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One Year Later: The Influence of Short-Term Study Abroad Experiences on Students

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Abstract

Using transformational learning as a framework and a case study approach, this study explored how students make meaning of their experiences 1 year after a weeklong study abroad experience and examined how they integrate their study abroad experience into their lives. The findings include that students who had engaged in subsequent learning opportunities continued to find meaning in their study abroad experience. The experience had faded into a distant memory for students who did not integrate the experience into their lives in some way.

A significant trend in the U.S. during the first decade of the 21st century was the impetus to internationalize higher education. Multiple U.S. government and education association reports called on colleges and universities to promote international and cross-cultural knowledge and understanding (American Council on Education, 2002; Commission on the Abraham Lincoln Study Abroad Fellowship, 2005). Often, these reports identified

study abroad as an important strategy for internationalization, and in growing numbers students choose to study abroad. According to the Institute of International Education (IIE; 2009), 4 times as many students in the U.S. studied abroad during the 2007–2008 academic year than they did 20 years ago.

Although there has been a rapid increase in the number of U.S. students studying abroad, more than half of those students are going abroad through short-term programs. In 2007–2008, over 56% of U.S. students who studied abroad did so in a short-term program (i.e., less than 8 weeks; IIE, 2009). Despite the growing popularity of increasingly shorter study abroad programs, little is known about how students make meaning of these experiences over the long term. The purpose of this study was to explore how students make meaning of their weeklong study abroad experience and to examine how they integrate this experience into their lives.

Literature Review

The positive outcomes of study abroad are evident when examining the research of the past 30 years. Study abroad participation positively affected students' psychosocial development, in particular their self-confidence, sense of identity, and personal independence (Black & Duhon, 2006; Hadis, 2005). Students reported gains in intercultural competence as a result of the study abroad experience. In comparison to their peers who did not study abroad, students who participated in these activities

- exhibited higher levels of adaptability, tolerance, and empathy for other cultures (Bates, 1997; Black & Duhon, 2006; Williams, 2005);
- increased comfort and ability to communicate with people from other cultures, especially non-English speakers (Drews & Meyer, 1996; Hadis, 2005);
- possessed greater knowledge and interest in global and intercultural perspectives and affairs (Carlson, Burn, Useem, & Yachimowicz, 1990; Hutchins, 1996), cultural relativism, and interdependency (Hutchins, 1996; Sutton & Rubin, 2004); and
- had a more thorough understanding of their host country's political, social, and economic issues (Hadis, 2005; Hutchins, 1996).

Some very limited longitudinal research indicated that study abroad influenced students' career plans (Wallace, 1999) and led to more internationally focused careers (Norris & Gillespie, 2009).

Recent research has emerged that examined short-term study abroad programs, and the findings are mixed. For example, Medina-López-Portillo (2004) found that participants in short-term programs did not show gains in intercultural sensitivity, whereas those in longer programs did. Neppel (2005) found that although students on longer study abroad programs showed significant increases over short-term participants on measures of growth in cognitive complexity, liberal learning, personal philosophy, and interpersonal self-confidence, the significant differences were either small or moderate, indicating that

short-term study abroad does have the potential for important student learning. Chieffo and Griffiths (2004) echoed Neppel's finding on the potential of short-term study abroad by comparing students who participated in a short-term study abroad program with those who had not studied abroad. They found that students in the short-term study abroad group demonstrated higher levels of intercultural awareness and gains in personal growth and development.

Although the existing research points to the potential for significant learning through short-term study abroad, most programs studied were for periods of longer than 1 month (Chieffo & Griffiths, 2004; Medina-López-Portillo, 2004). With over half of the students who study abroad doing so for somewhere between 2 and 8 weeks (IIE, 2009), and some students doing so for as little as 1 week, a pressing need exists to understand how students experience these very short-term immersion programs (i.e., less than 2 weeks). This study built on the existing literature by examining student experiences in a short 10-day study abroad experience. Specifically, it examined student learning and meaning making 1 year after the short-term study abroad experience.

Theoretical Framework

Mezirow's (1991, 1997, 2000) theory of transformative learning provided the theoretical framework that guided this study. Transformative learning theory describes the ways in which students' experiences alter their frames of reference, or the ways they make meaning of the world. This process can be very difficult because individuals tend to reject those ideas and observations that do not easily fit within their existing frames of reference. Often, frames of reference can be altered by experiencing a "disorienting dilemma." This is often experienced through exposure to "a different culture with customs that contradict our own previously accepted presuppositions" (Mezirow, 1991, p. 168).

Key factors that contribute to transformative learning are critical reflection and discourse during or after a disorienting experience (Mezirow, 2000; Parks Daloz, 2000). "Encounters with the other," persons who often have different frames of reference, can help students develop a connection with people who can urge them to think about the world in a different way (Parks Daloz, 2000, p. 110). Barlas (2000) found that the primary conditions that supported transformative learning included program intensity and design, which facilitated opportunities for students to learn across difference.

In order to have a truly transformative learning experience, the student must act on the new insight (Mezirow, 2000). The action steps are reflected in Mezirow's (1991) 10 phases of perspective transformation:

1. A disorienting dilemma,
2. Self-examination with feelings of guilt or shame,
3. A critical assessment of epistemic, sociocultural, or psychic assumptions.

4. Recognition that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared and that others have negotiated a similar change,
5. Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions,
6. Planning a course of action,
7. Acquisition of knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans,
8. Provisional trying of new roles,
9. Building of competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships; and
10. Are integration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's new perspective. (pp. 168–169)

Steps 5–10, in particular, focus on planning and executing actions based on the transformative experience. Subsequent studies of various transformative learning experiences showed that after such experiences students tend to make significant changes in their lives, including changing personal consumption habits, engaging in social justice work, joining the Peace Corps or Teach for America, changing career plans, and seeking out other volunteer opportunities (Barlas, 2000; Hashimoto, 2007; Kiely, 2004).

Using transformational learning as a framework, the purpose of this study was to build on the existing literature on study abroad by exploring how students make meaning of their experiences during, immediately after, and 1 year after a weeklong study abroad experience. We also examined how they integrated their study abroad experience into their lives. Our specific research questions for this study were as follows:

- What meaning do students make of their participation in a short-term study abroad experience, both immediately after the experience and 1 year later?
- How do students attempt to integrate this meaning into their lives?
- To what extent do students follow through on new commitments or intentions developed as a result of program participation?

Method

To address the research questions, we used a case study approach investigating a short-term study abroad program at a research institution in the mid-Atlantic region of the U.S. Case study research explores a case within a bounded system and draws on many data sources to understand the system (Creswell, 2007). Case study is appropriate given our focus on *how* and *why* questions in naturalistic settings as well as our interest in the contextual conditions that shape student learning and meaning making during these experiences (Yin, 2009). Our research was based in a constructivist framework, and our focus is on students' meaning making of their study abroad experiences and perceptions of their learning related to these experiences (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2006).

Sampling occurred on two levels: Both the trip itself and the participants in the study factored into our choice. This particular trip was originally chosen for a larger multisite

case study focused on the meaning making of students who participated in short-term immersion programs during college because of the location, group experience, and presence of both researchers on the trip, with one researcher in the dual role of staff member and researcher (Jones, Rowan-Kenyon, Cilente, Hui, & Niehaus, in press). The main focus of the trip to the Czech Republic was on global leadership, with daily lectures about Czech leadership, history, politics, and culture. Students visited multiple sites during the week including local government and university offices, a Czech high school, a papermill, student-run nongovernmental organizations, and an environmental center. Students had regular interaction with Czech high school and college students and lived in a university residence hall. With the exception of 1.5 days touring Prague, students spent most of the trip immersed in the Czech culture; they ate Czech food and struggled to communicate across a language barrier. Although the original intention of the research project was to focus on student meaning making in the short term, data collection for this particular trip was extended to examine how students make meaning of their short-term study abroad experiences 1 year after the trip.

All 10 student trip members were invited to participate in the study, and 8 students agreed to participate, including 2 African American women, 2 African American men, 3 White women, and 1 White man. One White woman identified as an Orthodox Jew, and the other participants all identified as Christian. Most students were sophomores or juniors from a wide range of majors including business, psychology, government, and politics. None of the students had previously studied abroad in college, and only 3 had traveled outside of North America.

Data collection included participant observation, document analysis, and multiple interviews. Detailed field notes were kept throughout the trip to record participant experiences, behaviors, and other reflections. Keeping field notes was especially important as a way to monitor our feelings and judgments about the participants and our experience throughout the trip. Document analyses included three journal entries submitted by each participant during the trip.

Data collection protocols were developed based on the literature on transformational learning and meaning making as well as our research questions and a constructivist epistemological framework. The use of these semistructured protocols helped ensure comparability of data collection procedures between the two interviewers (Yin, 2009). Questions focused on the students' motivation for participation on the trip, what they learned, their experiences, and outcomes related to trip participation. The same researcher interviewed each student three times—at the midway point of the trip, immediately after the trip, and 1 year later. Seven of the eight students participated in all three interviews, but one student (an African American woman) did not participate in the 1-year follow-up interview. Consequently, her data were not included in this article. All interviews were taped and transcribed verbatim. Each student chose a pseudonym for use in the transcripts and manuscripts.

To analyze the data, we utilized a constant comparative method of analysis, coding all transcripts by generating codes, comparing codes between researchers, and searching for patterns in the data that led to the creation of categories (Charmaz, 2006). Themes then emerged from the categories. Only themes that were noted by multiple participants were included. Each transcript was coded by one researcher and verified by the second. We continuously returned to the transcripts throughout the analysis process.

Limitations

This study is limited to one group of students, at one institution, participating in one trip. We, the researchers, were also active participants on the trip. Although this was beneficial in that we participated in the same cultural immersion as the students and developed relationships with the students, there was a risk that we were too involved in the research outcomes. We were cognizant of this possibility and took steps to minimize bias in the study. We used several strategies to ensure the trustworthiness and credibility of the findings and conclusions. To triangulate our findings, we collected information from students at different points in time and included the journal entries of the participants and researcher field notes. Multiple coders were utilized to function as auditors of the process, and we used multiple sources of data to triangulate our findings (Yin, 2009).

Findings

A previous manuscript using this sample (as part of a larger multisite case study) focused on how short-term immersion programs promote student learning and development and whether or not they deliver intended outcomes (Jones et al., in press). The previous study reported that crossing boundaries and personalizing the experience helped students to make meaning of their trip as well as helped them to have a new understanding of themselves and others based on the trip experience. In the month following the trip, students reported engaging in reframing to integrate new learning into their lives and to contemplate future plans (Jones et al., in press). The findings for this manuscript are based on the ways that these students continued to make meaning of this experience and integrate it into their lives during the year following the trip. Findings from the current study indicated that students who had engaged in subsequent learning experiences continued to find meaning in their experience in the Czech Republic, whereas for the other students, the experience had faded into a distant memory.

One Year Later

It was just a week, but a week that changed my life definitely and opened me up to a completely different perspective and I loved it. (Tony)

It's something I'll remember for the rest of my life, and it's an experience I'll have forever. [But] I guess it hasn't really changed me all that much. (Abigail)

As the two quotes above illustrate, 1 year after the trip some students believed that the trip was an amazing experience that they would remember forever. For some students the trip to the Czech Republic was truly a life-changing experience; for others, it was just a fond memory with only a minor influence on their day-to-day lives or future plans. Although all students participated in a shared experience and structured reflections upon return, students fell into two different groups after the trip, and this is the focus of our findings.

“I Guess It Hasn’t Really Changed Me All That Much”: Abigail, Ashley, and Lavar

A year after the trip, Abigail, Ashley, and Lavar all noted at least some enduring influence of the study abroad experience. All three had integrated their experiences into their lives in different ways. Ashley, for example, found that the experience helped her focus on her schoolwork and better define what she wanted out of life. Abigail still felt an emotional connection to the Czech Republic and more broadly noted that the trip had helped her to have a broader perspective on the role of the U.S. in the world economy. She was particularly concerned about the impact of the financial crisis in the U.S. on other countries:

I think with the way our economy’s doing bad, and I worry with our economy crashing I’m sure that’s not going to be . . . good for the rest of the world and it sort of makes you think how they’re doing, it’s not just America’s issue, it’s more of an international one, and I think of that a little bit. . . . I’ve thought on a couple occasions what about all of . . . there are all of those companies in other countries that have jobs and people too, it’s not just America’s issue, it becomes more of an international one.

Lavar, who had been working to start a youth center in his hometown, noted an influence of his experience in the Czech Republic on his youth center plans. In the Czech Republic he had been frustrated by his inability to speak a language besides English and so wanted to include foreign language classes in the programming of his youth center. He also hoped to one day establish youth centers around the world.

All three students demonstrated some enduring influences of the trip, but these were far fewer than the influences they noted during and immediately after the experience. This was perhaps best demonstrated by Ashley’s experience. During and immediately after the trip to the Czech Republic, Ashley expressed a strong desire to change her life as a result of the experience. The trip helped her decide that she no longer wanted to go to medical school and that she wanted to do something more international with her career. She had been inspired by the passion of the students she met in the Czech Republic and wanted to regain that passion in her life. She even considered breaking up with her boyfriend, to whom she no longer felt connected. A year later, though, she had retreated from her plans to change her life. At the time of the third interview, she was considering applying to graduate school to become a physician assistant. She was a junior at the time of the trip, so she had only 1

year left until graduation and did not want to extend her time in school by changing her major. She also decided that she did not want to alienate her family and boyfriend in order to work abroad. As she explained,

I kind of have pushed it away [the idea of working abroad]. I don't think that going overseas, especially for that long of time, I don't think I could do it, not that I can't do it but I don't think that . . . my parents and my boyfriend would want me to do that. So, I could do something here just as good and not try to push everyone away, or something like that, it's not that important to me.

For Ashley, the pull of her pretrip life was stronger than her desire to change as a result of the trip.

Neither Lavar nor Abigail had expressed the same desire to radically change their lives immediately after the trip, but like Ashley, they both felt the pull of their pretrip lives after returning from the Czech Republic. For example, Lavar had been working to establish his youth center for years, and in the year after the trip, he focused on finishing that project. He tried to study abroad again but found that he could not find enough money to finance the experience. While Lavar focused on his youth center, Abigail returned to her predominantly White sorority, which she found provided little opportunity in her life to interact with people different from herself. As Abigail described,

I do things like a lot of my activities are [with my sorority] and [fraternity and sorority members] are all kind of similar. I went to Mexico but that was just [with fraternity and sorority] people from somewhere else. So, I don't know, I just haven't really just done anything outside of my group, I guess.

For all three of these students, pretrip commitments and life circumstances were stronger than any motivation to change.

Interestingly, even when they did have an opportunity to interact with those different from themselves, the trip had little influence on how they approached those interactions. Both Abigail and Ashley traveled internationally in the year following the trip to the Czech Republic. Ashley traveled to London with her boyfriend and went on a Caribbean cruise with some friends but did not think that either experience had taken her out of her comfort zone. As she described her trip to London,

London, it's kind of just like the United States in a way. They have accents but the people are pretty much the same. I went with my boyfriend so it was like comfort zone. And we stayed with our friend so ... like nothing happened that put me in a different place. We did things like being touristy and looking at places from a distance, but it wasn't anything really to make me think, I guess.

Abigail had traveled to Cancun for spring break with other members of her sorority. When describing that experience, she noted that she felt more comfortable talking with Europeans there because of her experiences in the Czech Republic. Neither student thought that

these new international experiences had allowed them to interact with people different from themselves. One year after the trip, none of these three students indicated that their experience in the Czech Republic influenced specific future plans or intentions.

“A Week That Changed My Life”: Rachel, Patrick, Tony, and Dawn

Although Ashley, Abigail, and Lavar expressed little continuing influence of the trip on their lives, Rachel, Patrick, Tony, and Dawn stated that the trip to the Czech Republic was truly life altering. Unlike the three students described previously, for these four students, international travel and cross-cultural experiences had been, and continued to be, a big part of their lives. Three of the four students—Dawn, Patrick, and Rachel—seized opportunities to travel internationally in the year following the trip: Dawn studied abroad in Australia, Patrick studied abroad in Italy, and Rachel participated in an interfaith trip to Mexico. Although Abigail talked about spending spring break in Cancun, Rachel specifically noted that her Mexican experience had *not* been in Cancun:

We went to very, very, indigenous, Oaxaca, Puebla, Mexico City, amazing. At first, I got there and I'm like, “what am I doing and this is a really poor village, why did I come down here,” but it really taught me a lot about their culture. People make assumptions when they meet certain people walking down the street in America, and you don't know where they come from, you don't know what their culture is like, so it was really interesting for me to see that.

The three students in this group who had an opportunity to travel abroad in the year following their short-term study abroad experience framed their international experiences as opportunities to interact with people who were culturally different from themselves.

Rachel, Patrick, and Dawn also noted the influence of the trip to the Czech Republic on their subsequent international experience. For Patrick and Dawn, the experience in the Czech Republic had sparked their interest in further travel. As a result of the trip to the Czech Republic, Patrick studied abroad for an entire semester. As he described,

The Czech Republic [trip] kind of gave me a little travel bug and it's growing rapidly. I visited I would say 14 countries while I was over there. Just, that's what I want to do, I want to travel, I want to see the world. So, and I really would say that stemmed off from the Czech Republic program.

Dawn noted that while in Australia she constantly made comparisons between the Czech Republic and Australia. The Czech Republic trip helped her step out of her comfort zone and take more risks while in Australia. For all three of these students, the trip to the Czech Republic helped them to think about cultural differences in a deeper way during their subsequent travel. As Rachel explained, the Czech Republic trip helped her see some of the ways in which cultures can differ, so she knew during her subsequent international experience to expect similar cultural differences.

Tony did not travel or study abroad after the Czech Republic trip, but he had similarly built on his experience in the Czech Republic through a summer internship with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. Tony had a similar perspective to Dawn's and Patrick's. He had very clear plans to travel and work internationally in the future. Tony was particularly interested in traveling to a developing country:

I think I am really excited ... to go to a third-world country where the conditions are not what they are at home. I can't run up to a McDonald's and get what I want and be ok. I want to recognize and experience that the world is not a level playing field.

Patrick similarly wanted to experience a different variety of travel than he had in the past. Although he had been on vacation to a number of places, he explained,

Now I actually want to travel and experience firsthand world cultures, and actually put myself in the culture and see, not like their spas or their resorts, but I want to see how they actually live their lives on a daily basis.

Both Dawn and Patrick had specific goals to travel to every continent, and Patrick also wanted to visit every country in Europe.

In addition to influencing their future travel plans, the Czech Republic trip also influenced these four students' career plans. Rachel planned to apply for Ph.D. programs to study cross-cultural leadership, and Patrick hoped to find a program to teach English in South America for a few months before looking for a job overseas. After his summer internship with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Tony hoped to get a job with the department as a refugee officer in order to work internationally while having an impact on people's lives. Dawn's career plans were less clear, but she knew that she wanted to work overseas. At the time of the interview, she was in the process of looking for jobs. As Dawn described, "I keep looking for jobs that have tons of travel. I just learned that I can live out of a suitcase for a while."

Perhaps the most enduring influence of the Czech Republic trip was the influence it had on students' perspectives on their lives and the world around them. Dawn, for example, learned to embrace life and take more risks. As she explained, "growing up I was very calculated with everything and then now I am like traveling here, traveling there, jumping out of planes; all that stuff." Many of the students felt that they continued to have a more global perspective. As Tony described,

I think about things on a more global scale, I always think now not just how I feel about it as an American but how does the other side look at it. How does this country feel about this problem—if I was over there do people feel differently? Especially with the war and the economy especially and how I have been reading about that and how it is affecting everyone. ... Sort of keeping the "other perspective" in mind has been something that I try to do and really find very profound the ability to step out of my own experience. And there is a different one and it might challenge my own thinking and wrestle with that difference between the two.

Tony and Patrick both highlighted the newfound respect and empathy they had for travelers to the U.S., particularly those who did not speak English. After having struggled with the language barrier in the Czech Republic, they found that they were much more understanding and patient with non-English speakers who came to the U.S.

Importance of Intervening Experiences

After establishing the emergence of the two perspectives described above within the student group, we turned to the transcripts and coding to find themes in the differences between these two groups of students. Themes included (a) how these students made meaning of their experiences in the Czech Republic and immediately after, (b) how they described cultural differences, (c) their motivations for applying to the program and expectations for the trip, and (d) their openness or resistance to change. Surprisingly, no major differences between the two groups emerged from the data. We could not find any substantive differences between the two student groups in terms of their prior experience, engagement during the trip, reactions to the experience, or ways in which they made meaning of the trip during, or immediately following, the experience. Yet there were important differences between these two groups 1 year after the trip. Ultimately, we surmised that the difference was not in the students or their experiences on the trip, but rather what they had done with those experiences in the intervening year.

One possible explanation for the importance of subsequent experiences is the short-term nature of this particular study abroad experience. As multiple students commented, 1 week in the Czech Republic was probably not enough to change their lives, at least not without some help. As Rachel remarked immediately after the trip, “not to belittle it, but it was a 10-day trip, I don’t really think my views of the world changed.” At the same time, for those who were inspired to seek out additional experiences as a result of the experience in the Czech Republic, the influence of that experience was significant. As Patrick explained,

I think the Czech Republic wasn’t long enough for me to have that entire change, but it opened the door and got me thinking. And it got me interested in learning more and breaking more out of my shell. And I think spending the long 6 months in Europe that I did [the following spring] completely broke that down. ... So I think that, Czech Republic opened the door but [studying abroad in] Italy sealed the deal.

Without his experience in the Czech Republic, Patrick would not have studied abroad in Italy. At the same time, as can be seen by the examples of Lavar, Ashley, and Abigail, without a subsequent intentional educational experience a 1-week study abroad experience may have little impact.

Discussion

The true test of any educational experience is the extent to which students integrate their new knowledge and understanding into their lives. As the results of this study show, the

extent to which students learn from a short-term study abroad experience may depend more on what those students do *after* they have returned home than on anything they did while abroad. All students in this case study integrated their experiences into their lives in some way. The difference was the degree to which this integration occurred. For example, although Abigail's experience in the Czech Republic influenced her perspective on the world economic crisis, she did not move beyond thought to action. Mezirow (1991) theorized that this additional step is necessary for true perspective transformation. This was also consistent with the other two members of her group. As noted above, neither Ashley, Abigail, nor Lavar had a significant related educational experience in the year after the trip. Although Ashley and Abigail traveled internationally, both noted that the experience was more for fun and friends than for intercultural learning. Lavar wanted to study abroad again, but he was unable to secure the funding to do so and did not seek out other, less costly ways to build on his Czech Republic experience.

Ashley, Abigail, and Lavar are examples of how the changes that people attempt to make after participating in transformative learning experiences are difficult and pose challenges for many. Although a person may "understand intellectually the need to change the way one acts[,] one requires emotional strength and an act of will in order to move forward" (Mezirow, 1991, p. 171). Even if a person begins this process, he or she may become overwhelmed by the process and unable to carry out his or her intentions (Mezirow, 1991). Barlas (2000) and King (2004) documented the challenges that students faced when they struggled to integrate new perspectives into their existing lives. King noted that students' fear that they would not be accepted by others was the biggest hurdle in the transformative learning process. This challenge is clearly illustrated in Ashley's experience. Although she knew she wanted to make changes in her life upon her return from the Czech Republic, she feared that her parents and boyfriend would not support this decision. Therefore, she abandoned her new plans for the future. Whereas Ashley was challenged by a lack of emotional support from family and friends, Lavar was challenged by a lack of financial support to act upon his transformative learning. In both cases, students lacked the emotional and practical resources to overcome the challenges posed. Interestingly, although some students were influenced by the pull of their pretrip lives, students who did find ways to integrate their new perspectives after participating in the transformative learning experience did not mention the support of others in their decisions to pursue international experiences. Even though we can speculate that the financial support of their families helped students to embark on their adventures, this was not mentioned in their interviews.

Rachel, Patrick, Dawn, and Tony, on the other hand, *did* have significant educational experiences in the intervening year that strongly influenced their perspectives and future plans: Patrick and Dawn studied abroad, Rachel traveled on an interfaith trip to Mexico, and Tony participated in an internship with the Department of Homeland Security. These students took steps to participate in additional educational experiences that enabled them to utilize their learning from the Czech Republic experience, test out their newfound

commitment to global awareness in another new culture or place, and expand their learning. They made plans to act on their transformative experience in the Czech Republic, as described in Mezirow's (1991) phases of perspective transformation. Tony, Dawn, Rachel, and Patrick all built their confidence and took action to participate in further "disorienting dilemmas" with additional plans to continue doing so in the future. Although students in the other group had traveled (i.e., Ashley and Abigail), these students were not intentional in their decision to make their travel an educational experience and did not connect these experiences with their learning in the Czech Republic.

Implications

The findings for this study suggest implications for practice and future research. In the area of practice, this study exemplifies the importance of short-term study abroad experiences for students. By supporting these short-term experiences, institutions help students take risks and experience different cultures. Although possibly not as life changing as a longer term study abroad experience, these short-term experiences may encourage some students originally unwilling to take the "risk" of a longer study abroad experience to explore other opportunities after gaining confidence in themselves and their travel ability.

As institutions provide these short-term experiences, it is also important for follow-up to occur after the experience is over. This follow-up presents opportunities for students to build on their experiences rather than letting them fade. Faculty and staff involved in short-term study abroad programs can offer programs and information to encourage students to expand the knowledge they gained during their experience. Students can then explore opportunities to take new actions and explore new roles based on their short-term transformative experience. Examples of these programs may include (a) post-study abroad classes for students to intentionally reflect on their experience; (b) opportunities such as peer mentor programs for students considering study abroad or a reception where students can share experiences, photos, and stories about study abroad; and (c) information dissemination about English language partner programs, volunteer immigrants or refugees programs, and internship experiences related to international topics of interest.

In this study, three of the four students who built on their short-term study abroad experience did so through further study abroad experiences, both longer term and short term. These students can be an important focus for study abroad offices. They may be more likely to have the travel bug and be open to additional, more challenging experiences. Institutions should explore providing funding opportunities or financial aid for students so that it is not only the most privileged students who are able to have the opportunity to travel abroad.

Another implication of the study is the need to help students build on their short-term study abroad experiences through avenues other than study abroad, which may be prohibitive due to time or expense. Other avenues that students may investigate might include service learning, research with a faculty member, or becoming involved with student organizations or activities with a more international focus.

Many implications for future research emerge from this study. Our study is limited by the fact that this is one group of students, at one institution, participating in one trip. Expanding this study to a larger group of students at multiple institutions may provide more insight about how students build on their short-term study abroad experiences. Future research could also examine the longer term influence of both short- and long-term study abroad programs. This study is one of a few to investigate student participation in short-term study abroad programs and is unique in its attempt to focus on the influence of post-trip experiences on long-term effects of study abroad. As colleges and universities in the U.S. continue to expand these programs, there is a need to continue to expand research to explore the meaning making of these programs in order to document the learning that occurs.

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