

INTERCULTURAL LEARNING IN EDUCATION ABROAD

Current Research Trends



THE BOTTOM LINE

The Good News...

- Researchers can demonstrate that—in most cases—students who study abroad have higher levels of intercultural competence than those who do not.

The Bad News...

- Many of our assumptions about how students develop intercultural competence through study abroad are inaccurate.
- In order to support student growth to the best of our ability, we need to shift our understanding of that process and modify the frameworks that we use to support intercultural learning in a study abroad context.



3 KEY RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What is our understanding of the ways in which study abroad facilitates intercultural learning?
2. Which pedagogies do faculty use to facilitate that learning?
3. How are those pedagogies implemented by instructors?

The Goal: To better understand how study abroad faculty use pedagogy to increase intercultural competence in students.



TERMS

- **Intercultural Competence:** the ability to develop and use knowledge, skills, and attitudes in ways that facilitate effective and appropriate behavior and communication during intercultural interactions (Deardoff, 2006)
- **Intercultural Learning:** the teaching and learning methods, activities, and processes that facilitate the development of intercultural competence in a study abroad context





HISTORICAL UNDERSTANDING

What is our understanding of the ways in which study abroad facilitates intercultural learning?

HISTORICAL ASSUMPTIONS

- Study abroad increases intercultural competence when students:
 - Travel alone
 - Travel for extended periods of time
 - Immerse themselves by interacting only with locals
- IC is:
 - Not connected to classroom teaching methods
 - A skill that develops "organically" or "naturally" on its own



THE TRANSITION

- Shifts in enrollment toward short-term, faculty-led programs (Farrugia & Bhandari, 2016) imply that instructors from U.S. universities have significant influence over the teaching and learning that occurs in study abroad programs.
- Based on the assumption that students gained intercultural competence simply by spending time abroad, authors examined fifteen program variables to establish a correlation between traditionally preferred program characteristics, program duration, and intercultural learning outcomes (Vande Berg et al., Fall 2009).
- Outcomes fundamentally challenged the traditional assumptions about intercultural learning in study abroad programs.



THE GEORGETOWN STUDY (2009)

Students who participated in short-term programs made modest gains in intercultural competence

- Challenged the belief that the length of time spent abroad was the primary variable impacting intercultural learning outcomes

Students who attended classes composed entirely of host country nationals often made less progress than those who attended classes composed of both local students and students from the subjects' home culture

- Contradicted the belief that group or cohort travel undermined the development of intercultural competence

Students who spent free time with local residents did not consistently show the highest gains in intercultural competence

- Unraveled the assumption that individual travel was more effective than group program models for intercultural learning (Doerr, 2015; Vande Berg et al., Fall 2009)



THE AFTERMATH

- Over the next ten years, other researchers would support the findings of the Georgetown study (Bloom & Miranda, 2015; Holmes et al., 2015; Lou & Bosley, 2012; Perry et al., 2015; Vande Berg et al., Fall 2009).
- Scholars consistently found that short term study abroad programs improved the intercultural competence of students (Bai et al., June 2016; Bell et al., 2014; Bloom & Miranda, 2015; Doerr, 2015; Euler, 2017; Hallows & Marks, 2011; Lou & Bosley, 2012; Mitchell, 2015a; Peyvandi & Wang, 2016; Schaefer & Lynch, 2017; Smith-Augustine et al., 2014; Stoner et al., 2014; Williams, 2009; Wynveen et al., 2012).

Led to a shift in the research agenda: In an effort to understand the variables that have the most profound effect on intercultural learning, the role of pedagogy and course design became an area of interest for scholars.



THE LAST 6 YEARS...

- Teaching methods consistently impact the intercultural competence gains of study abroad participants (Vande Berg et al., Fall 2009; Vande Berg et al., 2012)
- Intercultural learning must be supported by pedagogy designed to increase students' cultural understanding (Glass, 2014; Stoner et al., 2014)
- **The absence of sound pedagogy frequently re-enforces stereotypes, leads to limited gains in intercultural competence, and sometimes even causes regression in participants' cultural understanding** (Anderson, 2016; Jackson, 2015; Macalister, 2016).
- We cannot assume that faculty themselves are interculturally competent or familiar with pedagogies and course structures that support the development of intercultural competence. Training for faculty may be a necessary component of instructional preparation (Anderson, 2016; Meyer-Lee & Evans, 2007).





PEDAGOGIES IN PRACTICE

Which pedagogies do faculty use to facilitate intercultural learning?

TERMS

- **Pedagogy**- a method of teaching (Press, 2017a)
- **Theory**- a set of ideas or concepts intended to explain or describe a phenomenon (Press, 2017b).

***Faculty often used the terms pedagogy and theory interchangeably
in the literature.***



Reflective Model of
Intercultural Competence

Reflexive Methods

Intercultural Educational
Resources for Erasmus
Students & Teachers

Project Method

**Transformative
Learning Theory**

**Experiential
Learning Theory**

Value-Belief-Norm
Framework

Pragmatic Instruction

Fantini's Intercultural
Communicative
Competence

**Intentional Targeted
Intervention**

Social Learning Theory

Description, Examination, &
Articulation of Learning Method

Cultural Intelligence Model



INTENTIONAL TARGETED INTERVENTION (ITI)

Assumptions (Lokkesmoe, et al., 2016; Lou & Bosley, 2012)

- Intercultural learning occurs through a process of meaning making
- Active, deliberate intervention by faculty into the intercultural learning process of students
- Rejects traditional assumptions that students learn best when forced to navigate the study abroad experience independently.
- Learning needs to occur before, during, and after a student's experience

Outcomes

- Increased the intercultural competence gains of students in long term and short term programs (Alcón-Soler, 2015; Almeida et al., 2016; Anderson, 2016; Doerr, 2015; Hallows & Marks, 2011; Lokkesmoe et al., 2016; Spenader & Retka, 2015).
- Impacts of intervention were most evident immediately after the intervention occurred (Spenader & Retka, 2015), justifying ongoing, sustained intervention throughout the experience (Alcón-Soler, 2015).
- Most effective intervention methods provide context, include reflection, and integrate active or authentic learning exercises in the experience (Hallows & Marks, 2011).
- Interventions included in course structures may be more effective than informal interventions (Almeida et al., 2016; Anderson, 2016).



EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING THEORY (ELT)

Assumptions

- 4 stages: Engagement, Reflection, Significance, & Application across contexts (Kolb, 1983).
- Learner constructs knowledge based on their thoughts, interactions, and experiences (Peyvandi & Wang, 2016).
- Fosters the development of transferable skills and allows students to use classroom content in a real-life environment

Outcomes

- Positively correlates to students' intercultural competence gains
- ELT does not necessarily lead to student engagement.
- Careful application of the pedagogy and critical reflection are necessary (Glass, 2014; Perry et al., 2015; Smith-Augustine et al., 2014).
- May be other contextual variables that influence the outcomes of ELT (Smith-Augustine et al., 2014).
- Some criticism of ELT as Eurocentric



TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING THEORY (TLT)

Assumptions

- Adults make meaning of their lives over time as meaning is changed by experiences that contradict their assumptions, beliefs, and values.
- Process begins with an intense experience that forces the individual to reflect on their identity and perspective. End when the individual integrates the new meaning into their lives and their understanding of the world (Merriam, 2015).
- Progress is linear and irreversible (Jackson, 2015; Merriam, 2015).

Outcomes

- Less information about direct outcomes
- Extensively used by faculty to understand and describe the observed process of student learning on study abroad programs
- Definitely a theory, not a pedagogy
- Often paired with other teaching methods or theories (Bell et al., 2014; Hallows & Marks, 2011).





PEDAGOGIES IN PRACTICE

How are those pedagogies implemented by instructors?

3 (OR MAYBE 4) TRENDS

- Course-based
 - Community engagement
 - Formal class activities
 - Reflection
- Co-curricular
 - Non-course and informal methods were also used by faculty to support intercultural learning



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

- Commonly used (Bai et al., June 2016; Bloom & Miranda, 2015; Engberg & Jourian, Spr 2015; Giovanangeli & Oguro, 2016; Hauerwas et al., 2017; Holmes et al., 2015; Smith-Augustine et al., 2014; Spenader & Retka, 2015; Wynveen et al., 2012).
- Cited as a mechanism for
 - Promoting global citizenship (Wynveen et al., 2012)
 - Modifying values (Wynveen et al., 2012)
 - Increasing cultural sensitivity (Bloom & Miranda, 2015; Smith-Augustine et al., 2014).
- The level and nature of CE varied from program to program.
 - Short, group projects and volunteer work CE (Bai et al., June 2016; Holmes et al., 2015; Smith-Augustine et al., 2014; Spenader & Retka, 2015)
 - Sustained relationship and activity (Engberg & Jourian, Spr 2015; Wynveen et al., 2012).
- Both a formal and informal learning mechanism in the literature



FORMAL CLASS ACTIVITIES

- Nature and type of assignments and activities varied dramatically based on program length, location, technology, and discipline.
- Common:
 - Artistic expression and digital media (Andrews, 2016; Bell et al., 2014; Euler, 2017; Glass, 2014)
 - Written assignments or journaling (Bell et al., 2014; Glass, 2014; Jackson, 2015)
 - Group discussion (Hauerwas et al., 2017; Jackson, 2015)
 - Interviewing (Holmes et al., 2015)
 - Projects (Euler, 2017).
- Instructors often used multiple types of activities
- Formal class activities:
 - Facilitated meaning making (Perry et al., 2015)
 - Increased cultural curiosity (Engberg & Jourian, Spr 2015; Holmes et al., 2015)
 - Enhanced problem-solving (Hauerwas et al., 2017)
 - Challenged students' preconceived notions
 - Addressed the cultural issues that they experienced abroad (Glass, 2014).



REFLECTION

- Most common methods include group debriefs, writing assignments, journals, digital media, and interviews
- Allowed students to:
 - Draw on their personal experiences and compare them to research findings or preconceived notions (Jackson, 2015)
 - Understand identity (Smith-Augustine et al., 2014)
 - Develop reflexivity (Tuleja, 2014)
 - Increase self-awareness (Stoner et al., 2014)
 - Navigate culture (Glass, 2014)
- Cautionary note: Instructors need to be flexible by allowing students to reflect in a way in which they are comfortable (Perry et al., 2015). This is particularly important in supporting diverse students.
- Used in 15 out of the 25 articles



INFORMAL/NON-COURSE METHODS

- Approaches included:
 - Book clubs (Schaefer & Lynch, 2017)
 - Pre- or post-program activities (Bai et al., June 2016; Hallows & Marks, 2011; Hauerwas et al., 2017; Smith-Augustine et al., 2014; Williams, 2009)
 - Student diversity and group dynamics (Anderson, 2016; Bai et al., June 2016)
 - Faculty and student mentoring (Engberg & Jourian, Spr 2015; Holmes et al., 2015)
 - Sharing one's experience with others (Engberg & Jourian, Spr 2015), optional cultural activities (Almeida et al., 2016)
 - Addressing anxiety, and setting expectations (Mitchell, 2015b).

In nearly every instance, non-course methods were used in conjunction with one of the other pedagogies or theories outlined in this section, making it difficult to discern if non-course strategies contributed to the learning outcomes.





SO WHAT NOW...

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

1. Our understanding of how study abroad programs support intercultural learning has changed in the past twenty years. While scholars previously believed that intercultural competence gains were disconnected from pedagogy, research disproved this assumption and created a new emphasis on the relationship between pedagogy, course design, and intercultural learning outcomes.
2. While fifteen pedagogies and theories were used by the faculty teaching study abroad courses, very few of them were designed for intercultural learning.
3. The three most commonly used pedagogies and theories are ITI, ELT, and TLT.
4. The literature indicates that community engagement, reflection, and formal class activities are the primary strategies used to implement pedagogy in study abroad courses.



QUESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

- The integration of intercultural learning pedagogies into education abroad programs was not consistent. In light of the research, why aren't intercultural pedagogies used to support the development of intercultural competence in an education abroad context?
- Do some pedagogies result in better intercultural learning outcomes than others? While many of the sources cited discussed the learning outcomes of education abroad programs, none compared the outcomes across different pedagogies.
- Several studies indicated that students' ability to use intercultural competence was strongest immediately following instruction on the topic. What does that mean for the long-term retention of the intercultural competence gains achieved through education abroad programs? How can we structure our courses to increase retention of these skills?
- How do we develop a common vocabulary for discussing intercultural learning in education abroad? Who creates that terminology and how is it shared and utilized in a highly interdisciplinary field?



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