

Book Review

Transforming Study Abroad: A Handbook

Neriko Musha Doerr

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Reviewed by: Joe Corrigan
College of the North Atlantic—Qatar

Study abroad programs can be exceptional learning opportunities for students. Doerr applied critical theory that advances our understanding of the discursive and conceptual frames commonly used in the study of higher education to talk about them. This author enriched the literature surrounding study abroad and international students by writing from her own experience and perspective studying abroad. Doerr challenged institutional bromides that presume and simplify the lasting impacts of study abroad and other programs, which immerse learners in unfamiliar surroundings. It is an ambitious and multi-disciplinary book that used a wide canvas and brought a welcome perspective from cultural anthropology and the study of language politics. The book provided plenty of refreshing insight and moved the study abroad discussion beyond what Simon Marginson (2014) referred to as the “galling” (p. 9) deficit frames often applied to cross-border learners. Educators and administrators who plan, design, implement, and assess border or boundary crossing programs will recognize the issues raised in this book, and may navigate them more confidently after reading it.

The author has a rich background studying abroad, and that background contributes to the ethnographic interrogation of conventional study abroad assumptions and practices. She was born and raised in Japan, and her first study abroad experience was a three week stay in the United Kingdom when she was just 11 years old. A second experience was a one-year International Youth Exchange sponsored by a Rotary Club in Tokyo, and at the age of 18 she took up the exchange in Aotearoa (New Zealand). This life-changing experience had a deep and lasting impact on her worldview, and she would return to New Zealand to do ethnographic research. Later, she left Japan and studied as an international doctoral student in cultural anthropology at Cornell University in Ithaca, New York. In each of these experiences, her understandings and analytical approaches grew, and she developed her ability to engage the social complexity around her. These formative experiences sensitized her to the dynamic linguistic, cultural, and social systems in which she participated or observed, and which prove to be a solid foundation for writing this type of book.

Doerr addressed topical issues and assumptions that are related to study abroad in seven chapters, and closed each chapter with readings and questions. Chapter one interrogated ideology related to national, global, and globalist notions that organize our thinking in relation to globalism, global competence, and global citizens. Doerr observed that when these terms de-historicize and homogenize the social evolution and diffusion of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, they are advancing an ideological position. When globalism literature uncritically accepts and “valorizes global connections as breaking down barriers” (p. 36), it assumes political

and economic centralization through an inevitable process of globalization. In this view, international students are discursive, economic, and institutional objects to be studied, not voices of linguistic and cultural diversity where social complexity persists. Doerr is critical of a globalist position, which assumes homogenized nation-state cultures and that “students gain global competence and become global citizens *only* by crossing national borders” (p. 38, emphasis in original). This challenge to globalist assumptions (i.e., neutral positions and inevitable outcomes) at the beginning of the book is an important start because much of what follows seeks to transform our thinking about study abroad.

Chapter two introduced differing approaches to how we might think about culture, power, and cultural hierarchy as they affect study abroad programs. Chapter three discussed language acquisition and assumptions about native speakers and used scholarly work by theorists Pierre Bourdieu, Michel Foucault, and Noam Chomsky to problematize the expectation of linguistic homogeneity. Chapter four observed how only properly formatted discursive immersion learning achieves institutional recognition, yet other forms, such as immersion that is the outcome of immigration, do not.

Chapter five outlined the diversity of backgrounds and experiences study abroad participants have when staying with a host family, including cultural integration and language acquisition. Chapter six described how service learning across borders may construct difference and the other, based upon learner actions, attitudes, and expectations, yet miss the more fundamental opportunity to collaborate in common causes. Chapter seven embraced the complexity of assessment in study abroad, differentiating and illustrating tensions between self-transformation and other desirable outcomes and the difficulties of measuring these in highly diverse learners. The author offered an additional concluding chapter on how to move beyond homogenizing discourses and recognize how relations of power, ideology, and the co-construction of learner experiences shape study abroad programs and outcomes.

This author wrote with the educator or study abroad facilitator in mind and suggested questions that may assist and support learners in thinking more deeply about how each may engage in study abroad programs. For Doerr, language and culture are not static or homogenous, nor are the learners that co-construct each learning experience. Doerr wrote from outside of a deficit frame and the constraints of national blinders, which too often constrain analysis of this socially complex and under theorized learning form. This book is theoretically rigorous and conceptually open in its approach, with considerable care attached to recommended readings and a reference list of 17 pages. It is a treatment of study abroad, informed by the theory and the institutional practice milieu in which it is situated (i.e., North America), yet it maintains a self-awareness of study abroad critiques, and the controversies permeating the literature.

One contribution of this book is that it extracts the study abroad experience from homogenizing institutional discourse and re-examines study abroad thru the lenses of culture, language, and relations of power. The following is an example of how the discursive orderings that surround study abroad work to organize our thinking about it and about ourselves in relation to these opportunities. There was a delicious discussion of *coaxers* in chapter seven that illustrated how the discursive location of study abroad within the institutional lexicon helps to frame deficit. By citing narratives of self-transformation from study abroad program participants (i.e., coaxers) in the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, Doerr showed how individual study abroad participants may become promoters that advertise study abroad programs through their testimonials of self-transformation, growth, and desirable outcomes, “something the addressee should also pursue” (p. 172). In this case, the addressee is one member of a target market of

students that may or may not have the social, economic, or cultural capital to participate in a study abroad program.

For the globalist, the addressee may be a successful learner in myriad ways, but will not be able to obtain global competence or global citizenship unless engaged in cross border learning in institutionally prescribed ways. With Doerr's observation about the selective recognition of immersion learning within institutions of higher learning in mind, coaxers help extend deficit framing to include those who may choose not to pursue global competence or global citizenship within the institutionally prescribed format. Doerr saw new and additional deficit frames now focused on those who may choose not to participate in cross-border learning opportunities. Although a tentative conclusion, this type of deficit framing illustrates how both study abroad learners and those who choose not to become cross-border learners can be found to be in deficit, deficient, or somehow lacking.

Doerr noted the production of "globally competent" (p. 33) students in the American context has been described by Pashby (2012) and other writers as a neocolonialist imposition of West-centric views. Study abroad offerings can be a discursive battleground where power matters, and because multi-centric scholarly work is still emerging there is an underlying methodological politics that Doerr worked to surface by drawing upon a broad spectrum of linguistic, anthropological, political science, educational, and critical theorists. I am reminded of a term that I associate with Dr. Ali Abdi at the University of British Columbia, in Vancouver, British Columbia: *epistemic multi-centrality*, which is a means to engage and surface the multiplicity of voices, experiences, and narratives that are produced in complex social engagement such as a study abroad program. As opposed to a dominant narrative making truth claims, implying consensus, or suggesting that "one size fits all", the future of this scholarly work is present within its social complexity (Kahlke & Taylor, 2018). Rather than working to produce a globally competent student, I suggest that Doerr is successful in advancing the field by asserting "what happens during study abroad is constructive negotiation between two politically positioned subjects with diverse backgrounds" (p. 55).

Once again, this book is detailed work, and the author has equipped the reader with questions, readings, activities, and post-stay questions on a variety of important issues related to study abroad. There is a short list titled *Summary: New Frameworks to View Study Abroad* that is notable in that it helps facilitators and study abroad participants to think deeply about their own personal experiences, and in the process challenge assumptions that seek to objectify these experiences. Doerr introduced a range of indirect surveys and self-assessment tools used to assess, compare, and quantify learner outcomes. These instruments include an Intercultural Development Inventory, Global Perspectives Inventory, Global-Mindedness Scale, Cross-cultural Adaptability Inventory, and Intercultural Adjustment Potential Scale. Still, it is Doerr's personal and professional life enrichment from study abroad and ethnographic study that is compelling. Ultimately, the individual impacts, surprises, engagements, and growth opportunities that arise from study abroad programs culminate in an individualized internal development experience for each learner, and critical reflection is an essential part of that learning.

As successful as this work is, it is a beginning that other scholarly work will challenge, affirm, and build upon. The homogeneity and bounded rationality of pure economics and rational actor theory currently dominates in the literature. The fresh thinking in this book will be a springboard for others and will help to populate the field with wide-ranging contributions that extend Doerr's perspective and challenge the assumptions of globalization and homogenizing globalist ideology. Some promising areas of additional enquiry include further study into various forms of cross-

border learning that center not only on the sender or learner but receivers such as host families, community partners, and host co-constructors of immersion program design. On the subject of assessment alone, researchers will need to call upon a plurality of approaches to develop more satisfactory instruments and explanatory frames. Overall, this book advocated for critical reflection and the application of critical theory to support the ongoing design and development of study abroad programs to achieve lasting impacts.

References

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Joe Corrigan is the QAPCO Chair for Technical Vocational Education and Training at the College of the North Atlantic in Qatar. He recently completed postdoctoral research on experiential and community-service learning at the University of British Columbia. His dissertation used institutional ethnography to adopt the standpoint of international students and map how learners from nine sender countries took up study at a Canadian university. Email: joseph.corrigan@cna-qatar.edu.qa