

ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: College Students' Intercultural Sensitivity Development as a Result of their Studying Abroad: A Comparative Description of Two Types of Study Abroad Programs

Adriana Medina-López-Portillo, Doctor of Philosophy, 2004

Dissertation directed by: Dr. Ana María Schwartz, Associate Professor
Language, Literacy and Culture Doctoral Program

The purpose of this study was to measure and describe change in intercultural sensitivity by 28 college students from two campuses of a major East Coast state university who participated in one of two university-sponsored study abroad language programs: a seven-week summer program in Taxco, Mexico (18 students), and a 16-week semester program in Mexico City (10 students). Intercultural sensitivity was defined as the ability of individuals to accommodate cultural differences into their reality. This ability is guided by the individuals' worldview, behaviors, and attitudes (Bennett, 1993). Three propositions guided this inquiry: 1) there is a change in students' intercultural sensitivity development and 2) in their perceptions of the Mexican culture and its people when students study abroad, and 3) length of time studying abroad has a differential effect on perceptions of cultural differences.

The methodological approach was a case study in which qualitative and quantitative methods were combined. The data-gathering techniques were face-to-face interviews, the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI), a questionnaire, and a guided journal.

Open coding and pattern-matching techniques were used to analyze the qualitative data. For the quantitative data, correlations, paired *t* tests, and regression analyses were

conducted. Three theories and models guided this study: The Intergroup Contact Theory, The Model of the Transformation Process, and the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS).

The findings supported the study's propositions. The quantitative and qualitative data indicated change in intercultural sensitivity development and in perceptions of the target culture in both groups but to different degrees and in different directions; while the quantitative data showed minimum changes, the qualitative data suggested greater changes. Whereas length of program appears to be a major variable for the difference in outcomes between the groups, two other variables seemed to have had an impact: students' initial intercultural sensitivity level and location of the program.

This study is the first to take into account the role that duration plays in the development of intercultural sensitivity during a study abroad experience.

Recommendations for further research are offered and implications for study abroad programs, particularly in the area of advising and orientation, are suggested.