

## Chapter 2

# Intercultural Awareness and Short-Term Study Abroad Programs: An Invitation to Liminality

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### ABSTRACT

*One of the desired and anticipated outcomes of study abroad is that participants, who are exposed to difference, will develop a deeper appreciation of intercultural awareness. For students about to graduate and function in an increasingly globalized world, intercultural awareness is a fundamental requirement and a valued asset. Although greater intercultural awareness is associated with longer study abroad experiences, the historical and current reality is that students predominantly chose shorter stays. To optimize intercultural awareness gains for students and their faculty, and to provide greater benefits for the internationalization of their colleges and universities, it is suggested that short-term study abroad programs focus on the inherent liminality of the experience. This chapter explores liminality and the opportunities and challenges associated with the liminally-centered study abroad program.*

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Many of those involved with them—students, program organizers, and faculty—attest to the potential transformative impact of study abroad programs, even programs that have a short duration. For example, Milstein (2005), who considered study abroad programs from the perspective of learner self-efficacy, noted that many returning students ‘describe a transformation in their very sense of self, both in how they experience their own cultures and in how they view their life paths.... an increased sense of empowerment, an enriched sense of belief in their own capabilities’ (p. 218). Similar comments are reflected in other research on study abroad, particularly in those that center on second language (L2) proficiency (Cubillos & Ilvento, 2013; Kim & Cha, 2017; Perry, Stoner, & Tarrant, 2012).

Forexample, Salisbury (2011) concluded that ‘studying abroad significantly affects the positive development of intercultural competence’ and adds that this positive development was noticeable, in varying degrees, for all study abroad participants irrespective of their ‘gender, race, SES [socioeconomic status], institutional type, pre-college tested academic preparation, [intercultural competence] pretest score, or college experiences’ (p. 92). Other researchers and scholars have reported that study abroad programs often provide participants with both personal benefits and valuable marketplace skills. At the level of personal development, study abroad can promote the ‘acceptance of difference in others, tolerance of ambiguity, self-awareness, confidence in meeting new people, and greater independence and self-confidence’ (American Institute for Foreign Study, 2013, p. 13). From a vocational and career perspective, these programs can ‘develop several important employment-related skills (e.g., intercultural competence, global awareness, foreign language skills) to which they [students] may have been less exposed [before travel]’ (Di Pietro, 2013, p. 18).

Research indicates that study abroad programs provide students with multiple benefits that may not be available on their domestic campuses. These include: (a) increased and developing intercultural awareness, understanding, and sensitivity (Czerwionka, Artamonova, & Barbosa, 2015; Jackson 2018); (b) a stronger and more appreciative understanding of both cultural diversity and multiculturalism (Wooldridge, Peet, & Meyer, 2018); and, (c) higher levels of intercultural competency (Hermond, Vairez, & Tanner, 2018; Nichols, 2011; Yarosha, Lukic, & Santibáñez-Gruber, 2018). As noted previously, study abroad programs even of a relatively short duration (4-5 weeks) also appear to contribute positively and significantly to the student’s sense of self-confidence and self-efficacy (Czerwionka et al., 2015; Lee & Negrelli, 2018; Nguyen, Jefferies, & Rojas. 2018).

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