

Book Review / Compte rendu

Embodying Intercultural Capacities: The Pedagogic Impact of Study Abroad

By Kate Naidu

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Reviewed by

Yifan Liu, University of Toronto

Study abroad is often treated as a transformative journey that will automatically give students a new way of seeing the world. *Embodying Intercultural Capacities: The Pedagogic Impact of Study Abroad* by Kate Naidu asks some critical questions: does studying abroad really help students develop intercultural capacities? If so, how, and under what conditions, do such capacities actually take shape? Drawing on a longitudinal study with Australian students in Indonesia, Naidu (2025) develops the term “interculturalization” (p. 5) to understand the slow and uneven process through which students learn to work on themselves as they navigate cultural differences. She argues that intercultural capacities are not a taken-for-granted by-product of immersion in a host country but are developed through a cumulative pedagogic process that requires active labour of both teaching and learning. This shift offers a critical lens for understanding student mobility, moving beyond *what* students learn to *how* their capacities gradually take form.

The book is situated within the context of the *Australian Consortium for In-Country Indonesian Studies* (ACICIS), focusing on Australian university students undertaking semester-long programs in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. This setting represents a trajectory that is much less addressed in the literature on international student mobility where students from developed countries pursue studies in developing countries, including in Asia. After setting out the research landscape in Chapter 1, Chapter 2 addresses the methodological challenge of “capturing the intercultural” (p. 21). Naidu tracked 16 undergra-

duate students through multiple rounds of interviews and observations across four distinct phases – before departure, early in-country, later in-country, and after their return – to examine the full cycle of the study abroad experience. Chapter 3 introduces the conceptual tools to unpack the process of interculturalization. Naidu (2025) especially draws on Bourdieu’s notion of *habitus* (e.g. Bourdieu, 2005) to emphasize students’ gradual internalization of the external learning environment over time. Crucially, she also incorporates Lahire’s (2011) idea of the “plural actor” to account for the aspect of multiplicity in students’ identities and contradictory beliefs when encountering new contexts of socialization.

Building on this theoretical architecture, the empirical chapters systematically unpack the untold stories of study abroad. Chapter 4 reconceptualizes the learning environment as a “pedagogic ensemble” (p. 31) of human and non-human actors, such as university spaces, student buddies, transport, and climate. Chapter 5 investigates the temporality and the significant moments of in-country experience, while Chapter 6 explores the embodied labour of “home-making” and accumulating comfort in a new place. Naidu (2025) in Chapter 7 then interrogates the students’ shifting (and sometimes resistant) understandings of “culture” itself. Finally, the conclusion chapter (Chapter 8) weaves these strands together through three dialectical tensions (distance/proximity, generalization/nuance, and specificity/transposability) and three critical dimensions (labour, embodiment, and reflexivity) of interculturalization. Rather than offering another checklist of skills, the book proposes these as lenses for thinking about when, how, and for whom study abroad becomes pedagogic.

Navigating what she calls the “conceptual jungle” (p. 2) of interculturality, Naidu posits it as a reflexive engagement with difference, and a negotiation between Self and Other. Her most significant contribution is the reconceptualization of interculturality not as a static competence to be acquired, but as a cumulative, temporal process of interculturalization. This approach resonates with the emerging attention to *time* in recent student mobility research, which challenges the traditional narratives that portray international experiences as straightforward paths to linear growth during students’ presence in a host institution (Shahjahan et al., 2025). Naidu’s (2025) temporal lens reframes study abroad not as an isolated interval, but as a phase “in time” (p. 197), that is situated within a continuous life trajectory that bridges past dispositions with future aspirations. Simultaneously, it is “about time” (p. 197). Students encounter unfamiliar rhythms, such as the fluidity of *jam karet* (rubber time), the bureaucratic process, and the waiting, which unsettle their

usual pace of life. These “significant moments and events” (p. 31), as instances of disruption, become a pedagogic force embedded in everyday encounters.

This temporal reading can also be placed alongside work that examines how time itself is unequally distributed in higher education mobility. For instance, *The Time Inheritors*, Cora Lingling Xu’s (2025) recent book theorizes “time inheritance” (p. xiv) to show how intergenerationally transmitted privilege and deprivation create uneven reserves of “banked time” and “borrowed time” (p. x). While Naidu (2025) does not explicitly focus on structural time inequalities in her analysis, her participants’ ability to spend a semester abroad, and the space they have to try things out, hesitate, and adjust, inadvertently illustrate the “time wealth” (p. xiv) that Xu (2025) describes. In Naidu’s account, interculturalization also involves recognizing one’s own positionality and privilege. The experience of being “othered” in Indonesia often catalyzes more critical perspectives on how minorities in their home country might feel, such as Muslim communities and Asian exchange students (p. 155). Read together, these works suggest that temporalities in student mobility operate in multiple dimensions, from structural conditions that shape educational choices to the daily pedagogic processes while students are abroad. Despite their different focal points, both authors converge on the centrality of embodiment in how time is experienced and made consequential for education.

As mentioned earlier, the book responds to the “how” question. The “pedagogic ensemble” (p. 31) is especially a compelling framing, referring to a distributed network of human and non-human actors that exerts educational force beyond the university walls. Naidu (2025) treats pedagogy as a collective enterprise involving an ensemble of actors engaged in the embodied labour that teaching and learning require (Watkins et al., 2015). She particularly departs from the classroom-centric lens and foregrounds the agency of the material environment. The book provides vivid examples demonstrating that each space possesses its own pedagogic relations that shape new capacities and subjectivities (Noble & Tabar, 2017). The visceral struggle to navigate *kos* (boarding house) bathrooms, the sensory negotiation of tropical heat, and the daily rituals at local *warungs* (food stalls) are all constitutive elements of learning. In an era increasingly tempted by digital internationalization, this emphasis on embodied friction also illustrates the irreplaceable value of “being there.” For educators and program designers, this framing serves as an important reminder to recognize these mundane material encounters as vital sites of pedagogy.

Seen from the angle of North-South student mobility, this book offers a much-needed perspective. Outbound programs from the Global North to sites in the Global South are often promoted, including in Canada, as pathways to global citizenship and intercultural competences. Universities have expanded internships and exchanges in developing countries, yet limited studies offer in-depth analyses of the impacts of such programs (Universities Canada, 2018). Naidu's (2025) careful mapping of study abroad as a chain of pedagogic sites suggests that meaningful change requires long-term pedagogic planning, attention to material arrangements, and support for the reflexive and bodily work that students and educators perform. Within the Canadian context, the *Reciprocal Learning in Teacher Education and School Education Between Canada and China* (see S. Xu et al., 2024) is one example of an attempt in this direction. Through its *Reciprocal Learning Program* and *Sister School Network*, the project builds sustained infrastructure rather than relying on episodic visits, and it follows participants' cross-cultural experiences as shared material for reflection between Canadian and Chinese schools. Read alongside Naidu's (2025) study, North-South mobility should be understood less as an outcome in itself and more as a pedagogic arrangement whose effects depend on how everyday sites of learning are organized.

Embodying Intercultural Capacities is a timely and necessary intervention that resonates far beyond the field of student mobility. By shifting attention from outcomes to the slow work through which students learn to "do" culture in everyday encounters, Naidu (2025) shows both the power and the limits of culture as an explanation. This perspective also speaks to contemporary multicultural contexts: it cautions against treating diversity as a matter of cultural celebration or facts alone, and instead highlights interculturalization as an ongoing practice of relating across difference. In doing so, the book reminds us that interculturality is never a final destination to be reached, but a process of becoming that is always situated, demanding, and open-ended.

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