

Transformative Travel: Measuring Study Abroad Activities and Outcomes

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Change your perspective change your world

The Problem

Only 1% of University Students studied abroad at the end of the 2011/2012 academic year. (NAFSA, 2014).

In the wake of this report Institute of International Education's (IIE) President Allan E. Goodman stated "we need to increase substantially the number of U.S. students who go abroad so that they too can gain the international experience which is so vital to career success."

Results from a recent public survey indicate "nearly three-fourths of [the 1000] respondents surveyed believe America's higher-education institutions must do a better job of teaching students about the world if they are to be prepared to compete in the global economy" (NAFSA, 2011).

Discussion at a Center for International Business Education and Research (CIBER) roundtable conference confirmed these findings suggesting a need for theory-based programming and evidence based practice in study abroad.

The Question

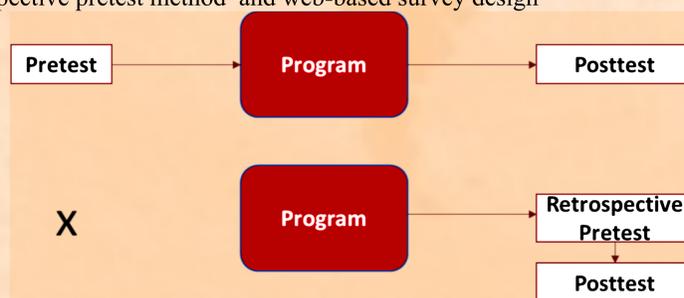
1. Can John Mezirow's (1978) transformative learning theory explain the study abroad learning process?
- AND
2. Do transformative learning processes predict study abroad outcomes?

The Method

Sample. Data were collected from students at Brigham Young University who had studied abroad between 2008 and 2013 via the Yvonne and Kay Whitmore Center for Global Management in the Marriott School of Management. The sample ($n = 107$) was predominately:

- . White (87.9%)
- . Single (72.9%)
- . Female (63.6%)

Design. A retrospective pretest method and web-based survey design were employed:

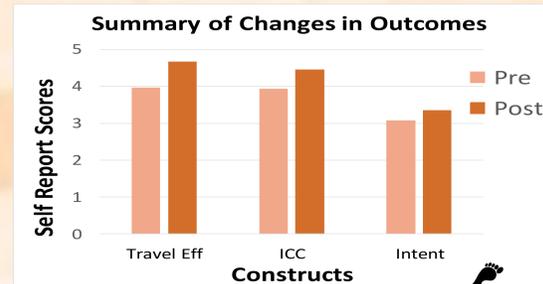


Analysis. Paired sample t-tests were used to measure differences in pre and post-travel scores.

Independent sample t-tests and logistic regressions were used to examine significance in relationships between transformative learning variables and study abroad outcomes.

The Results

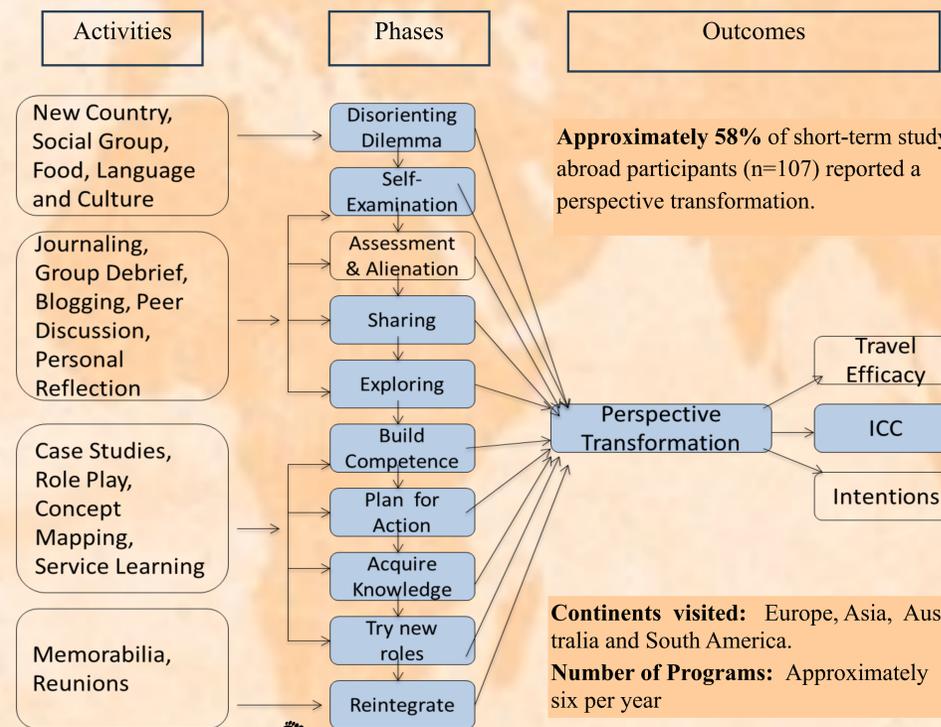
Quantitative. Paired sample t-test indicated the means of post travel measures were statistically different from pre travel measures.



Transformative learning phases (perspective transformation), significantly predict ($B = .320, p = .008$) the outcome, Intercultural Competence when controlling for other variables.

Variable	B	SEB	β	p
Change in Intercultural				
Block 2 $\Delta R^2 = .061 (p = .008)$				
Prior Travel Experience	-.378	.138	-.260	.007*
Prior Mission Experience	.025	.128	.020	.847
Motivation Academic	-.281	.136	-.191	.042**
Motivation Recreation	.287	.156	.175	.070
Motivation Career	.100	.139	.072	.475
Prior Language Experience	.030	.136	.021	.826
Perspective Transformation	.320	.118	.253	.008*

The Model



Approximately 58% of short-term study abroad participants ($n=107$) reported a perspective transformation.

Continents visited: Europe, Asia, Australia and South America.
Number of Programs: Approximately six per year

Qualitative:

"Because we visited five countries (and multiple cities within some of those countries) I feel like I came away with a greater appreciation for the diversity within Asia. Looking back on my experience, I feel like it is short-sighted to label a way of life as "Asian" or try to design a product or service for the "Asian" market.."



"I was interacting with so many different people each day and doing so many different things that I don't normally do on a normal day in the U.S. that I couldn't help but think about how I normally act and the opinions I have."

Conclusions

Findings confirmed transformative learning is occurring in study abroad and that transformative learning processes influence select study abroad outcomes.

These findings lead us to believe transformative learning can act as both an outcome and a model for change in study abroad settings.

Efforts to more intentionally steer study abroad towards perspective transformation could match program activities to the phases of transformative learning. These activities could include "journaling, group debriefing, peer dialogue, silent reflection, and online blogging (Trilokekar & Kukar, 2011) or "case studies, role play, learning contracts, group projects, concept mapping, consciousness rising, and participation in social action" (Foronda & Belknap, 2012, p. 159).