

“Multilingual Immersion and Multimodal Composition as Contact Zones in Study Abroad”

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Authors: Kylie E. Quave and Charles Lewis

Abstract

We recently taught a pair of linked, three-week courses in and around Cusco, Peru. Lewis taught a creative writing course in English; Quave taught a writing-intensive anthropology course. The shared learning objectives were to situate our experience in relation to the region’s history generally, as well as to travel and tourism today; to address how this region offers a rich site for formal investigation, creative expression, and personal reflection; and to develop a deeper, more nuanced understanding of the similarities/differences between various discourses and modes of inquiry, representation, and expression. We taught courses that were predicated on immersive experiential learning, yet students were mostly traveling in a place where they did not speak either of the two principal languages (Spanish and Quechua).

We posit that multimodal composition in multilingual contexts is one way to help students understand their experiences of cultural immersion and participant observation. Our students’ work featured writing, photography, and video that explored connections among critical reading assignments, class discussion, dedicated site excursions, and observations from their daily routines and interactions. Our teaching artifact describes course objectives, assignments and activities, and samples of student work to suggest how this approach offers principles and practices that can inform and enrich not only study-abroad pedagogies specifically but also teaching and learning experiences more generally that invite students to reflect on how multimodality is both a practical tool and a productive trope for critical reflection and navigation of the classroom as (what Mary Louise Pratt coined as) a “contact zone.”