



“Being young and going abroad: the long-term effects of a study
abroad period on the lives of German vocational high-school
students”

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Dedication

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1. Introduction

The phenomenon of study abroad has gained importance in the context of an increasingly globalized world. The capacity to gain valuable knowledge in an intercultural setting has become increasingly important, while the emergence of qualifying different forms of capital has emerged within the debate around the benefits of an experience abroad (Gerhards, Hans, and Carlson 2014, 262). Particularly within economically strong countries, the option to engage in a study abroad program during university and even secondary school has become more and more commonplace, and the desire amongst youth to engage in such a practice has increased. (Weichbrodt 2014, 73). This is also reflected in the German context, as the general opinion amongst experts is that a study abroad period affords participants with positive benefits after their year abroad (Büchner 2004, 709) Organizations that provide this service represent gatekeepers, who offer access to an opportunity that has the capacity to improve lives in a professional and academic sense (Thomas et al 2007, 112), but is unfortunately only privy to a select few (Weichbrodt 2014, 77).

However, despite the numerous studies in the past years on the general phenomenon of study abroad, there have been relatively few studies done on the particular age group that is the emphasis of this work (Czaja 2014, 23). Furthermore, the academic debate around this phenomenon has left out underrepresented groups (such as those of different nationalities, religions, etc.) entirely, and, to my knowledge, this is the only work focusing on the topic at hand. In this paper I will discuss the long term effects of a study abroad period on the lives of students who primarily come from working-class families with less access to financial capital in the form of grants, loans, and self-generated income.

The impetus of this work was the aforementioned lack of research surrounding this topic, and the interest of the Kreuzberger Kinderstiftung to have academic proof of the effects of what they provide to the participants of their stipend program. With that in mind, this work was made possible due to the ideological and financial support of the KKS. In order to establish the background for my work, it is necessary in this introduction to discuss the structure of the German education system, and how this relates to my topic. I will also delve into the phenomenon of study abroad as a whole, and what it means for the general social landscape. This will have implications for further activities within the KKS, and could possibly be extrapolated to fit other contexts. This work will be presented in a way that highlights the context of study abroad and the implications of a long-term study abroad period within the context of a case-study on this particular organization.

1.2 The German education system

In its current incarnation, the secondary education system of the Federal Republic of Germany has many facets. This is further complicated by the varying levels of education in different federal states. The varying levels of German secondary schools are as follows:

Name:	Final grade level	Age upon completion	Diploma
Hauptschule	9 th grade	About 15	Hauptschulabschluss
Realschule	10 th grade	About 16	Realschulabschluss
Gymnasium	13 th grade	About 19	Abitur

There are, however, various combinations. For example, the group of subjects coming from the city of Jena, were almost all students at a “Gesamtschule”, a combination Realschule/Gymnasium, which made them difficult to categorize as solely “Realschüler”. The target group is, in this sense, somewhat nebulous, as there are many students who, despite attending the vocational Realschule, fully intend to continue on to the college preparatory Gymnasium, either in the same school that they had been attending, or at a completely different Gymnasium. These definitions are, in any case, difficult to grasp.

A further complication is that it varies from state to state, meaning that similar categorizations will have different names (e.g. Oberschüler in Saxony, Regelschüler in Thuringia, etc.). For this reason, for the purposes of this work, the term “vocational high school student” will typically be used, although this is only an approximation of the concept in Germany. Further approximations will be made when referring to the college preparatory students who attend Gymnasium. In general, these demarcations will be used to describe the initial position and subsequent development of former participants of the stipend program of the KKS because, as this paper will show, Realschüler very rarely remain Realschüler.

1.2 Study abroad in Germany as a social phenomenon

The participation in a study abroad experience is considered a phenomenon which reflects both the context from which the student originates and the context in which it takes place. Former study abroad participants tend to relate to their experiences using their own history as a frame of reference (Thomas et al. 2007, 112). The phenomenon of study abroad is also characterized by differences in social class, and the lack and accrual of capital which can either prohibit or enable the study abroad period. Gerhards, Hans, and Carlson describe study abroad as a means

to accumulate transnational human capital, which can be understood as foreign language capabilities, intercultural competence, and knowledge of foreign countries and their institutions (2014, 172). Given that this capital is unevenly distributed throughout society (Gerhards, Hans and Carlson 2014, 128), this thesis is a look into how those who have less of it go about acquiring more, and whether or not this has a positive effect on their lives. The previously mentioned category of students with less financial capital also, unsurprisingly, belongs to the group of those who have less transnational human capital (Gerhards, Hans and Carlson 2014, 133). In this work, I will describe the process of study abroad, the accrual of transnational human capital, and whether or not this has a measurable effect on the lives of former participants of the stipend program offered by the KKS.

1.3 Structure

The structure of this work will include sections at the beginning introducing the theoretical framework and methodologies, which will explain why and how I approached the issue at hand. The framework will provide context for this contribution to the academic discussion around the phenomenon of study abroad, while the methodologies chapter will clearly delineate what I have done in finer detail. I will primarily utilize texts to justify my arguments that have focused upon this phenomenon, albeit with a slightly different research topic. Following these sections, I will provide the data I have collected as the basis of this work via the qualitative interviews that were performed during the process of my research. This section will be presented in a format that reports the relevant findings, along the lines of the semi-structured interview guideline that was also created in preparation for this piece. To this end, this section will reflect the order and structure of the interviews. It is important to note that this section will also serve as an evaluation of the long term effects on former participants. It was prepared specifically to be read by those interested in the processes of the Kreuzberger Kinderstiftung. The interview data section will highlight tendencies and relevant confirmations or discrepancies with current theories within the field. After this section, I will present the hypotheses in greater detail, and show how the interview data specifically relates to my initial hypotheses related to phenomena within study abroad. Finally, I will conclude with a discussion for further research that makes suggestions as to how this study could have been improved, should any researchers be interested in repeating the process after a suitable amount of time has passed.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 General notes

The purpose of this chapter is to elucidate the terms, concepts, and theoretical constructs to which I will be referring throughout this work. Each theory will be presented in a way that highlights its relevance to the subject at hand, and places it into an appropriate context in relation with the target group I have chosen to study. This section will also serve as a justification for why I chose to highlight the concepts I have elected to address with my hypotheses. In addition, I will present multiple sources of research and address the theories that are presented within the secondary literature. Pursuant to this, I will also address the theoretical academic debate by highlighting the dialogue between relevant authors of these texts within the fields of international education, globalization theory, and the specific phenomenon of high school study abroad, especially within the German context.

The following section will frame the research question to be evaluated, as well as contextualize the phenomenon of international education within the framework of globalization. This section will also present a working definition of globalization, with the intent of differentiating the phenomenon of flows of capital with a conceptualization of globalization that highlights the relationship between an extended period of study abroad and an emergence of new cultural forms. , As the emergence of study abroad as a cause and effect of globalization highlights the importance of this phenomenon, it is important to delineate this relationship and further answer the question as to why it is necessary to understand it. I will describe why it is important to consider all social strata of a society, and justify the reasons for selecting a systematically underrepresented group within a phenomenon that has the potential to reduce oppressive structures in the context of a globalized world.

2.2 High school study abroad in Germany

According to Weltweiser – Der unabhängige Bildungsberatungsdienst & Verlag (transl. Weltweiser – the independent education advising service and publisher), roughly 14,400 high school students per year went abroad from Germany to various countries across the world until the 2012/2013 school year. A majority of these students came from Western Germany, with Hamburg, holding the top position of the place which sent the most students abroad. Eastern Germany, (the so-called neue Bundesländer), in comparison, sent the lowest amount of students with the entire state of Thüringen sending only a portion of what places like Bremen and Schleswig-Holstein could manage. Other sources reveal that the number could be even higher. For example, an article by Michael Weichbrodt, „Einjährige Schüleraustauschprogramme in

Deutschland–gesellschaftliche Bedeutung, historische Entwicklung und Struktur der Anbieterorganisationen."¹, the number is estimated at 19,000 students going abroad in the year 2013 (2014, 76). These statistics demonstrate the growing trend of high school students seeking a study abroad experience.

In addition, the discrepancy between those who attend Realschule and those who attend Gymnasium is striking. In terms of privilege, students who attend Gymnasium often have more access to scholarships as a simple internet search² will show. Most stipend application processes inquire about or even prioritize academic achievement, which of course, is more likely to be advantageous to students who attend Gymnasium. In addition, students who attend Realschule are less likely to have access to external funding, as their families tend to be from a lower socioeconomic stratum (Neugebauer 2010, 202) Data from the SOEP (German Socio-Economic Panel) notes that roughly 6% of high-school aged interview subjects who were asked had spent time at a school abroad. (Gerhards and Hans 2012, 74) If we are to understand that students who attend Gymnasium are more likely to come from higher income families (Gerhards and Hans 2013, 103) and that the typical cost for a year in the United States, which is the most popular goal for German students, was about 7,000 to 8,500 Euros in 2012 (Terbeck 2012, 120-205) then it logically follows that the students going abroad are most likely to be students who attend Gymnasium.

However, the statistics about students who are not attending university preparatory Gymnasium are rare at best. A study done by Weltweiser in 2013 states almost all students who go abroad attend Gymnasium. While between 2000 and 2010 12,3% of all students who attended Gymnasium went abroad, only 2,1% of students who attended Realschule, and only 1,1% of students who attended the combination Gesamtschule did so. (Gerhards and Hans 2012, 19) The simple fact that the Kreuzberger Kinderstiftung, with numbers ranging from 20 to 50 students per school year, is the largest organization that caters to the target group of Realschüler is proof enough that students who attend Realschule are in the extreme minority in the overall population of those who participate in educational exchange at the high school level.

¹ transl. One-year-long high school student exchange programs in Germany – societal meaning, historical development and structures of providing organizations

² See, for example websites such as:
<http://www.austauschjahr.de/stipendien/>
<http://www.schueleraustausch-stipendien.de/>
<https://www.travelworks.de/stipendien/schueleraustausch.html>

2.2.1 Vocational vs. University preparation

One important theoretical discrepancy to discuss is the desire of the participants to eventually seek gainful employment. This can, of course, take many forms. The way of approaching this life path has almost as many variations as there are people along the path. So, it is necessary to locate ultimate intent of projects such as the one put on by the Kreuzberger Kinderstiftung in assisting youth with their ultimate goals. One of the questions to be answered in this paper is “what are students doing after coming back?” This was addressed in a number of ways, including questions addressing career path after the study abroad period, as well as hypotheses 1 and 5, which will be presented later and are both particularly related to professional development.

There is, of course, the desire that every student find their own purpose in life. Parents, in making decisions regarding their children’s academic futures, tend to push them towards decisions that will result in their attendance of Gymnasium, whether or not they plan on attending university. This was described, amongst other things, in a recent interview with Steven Schiller, professor of educational sociology at Bamberg University, on April 4, 2015. It also bears being said that employers in Germany who are looking to employ promising young people for vocational education (Ausbildung) also view the Abitur as a positive advantage over potential candidates who “just” have the diploma from Realschule (or Hauptschule) (Protsch and Solga 2012, 46). Given that this is the case, it is no small wonder that there is a growing trend to attend Gymnasium, particularly after experiencing a year abroad. The goal of this work is to either corroborate or refute this claim, with special regards to German vocational high-school students.

2.3 Literature

As stated at the beginning of this section, it was important to establish a basis for the categorical variables that differ amongst youth who have participated in high school study abroad. The current academic discussion around this phenomenon offers a number of sources that were partially relevant to my topic. In my search for literature, two particular sources emerged that were useful in conceptualizing what all could possibly change after going abroad. These sources are “Erlebnisse, die Verändern” (transl. Experiences that change) by Thomas et al. and “Students of Four Decades” by David Bachner and Ulrich Zeutschel. The following section will introduce those two works as the sources of useful parameters well as juxtapose them within the context of international education research. It will also introduce works that present several theories which were useful in qualifying the benefits of a study abroad period. One

important aim of this section will be to juxtapose important works that helped to form the basis of one of the two important works with the major findings of the other. By doing this, I sought to engage in a dialogue which presents much-needed context. In this theoretical consideration, it is my goal to address strengths and weakness within the literature, and to offer a holistic review that provides insight into overarching themes relevant to my own subject.

2.3.1 Erlebnisse, die verändern

Alexander Thomas, Celine Chang, and Heike Abt offer an extensive look into the phenomenon of study abroad within the German context with their publication “Erlebnisse, die verändern” (2007). This book presents perspectives on various forms of exchange, including international exchange meetings, work camps, and short-term sojourns. It is important to note that the length of the programs evaluated in this work are much shorter than those evaluated in the context of Bachner and Zeuschel’s work, as well as the length of the exchange prioritized in the program about which I am writing. However, the similarities between the topic of this work and the topic of my research were far too great to ignore, and the considerations made by Thomas et al. proved to be mostly in line with the findings that I made during the research phase. For example, one of the four main formats that were initially examined by Thomas et al were the same age and the same goal of exchange between secondary school students, with a host family in the guest region (2007, 57). In preparation for the production of this work, Thomas et al. engaged in a methodological process which was similar to mine: following the steps of literature analysis, document analysis, expert interviews, interviews with former participants, and then written surveys (2007, 67). In my process, I substituted the steps involving expert interviews for participant observation in the form of witnessing several events held by the organization for former participants and practical experience within the organization in the form of active participation in monthly board meetings. The step involving written surveys was omitted due to time constraints. The theoretical development also set me upon the path of seeking to examine this phenomenon in terms of biographical narrative. The authors suggest a deeper examination within the context of biographical research (Thomas, Chang, and Abt 2006, 273). It was then my intent to satisfy this need for a further look into their suggestions of prioritizing narrative. Additionally, the onus was set upon me to seek out ways in which a study abroad period can benefit these particular former participants outside of the professional sphere. Granted, it is necessary to look at a number of categories, when discussing potential benefits, but the general trend within the research is to discuss a study abroad period as a means of acquiring professional qualification. This book offered the convenient qualitative

consideration of development in a personal sense (Thomas, Chang, and Abt 2006, 32). In order to qualify holistic benefits of an exchange period abroad, I found it necessary to not only look into professional and academic development, but also development in terms of personality. It is important to my work, as well as the organization that stands behind me, that I discuss both personality development and biographical narrative as aspects of the theoretical framework in greater detail in subsequent sections that concretely describe participants' experiences.

The basis for my thesis draws from similar research done in the area of international education. Thomas et al highlight theoretical peculiarities necessary for considering the parameters of potential change during study abroad. It also suggest categories³ which are useful for considering the development of former participants. These categories are:

1. Self-related characteristics and abilities
2. openness, flexibility, and self-composure
3. self-awareness, self-image
4. social competence
5. intercultural learning
6. cultural identity
7. relationship with the guest country/guest region
8. further constructive activities
9. influence on professional development
10. foreign language
11. unintended effects.

These categories were helpful in the conceptualization of which parameters were necessary to target in the development of both the survey questions and the development of the hypotheses (see methodologies section). As one can see, the consideration for professional development actually occupies a relatively small amount of space in comparison with the other, more

³ It is important to note that these categories were translated from the original German.

abstract categories. These considerations are necessary to provide a broad framework in which benefits could manifest, and for my work, to be able to reflect upon which benefits have been proven to manifest within the secondary literature. Thomas et al. effectively decided upon the “Items” to be highlighted within the interview, taking into careful consideration the possible existence of both positive and negative aspects (2007, 81). Methodologically, these items were then approached in a way that allowed the specific topics to come up within the interviews in an organic way, similar to my own methodological approach (see following chapter). The concepts presented here also provided insight into what parameters are important in the current academic debate around the benefits of study abroad. The works of Thomas et al. have proven to be important landmarks in the literature around studying abroad, particularly in the German context.

2.3.2 Students of Four Decades

Another important publication whose theory I incorporated into my research was the work “Students of Four Decades” (2009) by David Bachner and Ulrich Zeuschel. This work was a study over a period of fourteen years specifically focusing on exchanges taking place between the United States and Germany. The exchanges themselves took place from 1951 to 1987, hence the title. Bachner and Zeuschel present their findings in a chronological way, dividing the sections into an initial examination by way of qualitative interviews and a subsequent follow-up wave of interviews that took place years later. Theoretically, this book was of significance in that it sought to codify the benefits of a study abroad period in a largely different way in comparison with Thomas et al. What this book presents is a specialized case study into the lives of former study abroad participants, albeit in a more selective subset of individuals. It was also more relevant to the findings of my work for a number of reasons: the length of the exchanges that were the focus were the same, and, given that a majority of the subjects I interviewed went to either the United States (or other English-speaking countries) the guest region was the same or similar in terms of language. Also, the entire process of research entailing me, as a US-American interviewing German research subjects, effectively mirrors the research interests of the work by Bachner and Zeuschel.

The authors offered a similarly structured yet ultimately very different set type qualification and categorization which I took into consideration when evaluating which parameters to research. These “Theoretical dimensions of Exchange Impact” are as follows:

Self-Efficacy. This refers to the degree to which respondents attributed increases in their levels of maturity, confidence, and independence to the exchange experiences (Exercise of personal and collective efficacy in changing societies Bandura 1995)

Individualization. A number of respondents observed that the exchange experience influenced them to move away from viewing people of any national group in stereotypical or collectivized ways. The term that comes the closest is open-mindedness (Arthur and Bennett, 1995; Harris 1973)

Internalized Effects – Externalized Effects. A number of respondents reported that they actually demonstrate exchange induced attitudes, skills, and perspectives in their professions and places of work. A number also reported a more subtle manifestation of effects...yet, upon scrutiny, the person's approach to that work has clearly been affected by the experience

Personal utilization of results – other directed utilization of results. Respondents reported numerous results of exchange that they have continued to utilize in their post-exchange lives, such as foreign language proficiency, study skills, and ability to articulate a point of view, among others. Many respondents also recounted instances in which something they themselves gained during the exchange subsequently had an impact on other people's actions or ways of thinking.

Specific utilization of results – general utilization of results. This continuum refers to skill, attitude, knowledge, and behavior outcomes from the exchange that respondents claimed they utilized after the exchange. Specific: English, General: attitude of social concern

Linear life Path – Circular Life Path. Certain respondents were notable for the degree to which their lives followed a clear progression or line of development. Other respondents described life experiences with less easily discernible patterns

Bilateral Perspective – Global perspective. Some respondents evidenced bilateral ethnocentrism (English/US relations) and some evidenced a more international or global attitude

Identification with Exchange – Non-identification with exchange. A number of respondents described the exchange experience as an integral and essential aspect of their identity, quite inseparable from their sense of self. For others it was not factored in their self-concept very much at all.

According to the authors themselves “The eight criteria could be operationalized in subsequent studies for more varied use if they were factored into the design from the beginning.” (Bachner and Zeutschel 2009, 78). In my implementation of the previously mentioned categories by Thomas et al, I also took into account this suggestion, implementing questions that targeted variables which were not necessarily covered by the first set of categories.

2.3.3 Dialogue

It is, however, clear to see that there are some areas of overlap between the categories offered by Thomas et al and by Bachner and Zeutschel. For example, the initial category in both cases addresses development in the self, utilizing various parameters in order to assess development. Furthermore, as each list continues, they both describe ways in which the Self interacts with its environment. Both Thomas’ “openness, flexibility, and self-composure” and Bachner and Zeutschel’s “individualization” refer to the individual’s ability to regard both themselves and others around them as individuals, and not generic parts of a collective. This ties in with the theoretical conceptualization of the Self offered by sociologist and globalization theorist Anthony Giddens. Here, he has this to say: “The ‘identity’ of the self, in contrast to the self as a generic phenomenon, presumes reflexive awareness. It is what the individual is conscious ‘of’ in the term ‘self--consciousness’. Self--identity, in other words, is not something that is just given, as a result of the continuities of the individual's action system, but something that has to be routinely created and sustained in the reflexive activities of the individual. (Giddens 1991, 53) By reflecting upon their own identity, the participants engage in this “reflexive awareness”, and in doing so, draw the link between the theories presented here and their own lived practices. Furthermore, the self is presented ontologically, in a way that emphasizes the existence of an individual within a system. In the example of my case study, the system of international exchange presents a background in which the finding of self can take place.

Another parallel that must be drawn is the similarity between the “relationship with the guest country/guest region” and “Bilateral and global perspectives”. In this case, the conceptualization offered by Bachner and Zeutschel is more effective in bringing in an essentially transnational frame of reference. Thomas et al. offer a binary between the participant’s home country and guest country, whereas the introduction of global perspective makes for a much more nuanced way to consider how the phenomenon of international education influences global flows of capital. The authors do, however, imply a particular set of intercultural knowledge that rejects this binary in the category of intercultural learning. This

category, while not as extensively acknowledging of the aforementioned global flows, takes into consideration the existence of juxtaposed cultures and the interaction between them, albeit in a less synergetic way. I will delve into this dynamic in later chapters, as the relationship between the dichotomy of foreign/domestic in comparison with a much more globalized consideration of transnational flows is more relevant to the point that I am trying to make. In multiple respects, the texts which form the basis of my work here complement one another and engage in an academic dialogue that will prove useful in relation to the data.

The dialogue here can also be found in the distinct sources which support arguments from the authors. In turn, these supports also justify many of the points I will make. I utilized both sets of these categories in order to qualify and categorize the experiences of former participants. It was particularly useful to relate various theories of both sociology and socio-psychology in order to flesh out these concepts. I incorporated the conceptualization of self-efficacy by Albert Bandura, a psychologist in the field of social sciences, to better elucidate the theories discussed by Thomas et al. For example, the entire concept of perceived self-efficacy as “beliefs in one’s capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to manage prospective situations.” (Bandura 1995, 19) is inherently related to the parameters of self-related characteristics and abilities, as well as the emphasis on self-awareness and self-image provided by Thomas et al.. The idea of belief in one’s capabilities relates to self-awareness and self-image as a person capable of organizing courses of action, in this case, the various situations which arose before, during, and after the study abroad experience.

There are many instances of sub-dialogue between supporting theorists for one work, and the authors of the other. For example, Seymour Epstein’s Cognitive Experiential Self-Theory of Personality, utilized by Bachner and Zeuschel offers an appropriate explanation of the relationship of the self with the external world: “It is assumed in CEST that everyone, like it or not, automatically constructs an implicit theory of reality that includes a self-theory, a world-theory, and connecting propositions.” (Epstein 1998, 169) CEST, then, offers a conceptualization of how an individual interacts with the world, which set the basis for how I plan to qualify the experiences had by former study abroad participants. For example, these theories of self and the world provide an interesting framework from which the parameters of self-awareness, relationship with the guest country, cultural learning, and intercultural learning can be developed. Essentially, this theory qualifies how one relates to one’s surroundings. Furthermore, Epstein offers an interesting look at two fundamental information processing systems in general, codifying this look as CEST. He presents a dichotomy of rational and emotional systems, which provide the basis for which people interact with the world, and

provides an excellent frame of reference for the experiences of the former participants that I have interviewed, in both the contexts of the work in which it was presented, and the contexts of other works which were applicable to my research. For example, the call for narrative made by Thomas et al can be answered in Epstein's suggestion to engage with the experiential system in its own way, which "refers to the use of association, metaphor, imagery, fantasy, and narrative." (Epstein 1995, 177) In this sense, I have attempted to move the theoretical implications of CEST into praxis, by offering former study abroad participants the space in which to exercise and exemplify this interaction between their self-theory and world-theory. These are, however, just a few of the many categorical considerations which go into the overall understanding of the qualitative effects of a study abroad period. Considerations such as this, which frame the possible benefits relevant to the target group are exactly what is necessary to begin the discussion around what constitutes the perception of self and the perception of the surrounding world. This is crucial in discussing intercultural experiences, as they provide a continuous feedback loop for what one's expectations of the world and oneself should be.

2.4 Transnational human capital

Transnational human capital is a concept based off of Bourdieu's Social Capital, with references to Gary S. Becker's Human Capital. It incorporates the aspect of belonging to specific cultural groups (in this case a minority of people who have managed to cross national borders) inherent in the understanding of social capital, with conceptualization of various forms of knowledge as an embodied capability to produce labor that describes human capital. It was then refined by Professor Dr. Jürgen Gerhards, particularly in regards to social mobility in the European Union. This proved to be particularly useful, as the accrual of such capital is deemed as necessary for upward social mobility within the context of the Global North. Transnational human capital is defined as foreign language skills, intercultural competence, and knowledge of other countries and their institutions (Gerhards and Hans 2013, 99). As previously mentioned, this conceptualization focuses on various forms of knowledge implicit in the production of labor leading to economic value. While economic value is not the sole focus of this thesis, it is necessary to consider the professional benefits of a study abroad period. I must however, stress, that transcultural human capital is also beneficial in the sphere of personal development, a consideration which is often understated. When considering the idea of transnational human capital, it is important to remember that the intangible components which go into acquiring it i.e. competences in foreign language, intercultural knowledge, and institutional knowledge are not always easy to measure. Quite the opposite, these variables are

often considered “the icing on the cake” when evaluating entrance into the professional world via a job application, for example. It is then important to devise a way that organizes and qualifies exactly how one collects and applies these capacities, and to which end. For this reason, transcultural human capital provides us with an excellent measure of how these particularly indefinite capacities come into play in the lives of those who have acquired them. It is also necessary to consider when discussing the inherent differences in the experiences of people with varying levels of access to different types of capital.

In another study Gerhards and Hans also pointed out that a period of residence abroad during secondary school is an effective way to acquire this capital (2010, 107). In my own research, it was necessary to see if this was also true for the specific group of students targeted by my organization, in order to extrapolate the initial findings within the secondary literature to a broader scope. This led to the development of hypotheses that highlighted the necessity of acquiring such capital, as well as specific questions asking about the aforementioned defining characteristics of transnational human capital. Exactly how the accrual of this form of capital interplays with the personal and professional development will be addressed later in this thesis. Transnational human capital provides us with a way of qualifying how former participants of international education exchange benefit from their experiences.

2.5 Mobility capital

It is particularly useful to be able to discuss social mobility, as defined by the ability to move between social strata when discussing the difficulties that face marginalized youth. The term “marginalization” here is used loosely as it is not always the case that those who attend Realschüler make up the basis of a marginalized group. However, there is a tendency that those who do not attend Gymnasium face issues during the international exchange process that those who do simply do not have, such as that their parents simply do not prioritize going abroad as a result of their social station (Gerhards, Hans, and Carlson 2014, 137). In order to engage in self-efficacy, become more independent, and seek agency in their lives, young adults tend to face challenges in the forms of socio-economic hurdles of bureaucracy, stigma, and finances. Particularly in the target group of this project, the ability to navigate the issues inherent in chasing one’s dreams across the globe is compromised by a social background that does not necessarily lend itself to the freedom associated with social mobility. The concept of mobility capital, closely related to the idea of transnational capital, is particularly useful here: [...] the main difference between student travelers and their peers rests in the acquisition of what we shall refer to as mobility capital. [...] Mobility capital is a subcomponent of human capital,

enabling individuals to enhance their skills because of the richness of the international experiences gained by living abroad. (Murphy-Lejeune 2003, 51) Sören Carlson utilizes the above quote to highlight the necessity of analyzing the benefits of this period abroad, and the various forms of capital that develop from them. He also points out that “At the same time, it seems necessary not just to look at the (non-)existence of different resources, but also to ask under which constellations or circumstances (i.e. fields) they become effective.” (2011, 126). These two concepts, social mobility and mobility capital remain interlinked in the theoretical background of this work. I am attempting to draw the connection between one telltale characteristic of a heightened amount of transnational human capital being the presence of increased social mobility, as a function of increased mobility capital. The impetus for the accrual of transnational human capital can be understood as the development of mobility capital by undertaking the study abroad period. In travelling abroad, the students are engaging in a practice which imbues the beginnings of mobility capital, which could lead to increased mobility within the social networks both within and outside of their own national sphere. By moving across transnational boundaries, and within social strata after returning from transnational spaces, the former participants of study abroad programs are likely to experience a marked difference in their own lifeworlds.

My project seeks to understand these “fields”, to examine the circumstance of coming from a different background as the typical high school student who studies abroad, and whether or not this had an effect on their professional, educational, and personal development. To this end, it is necessary to look at the lived experiences of the participants of study abroad from a holistic perspective, accepting the stories of these youth as the source of legitimate data.

2.6 Biographical Narrative as a (re)presentation of legitimate experience

Critically, it's possible to say that the changes in life chances cannot be traced back to one cause. However, the exchange period is, as mentioned before, integrated into the complete life biography of the participants. It is impossible to remove it from the context of their lives. There has long been a point of contention between qualitative and quantitative theories. Specifically within qualitative theory, the discussion surrounding biographical narrative calls into question the legitimacy of such theories as “valid” or “representative” of “real data”. However, specifically in the context of social phenomena, and with the advent of new ways to record and express narratives, the tendency in this discussion has shifted to extend the emphasis on life stories as Thomas et al have suggested (2006, 78). Epstein concurs, by highlighting the

importance of engaging in imagery and narrative, in regards to the emotional aspects of the experiential system (1991, 177).

The use of biographical narrative in the context of research first requires the experience of those being interviewed to present and represent their experience. The following quote does an adequate job of explaining the nuances of the importance of such explanations: “In what ways can previous experiences, mobility and adaptation taken together, prepare young people for the future venture? Undoubtedly, they produce a kind of background, a mental or imaginary landscape regarding the countries visited, but also regarding language immersion, the experience of living abroad and the process of adaptation. ‘Impressions’ understood literally as imprints or feelings left in one’s mind by some external event, associated with these first contacts, however immediate or superficial they may be, play a crucial role.” (Murphy-Lejeune 2003, 74). Impressions, such as the ones described in the previous citation, offer a crucial insight into the lived experience and understanding of the self-theory and world-theory introduced in the previous section. Furthermore, the usage of explained stories constitutes a legitimate system in which this subjective experience is presented as the only coherent means to understand what happened over the course of their exchange period. Murphy-Lejeune elaborates “The students’ stories are not presided over by chance. Rather, like life stories, they are set in a personal chain of events, a temporal continuity which we try to reconstruct with them. The attempt to recall fragments of their past implies trying to retrieve some coherence from diverse scraps of life. (Murphy-Lejeune 2003, 76). In this sense, it is of utmost importance to act as a biographer, as “someone who supports as many people as possible to present and construct their individual moments”⁴ (Mutuale 2013, 56). The entire purpose of this work is to be able to recreate the stories of former participants of the program, in order to extract meaning on a grander scale. To this end, acceptance of biography and narrative as legitimate, representative presentations is essential.

2.7 Participation in a Global Public sphere

The participation in a global public sphere can be seen as a prerequisite to becoming a global citizen. In order to participate, one must consume media produced on the global level. It is however, easy to conflate media produced for consumption at the global level, and media produced to perpetuate western (and specifically US-American) cultural imperialism. This theoretical paradigm was necessary to interrogate because I was particularly interested in

⁴ my own translation

seeing if access to a global public sphere was also possible for those who initially have less access to transnational human capital. In Gerhards, Hans, and Carlson's recent article, "Die Renditen von transnationalem Humankapital" (transl. The benefits of transnational human capital), participation in a transnational public sphere was presented in the framework of Europe, and essentially limited within that context. According to this article, the possibility of an international (in this case, European) public sphere, is quite low (Gerhards, Hans, and Carlson 2014, 267). Rather, the possibility of a "Europeanization" of multiple national public spheres is more likely, through the instrument of democratization within the European Union. It is interesting to note what sort of parallels this process has outside of the European context. In this respect, the idea of a global public sphere, in which the participants of study abroad programs are active members is of theoretical importance. Gerhard talks of a transnational public sphere, to which participants have access in a multitude of ways: the transnational experience of being born in a country and then migrating elsewhere, for example (2014, 278). It was also of particular interest to me to what extent the internet plays a role in the process of international communication. It was my initial assumption that the high usage of internet amongst youth would mean that my research subjects would generally respond positively when asked about their consumption of foreign media via the internet. This was however, not the case in initial research done by Gerhards and Schäfer upon the phenomenon of Internet as a medium for a higher presence of debate on the topic of human genome research in comparison with offline media (2009, 14). When examined more accurately, however, the relevance of this study of a phenomenon in which the hierarchy of "legitimate" sources of information (in this case scientific journals written and peer reviewed by experts) is not necessarily analog with the consumption of entertainment media in relatively more horizontal production and consumption dynamic. The theoretical basis being set, I was interested in seeing if the findings established by this study would hold true in a different context.

Overall, it was the particular phenomenon of acquiring transnational linguistic capital, a subset of transnational human capital, namely the ability to speak multiple foreign languages, that initially drew my attention to the question of whether or not a year exchange period at a young age increases the likelihood of consuming entertainment and informative media from other public spheres, and thus, participation in a global public sphere.

2.7.1 Hypotheses

It was therefore important to specifically evaluate the aforementioned theoretical considerations. By keeping in mind each of the variables involved in the possible long term

effects of study abroad, I was able to formulate hypotheses that targeted these considerations in order to be tested during the practical phase (see methodologies section)

The hypotheses are as follows:

Hypothesis --1: In general, the period of residence abroad has a positive effect on the lives of participants in terms of self-related aspects and competence; openness, flexibility, and composure, self-awareness, social competence, intercultural learning, cultural identity, relationship with the guest country/other cultures, constructive activities, and influence on professional development

Hypothesis 2: The period of residence abroad has a positive effect on the students in terms of unintended effects (which could easily but do not necessarily fall into the categories mentioned above)

Hypothesis 3: The period of residence abroad has a positive effect related to flexibility and composure, especially if the actual period can be viewed as “negative”.

Hypothesis 4: The period of residence abroad will result in a higher degree of transnational human capital

Hypothesis 4a: A higher degree of transnational human capital will result in higher participation in a global public sphere

Hypothesis 5: The higher degree of transnational human capital as a result of period abroad will have a positive result on professional and educational opportunities.

As one can see, the hypotheses span a broad range of areas of interest. It was my goal to target as many areas of improvement as possible, in order to provide definitive results as to the possible benefits of a study abroad period for the target group.

2.7.2 Framing the research question.

The preceding pages have positioned my argument to highlight how increasingly common and important studying abroad as a high school student has become. The growing trend highlighted by Weichbrodt (2014, 73) and (Gerhards and Hans 2013, 100) only serve to further illuminate the need for a greater understanding of this phenomenon, as well as to highlight the lack of representation of those who attend Realschule within this process.

The concept of study abroad being helpful to one's development is nothing new. The numerous studies I have mentioned previously highlight the benefits upon the lives of students who engage in such an undertaking many years into the future. Aside from professional and educational development, the less tangible concepts of self-reliance and independence are closely linked with living and studying in a foreign country at a formative age. As noted by Murphy-Lejeune: "Individuals liberated from conventional perspectives are freer and their individuality gains in strength since they are in a better position to take stock of their own identity and to master the social construction of their life" (Murphy-Lejeune 2003, 144). By liberating themselves from the former "conventional perspectives" of only occupying the country they've lived in for their entire lives, my research subjects engage on a journey which allows them to construct personal and public narratives which help them to shape their lives. The construction of this narrative has been integral in my understanding of their experiences and represents a substantial part of my research

By understanding how these students communicate their perspectives, conventional or otherwise, I will be able to offer a perspective of the benefits of these experiences in a way that attempts to present the data in a form as unadulterated as possible. According to the current research, there is an overwhelming tendency for participants to offer their narrative and "self-assess" the results of studying abroad as an overall positive experience. However, there are less sources that corroborate these self-assessments in the same way that they are communicated by participants (Hörl 2012 15, Savicki 2008, 131). Also, it is important to note that there have been studies which validate the qualitative process of self-assessment. Jürgen Gerhards describes a study in which Hartmut Esser evaluates the foreign language competence of migrants based upon their own statements, coming to the conclusion that "the subjective self-evaluation of language competence can be used as a substitute for objective measurement."⁵ (2010, 153). It is utilizing this basis that I was able to move forward with justifying self-assessment as a legitimate basis for my research.

The phenomenon of international education, particularly in the high school context, offers a plethora of perspectives as to how it improves the lives of its participants. However, as mentioned previously, studies tend to focus on the upper class perspectives of students who typically have an easier time and access to institutions like university preparatory schools, e.g. parents who have attended Gymnasium (Gerhards, Hans and Carlson 2014, 128) and who may

⁵ die subjektive Selbsteinschätzung der Sprachkompetenz durchaus als ein Ersatzindikator für eine objektive Kompetenzmessung genutzt werden kann.

have also had the opportunity to collect transnational human capital by going abroad themselves (Gerhards, Hans and Carlson 2014, 148). The increasing exchange of information, capital and people across international borders is both a cause and effect of this phenomenon. With this in mind, it is important to understand the all aspects of globalization in the context of international education.

Nicholas Burbules, a scholar on the topic of globalization and international education, succinctly describes the importance of defining globalization, and provides us with an applicable working definition: “One of the ideological effects of arguments about “globalization” is the air of inevitability given to the notion that public policies must address the transnational character of economic, political, and cultural processes, and that in the context of education, specifically, research must help us understand how the content of learning, the processes and activities of learning, and the institutions in which learning takes place are being “globalized”, shaping and being shaped by the movement of people, ideas, and material resources across national boundaries.” (2000, 165). This demonstrates an understanding of the explicit and implicit relationship between globalization and the phenomenon of international education. Burbules acknowledges that a potential definition of globalization could be the “emergence of new global cultural forms, media, and technologies of communication, all of which shape the relations of affiliation, identity, and interaction with and across local cultural settings.” (2000, 2). The definition of globalization presented in my work will also draw upon the fact that specific transformational changes, in this context, the existence and widespread proliferation of study abroad programs, contribute to the aforementioned emergence of global cultural forms and means of communication. In its current form, this exchange of information and flow of capital has only existed for a very short time. The implications of a globalized flow of knowledge taking place in the form of study abroad at such a young age for an increasing number of youth can be related back to the ideas of “affiliation, identity and interaction”. As these youth return from their period of study, they begin to shape their own lifeworld as well as their environment. The exchange aspect of study abroad often plays the role of bringing the embodiment of new information and knowledge in the form of former study abroad participants and their experience, with the end result of development within the context of cultural settings. It is with this consideration that the relationship between education and globalization must be thematized.

It also must be said that the unequal access to transnational human capital creates a system in which the target group of my research, German vocational high school students, face proven

difficulties in reaping the benefits of studying abroad. These considerations are all being made in the pursuit to answer the research question:

“What are the overall long-term effects of a study abroad period on the lives of German vocational high school students?”

In order to examine the phenomenon of international education in this context, it has been necessary to unpack what the experience of going abroad during high school means for the target group addressed in this work. As the research has shown, German vocational high-school students are routinely and systematically underrepresented when it comes to taking part in the phenomenon of high school study abroad. The reason this becomes so problematic is the categorization of participants and non-participants in the years following secondary education which include the difficulties of searching for jobs, university education, and general development throughout their lives. Bourdieu indicates that the accrual of social capital is not evenly spread throughout various categorizations of social class, while Gerhards, Hans and Sörenson relate this specifically to international experience (2014, 128). This phenomenon leads to much of what can be interpreted as global inequality.

Vocational high school students are going abroad, coming back, and feeling the effects of their experiences. As to what those experiences mean for their lives, I have decided to highlight the important concepts of transnational human capital, social mobility, and the participation in and existence of a global public sphere. Within the phenomenon of globalization, flows of capital remain ever-present and shape the lives of individuals that make up an emerging global populace. In the chapters that follow, I will demonstrate how I have reached the conclusions that I have. I will also delineate the tendencies I have found during my research, and extrapolate on what this could mean for the future.

3. Methodologies

3.1 General notes

The general layout of the methodologies section of this work will correspond to the recommended “checklist” suggested by Dr. Jan Kruse in his recent publication entitled “Qualitative Interviewforschung: ein Integrativer Ansatz” (trans. Qualitative interview research: an integrative approach). This publication offers an exhaustive method to presenting research findings, and the section which describes methodologies proved to be extremely useful in this regard (Kruse 2014, 635-639). These guidelines describe many subtle nuances and reminders as to how to position oneself in the discourse, the relationship and positions of the

various research subjects, and how to approach the considerable amount of data. The following section will be constructed as recommended by this publication.

The process I chose to employ began with the development of a theoretical framework that I would then set into praxis while designing my research instruments. The framework formed the basis of my justifications for choosing to highlight various categories relevant to this particular line of inquiry. I then developed a qualitative research interview guideline, with the ideological support of the steering committee of the Kreuzberger Kinderstiftung, after which I conducted sixty-nine interviews using a version of the guideline I developed and then translated into German. After this entire process, I analyzed the data during the final data analysis phase over the course of two months. This chapter will describe exactly which steps I took in order to effectively represent my findings in this thesis. In the following sub-sections, I will discuss the issues relevant to my approach to the topic at hand.

3.2 Reflection

Reflecting upon the phenomenon of study abroad has never been difficult for me. Initially, the intended topic of my thesis was going to be study abroad at the university level. However, thanks to the involvement of the Kreuzberger Kinderstiftung, I became involved with this similar, yet distinctly different topic (see previous section). My research interests have always been related to international education and the acquisition of knowledge and experience in other contexts. To be able to study this phenomenon in individuals at a very early stage in their academic and personal development presents a particularly interesting opportunity for me. I view it as an opportunity to reflect upon the process of education as a whole, as well as a way to consider development in both myself and others who also find themselves in a similar flow of global knowledge production and acquisition.

With this in mind, I would like to locate myself in the process of engaging in the study of international education. Organizing my own educational background around an international framework has led me to the position in which I find myself, namely contributing to the discussion around international education and increasingly global flows of knowledge and experience. I consider myself a participant observer in this process, as someone who has been living, working, and studying outside of his home country for the past four years. To this end, I see myself reflected in the stories of the research subjects I have been lucky enough to be able to study.

The qualitative research that I have done for this project represents my interests in hearing the biographical narrative of individuals who I feel belong to an emerging global citizenry. This

project also means that I am contributing to general knowledge about a phenomenon that I feel strongly about. I also very strongly identify with the mission of the Kreuzberger Kinderstiftung, which has the advantage of meaning that I am doing work that believe in, but also has the added disadvantage in that I run the danger of too closely identifying with the participants of the program and experience a false sense of security, a phenomenon that many researchers of social topic encounter (Kruse 2014, 306).

It is also important to note that I occupy the positionality of someone from the United States, of mixed African-American and Mexican-American heritage, male, from a relatively lower-income family, able-bodied. These identity characteristics, of course, played a huge role in informing my subjective position related to the people I interviewed and interacted with during the entire project. Each interaction that I had in the context of my research was informed by these identity constructs insofar as I presented myself to the research subjects, albeit without qualifying or introducing myself in that way. I did not find it important to let them know every aspect of my identity for the purpose of the project. That being said, it was relatively important for them to note my nationality for two reasons: the first being that the interviews themselves were not conducted in English, my native language. A number of participants initially assumed that they would have to conduct the interview in English, despite their native language being German. After realizing this, I addressed this in subsequent initial communication⁶ with potential interviewees. The second reason for which my nationality became an issue was the high number of participants who went to the United States, who spent a lot of time unnecessarily explaining the American high school system to me, someone who knows no other high school experience. In this regard, nationality played an important role in how I interacted, albeit in an unintended way, with the subjects of this thesis.

It is increasingly important, in the context of academia, to look critically at where knowledge is being produced. To this end, it has been my goal to be as transparent as possible with my own identity and to afford those reading this work a more accurate idea of the context which brought this particular research into existence.

3.3 Research instrument

The chosen instrument for this work was semi-structured interviews. The advantages of qualitative interviews in the context of socially focused issues has long been proven. (See

⁶ All communication with former participants is included in an electronic appendix for this work

Ardichvili 2002, Bresler 2002, Engle 2012, among others) It was of utmost importance to be able to adapt to different challenges that arose during the interview process. Although I did conduct three “test runs” with German students⁷ who had been abroad, the interview guidelines did see some minor variation from the first time to the last time an interview was conducted. Each incarnation of the interview guidelines was intended to more accurately target the qualitative issues outlined in the theoretical framework section. Of course, no two participant’s individual stories are alike. For this reason, the interview script took into consideration various differences from one interview to the next. Due to evolving nature of my own understanding of the data to be collected, the interviews adapted and developed during the research process.

The survey questions were written out to be performed orally (and ideally face-to-face, although this later became a problem) with former participants of the stipend program of the Kreuzberger Kinderstiftung. Initially, the questions were written in English, in order to provide a better overview of how each question could relate to the necessary topics to be evaluated, as well as to provide the professors responsible for evaluating this work an overview in the language of instruction offered by the Global Studies Programme, the department for which I am writing this thesis. After this, the questions were then translated into German, keeping in mind the target audience and adapting the language to be appropriate for that age group/comprehension level. The questions were based off of a number of categories found in previous works focusing on a similar topic, such as *Erlebnisse, die verändern* (Thomas et al 2007) and *Students of Four decades* (Bachner and Zeuschel 2009). The categories presented by Thomas et al were essentially corroborated as being particularly useful in terms of measuring development as a result from a study abroad period. (See theoretical framework section)

The reason for selecting these two particular works was the level of research that went into them which focused particularly on the German context. At the beginning, there was an abundance of literature available on this topic in German, and very little in English. However, it was not necessary for me to reinvent the wheel, in order to fit the needs of my project. Of course, the two sources I mentioned earlier focus upon the phenomenon of studying abroad in general, with Bachner and Zeuschel particularly focusing on at US-German partnership. However both of the texts failed at examining the particular sub-group of vocational high school students that will be the emphasis of this thesis. However, as I will show throughout

⁷ These students were considerably older than the subjects and had attended Gymnasium. The main purpose of these test runs was nevertheless to see if the interview guidelines were in need of any modification before approaching the subject population.

this paper, there are a number of similarities and parallels which mean that the literature can be applied in order to further understand this section of the field.

In order to round out the data presumed to be collected by questions relating to the previously mentioned categories, additional questions were asked relating to works by Bandura, Epstein, Hörl, Gerhards, Hans, and Sören, among others. This provided a number of different perspectives relating to the sociology of education, macrosociology, psychology and many other fields. It was necessary to include such perspectives, given the interdisciplinary nature of my field of study, as well as the fact that a majority of the works reference one another, providing a more holistic view of the phenomenon to be studied.

The instrument itself was also developed with the ideological support from the steering committee of the Kreuzberger Kinderstiftung. A meeting was held on October 30th, 2014 in which the initial development process and timeline of this thesis was presented, where the members of the committee offered their critique and suggestions. I then incorporated these suggestions into a final version, which was implemented in the interviews that took place. The final version of the list of interview questions in both English and German can be found in the physical appendix to this work.

3.4 Sample selection

This work is intended as a case study of the Kreuzberger Kinderstiftung. Since 2009, a total of 255 high-school students have gone abroad with the support of this organization, with a small portion of them not actually completing their entire year. In order to be able to extrapolate for future generations of youth going abroad, it was my responsibility to first establish demographic information in order to see who is going where. The following diagrams provide a brief overview of the demographics involved.

	Population	Percentage	Sample	Percentage
Male	84	32.94%	20	32.1%
Female	171	67.06%	49	67.9%
German	211	79.32%	55	78.2%
Immigration Background	44	17.25%	14	21.8%

Asian and African Countries	20	7.84%	5	7.25%
English-Speaking Countries	115	45.10%	32	46.38%
European Countries and Russia	54	21.18%	14	20.29%
Latin-American Countries	66	25.88%	18	26.09%

Table 1

The first two columns within Table 1 represent the demographics of overall participants out of the 255 that have taken part over the past 6 years. The third and fourth column represent the participants in my study. In addition to the descriptive tables, I also performed a brief statistical analysis, comparing the percentages of the relevant variables in the population with the percentages of the sample I interviewed.

	Population Percentage	Sample Percentage
Male	32.94%	28.99
Female	67.06%	71.01%
P-Value = 0.39		

Table 2

	Population Percentage	Sample Percentage
German	82.75%	79.71%
Immigrant Background	17.25%	20.29%
P-Value = 0.34		

Table 3

	Percentage	Percentage
Asian and African Countries	7.8%	7.25%
English-Speaking Countries	45%	46.38%
European Countries and Russia	21.2%	20.29%
Latin-American Countries	26%	26.09%
P-Value = 0.07		

Table 4

As Tables 2, 3, and 4 demonstrate, the sample and the population are not independent. With a significance value of 0.39, 0.34, and 0.07, respectively, they are representative at the .05 level, meaning that we can reject the null hypothesis that they are dependent, making the results statistically significant.

While my particular sample isn't representative of all vocational high school students to ever go abroad, for example, it does represent a sizeable portion of the entire participant population from the country's largest organization to specifically target this group. As you can see from the Tables, the field itself is quite diverse in terms of national/ethnic background, more likely female, and goes to a broad (but not exhaustive) list of destinations. Suffice it to say, this thesis provides a sound basis for further research to be done on the topic of international exchange amongst vocational German high school students.

3.5 Recruiting

The difficulty of collecting 100 interview subjects proved to be detrimental to the aims of the steering committee of our organization. After contacting every alumnus multiple times, it became very clear that the intended number and the actual number were to become two very different things. However, the end result of sixty-nine collected interviews, which is roughly 27% of the available subjects, offers a respectable amount of representative data. Also, it must be said that in the desire to collect relevant data to the phenomenon at hand, the question arose whether or not it was useful to ask the participants themselves about their experience abroad. Surely, there must be another, more legitimate source to gauge changes. What do their parents have to say, for example? This line of thinking, while valid in assuming that there are other ways to obtain similar veins of information, is flawed in trying to discredit the sole observers

of what is being studied: the participants of the exchange program themselves. It is my aim to give credence to the stories that they have shared with me and to remember that each individual (perhaps not only in relation to this project) is the expert of their own experience. While others may be able to “objectively” assess from an outsider perspective, it is also completely valid to listen and value the participants’ observations of their own development. Who else would be able to provide such intimate accounts of their own lives?

3.6 Data and Ethical considerations

In order to ethically collect data for my research, many considerations had to be made. Of course, basic understanding of integrity and the intention objectivity were of utmost importance. It is clear that true objectivity is impossible, given my own background and positionality (see previous section) However, as codified in the Ethik-kodex der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Soziologie⁸ (DGS) und des Berufsverbandes Deutscher Soziologen⁹ (BDS) (Gläser and Laudel 295-301), the intention to shy away from compromising results, infringe upon the rights of the participants, and maintain academic integrity was kept in mind throughout this project. It is also for this reason that any data presented pertaining to any one particular former participant will only be made available in the electronic addendum of this work, for the archival purposes within the Kreuzberger Kinderstiftung itself.

From the beginning of the interview it was made clear that the information would be held in confidence and only used for general statements. That being said, in the course of this work, certain quotations will be used to highlight salient points. In these cases, the quotes will be presented without names attached for participants who were told that their statements would be used.¹⁰

On multiple occasions, I was asked by my research participants if the information they were presenting was confidential. It is worth noting that after assuring participants that their names would be made anonymous, that they became notably more open in explaining their experiences. Indeed, in cases where the participant was unsure if explaining their experience was the right thing to do in this context, the only thing that allowed them to feel comfortable was the idea that their potential misdeed wouldn’t be passed along. It was my intent to approach this subject as sensitively as possible.

⁸ Ethics Codex of the German Society for Sociology

⁹ Professional Organization of German Sociologists

¹⁰ However, the electronic addendum will contain information connected with the real names of former participants. This will not be published.

3.7 Conducting the interviews

The actual process of conducting the interviews took place over the period of seven months, mostly in the form of face-to-face interviews that took place on site at the Kreuzberger Kinderstiftung in Berlin from October 2014 to April 2015. There were also three separate research trips to various parts of eastern Germany, in order to facilitate interviews with former participants who could not come to Berlin in order to be interviewed. They took place in Magdeburg, Dresden, and Jena during the seventh month period. After the initial rush of participants who were willing and available to be interviewed, it quickly became difficult to contact willing participants. For this reason, although it was initially planned to solely perform interviews in person, the last seventeen interviews were performed via Skype. This provided the advantage of contacting former participants who were outside of Germany, or who otherwise would not have been interviewed for various reasons.

The process of conducting the interviews in German offered its own special challenges. It was not immediately obvious to every participant, particularly in Berlin, due to its multicultural landscape, that I am not German. Interesting to note was the relationship between those youth who went to the United States. There were many moments in which the interview was co-opted by a need to explain phenomena with which I was already familiar. I also became aware of the Hawthorne effect (Landsberger 1958 1-119). This concept, initially used to describe the effect of the presence of researchers on the work ethic and productivity of laborers within an electric company, found parallel in my study in that I noticed that my presence also influenced the manner in which my research subjects produced the data that I was looking for. Particularly, I noticed that after participants became aware that I am from the United States, there was a reluctance to speak poorly of certain aspects of their experience. There were also a number of cases in which, after discovering that I am from California, the interview subjects immediately described their particular relationship with that region of the United States, even if they themselves had never been there. This is a reaction for which I can offer no other explanation, other than the fact that the interview subjects felt the need to relate in some way. Overall, conducting each interview was a multi-faceted process that offered an in depth look into the lives and experiences of each former participant. The following chapters will provide an overview of the data I collected.

3.8 Interview participation

The general reaction to my attempts to contact interviewees were mixed. At the beginning, it seemed that there was a willingness that, unfortunately, was lacking as the months passed. I had been operating under the assumption that, given the fact that these youth had received thousands of Euros from the organization's stipend program, they would be willing to participate in interviews that only required them to talk about an experience I assumed they would enjoy talking about. In this respect, I was mistaken. The general trend of what participants gave as their reasoning for participating in the interview gave me a sense that they felt begrudgingly responsible for giving something back. Only with a few did I have the feeling that the interview was an opportunity to discuss something that they perhaps didn't get the opportunity to discuss with strangers. However, a trend that I discovered after the initial interview was that participants did find it difficult to discuss their experiences with friends and family who had not been abroad, which only further presents this disinterest in being interviewed as being counterintuitive. Be that as it may, the interview subjects were varied in their willingness to participate, but ultimately erred on the side of a lack of interest.

The question posed in his manual by Kruse "What did the participants want to give you?"¹¹ (2014, 637) can be answered in various ways. This experience showed that many former participants were looking for a number of things: a chance to share their life experiences, the space to boast about their accomplishments, an opportunity to process an experience they hadn't given thought in a new way, or even an outlet to vent about some negative aspects of their year. The interview itself represented a discursive space which ultimately led to the discussion and exchange of experiences, and participation in the interview formed the basis of discourse which, of course, will be used for analysis in the following sections.

3.9 Analysis

The sheer amount of data made this portion of the thesis quite a challenge. I recorded roughly fifty-three hours of interview material, and transcribing it entirely would have taken an amount of time that falls outside of the realm of possibility, especially for a master's thesis. In order to analyze the data, I listened to each individual interview with the conceptualized hypotheses in mind (see theoretical framework chapter). This analysis technique made it possible to process the data in the allotted time frame, as well as provide enough material to accurately examine the data in relation to the hypotheses that were initially conceived. The process involved many

¹¹ Was wollten die Befragten einem mitgeben?

hours of listening and re-listening to the recorded interviews, and transcribing individual quotes which were relevant to the previously mentioned categories. In addition, the interviews were examined for data relevant to the hypotheses, and it was carefully noted whether or not they held true, were refuted, or if the data was inconclusive. Samples of finished analyses can be found at the end of this work, in the appendix. After evaluating the sixty-nine roughly forty-five-minute to hour-long interviews, the data was then compiled into a document relating to each hypothesis, which can also be found at the end of this work. In corroboration with the SRS (Social Reporting Standards), a qualitative guideline for the presentation of social research on non-governmental organizations and social enterprises, this work falls under the category of presenting “Erfahrungsberichte”, or “Experience reports” (SRS 2012, 12-13). This will help qualify the results of my research and possibly shed light upon the direction which the Kreuzberger Kinderstiftung would like to prioritize in the future in terms of their social efforts.

Summary

The purpose of this chapter has been to reflect upon the methodologies that I chose to apply in approaching this phenomenon. The overall qualitative approach has helped me to draw conclusions, which will be discussed later in this thesis.

4. Interview Data

4.1 General notes

The following section will highlight tendencies that I have found utilizing the data that was extrapolated from the semi-structured interviews as described in the methodologies section. I will point out the salient factors in effects of the roughly 10 month period in various countries that the interview subjects experienced. The questions will be justified and explained in a way which reflects their connection to the broader context, as well as their implications for the Kreuzberger Kinderstiftung. As mentioned previously, if quotations are used to highlight particularly interesting tendencies, names will not be used in order to maintain the anonymity that was promised to the former participants at the beginning of the interview. My argument will also highlight the hypotheses made based on the theoretical considerations established at the beginning of this work, in relation to the overall effects of the study abroad period on the lives of these particular students. I will argue that my primary research corroborates what has been initially stated in secondary literature research about the positive effects of a study abroad period on the lives of students who are more privileged with more access to various forms of capital than my interview subjects. The applicability of the phenomena in those initial cases

will also be confirmed in relation to this subset of individuals. I will discuss these positive effects based on the categorical considerations initially established by researchers in that similar field to further justify my claim.

4.2 Beginning the interview

The first questions were posed in order to get some background information, and establish the rhythm of the interview. Demographics were of particular interest, and each question was asked in a way that allowed the respondents to respond in any way they saw fit. It only occurred on a small number of occasions that a respondent refused to answer a personal question; this was usually in regards to either questions regarding familial relationships or “mistakes” made during their experience abroad. Examples of the types of questions asked are: “Where did you go, what did you do? Were there any special experiences you’d like to share?” Again, the particular portion relating to “special experiences” that they might like to share was framed in the sense that they could share both positive and negative experiences. This was done in accordance with the way questions were asked in the study presented “Students of Four Decades” (Bachner and Zeuschel 2009, 82). It quickly became apparent that the participants had a wide range of experience that fell on a spectrum of largely positive to largely negative, or a mixture of both.

4.3 Before and after

In describing themselves before their year abroad, most participants said that they were more shy and closed before their year abroad. Participants reported a plethora of new experiences, exactly that which would not have been possible, had they decided to stay in Germany. Some participants learned physical activities, like rowing or skiing. Others adapted to lifestyle changes, including vegetarianism. It is interesting to note that change in environment often (but not always) results in adaptation, particularly in this context. After coming back from their experience, a huge majority of those interviewed described themselves as having become more independent. Utilizing almost exactly the same wording, each former participant described the process of having to apply for the program and scholarship, as well as adapt to the bureaucratic responsibilities necessary to go abroad. In terms of support, the students often described being solely responsible for making their arrangements, occasionally falling back on their familial support systems or the logistic support offered by the Kreuzberger Kinderstiftung. Falling in line with Bandura’s concept of self-efficacy (1995, 19), students reported an improvement in their ability to “execute the courses of action required to manage prospective situations”. This

concept of self-efficacy and generally being able to effectively engage in their own agency as young adult came up quite frequently throughout the interview phase. Students described that they were more capable after coming back from a foreign country, and this could be directly linked by their own statements to experiences that they would not have had otherwise.

In addition, each subject described that after their experience, they are more likely to approach people in social circumstances, due to a developed sense of self-confidence. Thomas et al noted this in their subjects as well, stating that respondents in their study reacted more open and flexibly in new situations (2007, 112). This was a tendency that only saw a few exceptions, which will be discussed later in this chapter. The reported increase in self-confidence was so high in some cases, that they also attributed social successes such as meeting boyfriends/girlfriends or developing their friend circle because of it.

The surroundings in which each participant found themselves was, of course, markedly different to what they were accustomed. The household, specifically, presented a particular change in surrounding, as most youth noted spending a lot of time at home or with their guest families. The difference between the typical household in Germany, particularly for our target group, and the households in which they found themselves abroad was striking. Many participants reported having to adapt to a different number of siblings, different constellations of guest parents, pets, and other household peculiarities. Initially, after being asked to describe themselves, the most common statement made was about their familial relationships. This set the tone for the often very different situation in which they found themselves. The way that the former participants interacted with their family, as an extension of the country they had chosen, was almost always a juxtaposition of their own concept of self and self-identity. The concept of developing “Selbstbewusstsein” or self-awareness, is a common thread throughout the literature surrounding study abroad (Thomas et al 2007, 153). At this particular time, youth are developing their own concept of themselves, and the introduction of a next context presents an opportunity in which youth can process their theories of reality in a way that they would not if they had stayed in their home country (Thomas et al 2007, 48). To this end, the former participants noted quite frequently that they were confronted with issues regarding themselves during their study abroad experience that they wouldn't have normally come across if they had stayed home.

Another constant amongst the relatively independent youth of Germany was that in each of their guest countries they were unable to move as freely as they were accustomed to, given that public transportation in Germany is relatively extensive, especially in comparison to countries with a smaller amount of infrastructure. This resulted in a sense of appreciation for their own

surrounding upon return. One aspect in which this manifested itself time and time again was the idea of safety in relation to travel. Most of the female participants noted that they were not allowed to travel alone, and without the advantage of a developed public transportation system, were often confined to their homes or reliant upon asking to be driven. However, generally participants reported a general feeling of anxiety, particularly at the beginning of their stay. The development of “metastrategies”, general capabilities to integrate and find one’s bearings, was important here (Hörl 2012, 19). As is often the case when in a foreign country, the general experience of culture shock results in the need to orient oneself by developing strategies to adapt and thrive. In relation to the question of transportation, most students grew accustomed to being dependent upon other people, who were simply concerned for their well-being. Generally, the conversation around how each student was to travel within their guest country created thicker bonds with guest families, and relationships with fellow students, a generally positive experience.

All this being said, a number of former participants reported that it was even more difficult to come back into their old lives. This is contingent with the Bachner and Zeuschel’s findings (2009, 61). However, it is necessary to note that a number of former participants also noted that they needed to “escape” their current household living situations. In this case, it was also potentially detrimental to their development in the guest country, as the home support system, which has been known to be an important variable was lacking. The concept of escapism in terms of study abroad is also not a new phenomenon but, it bears being said that particularly lower- or working-class families, to which the target group of this work are more likely to belong (Prenzel, Manfred, et al, 2006, 330) the opportunity to leave troubles behind and embark on a completely new adventure is, understandably, attractive.

4.4 Security and anxiety

Security was, of course, an issue in many aspects of the study abroad process before, during, and after. As mentioned previously, many students, particularly female participants, reported choosing their potential countries based on the particularly gendered safety aspects. Perceived identity played a large part in choice processes in study abroad. For example, participants who reported being perceived as not “looking German” i.e. blond and blue-eyed, described a markedly different experience from their fairer counterparts. This is reflected in the fact that 21.8% of my sample that was not of completely “German” heritage. Self-identification also played a role in the perception of safety while completing the exchange year. For the minority of participants who self-identified as being of other religious affiliations, or belonging to the

LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay Bisexual, Transgender, Queer) community, the apparent unease rose in some situations. Admittedly, the experience of being a Muslim German girl of Turkish origin in the rural United States and the experience of being a gay German boy in South Africa are going to come with their own distinct challenges. Both of these particular subjects, however, reported the commonality of at times being unwilling to admit their extraordinary identity characteristics, for fear that it would change the perceptions of the people in their surroundings. During the period of time abroad, the feeling of safety ranged from feeling completely safe to at times feeling very unsafe, depending on the country. There was a tendency for former participants to report feeling unsafe or anxious on the first day of school, or during their transition period regardless of guest country. The drastic change in location and school placement presented a challenge, which prepared these youth for the inevitability of having to return to Germany and seek either placement in a new school or vocational training institution. Many students reported that their experiences in foreign countries provided them with a frame of reference for what they were capable of. The idea behind this concept being “If I’ve made it through that, I can get through this.” This is just one way that the year demonstrates an extended effect on the lives of the students after their period abroad.

In addition, former participants who went abroad to South Africa or countries in Latin America, for example, reported becoming acutely aware of “areas where you just don’t go”. This was reported in situations in both the Global South and the Global North, where students reported developing a sense of the “dangerous areas” of a metropolis. The benefits of this new sense of space could be seen in the experiences of many participants, particularly one young woman, who went to a Latin American country for her exchange year, but has since been to Bolivia and Turkey. This participant noted the similarities between the dangerous areas in these three countries, and how she used her prior knowledge of Latin America to avoid danger while stranded without a cell phone in Istanbul.

On the theoretical level, the general knowledge of “what one is doing and why one is doing it” speaks to an ontological feeling of security in the sense of Giddens (1991, 35). This particular feeling of self-awareness, self-reflexivity, and self-preservation is exemplified in the fact that former participants are acting upon the desires of the self, translated here into “everyday activities” that are no longer routine, given the fact that they are taking place in a setting that is completely foreign to them. Giddens also discusses the concept of motivation, in relation to security by stating “Reasons for action, [...] are an intrinsic part of the reflexive monitoring of action carried on by all human agents. Reasons form an ongoing feature of action -- rather than being linked as sequences or aggregates. All competent agents routinely ‘keep in touch’ with

the grounds of their behavior as an aspect of producing and reproducing that behavior” (Giddens 1991, 63). In maintaining their own day to day activities, participants study abroad demonstrate their own agentic purpose by reproducing behavior which keeps them safely in accordance with their own goals. This behavior then maintains the safety that is urgently needed when experiencing the vast array of new things with which these youth come in contact. The conceptualization of safety in a foreign country, and the development of a sense of how to stay safe is crucial when it comes to both physical danger and psychological anxiety. The tools that former participants of study abroad develop to navigate the inevitable evolution of circumstances, particularly in the context of searching for educational placement after 10th grade necessary for Realschüler, are invaluable. The fact that these students are coming back from their experiences and thriving in their educational environments speaks to the positive educational benefits of the study abroad experience.

4.5 Mistakes and triumphs

With regards to the psychological experiences of former study abroad participants, the idea of Epstein’s experiential system is noteworthy (2003, 159) This concept is an aspect of the previously mentioned Cognitive Experiential Self-Theory (CEST) which describes a rational system that emphasizes logical analysis of the world around you, and an experiential system which emphasizes emotions or “what feels good” (Epstein 2003, 160). The existence of this experiential system is exemplified in the work of Thomas et al (2007, 33) and is also completely relevant in the findings of my research. The former participants reported their experiences in ways that corroborate with this theory, indicated in the following excerpt:

“Toward the apex of the conceptual structure are highly general, abstract schemas, such as that the self is worthy, people are trustworthy, and the world is orderly and good.” (Epstein 2003, 160). The generality of the preceding statement was echoed by many participants, indicating that they embody some aspects of the experiential system, whose structure leans towards these generalized abstract schemas. The general conceptualization of the CEST as an emotional as well as cognitive system (Epstein 2003, 161) highlights its relevance within the mostly emotionally related processes and responses garnered by the interviews. Throughout their period abroad, former participants attempted, failed, and succeeded at a number of new endeavors, forcing them to process these endeavors in new ways. And despite the varying levels of success, the subjects noted a lack of regrets. For example, when asked if they made any mistakes during their year, a large majority responded that they had not. However, a small group of admittedly more introspective students did report things that they might have done

differently. These subjects tended to be older, with their study abroad experience a longer period of time behind them. The fact that the target group of this project goes abroad during their tenth year means that they have the space to make these realizations within an earlier time frame in comparison with those who go abroad after completing Abitur. In comparison with students who attend Gymnasium and go abroad afterwards, the former KKS stipend recipients are pursuing jobs (or university) with an experience under their belt that they have had years to reflect upon. During their year abroad, the sense of accomplishment garnered from positively completing tasks or fulfilling responsibilities in a foreign environment played a central role in the development of the students. This particular phenomenon offers them the opportunity to feel proud of something done in a way that would have been markedly different from their home country. A general trend amongst former participants was feeling proud, for example, of receiving compliments on their language capacity, possibly being confused with a local, or generally exhibiting characteristics which signify that they had fully integrated into the culture of their guest country.

The sense of accomplishment after having completed the year was a huge factor in the overall benefit of having studied abroad. Given the fact that many people do not have the opportunity to study abroad, and not all of those that do make it to the end, the former participants can rightfully feel proud of the fact that they have accomplished something in their lives. This serves as a huge reference point particularly for the lives of those students who may require more time after their year in order to find a pursuit in which they can consider themselves successful. As with every successful social program, there are always a relatively small number of cases in which this situation is particularly relevant. Overall, however, the participants reported that their period abroad was an exciting accomplishment, one that they were unanimously glad to have behind them.

4.6 Goals

In addition to reflecting upon their mistakes and triumphs, the subjects were also asked to describe any goals they might have had during their year. Many responded with the general “experience a new culture, meet new people, learn a new language, etc.” which is to be expected from youth faced with a new, international environment. Also, depending on their level of preparation and involvement in preparation activities offered by the study abroad organizations, many former participants were familiar with codifying their setting of goals in which they actually decided upon them before their year and wrote them down.

When asked if they had achieved their goals, the overwhelming majority responded that they had. This had the marked effect on their self-esteem, which must be highlighted as one of the four basic needs of the CEST (Epstein 2003, 162). The achievement of goals as an emotional experience holistically improves the experience of the study abroad period. Particularly in this way, the achievement of goals in a new setting provides the added bonus of the recognition of new peers.

When it came to learning a language, in most cases it was inevitable for the participants to attend high school in a foreign country without becoming relatively fluent. There were, however, certain exceptions. Countries which maintain English as the primary language of instruction, but are home to other national languages such as South Africa or Malaysia, did not necessarily provide the participant with extensive knowledge of languages like Zulu, Xhosa, or Malaysian. In many cases, former students reported becoming more proficient in English as a means of communication than the local languages. This also transferred back with them as they transitioned into their lives in Germany, simply due to the fact that a German teenager doesn't necessarily have much contact with a populace that speaks less widely-spoken languages.

The goal of meeting new people and experiencing a new culture was also very important to many of those interviewed. By and large, the responses were positive. There was, however, one discrepancy in the narratives of many. Guest families, given the wide range of personalities, types of families, and capacities to take guest students in, were a faltering point for many former participants when asked if they had completely met their goals. A large number of participants stated that they wished to have a more intimate contact with their guest families, which turned out not to be the case. Indeed, when looking at the amount of times that some former participants switched their guest families, and hearing of the occasional "horror stories" that some experienced, this was an area which required some luck on the part of the students. In a lecture on the 23rd of January, 2015, Anja Wrulich of Johannes Gutenberg Universität Mainz presented her preliminary findings to the long term effects of a study abroad program under the umbrella of AFS, a partner organization of the KKS. In this presentation, she stressed the importance of a positive interaction with the guest family, stating that the relationship with the guest country is also positively maintained, in many cases years afterwards.

In terms of present goals, the majority of those interviewed responded that they would like to successfully complete the form of education that they are currently undertaking. As the majority of students are either still in high school or in university, this typically means that they

would like to eventually receive their diploma. This does not necessarily have to do with their exchange year, but the tools which they received often help them to get there. For example, the language skills acquired in foreign countries whose languages are offered as an honors course in high school facilitate the achievement of better grades in that course. This was paralleled in the many cases in which former participants employed their language skills in their university studies, or in their job setting.

Another common thread that was present in many of the interviews was the desire to return to their guest country, either to visit the host family and friends or to have experiences or travel to regions that they did not get to experience during their initial study abroad period. Additionally, many former participants spoke of having the goal of generally wanting to travel more, a desire that was awakened by this initial exchange experience. The desire to visit their guest families years after while accompanied by their biological families is also a common theme in the interviews, demonstrating that the positive relationship between families also stretches across international borders.

When asked about friends, most students responded that they did have “a lot” of friends. Here, the German understanding of the difference between “Freunde” (friends) and “Bekannte” (acquaintances) comes into play. They also confirmed the research done by Murphy-Lejeune, saying that the topic of discussion is initially the differences between guest and home country, which then transfers to the general topics that one discusses with one’s peers (2003, 112). This was the case in which former participants sought out experiences with locals, choosing to make friends of people who were not of their nationality. The reverse, however was also true. Many former participants reported seeking out friends and acquaintances with religious, ethnic or linguistic similarities. In most cases, this meant forming friendships or acquaintanceships with native German-speakers from Germany, Switzerland, or Austria. There were however notable cases in which former participants of Muslim origin, for example, noted feeling more comfortable in the presence of other Muslims. In a similar case, one participant became very good friends with a fellow Turkish speaker, albeit from Kazakhstan. The demographics of our target group allow for these dynamics to occur with a high probability, given that more than one-fifth of them do self-identify with having a migrant background. The in-group/out-group dynamics of each study abroad experience are almost as varied as the participants that experience them. However, the general trend is that former participants seek out environments in which they feel comfortable and peers with whom they can communicate, or achieve social goals. This, of course, varied depending upon the goals of the study for their study abroad period.

There was also an expressed desire to integrate, resulting in a lack of interest in fellow German study abroad participants. This was an interesting dynamic, as the presence of other German study abroad participants was not always the case. In the examples in which there was the opportunity to socialize with other Germans, and to speak their native language, most participants stated that this occurred at the beginning of their period abroad. It represented a safe space for the newly arrived students, who then had the opportunity to branch out at a later time. There were naturally occurring instances in which the former participants made lasting bonds with their fellow countrymen which lasted beyond their study abroad year and into the years after their study abroad experience. This could possibly have been the result of the target group focus of the Kreuzberger Kinderstiftung; many students had similar backgrounds (e.g. attending Realschule, coming from the same city, having a lower-income background, etc.) Many students reported coming back to Germany and not exactly fitting in with their old friend circle. The difficulties of having experienced a year abroad, about which they cannot relate to their peer group could then be easily alleviated by seeking out those people who did have a similar experience. This was the case in many occasions, in which participants reported that their families and friends did not express anything more than an initial, superficial interest in hearing the stories they had to tell from their time abroad. In this sense, establishing connections with people who had had similar experiences provided the former participants with the opportunity to belong to another group with similar backgrounds: study abroad alumni.

This is evidenced by the sense of community exhibited at the “Nachbereitungstreffen” (transl. follow-up meetings) offered by the various study abroad organizers. In these meetings, youth who had gone abroad during a specific year would discuss their experiences with representatives from the organizations engaging in a form of exchange that they would not receive in their school context, due to the fact that many of the participants in the Kreuzberger Kinderstiftung’s stipend program were the only person from the school or peer group to have gone abroad. These meetings took place at the continental as well as regional level, offering European former study abroad participants to compare their experiences with other Europeans. This has the discursive function of solidifying a distinctly European identity within the new group of study abroad alumni to which these students belong. In this case, the important distinction of symbolic linguistic capital, which is to say, linguistic capital which serves the express function of the formation of a collective identity, comes into play. (Gerhards 2010, 21) By engaging in the linguistic ritual of exchanging in English with their peers who had also been abroad, the students demonstrate the accrual of a particular form of capital which binds them via a shared group identity. Moreover, it also reflects the bonds that were often created during

the study abroad period, as the participants often reported establishing connections with fellow European students while being abroad.

The Kreuzberger Kinderstiftung also offers former participants the opportunity to debrief after their year abroad. These opportunities offer the target population the chance to exchange experiences with their fellow scholarship recipients. It is at these events that the participants engage in the specific activity of providing a narrative of their year with students of a similar background who have had similar experiences. The debriefing sessions allow for the students to contextualize their stories with the stories of others, describing and comparing what has happened to them over the last ten months. In this context, the opportunity to share is invaluable for two reasons: the first is that it is a democratic space in which each former participant shares for a relatively equal amount of time, giving students the leeway to discuss their experiences in a moderated and non-judgmental setting, and the second is that the sharing takes place in a homogeneous group. This provides the benefit of being able to talk about their experiences in a setting in which they do not have to thematize the circumstances in which they find themselves in regards to post year plans, as they would have to in a situation which involved students who attend Gymnasium

4.7 The school experience

In regards to the academic benefit of their study abroad experience, former participants might have seen the year as a hurdle, depending on the content of the year, and whether or not they had to repeat the 11th grade after their year. However, this was also seen as an advantage by some participants because it meant that they received the opportunity to repeat the subject matter that they were exposed to at their foreign school. This was dependent on a large number of things: whether or not the student was academically motivated, the quality of education within their guest country, whether or not they were integrated into their classes, their ability to understand the language of instruction. Due to the bylaws¹² of many study abroad service providers, grades are not necessarily transferred back to the home country. This, in conjunction with individual participants' plans to continue with eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth grade after their year abroad, contributed to a wide range of reported experiences. Some students, when describing the academic level of the schools which they attended while abroad, immediately disparaged their teachers and fellow classmates in comparison with Germany. This, however, does relate to the policy of individual programs, in that the students are not necessarily required

¹² For more information see <http://aja-org.de/erkennung-von-auslandsschuljahren/>

to take classes of a comparable level to the ones they would otherwise be required to take in Germany.

An interesting tendency arose with regards to the regulation of time. As study abroad participants aren't necessarily required to take the same classes as their domestic peers, the participants experience freedom that they wouldn't have been able to experience if they had stayed in Germany. This represents a unique opportunity in comparison to both students who stay in their home countries as well as students who attend Gymnasium, as these students are typically given very little choice as to what subjects they are required to take if they are not studying abroad.

Additionally, the school experience offers the potential for gaining exposure to alternative forms of collaboration. Many students became distinctly aware of the style in which locals of their guest country collaborate, and how this differentiates from the typical German vocational high school. As an example of tacit knowledge of informal behavioral rules (Gerhards and Hans 2013, 101), this was a learning experience for many former participants. For example, for a large number of participants, the collaboration took the form of activities which lead to an improvement in social competence (Thomas et al 2007, 108) to which the participant would not have otherwise gained exposure. The offer of activities included: sports like volleyball or basketball, creative activities like photography or film making, or even organizational activities like student government. When asked about these activities, the participant often responded that they were happy that they had received the opportunity to practice such skills with a group of people, as these activities are lacking in many Realschulen. The opportunity to try out new things, and see whether or not they fit into one's life is an invaluable chance from which these participants especially benefit. Had it not been for their exposure to a different academic life, they would not have been able to test these things out, due to the simple fact that many of these opportunities are not offered in Germany.

4.8 Culture

The questions relating to culture posed some difficulties for the interview subjects. Many responded with confusion as to what culture is actually "supposed to mean". However, after simply repeating the question with very little explanation, so as to give the interview subjects as much free range as possible, they typically tended to respond with descriptions of "low culture". Food, interpersonal relations, dress, and many other day-to-day phenomena were the subject of this answer.

The discussion during the interview about the relationship former participants had with the culture of their guest country also made them reflect upon the relationship they have with their home country. Interestingly, I heard from several interview subjects that they had never thought about their culture and being confronted with another hegemon dictating the norms of interaction made them rethink the ways in which they had interacted with other people in their home countries. Also, the phenomenon of being viewed as a “cultural representative” was a common theme. Many people reported identifying much more strongly with German culture after their year abroad with one going so far as saying “you represent your culture”¹³, during your year.

The general understanding of the foreign country is always presented from the understanding of one’s own country. The tendency to describe others holistically as either good or bad people rather than to restrict their judgments to specific behaviors or attributes is known as the global person evaluation heuristic (Epstein 2003, 171). This concept plays an integral role in the former participant’s extrapolations of character relating to their guest country. Typically, when asked about their guest country, respondents spoke in generalizations that were based on their own lived experiences, often comparing to that with which they were familiar (e.g. they are less punctual/more friendly/less polite etc. than we are). This conceptualization of “us” vs. “them” is a phenomenon which derives from the aforementioned heuristic, and can be attributed to a general need to make sense of the foreign situation in which they found themselves. It simply reinforces the idea that former participants are utilizing their own life-worlds as a frame of reference in order to speak about their experiences.

It has been proven that the opportunity to become exposed to an intercultural environment generally improves one’s ability to learn in an intercultural setting (Thomas et Al 2007, 119) In the case of the alumni of this scholarship program, the results are no different. Hörl describes the benefit of acquiring a newfound sense of empathy, tolerance, and cooperation, which is exemplified by this group of youth in many ways (2012, 22). Almost every respondent remarked positively upon their experience in terms of having a greater intercultural understanding. This is then brought back to their families and communities in Germany. Particularly for the target group of the KKS, the question of family values and reverse culture shock comes into play. In the special case of Dresden, home to the recent xenophobic movement PEGIDA (Anti-Islam 'Pegida' march in German city of Dresden, BBC, 2014) the topic of culture and mutual understanding played a large role in the period after the study

¹³ du vertrittst deine Kultur

abroad experience of every participant from that region. As the Kreuzberger Kinderstiftung almost exclusively targeted students from Eastern Germany, where anti-foreigner movements like PEGIDA are most represented, the importance of cultural understanding in families and general discourse are also affected by programs that sponsor study abroad. The cultural and racial tensions that exist in the United States, for example, and those that exist in Germany were a topic for many of the Eastern German students who went to the USA and found that the phenomena share some similarities. For example, one participant from Leipzig, reported that she became less understanding of the intolerant opinions of the people who surrounded her in Germany because “they’ve never been different”. The fact that she had experienced an in-group/out-group dynamic from a different perspective led her to an increased degree of empathy for those who have been ‘Othered’ by the majority.

The idea that these youth will help shape the future of their regions, and the economic and cultural landscape of Germany is a part of the mission of the Kreuzberger Kinderstiftung. From a microphenomenological perspective, these youth are contributing to breaking down mental barriers by embodying their experience and being able to understand other perspectives. One of the many results of having gone abroad is a sense of belonging to a larger populace, in this case having a better sense of what it means to fit in with being German, European, and a citizen of the world. The idea of either a dichotomous relationship between guest and home country didn’t necessarily come into play as frequently as postulated by Thomas et al or Bachner and Zeuschel. Rather, there was the idea of an international existence, the beginning of a life in which the former participant would belong to a possible “transnational elite” in the sense of not necessarily living “here” nor “there”. A number of former participants responded that they quite liked the idea of moving around, a concept crystallized by the term mobility capital. This idea is comprised of “family and personal history, previous experience of mobility including language competence, the first experience of adaptation which serves as initiation, and finally the personality features of the potential wanderer” (Murphy-Lejeune 2003, 52). While many participants were the first of their families to go abroad, there were a number of them who reported being aware of the opportunity because of siblings, parents, and friends. Additionally, a small amount had already been abroad, saying that this opportunity wasn’t necessarily their initiation into what could later be considered a “global elite”. Finally, the personality of a wanderer, while difficult to quantify, could be considered the overall impetus for seeking out such an opportunity. An overwhelming majority of the participants responded with enthusiasm about their experiences, meaning that they must have had some initial motivation to pursue an

experience abroad. This tiny spark initiated the process of finding out what it means to be themselves in a new context.

4.9 History

Although the general tendency was that former participants reported a greater understanding of “being German”, many still found it relatively difficult to concretely define German culture as well as their position in relation to it. As mentioned previously, some identified themselves as representatives of Germany, but for some it wasn’t even really a problem. This was dependent upon a number of things: the country’s proximity and historical relationship with Germany, whether or not history was a mandatory course for the particular student, and if the student themselves were marked as being German. It was, for example, a different experience for students going to France to be able to define their relationship with Franco-German relations in comparison with a student going to somewhere farther away. If a student had been to a country with less historical and geographical proximity to Germany, and they were not required to take a history class (which was only sometimes the case) then the student was generally less likely to have been approached concerning Germany's history. Many students for whom this was the case reported having very little exposure to people curious about their relationship with German history, and therefore not necessarily feeling the need to explain or justify anything related to Germany.

4.10 Self-identification

The students noted a marked disinterest in portraying stereotypes saying that the stereotypical “Bavarian” ideal of Germany (i.e. beer, bratwurst, lederhosen, etc.) leaves much to be desired. There was, however, a general consensus that cleanliness, orderliness, and punctuality are typical German personality characteristics. Punctuality was mentioned quite often in one of two ways: either the participant realized that the way they had been socialized to be punctual was a positive aspect of their personality and they embraced it despite possibly being in a culture that places less value on punctuality or they realized that they do not identify with the way others understanding of German culture characterizes time and punctuality. The latter often reported adopting the way their guest country interacts with time and saying that they are now more “Brazilian” or “Italian”, for example

.One tendency is that people identified themselves as German but not “typically German”. Given the fact that only some percent of German students go abroad during high school, and an even smaller percentage of that are part of our target group, it can correctly be said that these

students are atypical. These students also mention an awareness of the difference between studying somewhere, attempting to integrate into the culture, and simply going somewhere on vacation. A number of participants reported that they had been abroad before and after their study abroad experience, but did not necessarily register this as an “intercultural experience”. This can be attributed to the fact that these trips were often for shorter periods of time, and they were not necessarily in close contact with the locals. Another interesting tendency to note was the differences between people from Berlin, a large, multicultural metropolis, and the former participants from the relatively smaller cities in the eastern part of Germany. As the Kreuzberger Kinderstiftung is located primarily in Berlin, a majority of the interview subjects were easier to contact simply because they live in the area. These subjects, when asked about their own particular culture, were very quick to paint the picture of Berlin as a microcosm, a “multikulti” bubble within the relatively less diverse setting of greater Germany.

There were, however, attempts to gain contact with a broader range of subjects both via Skype and in person. These subjects were all of non-immigrant origin and typically discussed German culture as a generalized hegemonic phenomenon. Although, there was a distinct understanding of city to city culture as illustrated by the following quote from a girl from Dresden “I learned that it doesn’t really depend on the country you’re from. I could have done my exchange year in Cologne and it would have been completely different. There are bigger differences there than if I had changed countries completely.”¹⁴ (Participant, Interviewed by Gian Hernandez, Ibis Hotel Dresden, January 30, 2015). The interview subjects from Magdeburg and Jena offered similar opinions. According to them, Germany has a hegemonic culture that may be reduced to east and west. The differentiation of the culture of eastern Germany, with that of western Germany came up quite a lot, particularly in the Dresden wave of interviews. Former participants described a lingering disconnect between the two regions, reporting that, although they had been to various countries and experienced other cultures, western Germany was rather low on their priority list. Interesting to note was that the period of residence abroad afforded them a new country which they could call home, and yet a region of their own country remains foreign to them.

4.11 Intercultural situations

Since pursuing a study abroad period many former participants noted a desire to further engage

¹⁴ Ich habe gelernt dass es gar nicht von dem Land abhängt. Ich hätte jetzt auch mein Austauschjahr in Köln machen können und es wäre schon anders gewesen. Es gibt auch größere unterschiede als wenn man das Land wechselt

in international activities. For example, speaking the foreign language they learned in a context within their home country, engaging with people from their guest country, and seeking out other travel opportunities and study abroad opportunities. As shown by Claudia Finger, the likelihood of going abroad during their undergraduate degree, should they choose to pursue university education, is drastically increased given the experience of going abroad during high school (2011, 82). The general trend around this phenomenon is that it strengthens both a cultural identity in one's own culture (Thomas et al 2007, 120), but it also opens up the possibility to exhibit that newfound cultural self in an intercultural context by pursuing opportunities abroad. Indeed, there were a number of former respondents who had to be interviewed over Skype, because they were no longer in the country. Every one of these interview participants said that their motivation for their current international endeavors could be traced back to their initial study abroad experience.

There was a tendency for subjects who studied abroad in Europe to visit their families more often, with some saying they'd been back multiple times. This is most likely simply because the costs in distance, time, and money are less. But there was a general tendency that people visited their families, especially if they had been gone for a long time. The importance of a connection with the guest family cannot be stressed enough. Recent research has shown that this connection presents a special learning opportunity that is usually reflected upon positively (Thomas et al, 101). Establishing a connection with the guest family, with the intent of having a "second family for life" was also noted as an explicit goal for many former participants.

Another trend was that subjects also voluntarily participated in the study abroad organizations that coordinated their trips (AFS, YFU, or Experiment). This is in contradiction with what was presented as a conclusion in "Students of Four Decades" (Bachner and Zeuschel 2009, 71). However, the fact that former participants who were willing to be interviewed showed a general interest in assisting study abroad organizations could mean that this presents a form of selection bias. Given that the participants were willing to spend their time talking to me, it would also make sense that these students are more likely to volunteer their time in other capacities. The Kreuzberger Kinderstiftung also organizes a Jugendbeirat (transl. youth advisory board) which presides over decisions made in terms of funding other projects that serve the target group of the organization. I made a special visit to one of these meetings, in which I managed to interview almost everyone who participates. It is then no small wonder that the people whom I interviewed tended to show a larger amount of engagement than the people who I attempted to contact, but ultimately demonstrated no interest in being interviewed.

4.12 Future

A large majority of the respondents at the time of the interview were still in the process of receiving their high school diploma. However, in terms of definite career plans, the selected sample was typically unsure which job they would like to pursue; this was not surprising given the fact that they were yet to complete high school. However, there was a distinct tendency for people who had been abroad to express a desire in pursuing a career that would afford them the opportunity to go abroad again. “Something international” seemed to be a common trend when asked if they had a rough idea of what they would like to do after they finish with their education.

In a small number of cases there was a potential to instill a measure of insecurity when it comes to a prospective career in former participants. One participant noted that: “Before the year, I was pretty sure of what I wanted to do. The year made me a bit more afraid”¹⁵ (Participant, Interviewed by Gian Hernandez. Per Skype. March 20, 2015). This can most likely be attributed to the fact that the scope of what becomes possible after a year abroad greatly increases. This particular interview subject, and the others like her, also reported that they didn’t believe that it was possible to go abroad at all. Without this experience, they not only would not have realized that it is in fact possible to go abroad, they would not have had the wherewithal to make decisions that bring them to the conclusion that they can, in fact, achieve more than what they initially thought possible.

In response to the question where they see themselves in two years and five years, a large majority of the interview subjects responded that they had always seen themselves attending university. Thomas et al noted “The exchange experience has effects on the professional development, choice of study/vocational training or on the related emphasis therein”¹⁶(2007, 113). The differences between the target groups aside, the point remains that it has been proven that an extended period abroad does have a positive effect on the professional lives of those who experience them. In relation to the target group of the KKS, the exchange period did tend to have an effect on the choice of studies, if the former participant decided to go to university. Also, in the few cases in which former participants had already begun their career, they did report influence from their exchange period. Additionally, the motivation and intention to

¹⁵ Vor dem Jahr war ich mir sicher was ich machen will. Das Jahr hat mich ein Bisschen verunsichert.

¹⁶ Die Austausch erfahrung hat Wirkungen auf die berufliche Entwicklung, Wahl des Studiums/der Ausbildung oder auf diesbezügliche Schwerpunkte.

pursue a career related to their guest country and experience abroad was relatively frequent, indicating that former participants are willing to engage professionally in an international exchange experience. In terms of those doing a vocational education, there was no noticeable trend of former participants reporting that they chose their specialty due to their experience abroad. However, in these cases, there were multiple respondents who reported that the skills that they learned during their exchange period assisted them specifically in their chosen field. The reason for this discrepancy is unknown, the need for a more accurate evaluation will be discussed in the conclusion of this work.

An important question for the ultimate research interests of this work was “Is there anything you’re doing now that you think wouldn’t have been possible without having done an exchange year?” The broad range of answers that I received after asking this question demonstrates the multitude of benefits from a study abroad period for our particular target group. Answers ranged from speaking the language of the guest country, to having the self-confidence to talk to people in the street. The particular mentality of the target group for this work tended towards either “thinking small”, which is to say, not believing that much is possible given their specific background. Of course, there were cases in which the answer to this question was “No.”. In these cases, it is uncertain if this is because they believed everything to be possible, they’ve fallen into old patterns, or another unknown reason. It is important to note that the majority of the former participants who answered this questions also stated that it was difficult for them to think of anything at all, meaning that there might be something outside of their own self-reflection.

4.13 Foreign language competence

Language plays a huge role in development after the year abroad. However, there are varying degrees to which certain languages found a place in the lives of former participants as the years pass. Of course, given the global position of English, the practice and desire to speak this language was a constant in almost every interview. Less widely spoken languages, like Dutch or Estonian, don’t necessarily see the same amount of practice as languages like Spanish or French, and therefore fall more often by the wayside. In terms of linguistic capital, the command of a second, or third language beyond your native language brings many advantages, particularly in terms of education, and participation in a global public sphere

When asked more directly about desire to learn further languages, there were general trends that fell in either one of two extremes: an awakened desire to learn more languages or the realization that foreign language doesn’t occupy a priority in their life. While the former, is

understandable given the relative ease that most participants learn the language spoken in their guest country, the latter presented somewhat of a surprise. There were multiple cases, particularly in former participants with immigrant backgrounds that the often three or four languages that they speak are seen as “enough”. Granted, multilingualism throughout the world and particularly Europe is becoming more and more valuable (Gerhards 2010, 41), but it is also within reason not to expect someone that speaks English, German, Chinese and Polish to immediately start picking up yet another language.

4.14 Foreign media consumption

Almost every interview contained some references to the consumption of foreign media. This is contingent with my hypothesis that experience abroad would also result in increased participation in a global public sphere. Most former participants reported an increased interest in the current events of their guest countries directly after returning from their study abroad period, which then waned as the years passed. They also reported an increased consumption in English-speaking media, regardless of their chosen guest country. This was foreseeable, given US-American cultural imperialism and the saturation of English-speaking media within the market. It is then difficult to ascertain if the increase in the consumption of English speaking media from those who went to English-speaking countries can be considered related.

4.15 Did you ever think it possible?

Many of the former participants interviewed in the sample, and people involved in the general population of vocational high school students did not believe it possible to be able to go abroad. The fear of not being able to participate in study abroad stems from a lack of resources, both financial and institutional, that prevent an often insurmountable barrier for many who would otherwise attempt to pursue an opportunity to study abroad during high school. From an expert standpoint, Petra Billecke, coordinator and advisor of the Kreuzberger Kinderstiftung, notes that a certain amount of responsibility must be taken on by the participant themselves. The presence of transnational human capital within the family, or general environment seemed to play a large role. When asked if they believed it to be possible to go abroad before their year, many students responded that they knew it was possible because a parent, sibling, or family friend had already done so.

Of course, nobody imagined that it would be impossible to go abroad after having gone abroad. However, the logistic realities of everything necessary that goes into going abroad seemed to be more apparent to some than to others. It seemed to be related to age and region; the trend

was that younger people from outside of metropolitan areas found it generally more difficult to imagine being able to go abroad again. Those who were older, more mature, and could already begin conceptualizing plans for their future tended to have a more concrete idea of being able to either return to their guest country (if they hadn't already) or pursue an entirely different experience abroad.

4.16 Summary

The interview process involved questions to highlight categories relevant to the current state of research, as well as the particular interests of the Kreuzberger Kinderstiftung. The questions asked confirmed a majority of the general assumptions around the benefits of a study abroad experience: that is a positive experience, that it benefits the students in terms of foreign language capabilities, and knowledge of informal behavioral rules, and that the particular target group of the KKS reaps these benefits in the same way as other students who have historically and systematically been privileged in comparison. The following section will codify exactly how these benefits manifest themselves in terms of the hypotheses developed in previous sections.

5. Findings

Hypothesis 1: In general, the period of residence abroad has a positive effect on the lives of participants in terms of self-related aspects and competence; openness, flexibility, and composure, self-awareness, social competence, intercultural learning, cultural identity, relationship with the guest country/other cultures, constructive activities, and influence on professional development.

The wide range of positive effects on the lives of participants in study abroad is a testament to just how life-changing such an experience can be. It was my aim to prove that a study abroad experience makes a measurable difference in the opportunities, both inside and outside of the professional world. In terms of personality development, this was understandably difficult to measure. How exactly does one measure social competence? Is there a general degree of openness that study abroad participants achieve that is lacking in those who have not been abroad? The data showed that there were trends that remained consistent with the data of the secondary literature research. Similarly, the aspects of openness, flexibility, and composure as one aspect of improvement were almost always discussed positively by former participants. Openness itself is an aspect of personality that seems to be required to even undertake such an

experience. Being open to going to a new country is, of course, a prerequisite for beginning the application process. Flexibility around the actual guest country and living situations within that country also seemed to be an integral part to success when discussing the year abroad.

As mentioned in the previous section, cultural identity was a topic that presented an area of growth for some and for others was not as important. Cultural identity in this sense can relate to German identities, regional identities within Germany, the various identities of those who have an immigrant background, LGBTQ identities, religious identities, etc. In this sense, there were many cases who described coming to terms with these identities when juxtaposed with majority societies who do not exemplify these traits. Being extracted from one's "comfort zone" is to be confronted with that which makes one uncomfortable, and the majority of the interview subjects responded by interrogating that and navigating their own identities in ways which they would not have had to in their home country. The added benefit of doing this in a learning environment, i.e. a foreign high school, presented this particular group of people with the opportunity to define and identify themselves, on their own terms. Also, in order to experience the positive benefits of intercultural learning, it is helpful to first establish a basis from which you can relate to the culture in which one finds oneself i.e. the self- and world-theories presented by Epstein's Cognitive Experiential Self Theory (2003, 160). The entire framework of an extended study abroad period revolves around the principle of intercultural learning as one of its main tenets. How the research subjects reacted to this schemata proves that they, too, were in the process of negotiating their own identities, in order to make the most out of their experiences. Many of the former participants answered that they intended to "meet a new culture" when asked about their goals, which signifies an acknowledgement of a need to explore a new world in relation to the self. For a lot of those interviewed, this acknowledgement afforded them the opportunity to engage with their guest country in a way that was meaningful for their development.

Generally, the former participants noted a positive trend in relation to their self and personality development. The only notable deviations from this overall positive trend were two cases, in which participants noted that they became more aggressive or fearful after experiencing particularly difficult situations, dealing with especially ignorant questions from their fellow students in the guest country. However, these two cases could be attributed to simple personality differences, which would explain the overwhelming majority having dealt differently with similar situations. It is, however, important to remember that some participants have different experiences. While one could say that the hypothesis can generally be confirmed, one can also run the risk of making blanket generalizations about an overall positive experience

during study abroad. It was my goal to see in which contexts youth benefit from a study abroad experience, and it would be detrimental to the presentation of my results to say that every case without exception experiences a positive benefit. The subtle nuances offered by qualitative data and narrative in the reconstruction of experiences here are crucial in this discussion around what sort of benefits actually exist after a study abroad period. It was my hope to present these results as general tendencies, to advocate for the representation of study abroad amongst an underrepresented population, and to make the readers of this piece aware of the broad diversity of subjects and experiences that occur within this phenomenon.

In terms of the relationship with guest/other countries, there were many instances of greater understanding through increased contact. The following quote, from a participant who went to Russia, accurately summarizes the general opinion amongst research subjects on this topic “I didn’t have that before. I was definitely not as open to the world before, and I thought much more on boundaries than I do now...this development from nationalities to a world population...let’s just say that this became much more apparent to me that we all have the same fears and needs”¹⁷ (Participant, Interviewed by Gian Hernandez, Café Alt Magdeburg, November 22, 2014). We see here that the participant demonstrates an increased sense of intercultural awareness, something that the period abroad afforded her. There are a number of other participants who echoed similar sentiments.

The category of “constructive activities” was purposefully left open to interpretation. The exposure to a different lifestyle often required adaptation and the learning of new skills. As previously mentioned, participants reported learning sports activities that were not offered in their home school, domestic capacities in order to help with the household, and even abilities they had not expected like hitchhiking, fishing, or playing the guitar.

Finally, professional development is the most difficult to measure, as a number of former participants have not been back from their period abroad to be able to start along their career path. In this aspect, for those who went abroad in 2010 or earlier, there were a few cases which exemplified how it is possible for vocational students to incorporate their experience abroad into their professional development. For example, there was a particular case of a young man who went to the United States, who is now responsible for speaking on the telephone with US-American customers in his job within the media branch. There was also the case of a young

¹⁷ Originally: “Was ich vorher halt nicht hatte. Ich war vorher auf jeden Fall nicht so welt offen und habe viel viel mehr an Grenzen gedacht als ich das jetzt tue...so diese Entwicklung von Nationalitäten zu einer Weltbevölkerung, sag ich mal, das ist mir bewußter geworden, dass wir alle die gleiche Ängste, Bedürfnisse haben...”

woman who, after coming back, was able to get a spot working at a Kindergarten in Latvia, where her English abilities from attending a school in the United States helped her immensely as a stopgap method of communication before learning Latvian. These and various other cases further illustrate the point that, although professional development is difficult to measure in such a young group, the beginnings of it can be shown.

Ultimately, the development of these numerous categories were confirmed in a number of ways. The previously stated anecdotal evidence only served to highlight the tendency that the alumni of the stipend program of the Kreuzberger Kinderstiftung do tend to experience positive benefits in the categories initially selected for further investigation.

Hypothesis 2: The period of residence abroad has a positive effect on the students in terms of unintended effects (which could easily but do not necessarily fall into the categories mentioned above)

In order to address the “unintended effects” one must first extrapolate on the methods of expressing intention in the study abroad process. During the preparation for many study abroad programs, a common methodological practice is to instruct participants to note which goals they attend to achieve during their stay abroad, while reminding them to be open to what may happen. Outside of this practice it is, of course, unavoidable that participants express desires to tailor their life experiences in certain ways; some students wish to become fluent in foreign languages, some wish to meet new and interesting people, and so on. The idea of unintended effects, spans a broad range of possible results of the study abroad experience which hadn’t been previously addressed in these situations. Understandably, the ideal situation is that the situation either matches the intentions of the student going abroad, or exceeds them by exemplifying these unintended effects.

In this particular study it is important to note that the effects that students wished for themselves were often within a framework which they initially believed to be possible. Not every subject, when asked if there was something outside of the typical effects to discuss, responded immediately. However, most of the participants responded with something similar to one participant who went to Bolivia, in that the exchange period helped him “more than he now realizes” (Participant. Interviewed by Gian Hernandez. Yellow Sunshine GmbH). This sentiment can be traced back to the initial point that most of the participants come from backgrounds which do not allow them the broader horizons of their counterparts who attend Gymnasium. Many participants, particularly from the eastern part of Germany, have not left

the country, resulting in them having goals in accordance with their current worldview. In this sense, the study abroad period exceeds their expectations.

Of course, when it comes to “unintended effects”, the phenomena which belong to this category are extensive, including newly-learned capabilities, greater understanding of cultural idiosyncrasies, or even possible self-discoveries initiated by a new environment. Former participants noted a plethora of phenomena that fall under this category, especially considering the aforementioned reality that many participants from the target group had very little concrete expectations, given their general lack of experience with going abroad. In most cases, these unintended effects were also the most strongly felt years after the exchange period. For example, one participant, whose guest family was of a different religious faith than the one in which she was raised, gained a newfound respect and understanding for other religions. Three years after returning home, during our interview it seemed to me that this experience still characterized her understanding of her guest country and of her own religion. This particular trend repeated itself in other cases, where a deeper understanding of spirituality had not been an intended goal, but was nevertheless an integral part of the period abroad. For example, a participant who went to Thailand was able to participate in a workshop offered by a regional meditation group, which was something that she herself hadn’t imagined doing. When listening to these stories, it quickly becomes clear that the expectations of former participants of the KKS stipend program do not encompass everything that a period abroad has to offer. Also, due to the limitation of the imagination in most participants, the experience has the potential to cause a crucial shift in the deeper, more meaningful aspects of the lives of former participants.

Hypothesis 3: The period of residence abroad has a positive effect related to flexibility and composure, especially if the actual period can be viewed as “negative”.

Reflecting on the negative aspects of study abroad is crucial. Although the current body of literature generally states that a study abroad period provides its participants with a positive increase in personal and professional development, it was interesting to me to see if this also included the cases which were less than ideal from the perspective of the study abroad participant. Granted, it would be ideal if every case of studying abroad meet or positively exceeded the expectations of the youth who seek to improve their lives by seeking intercultural experience. However, research and experience has shown us that this is not always the case.

The study presented in “Students of Four Decades” also concludes that any negative experiences initially feared by the former participants were likely to come to pass, but these

did not have a negative effect on the perceived success of exchange (Bachner and Zeuschel 2009, 72). This partially corroborates my initial assumption that an individual negative experience during the study abroad period would not necessarily ruin the entire 10 month period. However, my hypothesis expanded upon this conclusion by proposing that negative experiences which a study may or may not have anticipated would also result in personal or emotional development. This proved to be the case on many occasions, as evidenced by the following quote from a former participant, whose experience wasn't exactly what she imagined it would be: "Yeah, I learned a lot about my exchange year. I can say that my exchange year wasn't the best, but it was the best experience I've had...the best decision that I've made. My exchange year was somewhat difficult and there were a lot of problems and that's why I can say that it was just...well, so-so"¹⁸ (Participant. Interviewed by Gian Hernandez. In her home in Potsdam. November 25th, 2014). This sentiment, echoed by many of her peers, encapsulates the concept of "trial by fire". It is completely possible that the study abroad period goes wrong, even completely wrong, despite the efforts of the organizing programs. However, it is up to the participants to make the best out of their situation, regardless of what happens. In this case, the participant did manage to finish her year, and maintains a positive outlook towards the future. This shows us that my initial claim can be considered true, especially if the integral aspect of personal development examined in Hypothesis 1 also takes place.

Hypothesis 4: The period of residence abroad will result in a higher degree of transnational human capital

It was my initial assumption that the particular target of this work would not differ from other groups about which there are a number of studies in existence. However, it was important for the purposes of this thesis as a case study for the Kreuzberger Kinderstiftung to scientifically prove that students who attend Realschule are no less likely to benefit from an increased amount of transnational human capital. The data shows that an overwhelming majority of students were able to benefit from an increased amount of intercultural competence, foreign language skills, and tacit knowledge of informal behavioral rules and institutional systems. It was crucial to draw the link between transnational human capital and the population of

¹⁸ "Ja, ich habe sehr vieles über mein Austauschjahr gelernt, Ich kann sagen dass mein Austauschjahr nicht das schönste war, aber es war die beste Entscheidung die ich gemacht habe. Mein Austauschjahr war ziemlich schwer und es gab viele Probleme und deshalb kann ich sagen das es einfach...naja halbwegs war

participants at the KKS, as this study provides a further innovative perspective into a field of study that has seen little to no attention.

In the individual aspects of transnational human capital, there were little to no discrepancies in what I initially assumed. Specifically, that a period of international exchange will benefit a young person's linguistic skills is a surprise to no one. However, it must be said that there were several cases in which exposure to the local language did not necessarily benefit the participant as much as a general understanding of the English language as a means of communication.

There is also the special case of English fluency. While a majority of former participants went to English-speaking countries, making this particular variable difficult to measure, it is nevertheless important to note that the benefits of English can be seen both within domestic and international contexts. It is simply not the case that proficiency in other languages has the same effect as proficiency in English in non-English speaking countries (Diaz Medrano 2014, 251). In this particular group, however, there were a surprising amount of cases in which non-English language proficiency did present a marked advantage in the lives of several participants, specifically those who chose to study topics in university that were relevant to their guest country. While this phenomenon is a slender extract of the population on the whole, it must still be highlighted that language proficiency in general is still an integral part of the accumulation of transnational human capital. In this aspect, the hypothesis was confirmed.

Additionally, knowledge of intercultural behaviors and intercultural institutions were quite often reported as shaping the general impression of former participants after they returned from their sojourn. At the very least, most former participants noted an understanding of the educational system of their guest country, noting behaviors of fellow students as well as teachers. This exposure to the general systematic "flow" of institutions was to be expected, but nevertheless needs to be mentioned here.

It has been proven that people who have higher amounts of social capital tend to be the ones that are successful and have access to these sorts of opportunities (Gerhards, Hans, and Sorenson 2013, 127) The research I have done corroborates these findings with the special focus of highlighting those who do not necessarily have access to these higher amounts of either social or economic capital. There was an interesting tendency to note that people whose social world already involved influences that prioritized a study abroad period (e.g. their parents or siblings positively encouraged them to pursue it) they were more likely to be successful in their desire to study abroad both in high school and afterwards. However, it must be stressed that the former participants who did not already have access to transnational human capital also positively benefitted from their study abroad experience. This conclusion is an

integral part of the overall argument this study is making: the aftermath of a study abroad period is equally beneficial to those who have been underrepresented within this phenomenon until now.

Hypothesis 4a: A higher degree of transnational human capital will result in higher participation in a global public sphere

The overall existence of a global public sphere is something of a difficult concept. Throughout the development of this work, the concept of a global public sphere was of a somewhat amorphous platform in which former participants take part by consuming media across international borders. It was in this sense that this hypothesis was to be understood: are the participants consuming foreign media? The answer to this question could be seen through the internet as a sphere in which participants play a participatory or discursive role (Habermas via Gerhards and Schäfer 2010, 2) which also played a definitive role in the responses of those interviewed. Facebook, online news articles, blogs, YouTube, and other social platforms were a common theme which occurred regularly during the section of the interviews that focused on their current contact with the guest country.

Jürgen Gerhards describes a conceptualization of a predominantly “Europeanization” of a regional public sphere, which is supported by the social and political systems throughout this isolated geographic region (2010, 106). The results that I have garnered through my research seem to indicate that, while the former participants do engage in an increased consumption of media from outside of Germany, it is difficult to attribute this to their study abroad time. Furthermore, the case in which participants reported consumption of US-American media was very common, indicating that it could be possible that this would have been the case whether or not they went abroad.

All of this being said, there was a tendency for students to report an increased interest in the media originating from their guest country, with most reporting that they consume these media in various forms. In this sense, the hypothesis could be considered confirmed, as the former participants of programs in more remote countries would not have necessarily developed an interest in these countries had they remained in Germany. It does, however, necessitate a more scrupulous look at the data, as the increased consumption of media in general may have little to do with their study abroad period, and much more to do with the fact that youth typically consume media at a growing rate.

Hypothesis 5: The higher degree of transnational human capital as a result of period abroad will have a positive result on professional and educational opportunities.

It is difficult to discuss professional opportunities explicitly due to the relative timeframe in which these particular subjects went abroad. The target group typically falls in the age range of 17 to 23 years old, a time where German youth are just developing their own plans for professional or educational growth. As such, it is uncertain as to whether the acquisition of transnational human capital leads to a direct positive result on professional opportunities. However, given the aforementioned lack of a difference between the relatively marginalized group of students who attend Realschule, and the general public of more privileged participants in study abroad, it could be assumed that these benefits will manifest themselves in the future. One particular methodological consideration that could be made would be to consider the career aspirations of those who went abroad. If we make this concession, the impact of the study abroad period on the professional development of these youth could be seen in almost every interview. The study abroad period was very often reported as having an effect on their overall career goals, with the response of wanting to do “something international” coming up extremely often. The former participants also often indicated a desire to either work in their guest country, a similar region, a completely new region, or to work within Germany, but still maintaining professional contact with their guest region. Of course, this is all in *potentia* and would warrant a further look, once the former participants have had a chance to develop.

In terms of educational opportunities, the influences of the study abroad period and the higher degree of transnational human capital were much easier to see and came up much more often in interviews. After returning from their year abroad, a total of fifty-seven out of sixty-nine participants interviewed, or 82%, chose to seek out the college preparatory Gymnasium. This was even the case in some examples in which the student did not know or was unsure of their intention to continue with secondary education. In addition, there were a number of cases in which the abilities and experiences gathered during their study abroad period were directly applicable in a university setting. Of these fifty-seven, eight have gone on to a university education, with three of these studying the regional language of their guest country. The remaining five report using the transnational skills¹⁹ they gained abroad to some degree, whether it be linguistic capability, social competence, or simply general adaptability.

¹⁹ Transnational human skills can be defined as the ability to process information from, communicate to, mediate between, adapt to, and exploit resources from different national environments (Diaz Medrano 2010, 240)

Overall, this hypothesis can be considered confirmed. Given that the acquisition of transnational human capital was an integral part in the exchange experience, the students' positively benefiting from their experience in terms of professional and educational opportunities can be extrapolated from this result.

6. Discussion and conclusion

This section of the work will delineate what I have done to shed light upon an area of research which has received little attention: the qualitative differences in the lives of former students of Realschule after experiencing a year abroad. I will explain that this has been a first step in the direction of understanding this particular phenomenon by summarizing my findings for the case study of the Kreuzberger Kinderstiftung. In addition, I will also present possible strategies for further research.

This study demonstrated the heterogeneity of the target group, which complicated the answer to my research question. Given that the majority of students who were interviewed attended either a school that did not necessarily adhere to the principles of vocational training, attended a college preparatory school after their year, or both, the results strictly related to vocational high school students must then be adapted. How can I track the long term effects of a period abroad on the lives of this specific subset of society when the very category of "students who attend Realschule" isn't fixed? The answer to this question lies in the fundamental differentiation of marginalized and majority groups. Regardless of the school they attend, the target group of this study exemplified traits of coming from a background with lower access to sources of capital, which has been shown to have an impact on professional and academic development (Thomas et al 2007, 113) This differentiation was also shown in many aspects of the findings from the interviews, and further supports Gerhards' initial claims that students from lower-class families participate less often in extended study abroad periods because they lack the necessary resources (2014, 127). Furthermore, the findings, grounded in categories already developed by experienced researchers by this topic demonstrated a stark difference in the biographical characterization of the students' lives before and after their period abroad. What was presented can largely be characterized as positive, which was the initial assumption of this endeavor. However, it is and will continue to be important to note in what contexts a period abroad has a positive effect on the lives of these particular youth. The study presented the minimal difference between Gymnasiasten and Realschüler who have studied abroad, which highlights the need for sponsorship and representation of Realschüler in the phenomenon of study abroad because they equally benefit from the experience but are sorely

underrepresented (Weichbrodt 2014, 77). Specifically, it became clear through the research that the period abroad had a clear effect on the academic and professional goals of a majority of former participants. One of the more remarkable findings is that in the majority of cases, former participants demonstrated a willingness to return to their guest country, as well as pursue other international opportunities, both educational and in a professional sense. This indicates a chain reaction, as we already know that students who have been abroad during high school are more likely to go abroad during university (Finger 2011, 82) and students who go abroad during university are more likely to have an advantage in terms of linguistic capability, communication skills, and familiarity with the job market (Van Mol 2014, 299)

In addition, the benefits in regards to personal development were also evident. A huge majority of those interviewed responded with the fact that they became more independent, which is to be expected after a period abroad. The literature indicates that this is the case for university students (Van Mol 2014, 298) as well as university preparatory schools and now the same can be said for this target group. As my research has shown, very few of those asked began the interview with the professional or academic benefits of the study abroad period upon their lives. They focused rather on the personal development, often reconstructing their experiences through narratives that highlighted self-improvement.

This work also demonstrated that the accrual of transnational human capital in the form of foreign language competence, and knowledge of formal and informal systems outside of their own national context, offers students higher chances of participating in systems which will ultimately offer other forms of capital e.g. institutional capital from attending university. This is a corroboration of previous findings (albeit in another context with a slightly different target group) which indicate that those who have studied abroad are more likely to benefit from it materially (Gerhards, Hans, and Sörenson 2013, 263). In short, the benefits which were found to exist in the context of more upper-class social strata, have been proven by this work to take place in the context of students who don't necessarily come from those backgrounds. Because of this, it is of utmost importance that these students be afforded the opportunity to be part of the increasing number of study abroad participants, as they have been systematically ignored in this important globalizing process.

6.1 Strengths, weaknesses, and possibilities

The general strengths of this work include the number of interviews done, the qualitative methods which allowed for a relatively representative examination of each case, and the reflective manner in which each case was processed. However, there were many places in

which the study could be improved. The introduction of two control groups, for example, would have improved the quality of the study. These groups would have consisted of both vocational high school students who did not go abroad, and college preparatory high school students who did, in order to account for the variables addressed in the research question. Given the time and resources required to develop the research framework, interview guidelines, and analyses, as well as the unstable nature of the categorization of students previously mentioned, it is understandable that this aspect of the study could not take place.

Another consideration to be made was the timeframe after which the students were interviewed. The ages of students ranged from 17 (freshly returned) to 23 (returned roughly 5 years prior). The systematic issue of German high school requiring an additional three years after the planned year abroad, and the high ratio of those who went on to a multiple-year-long bachelor program or equivalent vocational training meant that professional and educational results were viewed as the actual development was taking place. In most cases, the former participants spoke of desires for professional or academic development but had not yet actualized their plans. In this regard, it would make sense to do a longitudinal study comparing my results with a study using the same or similar study subjects and methodologies. To this end, my results will be made available to the Kreuzberger Kinderstiftung, in the hopes that this research will be continued for the benefit of the stipend program.

6.2 Conclusion

The purpose of this work was to qualify and evaluate the processes of the stipend program offered by the Kreuzberger Kinderstiftung. It was my intention to provide an overview of the demographics of participants in the stipend program of the organization, to show what they are doing after their year abroad in professional and academic terms, and to draw the possible link between their year abroad and their current positions. In order to do that, I qualitatively analyzed interviews performed with roughly one quarter of the entire population of former participants with the organizations stipend program who went abroad from the year 2009 to 2014. In this work I have shown that the categorization of students who attend Realschule is unfixed, as a large majority of the students who return from their study abroad period go on to pursue a college preparatory secondary education. In addition, I also proved that the this population benefits from a year abroad in terms of transnational human capital, participation in a global public sphere, as well as academic, professional, and, most evidently, personal development. The findings of this study, in comparison with the established findings of secondary literature demonstrate that the participants of this stipend program receive just as

many positive benefits from a study abroad period as their privileged counterparts who have much more access to social, financial, and cultural capital. I would advocate that programs such as the Kreuzberger Kinderstiftung receive equal prominence in terms of outside funding and advertising in comparison with other programs which have systematically prioritized students who attend college preparatory high schools. All of this has shown the importance of studies which examine the differences between marginalized and majority groups in education, and the importance of organizations such as the Kreuzberger Kinderstiftung.

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Appendix

1. Interview recordings
2. Field note examples
3. Interview Analyses
4. Interview questions in English
5. Interview questions in German
6. Data analysis examples
7. Records of communication via Email and Facebook
8. General impressions

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