Categories are developed from ideas presented by Mezirow (1991))

**Content Reflection.** Learners talked about a variety of subjects during their interviews, a reflection of the ongoing circumstances that they were experiencing. As part of a reflective process, many learners talked about relating their experiences to what they had known prior to the experience. That is to say that they were comparing their observations and experiences with their prior experiences and knowledge. At times this was articulated in a manner that demonstrated a developing sense of relativity that guided their perspectives:

But then I started to realize, if you really think about it, is that right and is my culture or society better than Nepal's culture or society. It is just different and you start to be able to compare and contrast and understand the differences and accept them more.

It makes me think about how we do things back home and or how I do things back home and comparing and contrasting. Asking myself why we do it this way and the Nepalese do it this way. The differences that we have in common, there are so many new ideas and different ways of seeing things, a lot of the same ways of seeing things.

I think because it has been such an important experience and it has made me view things differently than I normally do, so in the future there may be things that I don't even realize that I'll be looking at through different eyes. Through eyes of a person that has experienced a different culture and gone back to their own culture. Now I'm just more aware of my biases and things that (pause) why I look at things the way I do. Me and X were talking the other day that we are starting to notice that when we came here just things like looking at the marriages and stuff, how we thought it was so terrible. We couldn't understand it. But we were comparing it to what we are used to in our society and now I'm starting to realize that it is not necessarily better; our way of doing things isn't better or the right way.

For some the level of comparison shifted from their life experiences preceding the Nepal trip and incorporated experiences that they were having in Nepal. Learners were able to reflect on initial perspectives of their overall experience and relate them to their understanding of experiences and perspectives at later times in the program, as well as recognize the change in the process of their learning over time.

We were able to draw comparisons even though our family is Gurung (Nepalese ethnic group) here. They are different, ways of life in the hills for Gurung's, ways of life here in town. You are able to get specific like that. We already had the general background and things with which we are used to, we can go deeper.

If you stay in the culture long enough, almost all of those preconceived notions, and things that you bring to the country are corrected or reformed or some kind of adjective to describe it; reinvent it I guess.

I'm settling in a lot more to where I am looking at things more realistically instead of everything looking so new and awesome. Like when I first got here I was like,

these people are so lucky, they live in this beautiful place and there is this and that. Now I am like, a lot of people struggle and I am seeing more of the realistic and bad side of what they have to go through and what they have to do.

Through reflecting on both their past knowledge and experiences preceding the study abroad experience, and their early and later perspectives on their experiences and learning in Nepal, learners developed a relativistic perspective on their personal perspectives towards experiences, as well as commenting on the relative nature of society and culture in reproducing their material reality. This developed sense of relativity was a hallmark of reflective learning revealed in the interview dialogue of learners.

Another significant topic of interest for many of the learners was the "holistic" connections that they were making through the general experience of being in Nepal. In this case the interview dialogue stressed the recognition of an interdependence of factors that were seen to inform perceived realities of the learner:

...I think all around, Nepal has helped me become a better person and I feel confident that when I go back to the United States I'm going to view things completely differently and maybe in a more mature, holistic way.

It's more about an understanding-understanding the whole-you know, not just understanding what we are being taught but why and maybe the connections between it all.

...I think that I've been trying to make a lot of connections. Looking at one thing and seeing how it connects to this and this and this. Just how it works into my life maybe; Just all of it, it really got to feel comfortable, that base which has given me an opportunity to look deeper into those things, or see how they relate to other areas.

This sense of connection was developed over the whole of the program. Some learners related both the connections they were making with knowledge and experiences



that were shaping their perspective on Nepal, and in exploring the greater social and cultural connections between Nepal and other cultures and societies.

It is not like school where you can go back through your textbook and see everything that you learned. It is something that you can't really test on, it is not facts, it is not scientific, it is more in the context of your Self and the world and how things process.

In the initial protocol of the interviews, questions regarding the Self, and how it was being influenced through the reflective learning of the learner was not explored. During the first interview series this topic emerged as a potential area of focus for a large number of the learners. Following this discovery, the question was later asked of the learner if it was not addressed in their subsequent responses. Again, in many instances, responses were given to questions that were not directly referenced. If this occurred the questions were assumed answered and not asked again. The following excerpts from a number of different learners reflect the focus of Self that many learners had by going through this experience.

So you start thinking about your Self a lot and where you are and where you are going. I think that just time away and being confronted with something that is completely different, it makes you have to be yourself because there is nothing that you can hide behind, because you don't know anything other than what you are.

I think my ability to accept my self has increased (pause) understanding where I come from and who I am and (to) know not totally, but some of the ways that I form some of my opinions and thoughts, because I was able to step out of it and to see other ways.

I think that I have been thinking about it (learning) more in terms of the development of my Self and how I will change more than in a specific aspect of the different subjects I'm supposed to be learning.

The experiences of learners were representative of both the cognitive and affective dimensions of learning. The affective dimension was revealed when learners

talked about how experiences were affecting their Self-concept. This in turn was perceived as an important aspect of their learning. Some learners expressed this awareness with greater confidence, while others were unsure of how to interpret the effects.

I think that I am learning my Self, of course, but (pause) I'm sure that I am but I don't know if I can tell you how I'm learning about my Self here. Everything just shows me who you are and who I am here.

Regardless of how this understanding was expressed, the affects of the study abroad experience were significant in confronting learner's perspectives of their Self.

The content of the learning experiences was the most prevalent and consistent reference during the interviews with the learners. Learners most often related the experience to past knowledge and experiences that they had coming into the program.

Although, there were some exceptions to this perspective:

At our dinner last night he asked me if I had culture shock at all and I don't know, I don't think I've had it at all because (pause) I don't know. I guess I kind of figure that people live, and people survive and the methods are various, but I guess I've just kind of come here and what you see is (pause) you accept it as that because that is how it is. There is not, in this kind of general living basis, there is not really this really strong right or wrong. I don't know how to explain that. I can't come into someone's house and automatically be looking at the table and saying-oh, it is not set up like it is at home-or looking in the bathroom and saying-oh, they don't have a curtain for the shower.

It is not. I don't (pause) I haven't really compared it much with home at all because I am here and I am not there, so I don't (pause) it is not really there for me.

For the most part however, the content of the experiences were seen as both a practical means through which to substantiate learning, as well as a means through which to develop and construct new knowledge and meaning for the learner. Most revealing

was the effects this had on the learners developed sense of relativity, the holistic connections they were developing, and their continued construal of their perspective of their Self. From direct experiences they were having during the program in Nepal, learners articulated a degree of reflective learning that related these experiences to pre-program knowledge and experience as well as substantiating it with the experiences they were having at various times during the program. Through this process, a greater conceptual level of understanding and meaning was expressed, which indicated the effects such reflective learning was having on the learners.

**Process Reflection.** In exploring reflective learning, part of the interest was in exploring whether or not learners were reflecting on how they were learning through the course of the study abroad experience in Nepal. This was revealed from the dialogue of the interviews both implicitly and explicitly.

Implicitly learners related past experiences and ideas with new experiences and ideas they were encountering during their study abroad. In this way it was a reflective process of bringing their past to their present in exploring new ideas and experiences.

They've made us feel as comfortable and as welcome as we could be but it seems like there are little instances where you draw the line between male and female and that you don't do that in America.

We were talking and comparing that to the American situation and how it would be such a sad situation, and so dramatic. But it was like, I asked my didi (sister) about it and she said, well they need the money. She was like, it is sad but at the same time it is how they can live the way they do. So after he left they just kind of hung out and talked. It just didn't seem like that big of a deal. It was interesting.

Explicitly learners talked directly about their perspectives of how they were learning. For some this was again the process of relating the past to the present, but

representative of the dialogue of these interviews, the learner explicitly talks about this process in relation to their learning.

Right now of course it just seems like I compare everything to my daily routine in America. Because that is a perspective that I've always understood that I've always been taught, and I think in a lot of ways right now I'm trying to compare what they do to the way we do it.

Right now I think that just by noticing the differences and comparing and contrasting it is meaningful, because it makes me think about my home and the American way of life. By comparing American life or my life with the lifestyle here it is giving meaning to my life because it is making me question why I do things the way I do at home. Maybe the larger picture of why my society is the way it is at home.

So I think, definitely for the first few days it was kind of like, okay, big eyes and taking everything in and not really thinking about why or how everything worked. It was pure observing and then after maybe five or six days I started to notice, I started to put what I was seeing in Nepal, or to compare that to how life was in the United States. Like kind of drawing more comparisons or noticing the contrasts. Those started to become more apparent after a few days. Obviously it was very different, but I started to notice little things like the family behavior and how I think that people in Nepal sort of-how they perceive their lives.

The social process of learning was also talked about extensively by many learners. This was seen as a process through which to facilitate an understanding of a shared or exclusive experience of the learner(s).

I see the interaction with the other people of the program is a good way to learn because they always see it from a different perspective from myself, or slightly different.

Definitely, just to understand how other people are feeling and what they are learning, it gives me insight into some of the differences and similarities that I have with everyone else.

...to talk with other students about what they are getting out of the trip, and how they are feeling about something, it gives me more insight about what I am getting out of the trip; a clearer idea of what I am getting and what they are not and what we are getting the same.

Given the communication difficulties, many learners articulated the importance of their observations in drawing understanding and meaning from their experiences. From their immediate observations, learners sought understanding from their experiences, as well as other means to validate their own impressions.

My learning is very observatory at this point, especially because today was our first class and so everything that I have learned up until this point has been observing what has been going on around me and kind of sensory oriented: sight, sound and smell. Not a didactic type of learning. Things that I have learned are just the daily lifestyle, like with my own family and watching other people.

I can't really explain the way I think. I guess it is more the experience. I guess usually I am observing. I don't really feel like I do anything special or think in a particular way that would help, it is just whatever the situation. Because it all seems to be different here, not the same rote memorization that I'm used to back at MSU. Which is basically all it is, memorization. It's different because it is more life experiences that I feel that I'm learning. Because there is nothing forced here for memorization. The test even, it seems like you can talk about a lot of different things about Nepal. That is how I'm used to learning, and then there are typical life experiences. Sometimes it is memorization a little bit, like talking with the lamas. I tried to learn a lot there. There is a lot of questions and answer learning and some observation with different ceremonies.

Understanding the process of how one learns is an important facet of reflective learning. Many learners articulated a sense of this process, and how they were actively going about this through their learned experiences. Learning is a dynamic, interactive process, which was made evident through the dialogue of many of the learners. Through social interaction with other learners and Nepalese, learners came to an understanding of their learning, which was often preceded or related with a process of comparing past and present experiences and knowledge. Evident from this understanding is the social and personal aspect of reflective learning that occurred for many learners during the study abroad experience.

The direct experiences of learners encouraged observation as a means for understanding experiences, which was related by some as a part of the process of their reflective learning. Being aware of their reality, making observations on what was happening, and then finding means through which to substantiate their perspectives was all a part of an ongoing process of reflective learning. Learner interview dialogue revealed both the implicit and explicit actualities of understanding and facilitating their reflective learning process.

**Premise Reflection.** A few learners talked about the psycho/social/cultural assumptions that were perhaps having a functional relationship to their overall learning through the experience. Those that mentioned this aspect articulated a sense of the function these assumptions can have on the ways they came to understand their experience. At this level of reflection, learners demonstrated a critical awareness that was not as evident in the discourse that related the content of the experience or the process of the learning. Following are some excerpts from interviews that relate this focus of reflection:

To ask the questions in the right way and to know when not to ask them and when it is appropriate to inquire (and) to come to this level of understanding about my environment and my family and a social understanding and a cultural understanding. And I'm kind of at this level right here, where it has come up and hit me in the face and I'm on the same level, but it is a superficial level.

...because I'm seeing more of how I view things and how the definitions that shaped information and words and concepts that I've taken are really Western influence. So I see that and I wonder how and what I've learned; questioning what I've accepted as being Nepali and how much of that has been through our Western parameters or influences.

I've come to a conclusion that you can't separate yourself from your culture because it has such a huge impact on your life, who you are, your value systems

and your moral beliefs. It has affected my learning here by determining what I see and how I identify things.

Western influence; viewed from Western parameters. And understanding that I can't take that away and that if I recognize it, then that is what I have to do. I have to recognize how I'm viewing it and what has forced me to identify.

Actively reflecting on the assumptions that influence learning can be a powerful means through which to transcend or substantiate these assumptions. Although only a few learners talked about this in interviews, the presence of such thinking points to the potential the experience can have for certain individuals. It is reflective learning that goes to the core of what guides ones learning and the understanding and meaning they can gain from an experience, a level that a few individuals explored during the study abroad experience.

The above were the categories found significant to the focus of reflection for learners. Every learner articulated a focus of reflection on some level, either incorporating one, two or all three foci into their interview dialogue.

### **Core Category Type Two: Means of Reflective Learning**

Respondents were asked or talked about where they were discovering their sources of learning. This in turn shaped both the content of their reflective learning as well as facilitated the process through which it occurred. Four salient subcategories emerged from these descriptions which are presented in Table 5.

**Table 5: Means of Reflective Learning**

Category	Relevance to Reflective Learning	Subcategories
Activities	Learning exercises involving writing, observing, listening that facilitated reflective learning.	<p><i>Classroom/Program:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Writing in journal</li> <li>• Writing papers</li> <li>• Lectures</li> </ul> <p><i>Personal:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Letters</li> <li>• Emails</li> </ul>
Self	Reflecting off of prior knowledge and how it related to their Self image	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Internal dialogue</li> <li>• Writing in journal</li> </ul>
People	Social interaction as a process of knowledge and meaning construction.	<p><i>Two salient sources:</i></p> <p>1) Members of the learning group -perceived as a means through which to gain novel information, varied opinions, and to provide a reference through which to check personal opinions and perspectives</p> <p>2) Nepalese people-mostly perceived as a good source of information both through verbal communication and by observing behavior. Provided a rich source of affective knowledge for the learner</p>
Experience	Relating past knowledge and experiences to situations experienced during study abroad experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Day to day experiences <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- observation</li> <li>- social interaction</li> </ul> </li> </ul>



**Activities** Learners reflected on the importance and helpfulness of program activities as a means through which they fostered their reflective learning. Writing in a journal was the most often cited means through which reflective learning was fortuitously facilitated. The following excerpts are pieces of interview dialogue that attest to the journal as means of reflective learning.

Definitely, things like keeping a daily journal is good, just getting my thoughts down on paper everyday, you know, this is what I did, not just for the learning experience, but to look back on it too, and to learn in the future from it.

My journal (and) I've said it before too. Just being able to write and reflect on things. I like to write, but I don't do it at home. Just in the feelings or the emotions or something new that you are seeing that you don't understand but then when you can remove yourself and think about it and write it down, it changes and I think about it more.

Yes, and writing in my journal is helpful too. I have to remember everything that happened today and when I am doing that I can think about it again and I can come back to it and have a more deep impression about it; what I did that day.

Less significant than the journal, yet mentioned by some learners was the exercise of writing in general. This was in reference to the papers that learners were composing for the program, letters to home and emails. This was perceived as a good way to synthesize the impressions the learner was having, and facilitated the construction of meaning.

More so now, especially after writing a reflection paper, I think that really made me think about what I was learning.

I think that getting my thoughts down on paper in my journal or sending emails and letters to my friends is kind of a similar thing. Like just recognizing my thoughts and trying to convey my experience to other people helps me clarify what I am thinking.

Working on my papers has been bringing up a lot of things that I wasn't consciously aware of at the time, but then thinking back and going over notes and

thoughts, realizing that I've learned a great deal more than I was realizing on an everyday basis.

For many learners, lectures served to substantiate and enhance their learning by providing background information from which they could relate their direct experiences. In this way it was seen by some as a positive supplement to their learning experiences.

It makes it a lot easier to learn when they teach you something (pause) you know we have been having our lecturer who teaches us and then we go out and he shows us the temples by example and I think that learning that way is so much better.

Lately I have appreciated the lectures. At first I really didn't. I think because at first I was so ancy to go out and see things. I didn't want to sit in a room.

So it is, for me it is kind of like a trade off and it is interesting and it is cool. Like my individual stuff I can still do it while I am here and then still have the classroom stuff to back it up and fall back on which is kind of cool. Not even fall back on. It is proactive in the sense that it changes your view when you walk out of the classroom armed with this knowledge that you didn't have before. Your perspective and view of the world changes because you understand why that temple is situated to the east or what that god means. Reactive because you have questions in your mind that you carry around that you might carry around for a month and then you have a lecture on it an poof, you know, it is great.

In other circumstances however, learners viewed lectures more negatively. in relation to their experience Rather than supplementing their experience, some expressed an opinion that they took away from what could be learned more actively in a direct experience.

Yes, I think things that I've thought about are how awful the lectures are, and how much more I would be learning if I wasn't in them. I don't know. I mean I learn some, but our outside learning has been so much more valuable and more readily absorbed. When you are talking with the people that is so real, whereas in the atmosphere of the classroom you are either not there or you are forced to be there mentally. Whereas when you are either outside of it, it is more interactive and more (pause) it seems like it is more valuable outside.

...I'm thinking about it but sometimes I wonder exactly what I am learning because I know I'm going to school, and I'm trying to listen to the lectures, but some just don't interest me whatsoever, and so I try to focus.

Learners recognized the importance that writing served in facilitating their understanding and meaning making of their experiences and thoughts. In regards to their reflective learning, these means were viewed with greater significance than lectures or classes. Although learners valued the information provided through lectures as a means to substantiate their learning through experiences, many voiced a negative impression, and found them to be counterproductive and less significant than the learning they could do on their own. As a means of constructing their own meaning and understanding, writing in various forms served a significant purpose of reflective learning for many learners.

**Self** Many learners reflected on the importance of their Self in influencing their learning. The overall experience became an impetus to examine ones Self, or to open up to the possibilities that the experience could have on the perspectives the learner had of their Self.

It is like being a new born baby, when you open your eyes for the first time everything is new, because it is all interesting, it is all sparkly and "glittery", because you don't know what any of it is. It is not to that extent, but it is a very similar feeling where it is like when you look around and everything is so new and different from anything that you know or are used to. Everything that I do everyday is my learning and the experience is become a part of who I am. It is not like I have to force myself to learn, it just happens, so it makes it a lot more easier and a lot more fun.

Like before I was writing in my journal and I was learning things, and I knew I was learning things but I really didn't know what; I couldn't make sense of it enough to talk with myself about it. But now I can talk with myself because I understand myself. I understand what I am learning and I think that I understand my Self, most of the time.

I'm thinking about it, but sometimes I wonder exactly what I am learning because I know I'm going to school, and I'm trying to listen to the lectures, but some just don't interest me whatsoever, and so I try to focus. In that situation I know that I'm not learning, but at the same time when I'm not paying attention to the lecture I'm focusing on myself, my inner Self, and so then I wonder if I'm growing as a person. Just trying to figure out who I am. Which before I started I knew that I didn't know anything about my Self, I kind of feel like I kind of had an idea and then I realized I didn't have any idea who I was and wondered if I needed to know who I was, and now I am just starting to feel really comfortable.

One's own Self, as a means of reflective learning, was the most elusive means revealed in the dialogue of the learners. However, the aspect of the Self was prevalent in much of learner dialogue (Focus of Reflection). For some learners this was the most significant learning pursued by participating in the experience.

A huge majority of what I'm learning is about my Self and being introspective. I don't know, it can be very overwhelming at times, because we are very full and busy, but we learn a great deal about our tolerance level and patience; pretty much every facet of life.

I think that I am learning my ability to accept my Self has increased. Understanding where I come from and who I am and knowing not totally, but some of the ways that I form some of my opinions and thoughts, because I was able to step out of it and to see other ways.

Most learners, in talking of the reflective intent of their learning talked about a perceived, anticipated, or uncertain change in their Self in terms of both how they perceive themselves to their environment and Others, and how Others would come to perceive them. This process was both influenced and facilitated by the learners' Self, a significant means of reflective learning for the learner.

**People** The reference to people as means to reflect and learn emerged from two distinct sources: students and people of Nepal. The former, pertained to learners trying to

understand the meaning of their experience through dialogue with other participants, and it was perceived as more significant than the later, in which learners articulated Nepalese people as means to gain this type of meaningful understanding.

Like I remember our first conversation and talking about that, like from the very beginning I realized that I was learning the most from the people around me rather than the teachers and I think that has carried through the whole program.

I think that a majority of it (learning) is coming from other students and not so Self reflective in my journal. That probably helps more because you get more opinions than just your own. It opens your mind to blind spots that maybe you had about yourself; it forces you to confront issues that you don't want to and sometimes that is the best way to learn because (pause) you can go down the easy road or you can go down the hard road and usually you learn down the hard road and that is facilitated better during group activities I think.

A lot of times I will experience something and not think I understand what is going on with it at all, and then looking back and talking about it with friends, which is probably the best way, getting a discussion going about it and hearing what other people got out of it, you realize how much you got out of it that you didn't even realize because you are talking about it.

Interactions with Nepalese was expressed as an important source of information for the learner, but because of language barriers, the potential for exploring meaning through dialogue with Nepalese was difficult. In those instances when speaking English was possible, learners expressed a greater focus on the meaning they were developing from it, rather than that which was derived through the interaction, as opposed to the former mentioned circumstance, which was inhibited through communication barriers.

Like how can I get the concept of fatalism from a book in the same way that I can from that conversation? How can I understand that I'm talking with three high caste Brahmins (Nepalese ethnic group) that have the opportunity to go to school when I'm looking at the cook's-who cooked my chow-chow-kids run around and there are five of them and they are not given the chance to go to school-That kind of stuff is cool. It is really powerful, it is not just text on a page, it is a living feeling.

Our didi (sister) is getting, or I think that she is remembering a lot of English that she learned in school because she has been talking to us a lot lately. And so it is helpful for me to explain what I did in a day or something that happened or something that. I think to hear and watch her reaction, and seeing how she reacts and what she has to say.

That is more of the experience I think that I was looking for in the first place, just interacting with the people. Just getting a true sense of the country than more of a typical tourist point of view. You will find some of the most interesting kinds of information in some of the most uncommon people.

And now I am talking with people. I stop running and I talk with people. That is interesting. I think that from the experience of talking with people it kind of empowers me, because it made me-that is kind of like it-like I was just so overwhelmed with the neatness of talking with people when I am running that I couldn't keep it inside, so I had to talk. I think that is exactly what happened. It is kind of interesting, it all just started to make sense to me and it was so overwhelming, what was going on around me that I started to understand it and my body was comfortable with it.

It was previously mentioned that learners found other students to be helpful in constructing their own personal understanding and meaning during the study abroad experience. This was contrasted to more informative interactions between Nepalese and learners in facilitating their understanding. Understanding for the learner was further facilitated by the interaction with other students, as learners also perceived other participants to be additional sources of valuable information, especially as it related to individuals academic backgrounds.

It has been very beneficial. Especially everyone having-even though there are a lot of environmental majors, it is a pretty good mix of people, with different interests both in and out of school. That has been really beneficial. Just backgrounds of students is varied so they are bringing those things into the conversation and to the whole experience.

It's nice because everyone has different majors, there is a lot of resource development majors, but everybody brings to the group different sorts of information. The religion majors know more about religion, you know when you are driving along they can point out stuff to you. Yes, so I think the group educates each other.

I also love being with all of these environmental people, because I love the environment but I don't have very much hands on with it since it is not part of my major.

**Experience** Finally, the actual experiences that learners were having were perceived as significant means through which reflective learning could occur. The practicality and hands on nature of the learning was perceived as beneficial to many in terms of what was learned.

I think that I always knew that I learn well in any situation, but I feel I'm more interested and more excited about learning in a situation like this where it is more hands on and more experiential learning (pause) I feel I have more of an understanding of something (pause) you see how it works actually into someone's life and it isn't just this removed thing that happens. I can see how it fits and how it works and get first hand information from someone who actually experienced it.

If you think of (pause) and I've just started to think about how Americans are so individualistic and so selfish, and that is good in the sense that, I mean obviously individual expression is a big thing, and being able to do what you want to do and that sort of thing, but I've just started to realize that we are so far removed from the idea of community that we live around other people that can help us and that we can share. And that is the thing that you can't, I mean I could read it out of a book but it just really drives home the point when you see it.

Like I kind of learned that, and I kind of knew that but I kind of didn't. I was always - I always wanted to do what I wanted and not really have to worry about justifying it being - maybe I don't want to say right but just there are so many ways to live life it is amazing how different and how variant they are from society to society. I knew it, but I had never really experienced it, so I didn't think that I ever really knew it. I could tell you it but I really didn't know what it meant, so affirmation is a good word.

The experience, as means to facilitate reflective learning, attunes to the active aspect of learning, which learners are afforded in such a learning experience. Through a dialectical relationship with their experiences, learners can engage their reality in a meaningful

manner, and subsequently, some learners were able to draw meaningful learning from their experiences.

### **Core Category Type Three: Reflective Learning Intent**

When discussing their experiences and reflective learning, learners were asked about the meaning this had for them. It was only during the second series of interviews that learners began to reflect more clearly on what, if any meaning, was found in their experiences and learning. A number of categories were emergent from this discussion and are presented in the Table 6.

**Table 6: Reflective Learning Intent**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Relevance to reflective learning</b>
Anticipated impact	Anticipation of a new or revised view that is articulated yet is predicated on the conclusion of the program and return home.
Uncertain impact	Uncertainty of impact of learning from program. Views the return to home, and removal from context as important for understanding meaning.
Perceived Impact-Attitude Change/New Perspective	Articulation of a changed behavior from experience that is not dependent on conclusion of experience.

**Anticipated Impact.** Many of the respondents commented on the impact their experience would have on their lives subsequent to the experience. They forecasted a



change that would result from participating in the program, and reflecting on the meaning it had had on their life.

I guess that now that we are about to be leaving I'm thinking more about how things are going to impact me when I'm done here. I think that I will be learning new things even in the future, in a couple of years. Certain things that happened to me here that will be impacting me still or influencing the way I see things.

So that is something that I will carry with me that was here before I came to Nepal, but for some reason here it has worked itself out. Yes, definitely, I know that I will because I feel it in my heart. I just know that it won't leave. And that is a neat feeling because I know it is not going to and I learned it here, but I know that I will keep learning as I leave here and it will definitely come with me. I think that I will be much more compassionate to foreigners in America (pause) I think that being a foreigner opens my eyes to-it helps being the foreigner and helps broaden my view.

That is one thing that I've learned here, just the reflection part of it and gaining more knowledge from it. Which when I get home, that is what Nepal is going to be, one big reflection. I'm going to learn so much from that when I get home.

**Uncertain Impact.** Others learners related that the most significant impressions would be formed upon their return to the US where they would be able to reflect on the experience as a whole. For these learners, the context of the experience kept the meaning from being fully realized.

The biggest thing is going home. That is when you really realize how much you have learned and changed here (pause) it is the little things like that, that I'm going to have a hard time accepting until I get back into my Western shoes.

Going home I think that I will be really impacted by where Nepal left me and what I've come back to. I think then it will be a profound impact and I will recognize what my experience was and how it changed me and how my perceptions of the world have changed because of it.

Some learners were confronted with the ambiguity the experience had left for them. Although they felt they had learned from the study abroad experience, understanding and relating how, at the time of the interview, was difficult.

So I've definitely thought about how this has affected me, and how what I've learned has changed me or my outlook on life. I think that just goes along with the closer to the program. It is kind of frustrating though, because I feel like when I think about things like that, I don't know why, but you think that for a big life experience you would have to reach some sort of conclusion. When I think about what I've learned I feel like I should be able to say, okay, this is what I learned and this is what happened to me when I went to Nepal, but the more I think about it the more I realize that I have a hard time doing that. Because it is not like I was going to reach some concrete answer. I think because I had never left the country before that I thought, I'm going to Nepal, and getting away from my usual routine and getting into a new environment, I'm going to learn so much and figure something out about my life. And that isn't the case. I've learned so much but I think what I'm starting to see now is that it is a never-ending process.

It is so hard to pick something out because there is so many different influences that I don't know if I could know that I've changed in many ways. I can't really tell you why or how, I can just tell you that I think I learned about a lot of things.

**Perceived Impact.** A few respondents noticed immediate impacts to their perspective from certain experiences and attributed significant enough meaning from the experience that they felt they had learned something new or something new about themselves. Here, the change was perceived to have already happened, without the need to step out of the experience to realize the impacts.

It is something that I've lost in childhood or growing up, or somewhere along the line. Because I know that I used to feel like this. Maybe it was going to college. I don't know. But, just getting older and forgetting about enjoying life and having a good day everyday, and not waking up with heavy weight on your shoulders with something that you can't do anything about. So yes, it is definitely something that I'm going to keep.

I think that everything here-like as far as myself I think that I've grown as a person. I think that I've learned to be more open to new things.

There are a lot of times where the things I was worried about or stressed about back in the states, it is just, ke garne (what to do). Identifying that no matter how much I worry about something, how much can I really control. I think that has increased my sanity or lowered my stress level.

If you would have told me that elephants were put up like that-you can read it in a book and you can become aware of it, but until you see it, or experience it, reality doesn't hit; at least for me. That wow, that when you can actually see it and touch it, it is a lot different than reading about it in the pages of a book. I think that it is a lot more immediate learning. It doesn't have to be drilled into your head until you are in 12<sup>th</sup> grade and you are like, oh, maybe there is mistreatment of animals, but it can happen instantaneously when you are there.

By making meaning out of new experiences, learners reflectively learned about what was experienced. Every learner perceived the effect or impacts differently. The articulated meaning of the experiences also revealed some general similarities. This is reflective of the idiosyncrasies every learner brings to an experience, and the social process of coming to an understanding of the learning that occurs for the learner herself and for the group of learners. Some experiences had an effect that was strong enough that learners felt a change in their ideas at the moment of experience. Others anticipated the effects of the learning that occurred during the experience to be revealed following their return to the US. Still others felt that the return home would further elucidate the learning that occurred. Regardless of the impact, making meaning out of the study abroad experience was an ongoing process that was revealed over and over during the interviews with learners.

#### **Core Category Type Four: Influences on Reflective Learning**

Respondents were asked if there were influences in determining what, why and how they were reflectively learning from their experiences. From this direct question, as well as from responses pertaining to other questions asked, three salient categories:

adaptation, time and communication, emerged from the data as relative to the influences on reflective learning (Table 7).

**Table 7: Influences on Reflective Learning**

Category	Relevance to Reflective Learning	Subcategories
Adaptability	Degree of comfort learners felt in new environment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adapt</li> <li>• Adapting</li> <li>• Adaptation</li> </ul>
Time	Function of content of dialogue in regards to what and how learners reflected on their learning	<p><i>Implicit</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reflective discourse during interview conversation was a function of the period when the interview was done, i.e. 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> interview</li> </ul> <p><i>Explicit</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dialogue referencing the importance of time in what the learner was able to understand and the meaning that was articulated of their experience</li> </ul>
Communication	Importance of social interaction in broadening meaning and understanding	<p><i>Two groups:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learner to learner</li> <li>• Learner to Nepali</li> </ul>

**Adaptability** Some learners described how the influence their ability to adapt to their new situation had on their reflective learning. The learners initial adapting and subsequent adaptation was described by some as a means to overcome the overwhelming engagement that the new experience had for them through a process of becoming

comfortable and familiar with their environment and new perceptions stimulated by the experiences within this environment.

...because my reaction to things has changed so much. When I got here, I don't know, I wouldn't say that I wasn't happy but I didn't (pause) I was adjusting. And I'm still adjusting but I've come to a comfortable sense where I no longer notice that I think when I'm tired that (pause) man I can't wait to get here (pause) I no longer notice that I am thinking that.

I don't know, it was just a realization that I came to. Being so set in the ways that you do things in Nepal, like you just adapt to the culture, and then all of the sudden it was things that I embraced.

I've been here so long I've stopped thinking about how I feel, like how different it is here compared to back home. I can now relate this to what I knew before, and it is just, I don't know, I think that it has raised me that much more. I can't pin-point one specific experience or one occurrence that brought this on, it is just kind of (pause) I don't know I guess. It comes with being so adapted to it.

Interestingly, not all learners found their adapting to be beneficial to their learning. One learner found the opposite to be true. Although being able to adapt was viewed as something positive, this ability to adapt and become familiar was viewed as a detriment to the initial learning potential that was possible from being in a new and stimulating situation.

I think that it is harder for me to learn now because I have spent ten weeks in Nepal society and things just don't seem to be different anymore. I think that it is good that I've adjusted well enough to that, but at the same time it is kind of a draw back because I know there are things that I'm missing, that if it had been weeks earlier in the program I would have seen.

Still, this was the exception, and most learners found the ability to become comfortable in their environment as a means through which they could take their learning to another level of comprehension and concentrate more fully on it.

But it seems like the first time we talked I was getting that base of just living in Nepal, and now that I am comfortable with that it seems like something to build on.

Through adapting and becoming comfortable, learners were able to notice and learn new things. In regards to their reflective learning, it allowed them the ability to understand and reflect on new and different experiences and ideas, while feeling comfortable in their new environment.

**Time** Since the interviews with the learners were conducted over the course of the eleven weeks of the program, there is an implicit influence of time on what learners chose to discuss. This implicit function will be addressed and developed more fully in the Section Two of this chapter, which explores the dialogue of individual learners. Of importance to this section is the explicit recognition of time, which some learners reflected upon during the interview. Most significant were comments that revealed the importance the conclusion of the program was having on their reflective learning.

I guess that now that we are about to be leaving I'm thinking more about how things are going to impact me when I'm done here (pause) I think that I will be learning new things even in the future, in a couple of years. Certain things that happened to me here will be impacting me still or influencing me the way I see things.

I think lately more than the rest of the program (thinking about learning) because it is coming to an end, so being reflective on what I've learned and trying to make sense of the whole experience.

I think if the program was still going on for a year, if I wasn't going to be leaving Nepal soon, and this was the first of many semesters I would spend there, I don't think that would be trying to say what has happened overall. So I definitely think it is the fact that it is coming to an end that I've been sort of synthesizing things.

Although most learners found the length of time to have a positive effect on their reflective learning, one student found the opposite to be true:

I don't think the meanings are as profound as they were before. Like before when we would all get together and the didi's would have roti and tea for us, it was such a good feeling that they would go through all of that trouble for us (pause) before it was really nice, and I'm not saying that it is not nice now, because it is still nice to know that they went through that much trouble, but it is almost now, I take it as being a part of the whole process.

Some students found the time in Nepal to be so crucial to their understanding that they made personal decisions to stay longer, revealing how they thought this would influence their learning.

Right now I am feeling that I am taking a lot in and learning a lot, but it is so bubbled in my head right now that I haven't had time to grasp it. Like today I just decided that I am staying longer in Nepal, and one of the reasons is because I am learning so much and I feel I need more time to iron it out.

Others felt the pressure of time and how it was not going to be enough for how much deeper they were willing to take their learning.

I'm running out of time though. If we had a year I think things would open up immensely.

Time played a big role in the reflective learning of the learner, and was directly related to adaptation and communication influences. In coming to understand this influence, learners both changed their focus to synthesize and evaluate their learning, as well as determine what could be done to take advantage of the changes that occurred over time in relation to their learning.

**Communication** A small group of individuals explicitly recognized the importance of communication in facilitating their learning. For most, observation was predominant in constructing their understanding of direct experiences. This was due to the inability to communicate in the native language, Nepali. While the limitations of communication was evident when reviewing the reflective dialogue of the interviews, only a few learners mentioned this as something they recognized. The communication that was both recognized and utilized by learners in facilitating learning was done amongst themselves, or with Nepalese with whom they could communicate. This reflects an awareness that most participants had in understanding the importance of communicating when trying to understand or make meaning from a new experience, yet few related this to the limitations it was having on their direct experiences. Those that did recognize it, reflected on the importance of being able to communicate in Nepali to achieve a more satisfactory level of understanding and meaning from their experiences.

I guess once I get a little more fluent in Nepali I'll be able to ask them questions. I guess it is just sort of my own hypothesis you know, like I think that they perceive themselves as a member of the group before they think of themselves as an individual, but I've never really asked my didi (sister) that or anything. So I hope to be able to communicate with them one on one instead of just thinking about, you know, guessing how they act.

Yes, right now I think because I want to communicate with people (pause) if I can understand the language I can understand their Self's much more deeply and hopefully I can understand their culture better.

One thing that I definitely (have) been thinking about, that I feel has inhibited me from learning as much as I could about Nepal, is the language. That I have barely learned any Nepalese and that I really should have taken a lot more initiative to learn it. Because I feel that with what people say to each other or to their children or what they talk about is so important, and I am completely missing it. Everything that I'm seeing is so visual. It is all in a physical context and in relation to the book learning that I've had and in relation to what I see in my house, but I feel that I'm missing a completely other world with what people talk about. Just what their feelings are. Because language is such a huge part of people



and their world; their cosmology, what they feel is important with everything. And I think that I'm missing that. So I feel that I won't be able to get a complete picture of Nepal at all because of the language.

Being able to communicate is crucial in making meaning and learning in general.

Learners recognized both the potentials - as with other learners - and limitations - language barriers - that communication posed to their reflective learning.

### **Summary**

The preceding discussion was a general picture of the different core category types, and the various categories within them that emerged from learner interviews and which were used to inform the development of the Typology of Reflective Learning. These core category types and their respective categories paint a picture of the complexity of reflective learning, and illustrate the various factors that are a part of it. Excerpts of interview dialogue were taken from the entire group that constitutes the case, thus allowing for an exhaustive exploration of the potentials of reflective learning that were present among the group. This deconstruction allowed for a more objective understanding of reflective learning in the context of a study abroad experience in Nepal, by allowing typological categories of importance to emerge from the words of those actively participating in the learning experience. Following is a reconstruction of the learner in relation to their reflective learning bringing the focus back to the context of the learner in the experience.

## **Section Two. Reflective Learning Reconstructed: A Typology of Reflective Learners**

The following presents the reconstruction of reflective learning by exploring it in relation to a number of distinctive individual learners. The reconstruction will involve exploring the interview dialogue of their individual reflective learning experiences, over the course of the study abroad experience. In discovering similarities and differences between individual learners, the above section, which presented the deconstruction of reflective learning, allowed for distinctions to be explored from the categories that emerged from the data in developing a Typology of Reflective Learners for this section. In reconstructing reflective learning through the learner, this section brings the individual back from disparate categories accomplished through the deconstruction and reexamines a more complete composite of reflective learning that occurred over the course of the study abroad experience for particular individuals. These particular individuals represent the Typology of Reflective Learners within the larger case of the group as a whole, and serve to illustrate the more visible distinctions of a continuum of reflective learning, of which all learners were apart.

Exploring the interviews that were conducted at three different periods during the study abroad experience facilitated the capacity and relevance of this reconstruction. The function of time allowed an exploration of the pattern of change or non-change with the reflective learning of individual learners. Following is a presentation of particular individuals and the trends of their dialogue that serve to demonstrate the unique and characteristic highlights of their reflective learning during the study abroad experience.

### **Individual Learners:**

**Kevin** Kevin represents one end of the continuum of reflective learning that was evident from the interviews conducted with the group of learners participating in the study abroad experience. From the very beginning Kevin's dialogue revealed a pervasive sense of questioning, which came to direct the course of the three interviews. This questioning would eventually lead to an exploration of the basic assumptions Kevin understood as directing his perspectives of his study abroad experience.

The dialogue of the first interview revealed a high degree of relativity in Kevin's thinking coupled with a general degree of curiosity and questioning that reciprocated this relative perspective.

I've really been questioning (pause) because so many things are different here because of the way of life working, and less people work; just the father works. And in our neighborhood they all work abroad, so there are a lot of people just hanging out during the day where back in the states it is not so common. So it is just wondering which way do you consider to be right, it really doesn't matter. Like it is kind of, there is no right way in life, like everything is kind of open. To people here this is the right way, for where we are from, our way is the right way but there really isn't because there are so many differences.

I try to ask a lot of questions of different people because what something means to one person doesn't mean that to someone else (pause), so I just try to ask a lot of questions and be curious. And I've realized that there are some things that I can figure out, just simple things, but then there are some things like, oh you are doing that for this reason but maybe the reason that, or the thinking process that I have is really Western and I don't realize it. I'm really not part of the society.

This last comment portends a thought process that Kevin continues to explore in later interviews, yet with greater depth. In this statement, the questioning that is revealed is that of exploring the assumptions that may be guiding his understanding of his experience (i.e. a Western perspective). This is the characteristic trend, one of *questioning* prior assumptions that may be influencing his learning perspective. Three

weeks later, during the second interview, Kevin articulated a growing propensity in questioning the assumptions that are in relationship to how he is perceiving his experiences:

I kind of see the process of my thought has changed from (pause) my thought process changed from (pause) like I was sitting in lecture and thinking, and I would try to think of what was going on and try not to think of how to change it by Western ideals, but how you could feasibly change it (pause) and I couldn't think of anything. I couldn't think well, how do you get rid of the caste system or why is the caste system so engrained within Nepal and I couldn't think (pause) I couldn't understand why an untouchable would let themselves be an untouchable and just kind of set up their shoe shop or whatever, why would they do that. And I couldn't understand that it was just fatalism, that they thoroughly believed that that was what they were there for this time and next time they may not be, or they may be, or they may be something else. But this time around that is what they are, and that is okay.

There is not that fight or challenge of who you are or what you are, you just are. And understanding that has allowed me to think (pause) I don't know what it has allowed me to think, but it has allowed me to see the impact of fatalism. I think we had a lecture on fatalism and I don't know if I stopped paying attention or I missed it or what. I didn't hit me. So perspectives, different perspectives and different viewpoints have really helped me to understand the people and how I reacted to it when I first got here, because my reaction to things have changed so much.

Although Kevin is not explicit in his questioning, his testimony reflects a growing interest in a different level of thinking that guide other perceptions of his learned reality. Through questioning and exploring the assumptions that potentially guide the reality of a Nepali (e.g. and untouchable), Kevin brings into question his own reality and the things that come to shape his perspectives and construction of it. This was facilitated by his incorporation of a variety of perspectives that he viewed as helping to change his own.

Three weeks later, during the final interview, Kevin immediately talked about the growing sense he was developing in terms of understanding how the assumptions that

had developed in his own culture were potentially shaping how he was able to perceive the reality he was experiencing during the study abroad experience.

...I'm seeing more of how I view things and how the definitions that shape information and words and concepts that I've taken are really Western influenced. I look at that and I see that in religion, how in Eastern thought it is different. There is almost like separate definitions to society because (of) how they implement the religion and how much of a factor it is. What it means in the West is very different, there is less connection to it, at least what I see. So I see that and I begin to wonder how and what I've learned; questioning what I've accepted as being Nepali and how much of that has been through our Western parameters or influences. I've come to a conclusion that you can't separate yourself from your culture because it has such a huge impact on your life, who you are, your value systems and your moral beliefs. It has affected my learning here by determining what I see and how I identify things.

In relation to the second interview, Kevin takes a step towards further conceptualizing his direct experience to the meaning it has in his general understanding of how his perceptions and learning are influenced by his personal and cultural history. His focus tends towards a critical understanding of the social, cultural and psychological functions that serve in relationship to how he perceives his reality. It is this aspect that marks the unique trend apparent in the interview dialogue of Kevin as he continues to question these basic assumptions he has. As he remarked:

I don't think that my learning process has changed as a result of being here. How I conceptualize and identify with them has changed, but (pause) I think it has (changed). Because I've taken more time to understand what is going on and to try to look at things from a different perspective. To try to figure out what is important to the people and not what is important to me, or what I would presume to be important to me. So I guess it has changed since I've been here, because my ability to understand people and their interactions with each other has affected my learning process by slowing it down and taking more time to find what is going on. Just trying to view every option or alternative, and understanding that most of the time I can't see every alternative or every point of view.

As a reflective learner, Kevin's dialogue represents a learner type that developed a critical understanding of his socio/cultural assumptions, and how they influenced his learning (i.e. premises that function in relation to his learning). In addition it revealed how he reflected on his own process of learning, and how he perceived that process to have changed through the length of his study abroad experience. As a reflective learner, Kevin's dialogue is representative of a learner questioning the basic assumptions that have and were shaping his perspectives, and the process of trying to come to a new meaning from this process of reflective learning.

**Gael** Gael is situated on the other end of the continuum, where the reflective focus tends to remain more exclusively on the content of her study abroad experience. The predominance of *content* revealed in Gael's interview dialogue reflects a general trend of focusing on the immediate *information* of her experiences and reflecting this against her informed knowledge before participating in the study abroad experience. During the first interview Gael made reference to the importance of context in understanding the content she is learning, and how it was through this dialectical relationship that she felt her learning was optimally achieved.

...personally I get more out of (pause) even going hiking yesterday. It was a holiday for us, but I learned so much and everything I do here I learn so much. It's more like the hands on stuff. Like before the wedding yesterday, X went and showed us a real typical Nepali home and he said that these (the houses the students are staying in) aren't really typical. So we went through what they went through and what their houses are made of and how they get their energy. I get more out of that than religion classes sitting in the lecture room.

Gael revealed the importance of experience in substantiating her learning perspective. It was through the process of comparison, a trend that almost every learner in

the program would describe at some point, which Gael came to a better understanding of her new experiences, through relating it to the knowledge and experiences she brought with her.

I've been trying to go (pause) I went to both the Hindu and Buddhist wedding and I'm really glad I did that because it allowed me to compare the two and see how different they were from the U.S. The Buddhist wedding was really (pause) I didn't like it at all. It was really sad. It was really casual and (pause) but the Hindu wedding was more, it was exciting. They were playing music and dancing and it seemed like everyone was happy. But I didn't like the Buddhist wedding; it was sad.

The predominance of the experiential benefits of the study abroad program were again discussed by Gael during our second interview. Again, it was the content of her experiences that constituted the majority of her reflective learning perspective.

I just don't get anything out of the lectures. I mean I get little bits of facts but it is nothing that I can incorporate. They give me the basics, which we get from the readings. That is what I've noticed, just how much I don't get. What am I trying to say (pause) I guess it is how I am not learning in the classroom, but in Chitwan (pause) I didn't even learn in Chitwan when they gave some of the lectures, just because the Nepali professors are really bland and their teaching style is so much different then the United States. I can't stay attentive when they talk. I just daydream, but when we are doing things, like hands on stuff, that is the only way that I learn.

I know that I'm learning a lot (pause) I know the basics on the history and the democracy, the political things going on in Nepal, and I guess that came from class a little bit. But I think that I'm learning more of the family values and the culture (pause), like when we were sitting by the fire and just playing music. They know when to stop here and relax and enjoy life. The American way of life is going fast all of the time. That is an instance that I realized what I was learning, the culture. I caught myself comparing the US and Nepal. But then lately, when I came back (to Pokhara) I hated Nepal. That was kind of what my reflection paper was about. I couldn't stand the flies, the smell and when we stopped along the roadside with the bus drivers, I used the bathroom and I thought that I was going to die. It was just one of those roadside restaurants. I hated that. Now I hate the pollution, I hate the dogs, the horns and it is so hard because I know now that I like the simple life, but I like the United States for all that we have. I think here they have more heart, but in America we have more material things.

By the time of our third interview the trend that Gael testimonies followed in the two previous interviews remained much the same. The one difference is the relation that time had on her perspective of her observations and perceptions of her manifest reality. Gael reflected on her assumptions in a more questioning sense, being more critical in how she accepted the presentation of the content of her experiences.

I started to think when the mother's group was dancing, I was trying to debate whether that was a show for us or if it really was their culture. We kind of know that it is their culture because they have done it in other places too. And when I started comparing that with the Americans and how we don't have any culture, I don't think, like I would never catch myself dancing around like that at home. I think it is hard for Americans to do that because it is even hard for some of us to get up there and dance with them. But then A was talking and she was saying that Black's have a lot of culture in the US, but that is kind of true. I liked how all of the women in Chomrung called us sister or didi, and I said something to A and she said, "You know, Black's do that at home". And I never noticed that before and they always have in our dorm rooms (pause) when I walk past a classroom at night and it can be Friday night, and we could be going out to a party, and they would be in a classroom learning songs and dancing. I'm pretty sure it is all cultural and black heritage. I would never see any white kids doing that, I don't think. So that kind of made me open my eyes that maybe culture is kind of important and maybe Americans just kind of lack it. I think they do. So I learned that this week.

It was during the final interview that Gaels' dialogue revealed a degree of questioning that was absent in the first two interviews. Through questioning the assumptions that she had in her direct experience in Nepal, and checking the validity of her experience, Gael demonstrated that she was indeed gaining a greater conceptualization of her experience. Her reflections on American culture, or lack there of, in relation to the culture she perceived to be experiencing in Nepal, was indicative of this development.

Well I think that in Nepal it seems like everyone is pretty much Nepalese or (pause) I don't know, when I look at America (pause) I don't know, it kind of puzzles me. Because everyone came from different countries in the beginning, so



they came from different cultures, and it seems that there are so many different cultures that maybe they just all got lost on the way over there, and then when things started to get more developed, and there is more alternatives now a days, why would we want to go out and sing and dance with a bunch of friends about there religion or culture when they could go see a movie with a couple of people. I just don't think Americans do that. I don't know, maybe they do and I just don't see it.

Throughout the study abroad experience, Gael's reflective dialogue is focused on the content of her experiences. Although she begins to question her past knowledge and experiences in relation to her present experiences, this is not developed beyond the questioning itself. The process and assumptive premises that are prevalent in Kevin's reflective dialogue are absent in interviews with Gael. Therefore, Gael represents a reflective learner trend that is developed primarily through her experiences and the content of those experiences.

Kevin and Gael represent the greater extremes of a continuum that characterize the reflective learners that were revealed through interview dialogues during the study abroad experience in Nepal. Falling at various spots along this continuum are the remaining learners that participated in the experience. Following is a presentation of a few of these learners, and an explanation of their characteristic trends that give an indication of where they may fall upon this continuum. It is intended that these cases will give a better picture of the multitude of perspectives and learning that were indicative of this study abroad experience.

**Mark** Like Kevin, beginning with the first interview, Mark's reflective dialogue revealed a general focus on the relativity of his experience and how he was coming to

understand these experiences by developing this perspective further. As opposed to questioning things, Mark articulated an exploration of *connections* that he was hoping to discover, continually trying to synthesize his learning experiences. This would be a reoccurring topic of discussion when we would talk.

Definitely! I mean so many things here are done differently than how they are done in America. Something as simple as not using utensils to eat. It just opens your mind so much more. In America it seems a lot of times, this is the way that it is, this is the way that everyone does everything, and I don't think a lot of people understand that on the other side of the world things can be done completely different. I've really (pause) what I've learned, it seems instinctual that I would compare it to what I've already learned, what I've been taught my whole life. Especially this first week, with so many things that were different from my Western upbringings. It's like I try to learn, I look at it (pause) more and more I've been trying not to look at it from the Western eyes and I think that what it really takes to truly understand how these people live or what, how and why they live. I think that might be something that takes time just being here. This is really my first time away from America, away from Western culture. Right now of course it just seems like I compare everything to my daily routine in America. Because that is a perspective that I've always understood, I've always been taught and I think in a lot of ways right now I'm trying to compare what they do to the way we do it. But the direction I would like to head is to kind of get rid of that bias, because there is an obvious bias that I have that (pause) I don't think it is very easy to get rid of sometimes or remove yourself from. It's hard to tell right now, because I have only been here for seven days, but that seems to be the way it's been so far.

More than questioning the experiences he was having, Mark was looking to see how they could work into his own life. The dialogue points to how this, more than anything else, is what Mark was hoping to achieve through the study abroad experience.

...gradually it just comes naturally, just being here. Maybe the longer I'm here the more I lose, how would I say it, the more I become aware of, I'm trying to think of the right way to say it, maybe the more I stray away from that label or that idea of I'm from this place, I'm a foreigner here, you know what I mean? Instead now I can say, instead of saying I'm an American, I come from America, I have to go back to America, therefore I can't internalize what I see here, it seems that with a lot of travelers, they go places and see it, but they don't make it part of their life. It's like it is almost like a novel idea and it seems that way with a lot of people before I left. You know, oh you are going to Nepal, blah, blah, blah, and a lot of people don't seem to realize that it is more than just going there and taking your photographs and seeing what the people do. I would more like to internalize it and

make it part of my life. Like some of the beliefs and the way things are here because they seem so much closer to the way it should be, than the way we do certain things in the West.

During the second interview, Mark talked more about the ongoing process of incorporating his experiences in trying to develop a perspective that would be inclusive of these experiences. Evident in these reflections is his articulations of the process through which he perceives the inclusion of these experiences being facilitated. Again, he talks about the connections he is seeking and finding through these experiences, and how he perceives his perspectives to be affected by the connections he is making.

The learning just kind of builds and builds. At first you are exposed to all of these new things, a different way of life and everything that goes with that. It seems day to day that you build on that understanding, you have this basis of the way Nepali life works, and it seems like everyday I kind of incorporate something else into that. Even if it is learning a new phrase, learning new language everyday, or learning something else about our family or about Gurung culture, or whatever it might be. But it seems like the first time we talked I was getting that base of just living in Nepal, and now that I am comfortable with that it seems like something to build on.

I don't know, I think that I've been trying to make a lot of connections. Looking at one thing and seeing how it connects to this and this and this. Just how it works into my life maybe.

Just as far a poverty perception and my individual standpoint, I started to realize (pause) I always thought of myself as living a pretty simple life, but then being here and seeing how that works in, it is a lot more complex than I ever thought it was. I think that just goes with the way you live in America. As far as making the connection between I learned it in class and then I reflected on that, and just walking down the street everyday, how I can have an impact without even realizing how it works into it.

This final statement alludes to Mark confronting some psychological assumptions that influenced his perspectives and how this confronted his perception of his Self. This

indicates a reflective focus on basic premises that may be influencing Mark, but he does not elaborate much beyond this one example.

When we got together for the last interview, Mark talked of the synthesis was making in bringing to fruition the connections he talked about in the first two interviews.

At first, when I came here, it was sensory overload, so many things going through your head everyday; just adapting. And slowly, as you integrate those things I think I realize more now, about making connections as far as what has come from what I've learned here and what I've learned from the first 22 years of my life in America. At one point, especially early on when I first got here I had all of these ideas about how the East is nothing like the West. It is the idea, all of these different things. More and more, even listening to what X had to say today. Everything seems to come back full circle. Where certain things are so different back home, but in the same sense there are many similarities that you don't realize.

I don't know, it was just a realization that I came to. Being so set in the ways that you do things in Nepal, like you just adapt to the culture, and then all of the sudden it was these things that I embraced. I can relate this to what I knew before, and it is just, I don't know, I think that it has raised me that much more. I can't pin-point one specific experience or one occurrence that brought this on, it is just kind of (pause) I don't know, I guess it just comes with being so adapted to it. Getting into that flow of the way things happen in Nepal, and then all of the sudden it was like, wow, this is not as different as I thought it was. Obviously on the surface, the West and the East are on opposite sides of the spectrum really, or Nepal and America would be on opposite sides of the spectrum, but when you dig a little bit more I notice a lot of the similarities too. It is both sides of the story. There are many, many differences, but then there are also similarities there, it is just a different context or a different level of something, but it is still there. I don't know, maybe I'm starting to realize that it is that way.

In the end, Mark comes to an understanding of the connections he first began to explore in the beginning of the study abroad experience. Through reflecting on the similarities and differences between his past experiences in America, and his new understanding developed in Nepal, he articulated a developed sense of the connections between the two, and the relativity that can be found when comparing both places.

Although there is a sense of understanding in regards to the degree to which his past

experiences and perspectives may have been shaping the assumptions he could make in understanding his experiences in Nepal, Mark's dialogue fails to reveal this beyond a basic level. More than anything, he talked about the connections he was seeking in integrating his experiences into his own life. Through exploring the process of his learning, and recognizing the importance that his past has on understanding his present experiences, Mark falls closer to Kevin on the continuum, yet tends towards of trend of looking for connections rather than questioning assumptions.

**Gwyn** The reflective dialogue of Gwyn is again, indicative of a pronounced focus on the manifest experience and *content* of the learning during her study abroad experience in Nepal. During the first interview Gwyn talked about how helpful it was to be in the actual experience, learning from it rather than an abstraction of it.

Just even from when we first got here I thought that I learned so much more from actually seeing the people and stuff and watching. It made everything more real for me. I'm excited to learn more about Nepal, like more so than when I was in the U.S., because (pause) I mean I was excited to learn about it, but not as much as I am now; like I really want to know about Nepal and all of the stuff we are going to learn. I think when I leave I'll probably have learned a lot more about the culture and the people than if I was at home, because it is all around us all of the time.

Like many of the students, Gwyn compared her experiences in Nepal with that which she had known and experienced in the past. Gwyn used this as base from which to substantiate her learning.

...Like, I'm going to be studying environmental issues and stuff and I think that maybe by being able to see the stuff (pause) I'm not sure what I'm going to study, what topic I'm going to do, but if I do water quality, like the paper we got from the professor. Like I could go visit places and actually see how it is different.

Different than the way it is back home. One thing that I have noticed is that there is a lot of trash around and it is dirty; not clean.

...I think that I have been comparing it quite a bit because that is the only basis from which to come from; the stuff that I know with the stuff that I'm seeing. It is hard to tell; it is hard for me to say.

During our second interview, Gwyn again focused on the significance she attributed to the content of her experiences, and how beneficial it was for her understanding. Through both her direct experiences, and by interacting with Nepalese, Gwyn remained focused on how her interests and learning about them were facilitated through these means.

More so now, especially after writing a reflection paper. I think that really made me think about what I was learning. This week in Chitwan, that was nice to see things. I get a lot out of the lectures, even though the days are long. I get more out of them then I do in the lectures because it is kind of hard to pay attention during the lectures at times.

I think I learn a lot from my didi, like asking her questions. She will sit and explain to us for hours about stuff and she has visitors over a lot and they always want to tell us about Nepal. I think that helped a lot too. I think I am learning a lot not even in the classroom here. Just talking with people, because people seem really open here to tell us things and they are always really interested in what we are doing.

In talking with Gwyn about the meaning of her experiences and learning, she found the new content stimulating, encouraging her curiosity and explorative intent, yet she did not articulate a conceptualization beyond this point of curiosity. The following excerpt from the second interview points to this:

I guess I can't think of anything off the top of my head right now. I guess there is more religion here and I guess that is something that there isn't in the US. I don't think there are as many religious traditions. Like Ama is always going to the temple and there are a lot of superstitions. I don't know.

I guess maybe here I am just more (pause) I'm trying to observe more I guess (pause) what people do. Where as at home it is kind of like (pause) like when you grow up (pause) when you grow up, you grow up a certain way in a culture and you don't notice the stuff that you do everyday that seem normal to you but when you come here and stuff is different. I can't think of anything exactly though.

Maybe I'm not always that observant at home. I don't really pay attention to that kind of stuff. I just kind of accept it and let it go as being normal and not even question it.

Gwyn briefly explores the cultural assumptions that may be influential on her perceptions. She recognizes that by not questioning those assumptions, she lacks attention to them. This brief excerpt points to the development of a more questioning, critical perspective, much like what was representative of Gaels' interview dialogue.

Our final conversation reflected little difference in the patterns and directions of Gwyn's thoughts about learning that were discussed in the first two interviews. More than anything she found the experience and the people an enriching way through which she could learn more about Nepal

I think just asking questions. I learned a lot from my independent studies because I could actually get out there and find things out. Just talking through interviews. A lot of people just like to tell you about Nepal, so there is so much information that they want to share with you. From all of didi's friends that come over, they all have things to say. Me and X went out with Y and his friends and we had conversations about Nepal and he was talking about the economy. It was interesting.

Like Gael, Gwyn was a learner that reflected significantly on the content of her learning experience. The novelty and hands on nature of study abroad experience made her learning exciting and enriching, something that Gwyn thought could not be achieved through learning the same content through a lecture, etc. Although she talked briefly about the differences in learning perspective and understanding that was developed by

stepping outside of her previous perspectives developed in the US, she did not conceptualize this beyond her initial impressions. As a reflective learner, Gwyn reflected a trend of focusing primarily on content from beginning to end.

**Andy** Andy's interview dialogue represents another example of reflections falling somewhere along the continuum that has been demarcated by the previous examples. Like Kevin and Mark, Andy articulated a degree relativity that began from the first time we sat down and talked.

Everyday, throughout the day and at night when I ruminate and do my journal. From the moment we stepped off the plane everything is a new experience, you know what I mean. Some things are universal, but so much is new and it is a constant learning process every minute of everyday when you are thinking this is different from how we do it at home and this is something new and you are trying to figure out how to act in situations; the situations are the same but how you carry it out is different over here. So yes, I am constantly thinking about that.

Like not, not that it's, it is pretty easy to remember that this is not America, but to remember that in America you are not the foreigner. Like I live in metro Detroit and there are a lot of foreigners and a lot of people who do not speak English. Like everyday when you go to the gas station and the family may have owned the gas station for five years but he still doesn't speak English. It can be frustrating but you figure I just want to get gas and go, but it makes you much more sympathetic being over here and understanding that I can't (pause) if no one in Nepal spoke English I would be in trouble for awhile because my Nepali is just not up to par.

I guess just being open minded helps a good deal because you are able to be much more receptive to the people and the culture. Just small everyday things like taking your shoes off before going into someone's house. In most American homes you just wipe them off and go in. Just small things like that: open mindedness, receptivity; not trying to impose your world view on other people and not so much thinking that this is entirely different than how I would do it back home. Just saying this is how it is done and trying to find out why it is done that way. It is really beneficial here too, that people seem very eager to answer questions that you have rather than giving you a short answer and just blowing you off. They will take time and talk with you and you will get the answer eventually, which is much different than America in a lot of regards, in terms of people taking time and having concern for someone they don't even know. You



talk with someone on the street and they will be like (pause) I will have a question about something and they will say here is the deal and then you will have this understanding that you didn't have before and I think that is really great that people are that understanding over here.

In the second interview, Andy's reflections were indicative of a growing comfort he had developed with the group, which in turn he perceived as a benefit to his own learning.

It offers different perspectives, which is good. Like the other day we were in Lakeside, going over those sample questions for the exam. And your mind only works in so many ways and you only have so many thoughts. But if you bring five or six other people into it, that is hundreds of more views and takes on things and people retain different information. So, you get different perspectives on it. It helps you see things differently and gives you new things to ponder that you wouldn't have thought of on your own.

Yes, I think so. I don't think that I utilized it as much as I do over here. I think that this trip has impacted people differently. Although we go through the same experiences, but still take different things out of them. Everyone gets impacted differently.

Most learners viewed the social dynamics of the group as a whole, or within varying smaller groups from the whole, as a positive influence on their learning. This was viewed as a means to reflect through another on one's own perceptions. This phenomenon developed over the length of the program, yet emerged as a significant means for learners to employ as a reflective exercise, around the time of the second interview, which were conducted during the fourth and fifth weeks of the program.

Andy's relative perspective that was revealed during our first talk was again the focus of much of his reflections when we met to talk the second time. This time he referred to the importance of the Other - in this case, other students - in learning and

understanding ones' Self, and the perspectives he has in relation to them. This reference seemed indicative of his reflective learning.

It is a different context to work within, with different thoughts and different points of view. It could change your point of view if you see it in a different way. It has been very beneficial. Especially everyone having (pause) even though there are a lot of environmental majors, it is a pretty good mix of people, with different interests both in and out of school. That has been really beneficial. Just backgrounds of students is varied so they are bringing those things into the conversation and to the whole experience. I think that is pretty cool and I appreciate that.

For sure, I think that being in Nepal is going to affect me in the pace that I (pause) the pace of life that I ascribe to so many things. Like back home, I move quickly. A lot of students have been talking about this, and I'm not exactly sure why; always rushing. The American pace of life is much faster than the Nepali culture, but um (pause) always rushing from one thing to the next. Go from school to lunch to school to a meeting to your apartment to work to dinner to homework to bed and do the whole thing all over. You are constantly feeling pressed for time and I think that once I am back home I am definitely slowing down, not so much physically but mentally. To know that the world is not going to come to an end if you don't get everything done on Monday. That things will get by and I think that (pause) it is a lot about patience and understanding.

I always thought of myself as a pretty tolerant person and coming over here you are like - oh my god, was I really being that tolerant back home - because you are in a completely different culture. I think that it helps that so many people are able to speak English. It hinders my learning of Nepali but it does help getting through the day, especially the smaller stuff. I think that I will be much more compassionate to the foreigners in America. I'm from metro Detroit and there are a lot of foreigners in our area and so many of them own so many of the businesses now. And a lot of them can't even speak English. So you go to get gas, you say-I want five bucks on number four- and they are like what. It gets kind of frustrating, like you just want to get your gas and go. Now you are the foreigner and you have to put up with some things that aren't pleasant or are just different and can be a hassle perhaps, so yeh, I think that being a foreigner opens my eyes to (pause) it helps put me in the foreigners shoes and helps broaden my view.

During our final discussion, Andy did not move beyond the relativity he referred to in the previous two interviews. In the end, he found his experience to be enriching to his life, giving him greater perspective to view himself upon his return home.

I think that almost everything that I've learned over here is applicable to my life outside of Nepal. It is not just for school or for the papers. It definitely impacted me. There are a million things over here, religion, culture, the 100 subsets of both of those, the sense of community that is over here and how that is perceived and carried out by people. How people go through their lives, day to day here. Like a lot of everyday living things have impacted me, given me a lot of food for thought. It makes me think about how we do things back home or how I do things back home and comparing and contrasting. Asking myself why we do it this way and the Nepalese do it this way. The differences that we have in common, there are so many new ideas and different ways of seeing things, a lot of the same ways of seeing things.

Because his combined stability and depth of perspective, Andy falls along the continuum somewhere in the middle. The relative perspective, which he brought into the experience, is developed and enriched through his experiences in Nepal. This relativity is attended in Andy's willingness to be open and to explore his new experiences, yet there was little mention of the assumptions that guide his perceptions and the possible reason for them existing. Thus Andy can be viewed as a reflective learner defined through his developed relative perspective.

**Roy** Roy is the last person that will be presented and discussed. Roy had traveled extensively before beginning the study abroad program in Nepal, and the impressions these travels had on his experience in Nepal are clear. His perspectives of learning, both on what and how he learns, are evident from the dialogue and indicative of these past experiences.

...are there questions about language later? Because the language (pause) I've taken some French and some Spanish and the language is a little difficult for me. It is strange, like there are certain words when we do our Nepali language training at the university, there are certain words that I know, by the sight of the object I know what it is and that is because I can trace it back to having an experience with S when she tells me what it is or like we were joking around with their 13 year old kid and dunga sticks out in my mind, like rocks, and we were looking at

a picture book of Michigan (pause) dunga is also a player for Brazil, he is a captain in Brazil so that was a connection and all his friends were laughing at me because I brought that up. It is stuff like that. It is weird how stuff sticks in my mind; you know what I mean. That is odd to me.

The same thing happens to me when I go to Mexico. I remember the first time I learned Beracho, like drunk and stuff like that, just situations I was in; it is kind of cool. Other than that it has been vocabulary. It has been chaotic. I don't feel I have time for reflection, and just time to chill out and think about my situation. It just seems like I have to go with the flow, like I am caught in this current right now which is good because I am seeing (pause) getting a small dose of everything and like understanding where Lakeside is and all of this other stuff.

Beginning with the first interview, Roy talked about the importance of reflection in terms of how he understands and makes meaning out of his experiences. His impressions relate the individual and social aspects of reflective learning.

...I usually don't interact with the group as well as reflection is concerned, especially a large group. I was going to say something yesterday but what I had to say would have changed the tone of the supposed reflection meeting. I am more into individual, just one to one. I like to probe and see what other people are doing. Because yesterday I was going to bring up (pause) people were complaining and talking about how they could structure the program better and I wanted to talk about how I was kind of having a quiet time drinking my tea on the back porch one morning, watching the sun come up, and my didi came down from their shrine and she was walking around the house with incense, blessing the house, and she came back around and she blessed me, and put a tika on me. Then she sat down and we had tea for about twenty minutes and we talked about how she felt so happy to have two boys instead of X, because we were healthy and we eat and we are really easy to get along with and the kids are really happy because we play with them all of the time. I said I felt I was in really good hands and that I was blessed to be in a situation like this. That was like my high point and that is what I wanted to say. I'm sure everybody had stuff like that, but it just wasn't that type of meeting.

Later in the interview, Roy talked about his learning, which he perceived as not only a process of coming to a new meaning for himself, but also the importance of understanding the social/cultural historical dimensions that shaped the experiences he

was having. Roy was interested in taking his learning to a level where he could begin to understand and make meaning beyond his own personal perspectives by incorporating the historical significance that constituted his experienced reality. He prefaced this with his impressions regarding the dynamics of learning in this type of experience.

Because I have traveled by myself, it is anarchic. There is no structure, you are free to do whatever and whenever you want within the constraints of the society. And going out and seeking out learning is a conscious choice, a cool thing to do as far as I'm concerned. I don't just want to know where the best restaurants are in town, or where the best tourist places are in town, I want to know about why they peel their fruit in a certain way or why they prepare their food in a certain way and there is usually a religious context or a historical context.

During the second interview Roy articulated a developed perspective that emerged during the first interview. Through his increased experiences Roy's dialogue reveals a process of continually pursuing an understanding of his perspectives in relation to himself and to the social/cultural forces that exert their influence.

But that was a separate issue apart from the social and cultural learning that I'm getting. Because even though the academic side may be a lot different that I'm used to, just living with my family is an educational experience in itself. There are different ways to dance and different song lyrics (pause) and I'm aware (pause) it is almost like an out of body experience, especially because I get up in front of people and dance. I don't know why I've been fulfilling that role, but it is almost like an out of body experience because I see what I am doing and people watching me and I look at the moves of the dancers around me and trying to figure out what is going on. That can be a metaphor for how I sometimes feel walking around the streets. I'm encountering new stuff and stuff is challenging me. Like today, when I was playing volleyball, I learned how young men interact with one another. Like how to lose in a friendly volleyball game in Nepali society. How to congratulate somebody or how people embrace or touch or use their body language when they want to express appreciation or to persuade you when they are upset. That type of learning is very strange. It is really kind of cool. You don't choose for it to happen to you, it just kind of happens. To be a fish out of water, to be an American in Nepal (pause) I don't know, I get hit with a lot of stuff that is not academic, but I can apply it to academics I suppose.

By reflecting on his experiences, Roy articulates a perspective of his learning that brings together his personal experiences with the knowledge he was gaining academically. It is at this point in the experience that Roy realized both the potential and limitations he faced in his experiences. The meaning of his experiences become increased by the variability of situations he found himself within, but Roy also recognized the barriers, like language, that impeded a more complete understanding.

I guess I'm recognizing it a little bit more, because that explains a little bit of how I could talk about having an out of body experience. Not an out of body experience but seeing myself doing things and seeing the directions that I'm going in when I'm talking with somebody. Like making the effort (pause) this is really hard, it is really hard once you get past tapai kosta cha (how are you) and tapai ko nam ke ho (what is your name). Once you get past that, to go further into conversation is an effort that I have to make, or have to make it. I can see myself struggle, I can feel it. The silence between me and someone else for a while is really weird. I try to get into what these people are about, (more) than I was four weeks ago because you know, you wander around like a wide eyed six year old for at least two weeks I think. At least I did. Sometimes my mouth is covered in my shirt because the fumes are so bad in Kathmandu or Mahendrapul. Just to let it soak into your brain before it can regain its' footing and retaliate. To try and analyze the situation like a boxer or something.

By the time of the final interview Roy remarks about his progress in learning. Although he perceived greater control and understanding of his experiences, Roy recognized other limitations, like the end of the program, which inevitably brought a sense of conclusion and synthesis to his experience.

I feel more manipulative of my environment, whereas before I was kind of like a sponge. I would soak it all in and then squeeze it back out through the filter and try to reflect on it and make sense of it. But now I know more things so I can facilitate or manipulate a situation, whichever way you want to say it, to give me what I want; to satisfy my questions a little bit more deeply than they were before. To ask the questions in the right way and to know when not to ask them and when it is appropriate to inquire. It is kind of cool. I'm running out of time though. If we had a year I think things would open up immensely. I was telling X that I feel like I've been up here and I've been trying to come down to this level, or come up to it, whichever way you want to say it because it makes me sound elitist, to come

down to this level of understanding about my environment and my family and a social understanding and a cultural understanding. And I'm kind of at this level right here, where it has come up and hit me in the face and I'm on the same level, but it is a superficial level, and it is just this surface or the tip of the iceberg or whatever. And I just know it is starting to open up and show me what the real guts of the culture and the society are. I have enough tools and I've sorted out enough strategies to deal with that, and it is just starting to open up.

I'm seeing things that I never saw before and (pause) like I'm getting tuned in, like when that girl was murdered in Amar Singh Chowk I was really tuned in to reactions and to peoples tempers, and what happened at my house. There was a didi meeting that happened and all the things that were said. That was something that I don't think I would have recognized in the first month here, and it is also something that the community tries to isolate or tries to keep us isolated from, because they don't want a negative stigma placed on their culture or their community either. It was blamed on a black, or an Indian, and apparently they arrested four or five other people. It was just really interesting to here the theories because first it was a Jankri and then it was a Black Lama or a bad Lama and before that it was an Indian. It still survives that it is an Indian ring, and I don't know if it is or not, but there is severe, severe racial prejudice in my family and I think in the Gurung community and I would pretty much say everywhere in Nepal. Those kind of things, that is the guts that is opening up. I mean you live in America for three months as an exchange student, you might see how great it is and how much material wealth we have, but you don't understand the racial tension or the psychological disorders that happens and stuff like that. But my learning is changing and it has changed.

In the end, Roy summarized to what level his learning had progressed and to where it could go, if devoid of various constraints. As a reflective learner, Roy demonstrated an ability to go from content to process to social and cultural premises that he was trying to uncover in order to understand his own experiences. Throughout the three interviews Roy articulated a sense of his learning, and the means and mechanisms he needed to develop in gaining more control over his environment, and thus his learning. It seemed indicative of an empowering level of learning. By taking as much control as was possible, and being self-directed and motivated to search for understanding and meaning, Roy carried his learning to the point where it could go within the constraints in

the program. The meaning it had for him, as for every learner in the program, was evident in his dialogue, and indicative of the powerful impact the study abroad program had on his life.

But because we are at the end, you can feel it. I mean I've had a lot of conversations about how difficult it is to put this experience and our learning into terms that anyone else that wasn't here could understand. I feel the push, there is a force, something forcing me to close down and parcel this learning experience and put it in my brain, but you can't because it is still teaching me. It is not something, like if you were to go for a week in the Bahamas, the day that you were getting on the plane or the day before you could pack it in your brain and just go and it wouldn't be a big deal, but this has affected so much of my life. My philosophies and my learning and stuff like that, that I can't (pause) it has forced a new awareness I guess, you start to evaluate where you have come and what your progress has been. You understand how far or how much farther you have to go with you language or how much you have picked up on cultural and social norms, how much more you need to learn because you don't understand as much as you think that you could or know that you could. I think that I've seen a lot of Nepal because we have been jetting all around, but I could do with another month on this program, but I could do with another year in Nepal before I understood it properly. I mean you saw with someone's presentation yesterday, which happened to be the last one, that there are certain things people bring to their experience that aren't here, and they completely misconstrue and misrepresent the country and that is something that I never want to do and I may and I probably (pause) I mean I started to, but you learn from that once you are corrected. If you stay in the culture long enough, almost all of those preconceived notions, and things that you bring to the country are corrected or reformed or renewed or some kind of adjective to describe it; reinvent it I guess. That is what is cool. Because I feel like I've went through 3 or 4 reinventing processes. Like my roommate said, you never know what is going to happen, you think that you are going to have an easy day and then Nepal comes through.

## **Summary**

The deconstruction and reconstruction of reflective learning was presented in hope that a clearer understanding of this process in the context of a study abroad program in Nepal could be explored and described. Reflective learning seemed to pervade much of the overall experience of the learners involved. Every learner revealed a sense of



reflective learning in their articulations of their experiences. The differences are indicative of the dynamic and particular individuals that participated in the program, which constitute the typology of reflective learners that was developed. A general sense of the complexity of reflective learning was revealed in exploring how the focus, intent, means and influences were understood by the learners themselves, and how together these may inform a typology of reflective learning.

## **Chapter V**

### **Summary of Findings, Conclusion and Implications**

In Chapter IV the findings of the study were presented. Chapter V presents a summary of these findings. These findings are explored in relation to the objectives that formed the intent of this study. Following this, a conclusion of the overall study moves the focus towards implications of these findings for future applications.

#### **Summary of Findings**

The two objectives that informed this study were:

- 1) To explore the content of learner interview dialogues in understanding reflective learning in relation to the present discourse surrounding this phenomenon.
- 2) To explore the phenomenon of reflective learning over the extent of a particular study abroad program in Nepal.

Findings from the deconstruction of reflective learning were in accordance with the underlying premise of objective one, while the reconstruction of the reflective learner provided an exploration of the phenomenon over the extent of the study abroad program in Nepal, which relates to objective two. In exploration of this phenomenon, a Typology of Reflective Learning and a Typology of Reflective Learners was developed in accordance with these objectives, respectively. Following is a summary in accordance with objective one, followed by a summary in accordance with the second objective.

*Objective One: To explore the content of learner interview dialogues in understanding reflective learning in relation to the present discourse surrounding the phenomenon.*

### **The Presence of Reflective Learning : A Typology of Reflective Learning**

The findings of this study indicate the salient role reflective learning had with a learner and group of learners participating in a study abroad program in Nepal. By exploring learner interview-dialogue, various interests were revealed as important for their reflective learning and were developed as a typology represented in Table 3. This table was originally presented in Chapter IV. It is provided here for clarification on the classificatory scheme.

**Table 3. Typology of Reflective Learning**

<b>Core Category Types</b>	<b>Definitions</b>
<i>Focus of Reflection</i>	Subject/content of dialogue
<i>Means of Reflection</i>	Means sought to foster reflective learning
<i>Reflective Intent</i>	Result/Action/Change from reflection
<i>Influences on Reflection</i>	Variables affecting reflection both articulated by learner and implied through dialogue

**The Focus of Reflective Learning** Learners demonstrated a willingness to reflect on the content of their learning experiences, the process of their learning, and in a few

cases, the psychological, social and cultural premises structuring the perspectives they brought to the experiences of their learning, each of which may be related as a focus of their reflective learning. These three foci were inextricably bound in relation to one another. The presence of one focus was indelibly reflected in the explicit or implicit presence of the other. That is to say, when reflecting on the content of their experiences, process was often revealed, or at times discussed by the learner. Premise assumptions shaping learning perspectives that learners had coming into the experience were also revealed in the content of some interview dialogue. At times learners were able to explicitly comment on these assumptions, reflectively learning how they shaped their perspectives. In the process, they either developed a new perspective or substantiated an old perspective, yet indelibly questioned prior perspectives that structured their learning. In this way the learners could be considered reflective learners.

Together, these three foci supplemented the other, disparately these foci revealed idiosyncratic characteristics that learners developed in relation to each. When reflecting on the content of their experiences, learners often tended towards a developed meaning of relativity, a reconstructed worldview guiding their perspectives and an interrogative introspection of their Self. During the duration of the program, reflective content tended to vary with the experience of the learner, which in turn, was in a functional relationship with time, adjustment and communication - all discovered to be influences on the reflective learning of participants. These general perspectives were developed through the shared and individual experiences learners had during the program.

Most learners revealed a developed sense of relativity both explicitly and implicitly. Explicitly, learners commented on the value of differing perspectives in

understanding their own. This was in relation to both the differing perspectives inherent in their learning experiences in Nepal (i.e. the physical and mental landscapes that were different from their own), as well as the differing perspectives that respective students brought to one another's perspective. Implicitly it was revealed in the actual experiences learners reflected on from the developed sense of difference and relativity found within them.

In relation to the content of their learned experiences, the degree of relativity in their statements concerning their experiences were distinct in both the extent of relativity and in regards to when it first became evident in the voices of the learners. For those who exhibited a relativist perspective from the time of the first interview, the experience as a whole either served to deepen the quality of this perspective, or, in a few cases, allowed the individual to develop a critical awareness of the social, cultural and psychological factors that worked in a functional relationship to that relativist perspective. Learners whose relative perspective first developed over the course of the experience developed this new perspective through the ideas and perspectives they had before the beginning of the experience along with their new experiences. Regardless of their perspective, learners facilitated the inception and development of a relativistic perspective through actively engaging in reflective learning, relating past and present knowledge and experience, and exploring the similarities and differences they perceived.

In addition to the emergence and development of relative perspectives, the worldview of learners was impacted. This was explicitly demonstrated in some learner testimonies as well as implicitly revealed in others. Worldview is generally defined as the spiritual beliefs and principles in which a person functions in society. Many learners'

view of the world was confronted and challenged by reflectively relating their experiences in Nepal to the prior assumptions that guided their worldview before participating in the experience. For others, it was an affirmative sense of connection that was developed through relating the differences that were encountered, and the development of a worldview that was both more inclusive of differing perspectives and an affirmation of previously held assumptions. The study abroad experience presented differences in cultural worldviews, which, along a continuum of possibilities, provided the opportunity for a reconstructed worldview to develop, through participants reflectively interpreting this new perspective as they understood it.

Finally, reflecting about ones' Self was at times evident in the testimonies of particular learners, and thus constituted a great deal of the reflective interview content. This tended to be facilitated through the use of writing and through the interaction of other people, both Nepalese and other students, as well as a function of the direct experience learners were engaged in, and their own personal writings. The study abroad experience in Nepal facilitated a potential for learners to engage in the Other, both in relation to people from another place, society and culture, as well as the Other encountered through the dynamics of the group. Both of these situations manifested an encounter with the participants Self, as a result of the encounter with the Other. In reflecting on their Self, learners revealed a particularly potent aspect of reflective learning, where they confronted assumptions and perspectives that can be held as exclusive. Many learners revealed a willingness to explore the Other, and through this reflective learning exploration, discovered a sense of something learned about their Self, or recognized that the experience was affecting their Self in some unexplicable manner.

Process as a Focus of Reflection was most often related by learners as their recognition of relating past knowledge and experiences, to that which they were experiencing and coming to know in Nepal. Learners related this aspect of their learning in a reflective manner when describing the process during the interview. It was also indicative of the content of the interview dialogues that were transcribed and reviewed.

The social dynamic was a manifest element in the overall learning of participants, and it became apparent for many that this was a process for them to relate and reflect on their experiences. The learners themselves became a process of their learning, by interacting with one another, and constructing the meaning of their experiences through this interaction.

Finally, recognition of the premise assumptions that a learner inexplicably brings to a learning experience was referenced by a few learners, during the time of the interviews. Here, cultural parameters were discussed as shaping how one could view and understand their experiences. In this way, these learners demonstrated reflective learning that explores basic assumptions that one has and how this comes to define reality and how one can learn from it.

**Reflective Learning Means** Exploring the means of reflection used by learners was important in understanding how different learners came to learn about their experiences. This reflection occurred under various conditions, like particular activities learners engaged in or an attempted reflective exercise with ones' Self. More predominant was a social mechanism, where understanding was facilitated through the dialogue between learners and when possible, Nepali people. The experiences themselves were

also discussed, as were various program initiatives such as writing papers and daily journal writing.

Through various activities, like writing in a journal, writing required papers, attending lectures, etc., learners were able to reflect on their experiences, and gain a more informed perspective of those experiences. Writing, in any sense, was seen by some as a valuable way to review initial impressions, and articulate thoughts so that they could be clarified. In many ways, this instrument facilitated the mean of the learners Self, in coming to learn about their experiences.

The Self of the learner functioned as a means through which to develop ideas and perspectives that were developing from their experiences. Learners talked about an internal dialogue that served this purpose. Time spent in thinking about their experiences and the questions that they were creating, allowed the learner to construct new or revised meanings.

Learners talked extensively about their learning process when explored in relation to the content of their experience and more significantly in relation to the means through which learners facilitated this process. In developing their reflective learning, learners talked about relating the experience(s) in Nepal to those experiences that constituted their knowledge before beginning this experience. Some learners articulated this explicitly, revealing it as a natural means in which to approach their learning. Do to the limitation of language, this was most often accomplished through group interaction, and not between other Nepali's.

Social interaction within the group, both as a whole, and amongst smaller subgroups, fostered a high degree of reflective learning. Many learners recognized the



differing perspectives could add or enhance their own perspective and learning. Almost all the learners found this a valuable exercise in checking their understanding with that of another. An interesting note is that one participant viewed this process as at times a limiting function to their learning. The participant gave more value to the intuitive sense of her perception, and found the process of reflecting with other learners as counterproductive and distracting to an understanding that otherwise could have been served through her own intuitive sense. Such a difference points to the varying perspectives learners can have regarding their learning, and various interests that suit particular learners

Still, overall, the group served the function of allowing ideas and perspectives to be presented and discussed. The dialogue between learners afforded the opportunity to explore the multitude of perspectives and realities that each individual was experiencing. In sharing these perspectives with one another, learners found their own experiences and perspectives to be questioned.

All of the four categories were in relative relation to one another. Activities involve people if they are social. Writing involves a dialogue with ones Self if it is done individually. Essentially, they all functioned in relation to one another.

**Reflective Intent: What it Meant for the Learner** The perspectives of learners were affected in various ways relative to the learner and the perspective they brought to the experience. For some the experience affirmed many personal perspectives, which gained greater depth and meaning through actually experiencing them in Nepal. For others, the opposite occurred, where the actuality of the experience confronted the

previous perspectives that were held by the learner, thereby developing a new perceived perspective. In either case, learners were actively constructing and reconstructing their learning perspectives.

It was impossible to explore how this was applied by the learner, as the current study was contextually defined to the study abroad experience in Nepal, and did not explore the affects of learning on the participants following the conclusion of the program. Still, learners articulated perceived changes in perspectives, anticipated the change that was developing through the experience, and envisioned an ongoing process of learning upon their return home. The experience in Nepal began the reflective process, which is significant in any journey involving learning.

**Influences on the Experience of the Reflective Learner** When reflecting on their learning, learners discussed adaptation, communication and time as significant to their reflective learning. These influences are consistent with previous studies that have explored learning abroad (Laubscher, 1994; Sikkema & Niyekawa-Howard, 1977). Invariably, these three influences are bound to one another. Over time, learners became more adapted relative to their environment and experiences, and thus were able to communicate between themselves and other Nepalese in regards to understanding and making meaning of their experiences.

Through adapting, learners generally found their learning to develop and mature. This was due to a sense of comfort that was created over the extent of the program. Becoming comfortable in their living environment was foremost on their minds in the beginning. Over time, learners found their learning focus to adapt in relation to the

adaptations they were making in response to their environment and new experiences.

Sikkema & Niyekawa-Howard (1977) found similar fluctuations in learner adaptability in relation to how study abroad participants process their learning. This is consistent with other studies (Lysgaard, 1955) that have explored this phenomenon. Still each of these studies, as well as the present study, varies in relative degrees to one another.

In this study, adaptability, in most cases, was equated with a relative change in the quality of information that could be taken and reflectively interpreted by the learner. In one specific instance, the quality was seen to move in the opposite direction, as the learner found the ability to perceive certain subtleties as more difficult. Again, this points to the uniqueness of learner perspectives. Regardless, learners felt the need to adapt, and it was expressed as significant in their reflective dialogue.

In relation to time, the beginning, middle and end of the program revealed the different learning perspectives learners developed. Some learners explicitly noticed the importance of time. Inherent within all interview dialogues was the influential presence of time on learner experiences and perspectives of those experiences. Through adapting over time, the reflective learning of the learner adapted and developed. At the conclusion of the program, time influenced the synthesis and evaluation the learner placed on their experience. Some tried to assess their learning, while others felt the limitations time had on allowing them to reach a comfortable point of synthesis. In either case, time was recognized as important to their reflective learning.

In some manner, communication was recognized as both important and significant to the reflective learning of the learners. In establishing coherence and constructing revised meanings of their experiences, learners talked with one another. The

social process of reflective learning was one of the more salient and intriguing discoveries of this study. For many of the learners, it seemed equally as intriguing and exciting to engage in this act of reflective learning as it was to engage in the mutual experiences that they were having through the study abroad program. The familiarity and commonality developed within the group over time allowed the majority of participants to feel comfortable in expressing their impressions and perspectives on their experiences. They became adapted to one another, and over time, felt more comfortable communicating with one another. Aside from the actual experience of living and studying in Nepal, the social phenomenon developed between the group was discussed by most learners as the most significant aspect of their experience.

Fewer learners revealed the barriers of communication between themselves and Nepalese as a function of their overall reflective learning. Those who did mention this found the inability to communicate directly with other Nepalese as a limitation on their overall experience. For this reason, developing meaning of the overall experience was less a function of the communication expressed between learners and Nepalese, and more a function of a dialogue between learners. Still, this was relative to the particular learner. Although communication was not explicitly stated in many interviews, it was revealed as a significant source of learning and meaning for learners.

Together, these four category types were found to constitute a Typology of Reflective Learning. In a general sense, these category types informed the analysis of the interview dialogue, which demonstrated the similarities and differences found between the learners and their interview dialogues. Focus, Means, Intent and Influence were

emergent categories, which helped to better understand the phenomenon of reflective learning in the context of this study.

*Objective Two: To explore the phenomenon of reflective learning over the extent of a particular study abroad program.*

### **Reflective Learning Reconstructed: A Typology of Reflective Learners**

The six learners presented in the findings, as reconstructed reflective learners, were used to develop a Typology of Reflective Learners situated on a continuum of reflective learning. This continuum was inclusive of the core categories, which were found to be indicative of reflective learning. Learner interviews conducted over the length of the program revealed dynamic and varied perspectives. In taking a learner perspective, this study allowed the voice of the learner to articulate and express these variances. What was found is that learners vary between the significance they attach to the content, process and premise of their reflective learning, as well as to the means, intent and what is perceived to be influential on their learning. These differences did not create disparate exclusions of learning, yet rather demonstrated the uniqueness of the learner in an experience along an inclusive continuum, of which all learners were apart. Although limitations restricted presenting all of these perspectives, all learners were apart of this continuum. Those presented in the findings were used as representative examples for development of the Typology of Reflective Learners.

Below is a table containing the group of reflective learners and their corresponding characteristic which was used to develop a Typology of Reflective Learners.

**Table 8. Typology of Reflective Learners**

Learner		Type	Typological Characteristic
↑ C O N T I N U U M ↓	Kevin	Questioning Learner	Exploration of basic perspectives which guide assumptions of learning and reality
	Roy		
	Andy	Synthesizing Learner	Looking to synthesize informative content of experiences with past knowledge so as to inform new opinions and actions
	Mark		
	Gwyn	Content Informed Learner	Reiteration of experiences in comparing content with past knowledge and experiences
	Gael		

Returning to the specific examples, Kevin demonstrated a perspective of exploring various levels of content, process and premise through *questioning* the basic assumptions that were guiding his learning perspectives. In this way he can be associated with what some (Mezirow 1991, Brookfield, 1987) associate with a learner who is engaged in critical reflection. Moving from an initial relativist perspective regarding his experiences, Kevin talked about the assumptions that he began to question in regards to how and what he knew before the experience. He began to realize that what he was learning through the program was inevitably shaped and developed in relation to his

social/cultural background which he carried with him to the experience. In this way, Kevin began a process of reflection that explored the underlying perspectives that shaped his learning. In the process, he reflected on the process of his learning in relation to this realization, and to the contextual experiences that were important in developing the perspectives that were being reconstructed during the program.

Gael's dialogue was indicative of a reflective learner of a different type, that of focusing on *informative content*. She moved back and forth between content and process, bouncing between these two perspectives, yet never following through to the premises that may have been influencing those perspectives. Her reflective learning centered mostly on the content, relating her new experiences to that which she had known before. Eventually, Gael began to critically assess her learning in relation to the experiences she was having in Nepal. In this way, Gael demonstrated a growing awareness of her reality in the context of the program, which was revealed through reflectively interpreting the content of her present experiences.

Mark, was typified by his attempts at continually attempting to synthesize and connect his learning experiences. Throughout the dialogue of Mark's interview was a pervasive sense of trying to make connections with his new experiences and knowledge, from that which he knew in the past. It was apparent that every learner was doing this to some degree, but in Mark's case, it remained an ongoing focus of his dialogue, and thus became indicative of a particular type of reflective learner. By focusing on this aspect of his reflective learning from the beginning of the program, Mark was consistently willing to return to this aspect of synthesis, which he saw as important in transforming his present practices and beliefs.

Gwyn, Andy and Roy, respective to their own similarities and differences in perspectives which they brought to the experience, involved differing amounts of content, process and premise in relation to their reflective learning. Like Kevin, Roy's dialogue revealed a reflective learning process that explored content, process and premise assumptions. Unique to Roy's situation was his previous travel experience, which was evidenced in his relating these past experiences to those experiences he was having in Nepal. When relating these past experiences, Roy mentioned the cultural parameters that shaped his understanding and meaning of his experiences, as well as the reality that he was experiencing. In this way he represents a learner that was critically reflective of his learning experiences.

Like Gael, Gwyn focused more exclusively on the content of her experiences in exploring her reflective learning. This was largely conceptualized through her direct experiences, and how she perceived her learning to be enhanced by this direct exposure. In this way she was a content reflective learner, exploring her experiences in relation to her past knowledge and experiences.

Finally, Andy was somewhere between the questioning typified by Kevin, and the process of connecting his learning, indicative of Mark, in falling along the continuum. Although representative of both of these types in some manner, Mark never exhibited the same degree of searching, and questioning that pervaded Kevin's dialogue, or the degree of trying to make connections that Mark exemplified. Therefore, he falls somewhere in the middle of these two types.

The six learners were presented as means to give examples of the variety of perspectives that are present within any group of individuals reflectively learning in a



study abroad experience in Nepal. Every learner that was part of this study demonstrated varying degrees of content, process and premise in their reflective learning. The dynamics of reflective learning explored by learners during the study abroad experience in Nepal was a mirror reflection of the dynamics of their experiences of living and learning in another country, with differing psychological, social and cultural norms that pushed the boundaries of thought and perspective of the learners. Learning is generally defined as change. Reflective learning is generally viewed as a process of assessment or reassessment of assumptions guiding perspectives through which knowledge is constructed that involves a process of deep thought, both a looking backwards to the situation being pondered upon and a projecting forward to the future. In a relative sense this experience began a process of change for the learner. That is to say, that to begin to reflectively learn, a process of change for the individual begins, regardless of how that change is behaviorally or cognitively realized. The change is implicit in the processed experienced.

Learners revealed the beginning process of such reflective learning in articulating the questions that were challenging their perspectives. There was observable change in perspective that developed over the course of the program. The learner participants' ability to conceptualize their experiences through continually questioning and exploring their experiences, while continually comparing them to their perspectives and previous experiences, pushed the boundaries that previously structured their perspectives. Learners found their own ways in which to facilitate this process, adapting to their situation, finding ways to communicate, and discovering means through which to express the meaning and understanding they were developing.

## **Conclusions**

The purpose of this study was to explore the reflective learning of participants in a study abroad experience in Nepal, by allowing the voices of the learners to describe their perspectives of this learning process. Reflective learning is part of a process of learning that emerges and functions dialectically with the experiences of a learner, and the reconstruction of knowledge and meaning through those experiences. Proponents of reflective learning implore the benefits that it can have for emancipating the learner from psychological, social and cultural structures that shape and determine perspective, thereby limiting the acceptance or inclusion of new and different perspectives.

Study abroad learning programs offer unique learning experiences that are rich in content, which is relatively different than the content of experience that learners bring with them to the study abroad experience. The study abroad program in Nepal presented a context of learning that was indicative of this richness. The program exposed participants to social and cultural systems that were noticeably unique compared to the normative perspectives that the learner brought to the experience. This richness of content and experience, relative to the context of Nepal, facilitated a reflective learning environment that was revealed through the dialogue of individual learners.

That reflective learning was prevalent amongst learners in a study abroad program in Nepal is evident from this study. Discovering more about the characteristics of it in relation to the learner gives some perspective on what meaning this study has beyond this text.

The following are concluding highlights that guided the realized implications of this study.

• **Reflective Learning Typology** The typology developed from this study was an exploratory attempt at understanding further the phenomenon of reflective learning. The categories that emerged are indicative of the phenomenon as it was explored for this study. Since this study was defined by the context of the study abroad program, with explicit focus on the process of reflective learning, the implications of this typology must be understood in relation to these parameters.

What the categories of the typology revealed, was that there are a number of factors that function explicitly and implicitly with reflective learning: focus, means, intent, and influence, as expressed by learners. The development of this typology, in an abstract sense, facilitated the process of extracting these typicality's from the reflective learner dialogue. In doing so, an improved understanding of the phenomenon was facilitated.

**Typology of Reflective Learners** In exploring the phenomenon of reflective learning, the categories which informed the development of the typology of reflective learning were broken out from the dialogue into disparate units. These units were necessary in eliciting an informed opinion on the phenomenon of reflective learning itself. Following this analysis, the phenomenon itself seemed overly segmented from the whole that was exhibited in the interview dialogues. Because of this, an effort was made to bring the segments back together in rediscovering the learners, whose dialogue informed the initial analysis. As a result, a rudimentary typology of reflective learners was developed, incorporating distinctive representative learners into a framework for

analysis. What was found is that learners tend to function along a learning continuum during the process of their experiences. Distinct points along this continuum informed the creation of certain typologies of learners, whose learner dialogues revealed striking exemplars of reflective learning. Through further analysis, this continuum could be developed further, in further delineating learner types. For the purpose of this study, it served a useful function of bringing the individual learner back to the level of representation, which was denied in the analysis reflective learning itself.

### **The Group, The Learner and The Social Dynamics of Reflective Learning**

Social interaction amongst group members facilitated the greatest degree of reflective learning. Learners found the insights, perspectives and actions of other group members as important to their reflective learning. In a sense, the learners themselves became teachers for one another. The shared, as well as individual experiences of the learners provided the content for this reflective activity to occur. Through sharing with one another, learners found their own perspective to develop and change, shift and reform, coalesce and become affirmed. It was this dynamic process between experience/content and reflecting on the experience with other learners that facilitated meaning making for learners.

**Reflective Learning as a Function of Time** Interviews done at different periods of the study abroad experience allowed for the exploration of the influence of time on the reflective learning of participants. The reflective learning of participants changed over the time of the experience. Becoming adapted and being able to communicate, in relation to time facilitated this process. By the second interview, week four and five, almost all

participants had reached a point where they began to conceptualize their learning. Towards the end of the program learners strove to synthesize and evaluate their learning, reflecting back on both the experiences, and the changes in perspective that had developed over the course of the program. The exploration of reflective learning during different points of time of the program allowed for a picture to develop of how this process occurs for various individuals.

**The Informal Interview, and Its' Pedagogical Function** The informal interview is often used in qualitative research as means through which to gain an understanding of the view of the interviewee (Byram, 1996). It was with this intent that an interview was used as the main data instrument for the study. Interviews also serve educational purposes in that it allows the interviewee to gain a greater understanding of their experience through the function of dialogue. The interview serves as a reflective exercise for the learner to gain a greater understanding of their learning and what they had perceived to learn, enabling the learner the opportunity to contextualise the experience within their previous experiences (Byram, 1996; Cain, 1996). The intent of the study was to explore study abroad participants as reflective learners, yet it became apparent that in many ways the interview used to explore this aspect of learning was, in part, an aspect of their reflective learning. However, it was evident from the content of the interviews conducted that learners were learning in a reflective manner outside of the time spent during the interviews. Regardless, this technique was used in a manner coinciding with elements of supportive research, which combines investigation, education and potential action as the intent, so that in essence the interview served the

purpose that the research paradigm suggests. Many learners shared this sentiment, as it was discussed how the interview was helpful for them in understanding their experience more critically. The interview encouraged them to focus on their learning, and to articulate that understanding, through which they gained a more coherent understanding of their experience.

**The Function of the Research Methodology** The grounded theory methodology used for this study was helpful in drawing out the distinct characteristics that were a part of participants reflective learning during a study abroad experience in Nepal, as well as elucidating the differences in reflective learning that occurs for various participants of the program. Grounded theory methodology is used to discover inherent theoretical representations emerging from social phenomenon, as well as developing a greater conceptual understanding of this phenomenon. It is from this second function that this study benefited the most. By exploring the social phenomenon, rather than looking to prove hypothetical hypotheses that guide assumptions of the study, this study allowed the voices of the learners to emerge, elucidate and create the findings, which in the end, adds to the discourse surrounding reflective learning.

### **Implications**

Following is a list of implications that provide a perspective of the meaning of this study in relation to the phenomenon of reflective learning, as it was discovered in accordance with a study looking at a study abroad program in Nepal.

**Recognizing the complexity of reflective learning and learners** The process of reflective learning is complex, and should be recognized as such when attempting to encourage this type of learning in any type of program setting. This can be done most effectively by taking a learner perspective, and determining the perspectives the learner has from the very beginning of any learning experience.

Reflective learning is not a happenstance occurrence that is easily recognizable. Upon the initial disorientation that insights such thinking and learning, individuals need time to interpret, process, and reflect the perspectives that are under construal, as well as develop means through which to communicate this process, so that it can be understood and meaning can develop. Facilitators of such learning should explore the context of the situation, and develop a trusting rapport with individuals, so as to foster and encourage the most appropriate means for the individual learner. Facilitators should also remain cognizant of how adapting, communication, and time itself influence reflective learning.

The development of typologies for both the phenomenon of reflective learning, and a group of reflective learners, provides added insight into the complexity of this phenomenon. Those interested in the phenomenon, either for themselves, or for the explicit purpose of facilitating its process, may take note of the characteristics which were presented in this text. By noting these characteristics of the phenomenon, and potential learners, facilitators' position themselves to grasp the complexity of the phenomenon, and to institute appropriate means to account for the phenomenon in various learning programs. Simply saying an exercise is reflective in nature is not enough. Those facilitating the process should be aware of the phenomenon, so as to facilitate the process appropriately.

**Strong consideration should be given to the social dimension of reflective learning.** The social dynamics of reflective learning are important for the development of learner perspectives. This has been recognized by a number of studies exploring reflective learning and the importance of discourse in the development and meaning of knowledge (Mezirow, 1991; Habermas, 1968).

Facilitators of reflective learning should make efforts to develop proper reflective learning conditions for learners to take full advantage of the opportunity to learn from one another. This involves recognizing that individuals partake of this activity on their own, in non-formal learning circumstances, as well as in more organized activities. In fact, it is the informal dialogue that develops between individuals that may contribute to some of the more significant reflective learning for individuals. This is often due to the difficulty in establishing trust and creating a functioning dialogic environment with large numbers of people. Taking into consideration group size and learning activities that encourage dialogue and discussion are important in ensuring that the social dynamics can be useful and beneficial to the learner. Like any learning program, consideration should be given to the ideal group size to facilitate learning goals. For the fostering of reflective learning, no more than 20 individuals is desirable. Programs with larger numbers of participants may need to consider additional full-time facilitators to improve upon the possibility of attending to learners, so proper learning environments and activities can be established.

Articulating ones own perspectives and ideas helps facilitate and construct the learners' understanding and meaning of their experience. The learners can contribute their own learning for the benefit of others. In this way it becomes a collaborative learning





activity. Learning and contributing to another's learning is a powerful form of reflective learning. Ensuring that social interaction is encouraged, maintained, and developed over the extent of the program should be given top priority if reflective learning is to be encouraged.

**A one-to-one learning focused interview is an effective means through which to facilitate reflective learning.** Talking with learners one-on-one served a pedagogical function of encouraging reflective learning processes. Learning programs may consider developing components of their programs that allow for such dialogue to occur between a learner and facilitator of reflective learning. The interview allows for a structured dialogue to occur between learner and facilitator, and thus lacks the capriciousness of informal conversations. It also allows for an intimate forum that is free from social pressures and obtrusive distractions that limit the potential for a critical dialogue to develop. Although this study involved interviews during the time of a study abroad program, the benefit of conducting one-to-one interviews both prior to, and following the conclusion of any similar type of learning program, should also be considered. This would further develop the overall process of the reflective learning process for the learner. Administrators of programs may need to train facilitators in interview techniques, and provide support so as to maximize the potentials of such an endeavor. These interviews should be voluntary. Participants should not be forced to participate in such interviews.

**Having a learner perspective is needed to foster reflective learning in a learning experience.** When given the unique opportunity to socially interact with a small, defined and contained group of learners, facilitators of learning programs should be encouraged to develop a learner perspective from the beginning of the program. In the Study Abroad Program in Nepal, it was found that learners constructed and reconstructed the understanding and meanings of their experiences throughout the extent of the program. The learners' perspective that is present at the beginning of the such a learning program is functional to the perspectives that are developed during the program, and the meaning and knowledge they gain from the program and experience as a whole. By understanding the learner from the perspective they bring to the experience, facilitators of learning programs create the potential to maximize the learning experience for everyone involved in the program. This learner perspective can be developed and encouraged through reflective learning activities and by the facilitators themselves reflecting on their own learning and thinking in relation to the program and the participants for whom they are assisting in learning.

#### **Afterword: A Reflexive Response Regarding Reflective Learning**

It seems only fitting that I, the author, would bring a close to a thesis about reflective learning with a brief digression regarding my own relationship with this phenomenon. As has been related repeatedly through this thesis, learning is a dynamic process, which often may find synthesis through the dialectical relationship of learner and learned. Through the process of writing this thesis, I too, as the author, have been a learner, dynamically engaged in the process of meaning making and learning through a

dialectical relationship between writing and the engagement of this process with my Self. I hope this was evident through some of the ideas presented in the thesis, but I also realize that there is much which could not be included - given the limitations of format and time.

Still, I believe that in presenting such ideas, the reader should not be bedazzled and fooled into believing that this was a snapshot of time, revealed in the stagnantly static pages of text. Rather, this was a dynamic, temporally bound process, which began one and a half years ago, when I first began formulating ideas for the thesis, and continues to the present, as I write these closing remarks.

In some ways unfortunate, this thesis became yet another predictable treatise in form, masking the actual creativity and dynamism that is involved in any writing, and for that matter, learning process. This brief digression is a tribute to this dynamism, whether recognized or not, which informed the writing of this work and the reflective learning that was an integral part of it. It was work that consumed much of me, and my time, over the past two years, and thus has been influential on my being.

As a reflexive process of learning, my writing of this thesis was a voyage of discovery and rediscovery of the reflective learning phenomenon. Writing, as was referenced in the text, is often used as a reflective exercise of learning. It is a means through which one can transfer thoughts, in a concrete tangible form, to paper. In the process, the flow of ideas that move to the paper can be returned to the mind from which they came. I continually found myself engaged in this text – sometimes to the point of exhaustion – trying to put down, in some varied form, the learning of what I had learned.

I explored the phenomenon of reflective learning in relation to a group of participants involved in a study abroad program in Nepal, yet it was my initial discovery of the notion of reflective learning, which prompted such exploration. I would like to take a step back and remember these incipient moments of discovery, as a further means through which to develop the dynamism of the process of this writing.

I first became aware, and subsequently interested, in the phenomenon of reflective learning, while taking a graduate class in adult learning theory. It was during these class periods, when the ideas of learning were discussed amongst a group of learners, that I began to traverse the meanings these ideas had for me as an individual.

At the time of taking the class on learning theory, I had been back in the United States for just about one year, after spending over two years in Nepal, and other countries of South and South East Asia. During that year, after I returned back to the United States, I struggled and searched for meaning of those years spent away. It was this searching, which undoubtedly brought me back to the classroom that I was in, searching for an understanding of what I had experienced.

It was within these discussions that I began to discover something previously unknown to me: I took a voyage within, reflecting on recent experiences that had had a profound effect on me as an individual. These daytime discussions immediately transported me back to my previous years spent in Nepal, and how I had, and was, continuing to be transformed by my experiences there and elsewhere in Asia. I can recall the almost amorphous existence of my thoughts up until that time, switching and reconfiguring into patterns of discernment as allusively as clouds caught in the wind. It

was only during these classroom discussions, which introduced me to such terms, that my ideas started to take shape.

My experiences were what, after reading a great deal of literature on reflective learning, I consider to be 'transformative' in nature. I hope, upon reading this thesis, the reader has a rudimentary understanding of what is meant by such a phrase. Up until the time when I began to become familiar with such literature and terminology, I had no such language to refer to what I was experiencing. It was an amazing experience in itself, when I first became aware of these ideas.

I moved back and forth between my own thoughts and the various texts and persons with whom I discussed these ideas. The more I learned about the idea the more the term reflection seemed appropriate. It was as if the ideas and I were two mirrors reflecting off of one another. I can still remember the variable moments of epiphany when I first began to make the meaningful connections between what I was learning and how it was significant to my own experiences. It was an amazing moment for me as an individual, as I began to gain greater control over what had, and was, happening to me as a result of my experiences abroad. It also instilled within me the motivation to explore this phenomenon further. What a great opportunity I would have to do so!

So, in discussion of the idea of reflective learning, I began to wonder how I could explore this idea further. Fortunately, even before taking this class, I had arranged to work for the study abroad program that became the focus of this thesis. Whether serendipitous or not, my eventual involvement in the program gave me the opportunity for which I was searching. I remember, that even at that time, I began to recognize that this was not only an objective inquiry into the phenomena of reflective learning, but the

beginning of a personal dialogue between me, the students, and this notion of learning that I had discovered. Thus began my own journey into the ideas that guided this study.

The writing of this thesis certainly became a mirror for my thoughts, revealing at times, yet often overly reflective to the point where I felt I was looking at a never ending reflection or mirror images, moving me further from the meaning of what I was searching for. It was during these times that I searched for friends, family and mentors, who then became a new form of mirror through which I could reflect my thoughts. I will be eternally grateful for their unconditional support. Again, this point, of reflectively learning through the social engagement with others, was brought up in the text as means through which many participants sought and facilitated their own reflective learning. It seemed only natural then, for me to do the same, even though it was often instinctual, and beyond the rationality of predetermined thought.

While writing this text, I was also absorbed in texts that guided most of the ideas that informed my opinions of my own work and writing. In this way, the texts, which I perused, extended my own thoughts, and transformed my understanding throughout the five months that this was written, and the preceding months of participating in the program with the students. The philosophical positioning that would eventually inform my own exploration of reflective learning was what was referred to as constructivism in the body of the text. One of the main premises for this position is the meaningful construction of knowledge and learning by an individual. This presupposes an ideal that claims that there are always multiple realities from which various individuals interpret their experiences, because it is the meaningful interpretations that hold true for the individual in their interpretations of the experience. Being that this was the philosophical

position that guided the study, it also must be understood that this position informs my own beliefs and opinions about learning. It would be absurd to claim or admit that this was not true, but it can often allude the reader and author, and thus must be constantly reinforced. I wish to take this space to reinforce this aspect of my own learning. What was presented in the text was undeniably biased through that which was meaningful to me as a learner.

So, it cannot be said, that at any times my thoughts and learning were fulfilled in any absolute sense. The overall process was, however, a fulfillment of the meaningful learning that was necessary at this particular period in my life. In a relative sense, my own learning of this phenomenon has continued up until the final printing of this thesis, and will continue far beyond what this text will demonstrate.

I have included this final section as a means to reflectively related how I learned through the process of completing this thesis. It has been a journey of discovery and rediscovery. In the end it has been an instructive means, which has informed me of that which is most important: to learn.



## **Appendices**

## Appendix A

## **Interview Protocol**

1. What issues regarding your learning are you thinking of at this point of the experience?
2. Why is this?
3. What do you think influenced you to think about the issues you have mentioned?
4. What does this mean for you in terms of what you have learned? What to you anticipate doing with this new knowledge.

## **Appendix B**

## **Interview Protocol Revision**

1. Have you been thinking about your own learning up until this point in the experience?

Probes:

In regards to

What you are learning?

How you are learning?

2. Why do you think you are thinking about these things?
3. What do you think caused you to think about these things? Are there things that you are doing to facilitate this?
4. Have you been thinking about your learning in regards to your self?
5. What does this mean for you in terms of what you have learned?  
Does what you just described have any meaning to you?  
Is the meaning relevant to this experience, or does it have meaning outside of the context of this experience?

## Appendix C

### **Personal Interview Consent Form**

This research is being conducted to gather information that may be pertinent to the eventual writing of a Master's thesis. I will be conducting interviews to gain information about the expectations of students and administrators with regards to the Nepal Overseas Study program offered through Michigan State University.

Your participation in this interview is completely voluntary. This interview will be recorded. All recordings will be confidential in nature. You may elect not to answer any questions, and you may end the interview at any time. Your opinions will be kept in complete confidentiality and none of your comments will be directly attributed to you in the writing of the thesis.

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

## **Research Consent Form**

This research is being conducted to gather information that may be pertinent to the eventual writing of a Master's thesis. Observations will be recorded by the researcher as they pertain to the research exploring the learning of students in an overseas study experience.

Your permission for this research to be conducted is completely voluntary. You may elect to not be a participant if you so desire. References will be kept in complete confidentiality and none will be directly attributed to you in the writing of the thesis.

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_



## **Research Consent Form**

This research is being conducted to gather information that may be pertinent to the eventual writing of a Master's thesis. As per requirements for the Nepal Overseas Study program students will submit various assignments to instructors. For those who choose to participate in this research those assignments that they submit will be reviewed by the researcher to better understand the different dimensions of their learning.

Permission to review these assignments for this research is completely voluntary. The researcher will not be involved in the grading of the assignments submitted and thus review of them for this research will not influence the grading marks for the students. Any references made in the eventual writing of the thesis will be kept in complete confidentiality. There will not be direct reference to you in the writing of the thesis.

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

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