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2009 Forum on Intercultural Learning and Exchange

Learning
intercultural
competence
in exchange

Enhancing
intercultural
competence within
the living context

Narration of
re-entry experience

Interculturalists
facing the global
scenario





La Fondazione Intercultura *Onlus*

La Fondazione Intercultura *Onlus* nasce il 12 maggio 2007 da una costola dell'Associazione che porta lo stesso nome e che da 55 anni accumula un patrimonio unico di esperienze educative internazionali, che la Fondazione intende utilizzare su più vasta scala, favorendo una cultura del dialogo e dello scambio interculturale tra i giovani e sviluppando ricerche, programmi e strutture che aiutino le nuove generazioni ad **aprirsi al mondo ed a vivere da cittadini consapevoli e preparati in una società multiculturale**. Vi ha aderito il Ministero degli Affari Esteri. La Fondazione è presieduta dall'Ambasciatore Roberto Toscano; segretario generale è Roberto Ruffino; del consiglio e del comitato scientifico fanno parte eminenti rappresentanti del mondo della cultura, dell'economia e dell'università.

Nei primi anni di attività ha promosso un convegno internazionale sulla Identità italiana tra Europa e società multiculturale, numerosi incontri con interculturalisti di vari Paesi, ricerche sulla percezione dell'alterità da parte dei giovani, un progetto pilota di scambi intra-europei con l'Unione Europea. Raccoglie contributi di enti locali, fondazioni ed aziende a beneficio dei programmi di Intercultura. Gestisce il sito www.scuoleinternazionali.org.

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L'Associazione Intercultura *Onlus*

L'Associazione Intercultura *Onlus* (fondata nel 1955) è un ente morale riconosciuto con DPR n. 578/85, posto sotto la tutela del Ministero degli Affari Esteri. Dal 1 gennaio 1998 ha status di Organizzazione non lucrativa di utilità sociale, iscritta al registro delle associazioni di volontariato del Lazio: è infatti gestita e amministrata da migliaia di volontari, che hanno scelto di operare nel settore educativo e scolastico, per sensibilizzarlo alla dimensione internazionale. È presente in 132 città italiane ed in 65 Paesi di tutti i continenti, attraverso la sua affiliazione all'AFS ed all'EFIL. Ha statuto consultivo all'UNESCO e al Consiglio d'Europa e collabora ad alcuni progetti dell'Unione Europea. Ha rapporti con i nostri Ministeri degli Esteri e della Pubblica Istruzione. A Intercultura sono stati assegnati il Premio della Cultura della Presidenza del Consiglio e il Premio della Solidarietà della Fondazione Italiana per il Volontariato per oltre 40 anni di attività in favore della pace e della conoscenza fra i popoli.

L'Associazione promuove, organizza e finanzia scambi ed esperienze interculturali, inviando ogni anno oltre 1500 ragazzi delle scuole secondarie a vivere e studiare all'estero ed accogliendo nel nostro paese altrettanti giovani di ogni nazione che scelgono di arricchirsi culturalmente trascorrendo un periodo di vita nelle nostre famiglie e nelle nostre scuole. Inoltre Intercultura organizza seminari, conferenze, corsi di formazione e di aggiornamento per Presidi, insegnanti, volontari della propria e di altre associazioni, sugli scambi culturali. Tutto questo per favorire l'incontro e il dialogo tra persone di tradizioni culturali diverse ed aiutarle a comprendersi e a collaborare in modo costruttivo.

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in questo numero

2009 Forum on Intercultural Learning and Exchange



Eccezionalmente questo numero della rivista INTERCULTURA viene pubblicato in lingua inglese, per riflettere più da vicino discussioni e conclusioni del primo Forum on Intercultural Learning and Exchange tenuto a Colle di Val d'Elsa dal 3 al 6 ottobre 2009. Il Forum, voluto dalla Fondazione Intercultura, ha scadenza biennale e riunisce studiosi ed attori di progetti di educazione interculturale attraverso lo scambio di studenti, per comprenderne più a fondo la metodologia e le ragioni di eventuali successi o insuccessi.

Il Forum del 2009 ha visto la partecipazione di una sessantina di esperti, per metà provenienti dal mondo accademico europeo, americano e giapponese e per l'altra metà da organizzazioni ed istituzioni che promuovono scambi di studenti, tra cui ovviamente l'associazione Intercultura. Ha dibattuto due temi principali: le competenze interculturali che si possono acquisire attraverso uno scambio di studenti e la narrazione dell'esperienza al ritorno, come chiave per un proficuo reinserimento nel proprio ambiente.

La nostra rivista ringrazia Milton Bennett e l'Intercultural Development Research Institute per aver curato la parte accademica del programma e Luca Fornari per aver redatto la relazione che pubblichiamo.

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Background of the *Forum on Intercultural Learning and Exchange (FILE)*

The topic of intercultural learning and competence is a major focus of *Afs Intercultural Programs*, and *Intercultura* particularly has long been a leader in recognizing the importance of intercultural theory and research in study abroad program development, volunteer training, and homestay orientation. The *2009 Forum on International Learning and Exchange (FILE)* maintains this commitment by providing an opportunity for intercultural scholars to discuss state-of-the-art theory, definitions, and research in the field of international exchange, and to apply that knowledge to the crucial process of re-entry.

The *Intercultural Development Research Institute (IDRI nstitute)* is dedicated to furthering theory and research in intercultural relations, particularly from a developmental perspective. *IDRI nstitute* cooperated with *Fondazione Intercultura* by organizing the program for *FILE*, and by identifying and inviting the international scholars who participated. *Intercultura* in turn provided funding for international travel, sponsored all on-site arrangements including housing and meals, and invited a group of Italian scholars and practitioners. Finally there were about sixty participants, including subject matter experts (SMEs) from Italy, the United States, Japan, Finland, France, and Germany and practitioners from throughout Italy.

The 2009 *FILE* was an outgrowth of the *Moving Beyond Mobility (MBM)* conference held in Berlin in October 2008. The *MBM* conference focused on state of the art research and practice in intercultural learning in study abroad, using a relatively traditional format of paper presentations and discussion. It was funded by the European Union Programme of Lifelong Learning, and co-sponsored by *EFIL*, the *European Federation of Intercultural Learning*, *AFS Germany*, *IDRI nstitute*, and some other *AFS Intercultural Programs*-affiliated organizations. While the interest of *AFS* was on secondary exchange, much of the research and best practice was about university-level exchange.

Papers presented at the *MBM* conference were refereed by a selection committee made up of subject matter experts (in the case of research papers) and expert practitioners (in the case of best practice papers). Those papers that were also rated highly by *MBM* conference participants have been published in:

Bennett, M. (Guest Ed) (2009), Special Double Supplement: "State of the art research on intercultural learning in study abroad and best practice for intercultural learning in international youth exchange," *Journal of Intercultural Education*, International Association of Intercultural Education.



2009 Forum on Intercultural Learning and Exchange

Sponsored by *Fondazione Intercultura*
in cooperation with *Intercultural Development
Research Institute*

COLLE DI VAL D'ELSA (SIENA, ITALY), OCTOBER 3-6, 2009

By Milton J. Bennett, Ph.D., IDRInstitute with the assistance of Luca Fornari, IDRInstitute

STRUCTURE OF THE 2009 FILE

Like the *MBM* conference, *FILE* included research at both the secondary and higher education levels. Specifically, the focus of the conference was on 1) the definition and measurement of intercultural competence, and 2) the narration of re-entry experience by returning exchange students. The meeting extended over two days, with the first day dedicated to the research topic and the second to re-entry.

The format of the *FILE* was intended to establish state-of-the-art themes and to encourage discussion among peers. At the beginning of each day, plenary sessions introduced the topic and suggested themes for discussion. The plenary sessions each addressed three central questions that had been posed by scholars and practitioners in discussions prior to the conference. The plenary leader introduced the topic of the day, and the three participants selected for each introductory plenary presented a range of knowledge and opinion on the topic.

The plenary session was followed by two rounds of semi-structured discussion groups. The topics of the discussion groups reflected a thematic analysis of questions that had been earlier elicited from many of the SMEs who were participants in the 2009 *FILE*. Those SMEs were then assigned as leaders of the group. They introduced the topic and led discussion more or less informed by the set of questions associated with the topic. Each group was repeated, so that *FILE* participants were able to select two subjects within the day's topic for deeper discussion. Additionally, facilitators were able to hear a wide range of thoughts on the topic in the two sessions.

At the end of each day, facilitators reported on the themes that had emerged in the discussion groups in a plenary session, and those themes were synthesized to some extent by the plenary leader. *FILE* participants were then encouraged to make observations or summary comments on the day.

For this report, audio recordings of the two plenary sessions each day were fully transcribed and subjected to thematic analysis. Comments by panelists were then selected as representative of both the assigned themes of the conference and of other themes that were identified from the transcript. In sum, there are three levels of thematic analysis incorporated into these comments: 1) the themes that emerged from the original questions submitted by participants before the conference; 2) the themes that emerged during discussion groups; and 3) the themes that emerged from the final transcript. The results of this process of thematic refinement should be of interest to scholars and practitioners who need to know how the narrative of intercultural education is evolving, and particularly to graduate students who are searching for research topics in this area.

LEARNING INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE IN EXCHANGE: THEMES AND DISCUSSANTS

The morning plenary panel on Intercultural Competence was constituted of Milton Bennett (IDRInstitute, Italy & USA), Susanna Mantovani (University of Milano-Bicocca, Italy), Liisa Salo-Lee (University of Jyväskylä, Finland), and Darla Deardorff (Duke University, USA). The three organizing questions for the plenary were:

1. What are the desired outcomes of study abroad?
Desired by whom?
2. What is meant by "intercultural competence"?
3. What is the difference between "intervention" and "non-intervention" study-abroad programs?

Following are the discussion sessions on intercultural competence, associated questions, and facilitators.

- 1. Ethicality and Effectiveness in Program Design,**
facilitated by Judith Martin (Arizona State University, USA)

- a. What obligation do we as educators have to maximize opportunities during study abroad /international exchange programs?
- b. Which programming approaches have conference participants found to be useful in facilitating increases in intercultural competence?
- c. How can those associated with programs abroad —teachers, intercultural trainers, host family members, even teachers at students' home campuses—facilitate intercultural learning through second language teaching?
- d. What is the relative importance of the orientation and reentry in terms of promoting intercultural learning? Why does pre-sojourn preparation seem to dominate (or be “privileged”) as part of the international education cycle?
- e. Although it is recognized that both orientation prior to going abroad and continued instruction after arrival overseas is optimal, what should one do if one must make a choice of which to emphasize? Where and why would you put your resources and time allocations?

2. Research on Intervention Strategies, facilitated by Mick Vande Berg (CIEE: Council on International Educational Exchange, USA)

- a. What is currently being done to assess/measure intercultural competence in study abroad? What instruments/methods are being used and what are the cultural biases/limitations of these tools/methods? How are the data from the assessment being used? What is the optimal process for assessment/measurement of intercultural learning in study abroad?
- b. What personal factors and/or program factors influence the extent to which intercultural learning and intercultural competence follow from a study abroad/international exchange experience? To what extent have these changed in the recent years?
- c. Do learners need active facilitation of intercultural learning and development while they are abroad, or do students develop as well when they are trained prior to and after study abroad? (To what extent is training during the program essential?)
- d. Is there a minimum amount of time (for instruction, reading or work on the internet) that is necessary to achieve any significant intercultural learning and, if so, what is it?

- e. Are there design characteristics of study abroad programs that are correlated with student intercultural development abroad? What are these?

3. Research on SA Environment: Host Families, Curriculum, and Culture, facilitated by Lilli Engle (American University Center of Provence, France)

- a. What factors influence whether host families also develop intercultural competence and learning? And under what conditions might the members of host families actually see their stereotypes confirmed?
- b. What sort of facilitation strategies will allow students who are enrolled directly in host university courses, and who are housed with host families, to develop their intercultural competence?
- c. To what extent does ‘cultural match’ have an impact on the degree of learning and competence, in terms of Geert Hofstede’s dimensions. For instance, does going from one individualistic culture to another individualistic culture make intercultural competence easier to gain because the cultural distance is otherwise too large?
- d. To what extent should study abroad programs “immerse” students into host university studies and life, including direct enrollment in didactic courses, when most of the students have been learning back in the US in classes that are increasingly interactive? (To what extent should US sponsored study abroad programs accommodate earlier student learning experiences into the design of courses?)
- e. If intercultural competence is in fact valued as a primary goal of study abroad, what are the essential qualities and skills of an on-site facilitator and what forms may his/her intervention take for best results?

4. Developmental approaches to research and intercultural training, facilitated by Ida Castiglioni (University of Milano-Bicocca, Italy)

- a. How much training do learners need while abroad, in order to make significant progress with their intercultural learning? (All other things being equal, what is the relationship between frequency of training abroad and the intercultural development of students?)



- b. Why do female students develop more intercultural than males—and what if anything can be done about this? (What sort of training program will meet the intercultural learning needs of various groups of students?)
- c. What are the core concepts and training techniques that a facilitator will need to use in order to be able to do DMIS-guided development?
- d. How can research into study abroad be made more constructivist and developmental, so that the research methods are consistent with the underlying assumptions and expectations of study abroad.
- e. What is meant by intercultural competence in different cultures and from different cultural perspectives? In other words, intercultural competence according to whom?

5. Intercultural competence and global education, facilitated by Alessio Surian (Intercultura, Italy)

- a. Can academic institutions continue to equate study abroad with the development of intercultural competence when recent studies show that students do not progress significantly in their intercultural sensitivity development abroad without purposeful, professional intervention?
- b. How important is the development of students' intercultural competence to the general ambition of the study abroad field?
- c. To what extent can/should study abroad program structure the cross-cultural encounter in order to facilitate intercultural communication? What are the most effective “engagement” strategies and their limits?
- d. Is the recent trend toward Service Learning the profession's way of bringing maximum (reassuring) structure to the cross-cultural experience? To what result?

The analysis of the written transcripts yielded the following major themes:

- 1. Definitions of intercultural competence, intercultural learning, and issues regarding their assessment**
- 2. Enhancing intercultural competence within the living context**
- 3. New strategies of peer support and use of digital culture**
- 4. Exchange professionals as complicity builders**

In the following sections, comments that are representative of these themes have been selected and edited from the transcripts of the morning and afternoon plenary sessions. References are to the name of the commenter and the position of the comment in the transcript.

COMMENTS ON LEARNING INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE

1. Definitions of Intercultural Competence, Intercultural Learning, and Issues Regarding their Assessment

It is probably useful to think of intercultural competence as a special case of competence in general, and also to distinguish between “cultural” and “intercultural” competence:

“Competence” is the ability to do something, acquired either through primary socialization (eg linguistic competence) or secondary socialization/education (eg artistic competence, athletic competence, etc). “Cultural competence” is naturally exercised by all normal people who have received primary socialization in a human group “Intercultural competence” is the ability to exercise cultural competence outside of one's own culture. It is usually acquired through intentional education.
(Milton Bennett, Slide)

While the above definition of competence seems fairly broad, we should be attentive to the cultural context of all our definitions, including this one:

What are other cultural perspectives on intercultural competence? ...looking at this from an Indian perspective, a Chinese perspective, an Arab perspective, a Latin American and so on... Because when you look at the Western models they are very individual based. But... some of these other non-Western perspectives really focus on the relationship. In Africa for example the concept of Ubuntu 'I am because we are and we are because I am.' (Darla Deardorff, 1.91-94)

If you look for instance at Asian Management Competencies, they do emphasize relationship, they do emphasize leaders integrity, they emphasize how important it is to be inspiring. This is a little bit like what Coleman has identified in his social intelligence lately... and it is this kind of thing that we should incorporate [into our thinking about intercultural competence] (Lisa Salo-Lee; 1.152)

But there is a strong need for valid research on this issue to avoid idiosyncratic bias:

If an individual from another culture says 'intercultural competence works differently in my culture' then it would be important to us that we see a construct, a model. Something that we could build on, something that we could test, other than just the personal opinion of somebody. We want to get some objectivity on this (Mick Vande Berg; 2.47)

Panelists agreed that without intervention, cross-cultural contact does not usually yield more than "tolerance." Transferable intercultural learning is a product of systematic intervention through a coordinated pre-departure, on-site, and re-entry intercultural curriculum. Such a curriculum generally increases awareness of "subjective culture":

This is the idea of 'world view' as distinguished from the objective culture – architecture,



literature, and that kind of big C culture that continues to be the educational focus of study abroad programs in many cases. But it is well known that big C is not the stuff of intercultural learning. The stuff of intercultural learning is an understanding of subjective culture – including ones own – that allows one to develop the competence to interact sensitively and competently across cultural contexts. (Milton Bennett; 1.31-32).

Organizations that promote intercultural learning through study abroad programs need to assess the intercultural competence that has been acquired by their students during the program. When programs position themselves as "learner-centered," assessment is a useful tool for helping both the student and the organization to understand what has happened during the SA experience. On a macro level, assessment could also be used as an instrument enhancing the entire program.

The assessment of intercultural competence was widely discussed during FILE, including:

- who should be assessed (only the students through self reported questionnaires, or should the target group be widened?)
- why (what is the link between assessment, methodology and goals?)
- when (considering that intercultural learning is an ongoing process after re-entry)
- how (what instruments and what methodology)
- what (intercultural competences, intercultural sensitivity ...)

Plenary panelists agreed that goals, methodologies, actions, and assessment tools need to be consistent with one another, and all the above aspects should be clear to professionals assessing study abroad students:

When we look at assessment it is really important to first start with the mission, with the program for example, and then the goals.



A goal might be to develop intercultural competence in our students, but the goal is not what we assess, we need to break the goal into more specific learning outcomes if we are trying to assess the whole intercultural competence. We should begin by asking, 'What is it that you want to measure specifically'? That should inform the methodology and the tools that we use. It is crucial to align the missions, goals, learning outcomes and their indicators to determine what methods we use for assessment. (Darla Deardorff, 1.173)

Assessment of the study abroad experience has traditionally relied on subjective reports from participants. While this provides important information about the students' experience, it is not the whole picture:

Intercultural competence can be assessed not only from the point of view of the young person... who lives it, but from the other point of view. Intercultural competence implies a relationship, and we can really tell if somebody is interculturally competent if we have the opinion of the people of the context he or she encounters. And probably... the assessments we have are not equally sensitive on that, since they have been developed only for the program participants who have the experience. (Susanna Mantovani, 1.51-52)

This theme of multiple inputs to assessment was expanded upon by other members of the panel:

Assessment must involve ... both the self perspective, but also the other perspective, which makes the assessment piece much more complicated. But to do it well, we need to use a multi-method multi-perspective approach to assess intercultural competence. There are a

few programs out there that are looking at this, for example asking the host families their perspective. At Duke we have been (...) asking cooperating teachers in the classroom who observe the student 'are they being appropriate in their interactions with students in the classroom?'. So there are ways to do this but it becomes much more complex than administering a self report survey. (Darla Deardorff, 1.87)

We also need to look at organizational and societal levels. I'm kind of in favor of this multiple-assessment method, multiple-assessors approach. I think it is like other kinds of research, where we don't find what is going on if we only use one source of data, or one approach. We need to 'look from the airplane', but how the terrain looks is not sufficient; we need to go down and have also quantitative, qualitative, mixed method look. (Lisa Salo-Lee, 1.154)

The introductory panel was also concerned with possible misunderstandings of the relationship between the measurement of intercultural sensitivity and the actual enactment of intercultural competence:

Assessments always reduce the complexity of the phenomenon observed: only a selected type of data emerges from the evaluation tools. Even though a reduction of complexity is necessary, often a superficial use of models or measurement instruments could bring to a reification of some kind of a category into a classification. (Milton Bennett; 1.58)

It seems that this thing is crucial: there is a constant risk of reduction. You need models and you need approaches to systematize your understanding and knowledge of a complex phenomenon. But the moment you deduct practices from these models..., the risk that they get frozen is very high. (Susanna Mantovani, 1.63)

An example of Mantovani's concern was given about the use of the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) instrument to measure the Development Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS):

The model was always meant to be an entrée into the world view of people's development. It was not meant to be a classification. The development of its measurement has of course created tension, since once something becomes measurable there comes the danger of the reification of those measurement categories – the measurement becomes the thing. But in fact the measurement was meant only to give an indication of what issues people were dealing with, and thus to facilitate engagement of their world view... We construct a model, we construct a view of the world and then we may also construct ways of testing that view of the world but none of that is to say that we are testing reality or that we are modeling reality. We are creating models that are useful for some purpose – in this case, for the purpose of understanding the acquisition of intercultural competence. (Milton Bennett, 1.221; 2.54)

2. Enhancing Intercultural Competence within the Living Context

The tensions between theory and practice, between explanations and the behavior they purport to explicate, are central to learning intercultural competence in exchange programs. One way the tensions are exposed is through the way “culture” is defined in both theoretical and practical terms. The development of a constructivist approach to the definition of culture avoids the reification of cultural categories. From a classification of culture using broad categories (mainly national culture categories as Italians, Germans, Japanese), culture can now be defined in a more dynamic, multi-layered way: “we all have a mixture of cultures within ourselves” (Participant, 1.239).

Theories and paradigms reflect their times... Many cross cultural studies have been done thinking that cultures are something rather stable, do not change with time and of course this is also true, but things also change very quickly today. (Lisa Salo-Lee 1.125)

I can see a Norwegian student sitting on the tram in Oslo and he is chatting with his cellular phone with another student in Sydney in Australia. They have a common culture. You can say it's not the nationality that is important, but it is that they are both youngsters... But the same student can go and see his grand mother in the afternoon and that mobilizes other elements of his culture, communicating with his grandmother who does

not know what is up and down of this cell phone. (Øyvind Dahl; 1.228)

Very often we are under the impression that the only way in which somebody, a student for example, can become intercultural competent or can have intercultural experience is by going abroad. And the further away the better, so if you go to China instead of just going across the boarder to Germany, then you get somehow more enriched because [you have a] more intercultural experience. I think very often we miss some of the chances of understanding what cultural and intercultural communication is within our own circle. (Participant, 1.241)

A major implication of this expanded definition of intercultural experience is its application to intercultural learning between immigrant and host culture groups. However, the issue of power symmetry is usually different for students studying abroad and immigrant students in host country schools:

In principal [exchange] puts people in a situation of a certain symmetry of power... [But] for an immigrant, for a child of an immigrant family, is not exactly the same thing. So what can we learn from the two sides? (Susanna Mantovani, 1.41)

While asymmetry of power may exacerbate stereotypes for immigrant students and thus interfere with intercultural learning, for the exchange student the impediment to intercultural learning is probably too much comfort:

When you are at home it's very easy to stay in your comfort zones, so in order to really become competent you need to go through certain kind of issues that are not that pleasant – you need pain. (Lisa Salo-Lee, 1.257)

If there is too much emphasis on similarity, it simply lets them reproduce that feeling of safety and comfort of their home environment. They need to experience the difference that host families abroad can provide. (Lilli Engle, 2.67).

3. New Strategies of Peer Support and Use of Digital Culture

It is increasingly clear that traditional teaching methods, such as lecture/discussion in pre-departure orientations, may be useful but are certainly insufficient for intercultural learning. Some new practices made possible

largely by the rapidly evolving technology of Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, etc:

What about those students who's got the same tools, the same exposure to an intercultural process and yet are not interculturally learning. What can we learn from them? what was wrong in our approach? Self based learning and peer very often e-learning, online learning helps. In a way and we heard it in different ways teaching is a way to learn, teaching your peers is probably the best moment where you are both learning yourself and empowering other people to get a grasp about what's going on (Alessio Surian, 2.132)

Of course, the idea of digital culture in itself represents an opportunity for intercultural learning:

*[In discussing how students] are learning through and with peers or in isolation..., something really, really nice happened: somebody [in the session] raised the issue of **digital natives versus digital immigrants**, meaning people who were born in the digital era versus people who are immigrant, who are new learners of the digital means. What this mean and how does this impact of course the peer learning? How should we use this methodology as well to enhance [other kinds of] learning? (Ida Castiglioni; 2.106)*

What digital technology does is enhance the possibilities of peer-learning, which may be the key element in intercultural learning from exchange:

I've long observed that intercultural work seems to work better as group than it does individually (Milton Bennett, 1.207)

I think strongly that intervening in group situations seems to be more effective that has been shown experimentally to be more effective because people do clearly learn effectively from peers (Mick Vande Berg, 2.41)

This is particularly evident in re-entry:

For the US students, I think where we've missed the boat is we say we the administration in the study abroad office think that you need to come in and have this re-entry stuff because may be you're kind of having some problems or something like that. And I think that's exactly the wrong tack. I think it has to be peer to peer, I think it has to be student driven, I think it has to be student-learners, I think it has to be

student-mentors. You can have people in your offices guiding it, facilitating it, setting it up, doing the logistics, getting it funded. But the people that have the real credibility are the students that have just come back, the people just above them by two or three years. (Bruce LaBrack, 4.23)

4. Exchange Professionals as Complicity Builders

Apart from the students, exchange programs involve many other players, all participating in the process and carrying specific expectations: the student's family and friends, the host family, the schools/universities and, of course, the professionals involved in the organization of the entire program. All these actors have slightly different expectations on the outcome of the exchange experience:

What strikes me about much of the research... is organizational asymmetry in terms of the goals for study abroad or international educational exchange... If you are looking at youth exchange program... there may be very different goals for that experience, that the organization holds, and therefore the definition by extension of outcomes in terms of inter-cultural competence will be very different. (Dave Bachner, 1.165)

These different expectations may need to be treated as both an ethical issue and as a matter for practical negotiation:

An ethical student exchange involves clear definable publicly stated goals [and] also involves truth and advertising so that we are not promising something that we don't deliver... An ethical student exchange involves both host families and student families that we treat in a more holistic way – it's not just individual centered, but [we also] offer support to host families and also to the students' families. And this is probably particularly true when we are dealing with secondary exchanges (Judith Martin, 2.12)

*The strategy that bridged both groups came out to be **establishing your value system**. In the sense of establishing very clearly what your intention is, what are you aiming for in terms of your learning goals... It is the idea of creating a complicity amongst all the actors that touch this environment that is trying to be created... So if you in your*

promotional materials put forward that what we're offering your child is an immersion experience and we want them very much to create a zone of intimacy with their new family you can help us by not phoning everyday. By not expecting them to respond by e-mail all the time so that the in anticipation the families and friends can enter into your logic before hand and support your entire initiative" (Lilli Engle, 2.76-77)

In anticipation of the next section, we will include here comments on the particular challenge of creating complicity in re-entry:

People expect you to fit back within hours or days or weeks at the most. They are not, "they" meaning the schools, the families, the friends, they are not patient, they want you to be back, they want to sort of take care of whatever you have done quickly, in a simple way that they can understand and then get over with it. (Roberto Ruffino, 4.117)

The families want to see their child back the way he left. ... But they are not ready to certain effects... [We] have to prepare families and schools to see a different person" (Anna Pozzi, 4.90-92)

NARRATION OF RE-ENTRY EXPERIENCE: THEMES AND DISCUSSANTS

The introductory plenary panel on Narration of Re-Entry Experience was constituted of Roberto Rufino (Fondazione Intercultura, Italy), Nan Sussman (City University of New York, USA), Shoko Araki (Oberlin University, Japan), and Dave Bachner (American University, USA). The three questions for the plenary were:

- 1. What is meant by "narrating" or "construing" the experience of study abroad?**
- 2. How do the stories students tell themselves and others about their study abroad experiences impede or support their intercultural development?**
- 3. How are reentry programs and processes conducive (or not) to constructing an appropriate and beneficial narrative?**



Following are the discussion sessions on intercultural competence, associated questions, and facilitators.

1. Research and Best Practices in Re-entry Programming, facilitated by Bruce LaBrack (University of the Pacific, USA)

- a. What role does structured facilitation of narration of one's experience abroad (e.g. by providing a list of questions to address when journaling, by conducting guided reflection discussions, etc.) play in determining the construction of one's abroad experience? In determining the extent of intercultural learning that occurs during re-entry? How does the introduction of culture-general categories, models of culture shock and reverse culture shock, or other theoretical frameworks effect narratives?
- b. Use of technology in minimizing re-entry distress?
- c. Reentry, like initial entry into a new culture, can be experienced multiple, sequential times. How does (or should) this be handled in a group reentry situation? Will the internal group differences in experience impact on what kind of training activities might be offered (and effective) to "returnees" of significantly disparate experience levels?
- d. For most educational institutions the duration and frequency of the reentry programs has not seen a significant increase for many years. However interest in and discussion about the process has dramatically increased recently. What are the reasons (economic, social, philosophic, logistical, etc.) behind the lag between "perceived



benefits” purportedly associated with reentry training and the actual delivery of corresponding programs?

2. Home Culture Influences on Narrating the Experience Abroad, facilitated by Ulrich Zeutschel (Transfer Beratung & Training Germany)

- How does home culture shape the problems and coping strategies of the repatriate and the reactions of compatriots to repatriates?
- What values and historical experience form the cultural responses to repatriation?
- How do repatriates change their home societies?
- What sorts of stories are most likely to be well-received by those at home; to what extent does this effect the selection of narrative by the returnee; what impact does this have on the intercultural development of the returnee?
- To what extent should faculty members at home campuses inform the development of study abroad programs abroad? (This question goes, among other things, to assumptions governing teaching and learning, at home and abroad, and to how home institutions respond to the learning of students abroad—academic and intercultural—when the students return home.)

3. The Appropriateness and Effectiveness of Narration, facilitated by Laura Bathurst (University of the Pacific, USA)

- How can we generate more authentic re-entry narratives and minimize construals that

romanticize and distort the experience?

- What might narratives (including, but certainly not limited to anecdotes) tell us about the ways in which experiences abroad are being integrated into students' conceptions of the world?
- Does the silencing of these stories (whether through self-censorship or external imposition) effect intercultural learning? In what ways?
- To what extent should faculty and study abroad professionals take employee expectations/desires into account in designing study abroad programs. (Put differently: should an institution or organization design a study abroad program in ways that increase the likelihood that students will develop skills in working in teams--the most highly desired skill for employers, and one that, at this point, they associate relatively little with studying abroad?)
- How do the forms and functions of “narratives” differ when characterizing the results of intercultural learning for different purposes (personal, professional, educational)?

4. Practical re-entry issues with Intercultura returnees, facilitated by Anna Pozzi (Intercultura, Italy)

- Which re-entry approaches have conference participants found to be most useful in helping returnees integrate intercultural learning into ongoing personal, educational, and professional activities?
- How can AFS (and other exchange programs) collaborate with career services offices to train students how to articulate their study abroad experiences in ways that will allow employers to see, during employment interviews, that the student has developed skills, during study abroad, that are important to the employers?
- To what extent do people with exchange experiences seek out others (enter into new friendship networks) with similar experiences or others who are not ‘indigenous’ after re-entry.
- To what extent do young people change their career path decisions due to their exchange experiences - for instance going into humanities, social sciences to better understand what they have experienced.

Analysis of the written transcript yielded the

following themes in the Day Two discussion of re-entry:

1. **What is meant by “narrating experience” and why is it important?**
2. **Narration and the locus of learning**
3. **Making pre-departure/on-site/re-entry programs interculturally sensitive**
4. **Interculturalists facing the global scenario**

As was the case for Day One, the following sections present selected and edited comments that are representative of these themes.

COMMENTS ON NARRATING RE-ENTRY EXPERIENCE

1. What is the “Narration” of Experience, and Why is it Important?

The morning plenary on Narrating Re-entry Experience established the application of intercultural competence to this particular aspect of educational exchange. The panel agreed that “having” an experience is different than being able to intentionally incorporate that experience into one's ongoing studies and professional life. Experience does not have any inherent coherence – no beginning/middle/end, and no meaning relative to our goals, our beliefs, or to other experiences in our lives. To narrate our experience is to build meaning and coherence that makes the experience part of us.

A narrative tells the story of an experience... But I think it's important to remember that a normal life doesn't have the kind of coherence that a narrative has. So when we ask individuals to reflect and to write in particular about their experiences there's a certain coherence to it that doesn't happen in our real lives. (Nan Sussmann, 3.144)

... if you cannot tell others what has happened to you, I'm not sure that you have understood what happened to you.... So it's an internal educational need for the individuals who go on an exchange to be able to find some mental organization of the experiences that they have lived. (Roberto Ruffino, 3.19-21)

Narration can be seen as an active and ongoing process that may be supported by... re-entry facilitation... ideally linking the reflection back to issues addressed in pre-departure orientation and maintaining a mix of positive versus negative of the spectacular highlights or crisis in the exchange experience versus the [mundane] everyday experiences

(David Bachner, 3.101)

Narration is necessary to generate the competencies we hope are nurtured by educational exchange. It was noted that The Italian Ministry of Education three years ago issued a ruling to all secondary schools in Italy stating a number of competencies that the schools of the country had to incorporate into their curriculum and their activity. The competencies were the same as those specified for the 21st century by the council of ministers of education of the European union, and they included: learning how to learn, learning how to make projects, learning how to communicate, learning how to participate in groups and to co-operate, learning how to act in a responsible and autonomous manner, learning how to solve problems, learning how to establish links and relations with other people and organizations, learning how to acquire and interpret information.

Too bad that the minister did not explain how to do all this... The problem lies exactly in the fact that most the school curricula teach notions and do not necessarily lead to the acquisition of these kinds of competences. I would say even more that often schools and teachers and people working in education lack the appropriate vocabulary to describe situations that lead to the acquisition of these types of competencies. (Roberto Ruffino, 3.6-7)

The Re-entry panelists agreed that competencies such as those mandated by the Minister of Education were exactly what students on exchange programs could (and often did) achieve. But their achievement was dependent on the rather mercurial process of coming up with an effective narration of the exchange experience. So the question to the panel was:

Is there anything that schools, universities, institutions, and sponsoring organizations can do to facilitate this process of putting some order [to the experience] and being able to communicate this to others so that the re-entry into the home situation, becomes less of a troublesome event [and more of a learning experience]? (Roberto Ruffino, 3.23)

2. Narration and the Locus of Learning

Central to the discussion of re-entry issues at FILE was the recognition that exchange participants are not necessarily conscious of the learning that may have taken place, and therefore they are often unable to intentionally apply the learning to other contexts:

Experiential education is by nature essentially

unprocessed until the post experience period and the greatest gains in understanding what happened often occur after the event in the senses passed (...) Most of the competencies that people gain in study abroad other than language tend to be what I refer to as 'cover competencies' that they have acquired but don't yet understand and they won't understand until they actually have to put it into practice in their own culture or they go to another culture and have to use those cultural learning strategies all over again" (Bruce LaBrack, 4.122)

Many times even the participants themselves are not aware of what they learned when they were on an exchange. ... These people came back naturally with a rather confused mind about all the experience they have done... It's an internal educational need for the individuals who go on an exchange to be able to find some mental organization of the experiences that they have lived. (Roberto Ruffino, 3.10-21)

Through narration students have the chance to become aware of what they have learned:

I think this session [Narrating Experience Abroad/Re-Entry] is so important... because you are in a really fundamental way shifting the locus of learning from the place where study abroad professionals typically put it [in the host country] to a place that has not heretofore been the privileged place of learning. It is saying that the really important locus of learning is the return (Mick Vande Berg, 4.113)

Professionals tend to underestimate the importance of this locus of learning, which may contribute to why students avoid it. But the knowledge that re-entry work is crucial to learning intercultural competence is now more wide-spread, and efforts are being made by a broader range of programs to address the educational need:

That ability to communicate is essential to spread the news that this is a valuable educational experience because you learn A, B, C, D and you change in such a way that is useful for the rest of your school, academic career, and professional life thereafter (Roberto Ruffino, 3.14)

2. Making Pre-departure / On-site / Re-entry Programs Interculturally Sensitive

Re-entry and other structured programs that seek

to facilitate the development of intercultural competence need themselves to be interculturally sensitive. Ironically, this is often not the case. Programs tend to be individualism-based in their emphasis on personal development, and they usually do not have alternative strategies to deal with more collectivist narratives of the exchange experience:

[In the context of the US] I have never had a successful pre-departure for international [non US] students that was attended voluntarily... If you're a student of certain collective cultures, the idea of having somebody suggest to you that going home is going to cause a problem would be anti-nationalistic. (...) I tracked re-entry for a group of students from Middle Eastern countries, and within three years of graduating and going back, 50% of them had left the country and gone to live elsewhere. So clearly they're not adjusting (Bruce LaBrack, 4.19)

And that may have something to do with the difference between more individualistic types of cultures where there is almost an expectation of self development and demonstrating that, versus more collectivist orientations where it is important to fit back in and not to be so much of direct change agent but maybe more a liaison person to outside contacts for example" (Ulrich Zeutschel, 4.60)

There is a danger that culturally inappropriate re-entry strategies could be harmful personally and/or professionally to the student:

Japanese people who don't have any intercultural experience think she or he [the student re-entering] is just not a member of our group anymore, so that's why they have a very hard time to re-adjust Japanese society. Sometimes they really have nervous break down and it's very hard time... (Shoko Araki, 3.116)

*[How is it] that returning home can be so distressing? Because you try to integrate and you try to use your newly learned competence, **but in a new context it no longer works**. So the competencies that you gain in one cultural situation often are sort of incompetencies when you return home. ... In cultures where you need to be one or another single identity, returnees who try and integrate can be marginalized (Nan Sussmann, 3.174)*

The attempt to facilitate re-entry narration should therefore take into account the cultural context in

which that narration will occur, including the possibility that the narration will not be verbal at all:

How does a knowledge of those patterns [of low and high context, individualism and collectivism] influence our understanding of what is being said and the process that we use to encourage the saying of it?... The student who has learned the lesson ... is able to adapt a narration that might look different in Japan, quite different to Germany or the United States where the attempt to portray the experience comes out in quite a DIFFERENT way but in a way that's culturally appropriate (David Bachner, 3.131-33)

Silence for us [Japanese] is full of meaning, it is not an empty thing.... We get information by watching, by observing, by sensing the air or atmosphere and without so much direct exchanging of words (Shoko Araki, 3.138, 52)

[Regarding] cultural influences on the return experience... I found among Japanese returnees – both students and business executives – this compartmentalization of the cultural competencies that had been learned. ... It wasn't the western model of integrating your overseas experience, but rather separating your experience and bringing out those intercultural competencies in the situationally appropriate time (Nan Sussmann, 3.161)

3. Interculturalists Facing the Global Scenario

The ultimate goal of re-entry is to generate good global citizens – people who can interact with a wide range of culturally different people in peaceful and productive ways. However, this commitment exists within the context of problematic contact between diverse groups, and increased risk of conflict in both local and global contexts. In this context there is also a strong need of for intercultural facilitators – bridge builders, change agents. To what extent does or can re-entry contribute to this extended goal?

Imagine we are in a world that is governed by attraction and aversion. I like what you do therefore I would go towards you, I don't like what you do so you will either stay away from me or I will attack you. Okay, and through that bringing of awareness to another alternative, which is that alternative of maybe



somewhere there is a ground of openness of respect that we might be able, we talked about it our class, to replace judgment by fascination and that transformation of judgment into fascination can only take place in a zone of trust and if you look at our role as facilitators it is our job to create that space of trust and once someone learns that and develops that mechanism of that transformation they can take it anywhere (Laura Bathurst, 2.187)

*... what do we want for in a cultural learning to be? Do we want people to become competent so that they can better address different cultures or **in fact deep down do we want them to become change agents in society** so that they spread ethno-relative world views and so that we have a better world?" (Ida Castiglioni, 2.101)*

Our idealism needs to be tempered with realism, however. Our exchange programs still involve only a small percentage of high school and college students, and those tend to be from dominant ethnic groups and relatively privileged economic status. Further, we assume that exchange students have the goal of understanding themselves in cultural terms and of appreciating how cultural perspectives differ.

To me it raises the challenge of how we can reconcile the perspectival nature of what we do with a traditional view of the world that is in fact not perspectival – it is an essentially conservative view in which the preservation of tradition is paramount. How could we bring together this idea of the respect for multiple perspectives and the idea that there is only one proper way of looking at things in the



A comment by Bruce La Brack

Dear Roberto,

I have just arrived home and wanted to drop you a note to let you know how much I enjoyed, and benefited from, the excellent conference you co-sponsored. I also wanted to thank you for the opportunity to participate in the conference. The setting was beautiful, the hospitality excellent and the conference itself was amazing. The format worked quite well and was in marked contrast to the 2008 Berlin event, where researchers and practitioners and academics had to make major efforts to carve out time to discuss theoretical issues and seek out one another. The idea of keeping things relatively loosely structured but with a thematic focus and some general guide questions allowed for 'an emergent design' to take place. It served our social and professional needs quite nicely. I can honestly say that this conference was the most enjoyable and intellectually productive I have experienced for many years. Congratulations on providing such a satisfying and useful event.

This was truly a 'working' situation designed to have maximal interaction, sharing and collegial exchange. Good mix of people and everything supported the process. It was a fine example of how to assemble and facilitate a group to achieve a positive synergy. It was, at least for me, an exciting, useful and ultimately quite successful gathering. Everyone in my discussion groups seemed quite satisfied with the breakout sessions. Of course, ultimately I most enjoyed the opportunity to see old friends and colleagues as well as make some new contacts. I hope you were happy with the results of your endeavors. Everyone I talked to had nothing but praise for the entire place, process and outcomes.

The Intercultura meeting site was perfect and your staff and volunteers were amazingly helpful, cheerful and efficient. Please let them know how much the participants appreciated their prompt information and assistance. As an anthropologist, I particularly appreciated your personally guided walking tours following our two dinners. I always like to see a new city through the eyes of a knowledgeable and enthusiastic 'local informant' and I really enjoyed your historical commentary and 'insider' perspective. Needless to say, I am now motivated to return to your area of the world and explore it more thoroughly and at leisure at some, hopefully not too distant, future time. Thank you for all you have done for both AFS and the field of intercultural studies for so many years. I look forward to keeping in touch with you as we all continue to try and help different peoples understand one other and their cultures a bit better.

Best personal regards,
Bruce

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Professor Emeritus
School of International Studies
University of the Pacific
Stockton, California

Narrazione e competenze interculturali

Ho visto, mentre mi accingeva a scrivere queste righe, alcune interviste rilasciate da nostri studenti al ritorno dall'anno in Cina e ho pensato a quante persone a loro sconosciute possano aver letto con interesse e curiosità le loro avventure.

Ma che cosa succede a tutti gli altri studenti di Intercultura che non hanno occasione di raccontarsi sulle pagine di una rivista, ma ne avrebbero molte altre, meno effimere, per narrare a chi sta loro intorno quello che hanno vissuto?

Il tema della "narrazione" al rientro dai nostri programmi ha riempito un'intera giornata del Forum on Intercultural Learning and Exchange svoltosi nella nostra sede di Colle Val d'Elsa all'inizio di ottobre.

L'altro tema, trattato il giorno precedente, riguardava l'argomento che da anni ispira il nostro lavoro quotidiano e le nostre riflessioni: le competenze interculturali che si sviluppano, o dovrebbero svilupparsi, da un'esperienza prolungata, preparata e assistita, in una cultura diversa dalla propria. Come si acquisiscono, come si misurano, come possono essere stimolate, come possono poi essere trasferite nella propria crescita personale, in un percorso successivo di studi, di professione e di contributo fattivo alla società?

La consapevolezza e lo sviluppo di queste competenze, solo abbozzate e un po' confuse al rientro, passa anche attraverso la narrazione. Rileggere la propria esperienza attraverso il racconto che se ne fa aiuta ad apprendere, a non sprecare ciò che con tanta fatica e impegno si è conquistato. A chi raccontare? A se stessi, con riflessioni guidate, ai compagni, attraverso racconti che non si limitino agli aneddoti più divertenti o ai cliché turistici, alla famiglia, talvolta solo attenta al recupero scolastico, agli insegnanti, che difficilmente riescono a pensare ad un apprendimento di competenze, e non solo di nozioni.

Da sempre giudichiamo il rientro come un momento delicato e determinante, ma da qualche anno le ricerche di studiosi come Mitchell Hammer e Milton Bennet ci aiutano a inquadrare in una cornice teorica ciò che vogliamo perseguire.

Il Forum, organizzato dalla Fondazione Intercultura e dall'IDRI (Intercultural Development Research Institute, che fa capo a Milton Bennet, fondatore e direttore dell'Istituto) ha offerto a un alto numero di persone che si occupano di educazione interculturale di confrontare, condividere, discutere le loro esperienze



e competenze maturate in ambito accademico o direttamente sul campo: trentuno fra i più quotati docenti e ricercatori universitari provenienti da molti Paesi del mondo, trenta fra volontari e staff della nostra Associazione, partners stranieri, una rappresentante del Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione, una rappresentante del programma Socrates hanno cercato di mettere insieme pratica e teoria, con interessantissime presentazioni in plenaria e gruppi di discussione molto vari nella loro composizione.

Si è parlato di etica dello scambio, di educazione globale, delle famose competenze, di come raccoglierle e presentarle in un eventuale portfolio riconosciuto a livello internazionale. Sul piano concreto, si è discusso delle pratiche efficaci che a tutti questi grandi temi e progetti si devono ispirare.

Sono emersi obiettivi comuni e differenze culturali nell'approccio alle stesse problematiche, ma soprattutto sono stati stimolati curiosità e interesse verso i reciproci ambiti di competenza: l'approfondimento della ricerca negli uni e la realistica esperienza degli altri.

Si è sperimentato, con successo, il ruolo della Fondazione Intercultura nel facilitare il passaggio fra la teoria e l'operatività, con la proposta di temi di studio che entrano poi nella vita associativa, che suscitano nuovi stimoli, nuove riflessioni e nuove sperimentazioni. E, per tutti i volontari, nuovi entusiasmi.

Incontri che cambiano il mondo

I programmi di Intercultura

I programmi di Intercultura sono di quattro tipi:

- invio di studenti del quarto anno delle scuole secondarie superiori all'estero, per soggiorni di un anno scolastico, un semestre, un trimestre o un'estate – con ospitalità presso famiglie di volontari dell'Associazione
- accoglienza di studenti liceali stranieri presso scuole italiane e famiglie che accettano di inserirli nel loro nucleo domestico come figli, sotto la responsabilità e il controllo di Intercultura, per un anno scolastico, un semestre, un trimestre o un'estate
- scambi di classe per due settimane con Paesi dell'Unione Europea, ma anche con altri Paesi sia dell'Europa e sia di altri continenti
- corsi di formazione ai rapporti interculturali, per scuole, presidi, insegnanti, associazioni, aziende. Questi corsi sono in alcuni casi di breve durata (una giornata), in altri di durata più lunga ed anche annuale (ad esempio: nell'ambito di progetti di formazione europei).

Dal 1955 ad oggi sono andati a studiare all'estero con Intercultura:

- circa 12.000 studenti per un intero anno di liceo o istituto tecnico-professionale
- circa 1.500 studenti per un semestre
- circa 2.000 studenti per un trimestre
- circa 4.000 studenti per un periodo estivo
- 306 classi (circa 6.000 studenti e 750 insegnanti).

Sono venuti vivere con una famiglia italiana ed a frequentare una nostra scuola:

- circa 8.000 studenti esteri per un intero anno scolastico
- circa 1.500 studenti esteri per un semestre
- circa 2.000 studenti esteri per un trimestre
- circa 5.000 studenti esteri per un periodo estivo
- 306 classi di scuole estere (circa 6.000 studenti e 750 insegnanti).

A questi programmi di scambi internazionali si accede per concorso. Due terzi dei vincitori hanno usufruito di borse di studio totali o parziali offerte da Intercultura o da aziende, banche ed enti locali su sollecitazione di Intercultura.

SVILUPPO DEI PROGRAMMI DI SCAMBI INDIVIDUALI

	1955	1965	1975	1985	1995	2005
Un anno all'estero	35	145	138	241	277	470
Un semestre all'estero	0	0	0	0	44	99
Un trimestre all'estero	0	0	0	59	73	49
Un'estate all'estero	0	0	0	93	113	294
Un anno in Italia	0	18	37	84	196	323
Un semestre in Italia	0	0	0	0	47	75
Un trimestre in Italia	0	0	0	59	74	33
Un bimestre in Italia	20	35	78	135	143	165
Totale	55	198	253	671	952	1.508



Aggiungi un posto a tavola!

Occuparsi dell'educazione dei figli vuol dire anche metterli in contatto con coetanei di altri paesi.

Non è sempre possibile andare all'estero per un lungo periodo ma è facile accogliere in casa per un anno scolastico o una durata più breve uno studente straniero selezionato da Intercultura.

Sono giovani di sedici o diciassette anni motivati a conoscere e capire l'Italia e desiderosi di parlare del proprio paese: Intercultura li iscrive a scuola e li assiste attraverso i suoi volontari.

Dal 1955 ad oggi migliaia di famiglie li hanno accolti in casa li hanno inseriti nella propria vita ne hanno accettato l'idealismo e le incertezze, l'entusiasmo e gli scoraggiamenti.

Oggi hanno un amico per la vita.

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